Taking Heart

Technology as a means to access justice

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

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WongPartnership LLP collaborated with Abovitz - an interest group formed by National University of Singapore Law students - to organise the first ever LegalTech competition, Code for a Cause.

The competition garnered interest from more than 60 students from various disciplines and the final event was on Sept 18, 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 from the Bar60Group, 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 embrace law 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 technical processes. 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."

Elaine Wong, vice dean, student life & global relations, at NUS Law, said that the project challenged students to come up with innovative technological 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. The "legal chatbot" they developed, named "Tashi", can converse in over 100 languages and could provide easy access to basic legal information understanding to migrant workers of varying nationalities. It is hosted on Facebook and has no fees.

Team member Yo Kae Yap said: "Tashi is in the team have had experiences working with migrant workers and this group eventualised in the chatbot. We went over the problems they might face and developed a chatbot that can provide basic assistance. Upon refining the idea, we realised that automatic translation was important too. The whole two weeks were spent working on the chatbot.

"On the day, when the chatbot was launched, 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 and as such that part of the technology would keep for future use."

"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, Lau Cheng Xian, 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 common understanding of the problems from the legal and technical perspectives, translating the legal problems to be addressed into data and logical structures."

Mr Ng said that compared to monetary donations, which have a finite impact, the value of innovation when applied to the right causes is priceless.

"Change begins change and what is particularly heartening in this initiative is the collaboration among students from different faculties to transform the problem and identify a possible 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."

Drwe left: WongPartnership LLP managing partner Ng Wei King, centre, lawyer Lim Choon Koe, left, managing director and head of group legal compliance and secretariat, and winners of the LegalTech competition, Code for a Cause - P Sinha, Soh Mee Xiong, Natalie Tan, Tran Mien Ton and Yo Kae Yap.

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