

FOCUSING ON PEOPLE



“We may have all heard the utterance ‘people are our differentiating factor’ *ad nauseum*. If this phrase has been overused, it is because it is true,” Daryl Lee asserts. “Yet, this phrase tells us but one part of the story. People indeed make the difference between good and great organisations. However, we are not parts of a machine, whirring and cranking away in isolation. Our productivity is very much dependent on the culture within which we operate.”

Hailing from a background of psychology and human resource, Daryl is part of the A*STAR team behind the drive for organisational excellence. “For instance, the organisational excellence perspective tends to focus on systems. We ask questions such as what is the current organisational culture, and how does it hold up to our ideal organisational culture?” explains Daryl.

These are critical questions, since organisational culture covers a wide spectrum of issues, from perceptions of acceptable behaviour to team dynamics. Daryl says, “Organisational excellence is very much the curator of culture in A*STAR. I believe our end-goal is to guide the organisation along the path of high performance.”

MOBILITY AND DIVERSITY

Driven by an innate curiosity in human cognition and behaviour, Daryl would have pursued his interest in data analytics had he not embarked on his challenging career with A*STAR. Since he joined the agency, his journey has brought him through diverse roles. Recruitment, building talent pipelines, strengthening A*STAR’s brand as an employer, leadership development and now organisational excellence, Daryl’s career has been remarkably multi-faceted.

Reflecting on his career, Daryl says, “It is definitely a huge plus that there are mechanisms in place to allow staff to move across job roles in A*STAR. This creates tremendous learning opportunities for staff and helps them understand the organisation better from different angles. I am positive about my move as well because organisational excellence is an area I care deeply about.”

Prior to his move to organisational excellence, Daryl was in human resource management, where he was in charge of planning, forecasting and executing the entire learning and development process for the agency and all

“I’m interested in understanding human cognition and behaviour, and using my insights to help my colleagues unlock their potential.”

Mr. Daryl Lee
Assistant Head, Organisational Excellence



its institutes. Part of the work included driving initiatives to equip A*STAR scientists with skills in leadership and staff mentorship so that they could become more well-rounded.

“Scientists are like any of us too. They are motivated by their passion, but they can be better motivated if they know where their careers are headed and if the environment supports their personal and professional growth. So we try to draw up a learning framework that makes sense to scientists. We aim to equip them with the right skills to lead their teams. We also seek to get the buy-in from the top management in the institutes so that the culture of personnel development can cascade down,” shares Daryl.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Given how varied his interests are – from Ultimate Frisbee and dance to board games and reading – it is little wonder that Daryl is focused on helping others to be more well-rounded. He says, “I find great joy in balancing my interests as having varied interests provides vast all-roundedness and helps me sharpen different abilities.”

His background in psychology has greatly influenced his approach to work. “The key question in psychology is how people perceive things and how this drives their behaviour. For instance, if a programme is met with resistance, I try to see it from the stakeholders’ perspective to understand what does not make sense to them. Then, it’s a question of empathy and conveying our perspective to them,” elaborates Daryl.

For Daryl, working at A*STAR has been highly rewarding. “In my previous role, my work touched those who participated in development programmes that we initiated. I had to remain very close to the pulse on the ground to understand my fellow colleagues’ concerns and use them as the starting point. Now, through organisational excellence, I am able to impact individuals on a larger scale since the initiatives are much broader in scope,” analyses Daryl. “Yet, while the portfolio and initiatives may be different, I am still serving the same internal customers, and ultimately, the focus is still on people.”

