Taking Heart

Technology as a means to access justice

By Vivien Ang

18 teams competed in the competition organised by WongPartnership LLP to raise awareness of technology as an enabler for pro bono organisations.

The competition garnered interest from more than 60 students from various disciplines and the final event on Sept 18 saw 18 teams coming together, with the top three teams presenting their ideas.

Teams were required to develop a legal technology platform or solution that can help one or more groups of beneficiaries of the Pro Bono Group, a student-run organisation dedicated to the promotion of pro bono among law students at the NUS Faculty of Law.

Ng Wei King, managing partner, WongPartnership LLP, said: "We are the first Singapore law firm to showcase legal technology for lawyers and clients. As strong advocates for the use of technology, we were delighted to organise an event that would raise awareness of technology as an enabler for pro bono organisations.

"Too often, access to justice is undermined by the lack of information and expert witnesses. This initiative seeks to find ways in which we can leverage technology to overcome these challenges so that legal aid is more accessible to those who need it."".

Eleven Wong, vice dean, student life & global relations, at NUS Law, said that the project challenged students to come up with innovative technology solutions for a good cause and many teams, within the span of two weeks, had come up with a programmed working prototype of their ideas.

The winning team comprised five students from the engineering and law faculties. They designed a chatbot, named "Nalu", which can converse in over 100 languages. It aims to provide answers to basic legal questions understandable to migrant workers of various nationalities. It is based on Facebook to extend its reach as far as possible.

Its maintenance is simplified as individuals are able to change the content of Nalu after reviewing their feedback.

Team member Yu Kai Yan said: "Three of us in the team have had experience working with migrant workers and this group moved and sold us on the event. We went to the problem they might face and developed a chatbot that could answer basic questions. Upon testing the idea, we realised that automating transactions was important too. The whole team works were spent working on the chatbot."

Dr Ye added that besides time pressures, the group was trying to come up with a product that catered to both migrant workers and the people helping them. Future-proofing the chatbot was essential as well as that parts of the technology would be progressively improved.

"We plan to have the chatbot cover a wider scope of scenarios so that it can be of greater use to its audience,"

One of the judges, Lim Chong Siong, partner and head, intellectual property, technology & media, telecommunications and data protection practice, at WongPartnership LLP, said: "The winning team had the best demonstrated plans and personnel for testing their ideas into a useful reality. They also demonstrated good collaboration in reaching a consensus understanding of the problems from the legal and technical perspectives, translating the legal problems to be addressed into data and logical structures."

Mr叶 added that compared to monetary donations, which have a finite impact, the value of innovation when applied to the right cases is priceless.

"Change begins with what is particularly heartfelt in this initiative is the collaboration amongst students from different faculties to transform the problem and identify a viable solution. We are hopeful that this competition will lay an important foundation on which a more technologically savvy legal pro bono community can be built."