

SINGAPORE'S BEST EMPLOYERS 2025



▲ Ms Sharon Tan, a programme director at DSO National Laboratories, trains with the dragon boat team, one of the organisation's many common interest groups that help staff connect and recharge. PHOTOS: DSO NATIONAL LABORATORIES

Creating space for curious minds

At the frontlines of high-stakes defence tech, DSO National Laboratories provides an environment that encourages its employees to recharge and push their limits

B Brilliant minds from diverse backgrounds work together to build mission-critical technologies – the kind they cannot talk about but are vital to Singapore's security.

One of them is 39-year-old Sharon Tan, programme director at DSO National Laboratories' Multimission Aerial Robotics department under the Robotics Division, who is engineering classified unmanned aerial systems.

However, beyond the classified corridors, her bosses recognise that even the sharpest minds need space to recharge, explore and grow.

So, every last Friday of the month is set aside as a Learning Day, where meetings are off the table and staff can spend half a day learning anything they like – from picking up a new skill to exploring a hobby.

"Learning Day has taken meeting time away from us," Ms Tan admits. "But if you think about it in the grand scheme of things, half a day each month is a small investment to motivate staff to keep learning."

Other initiatives like Sports Hour also prioritise mental well-being and team bonding – underscoring a culture that values employees not just as workers but as whole people.

That freedom to explore often steers some towards new technical passions. Senior engineer Darren Lai, for example, initially planned to spend his Learning Days diving into electric vehicle technology, being a self-professed automotive fanatic.

But these days, the 32-year-old is deep in the world of lossless data compression, a method that reduces file size without losing any data. It is

a field more aligned with his current work and one he has grown deeply invested in.

"We're all just so passionate about what we do that we just naturally gravitate towards new things related to our job," Mr Lai says with a laugh.

His teammates in the Sensors Division also come from diverse backgrounds – electrical engineers like himself, as well as mechanical and thermal engineers – each bringing a unique perspective to every project.

"Whenever you suggest something at a meeting, you don't hope for people to just agree with you," Mr Lai says.

"In fact, everybody always hopes that somebody will see a problem, point it out, and everyone will put their brains together to try to solve it."



◀ Senior engineer Darren Lai finds new ways to explore emerging skills in his field.

Says DSO's chief executive officer Cheong Chee Hoo: "Being a good employer means building more than careers – it means creating a community where people feel supported, challenged and inspired to grow."

This culture of curiosity, ownership and continuous learning has earned DSO a spot among Singapore's best employers, as ranked by The Straits Times and Statista.

Tailored paths for every talent

Beyond self-directed growth, DSO also offers structured pathways for employees to deepen their expertise – from fully funded part-time or full-time academic programmes at local institutions, to hands-on secondment opportunities within DSO or with external organisations. These organisations include ST Engineering, or Temasek Laboratories at local universities.

Ms Tan opted for a three-year secondment to the Ministry of Defence's Future Systems and Technology Directorate. There, she gained valuable insights into how DSO's emerging technologies would fit into the larger ecosystem of Singapore's defence capabilities.

Stepping into a new environment, she says, is sometimes necessary – not just to gain fresh perspective, but also to break out of the daily routine and spark new ideas. "Because good

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MR DARREN LAI
Senior engineer,
DSO National Laboratories

employees thrive when sufficiently challenged," says Ms Tan.

She makes it a point to check in regularly with her staff – not just to track progress, but to spot early signs of disengagement and take timely action.

That could mean lightening the workload or, more often, reworking an employee's role in a way that rekindles their interest and drive.

"Everyone's sweet spot is different – and also changes over time – so we have to put in the work to find it," she adds.

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