



HR professional Ms Ong finds her IT course applicable to her workplace. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

#### ESTHER TEO

IF THERE is one thing Ms Cheryl Ong's 15 years in human resource (HR) consulting has taught her, it is that skill sets can be rendered useless overnight.

She says: "Mid-career professionals must keep up with the ever-increasing speed of change and take control of their career by learning new skills without depending on their employers to send them for courses."

She took her own advice and decided to go back to school to keep up with the times.

Fascinated by technological innovations such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, analytics and the cloud, she enrolled in the National University of Singapore-Institute of Systems Science (NUS-ISS) Graduate Diploma in Systems Analysis (GDipSA) programme.

#### Unrivalled exposure

Ms Ong says: "GDipSA is designed for technology novices like myself who are keen to switch to the information technology (IT) industry and/or to update our skill sets without juggling part-time

schedules or a prolonged period of time away from the employment market."

Dr Esther Tan, chief of the GDipSA Programme, NUS-ISS, says: "People who feel they have lost touch with their IT knowledge can also join this programme as a refresher course and get updated with the latest IT knowledge."

NUS-ISS works closely with industries and companies who need IT solutions by providing them with student interns. Interns gain real-life experience as an IT professional, and companies get to prototype advanced technologies.

Ms Ong interned at Avanade and was assigned to one of the largest projects won by Accenture (Avanade's parent company) in recent years. Her role was to create technical designs (similar to a building's blueprint) for one of the project's modules.

She recalls: "Witnessing the systems development life cycle and being part of a huge project team gave me great insight into how a Web portal is designed and analysed, and how tasks are then divided and apportioned to the right teams for execution."

#### More equipped at work

At work, Ms Ong evaluates and hires mid- to senior-level talents for the Asia-Pacific Advisory Centre at Ernst & Young and EY3.

She has observed a bigger demand for IT specialisations such as SAP HANA Solution Architects, integration leads and big data engineers.

With her newfound skills, she now achieves a higher hit rate for IT roles. In addition, her exposure to complex software development enables her to present new ideas to her stakeholders.

Ms Ong is currently undertaking an executive course in data analysis and hopes to continue pursuing HR analytics and workforce management software development.

She says: "Often, organisations let go of valuable employees (or make hiring errors) due to lack of information and/or unconscious bias."

"I hope to solve this conundrum by utilising both big and small data gathered from within the organisation and external research data."