

DAY 3 (1 October)
Session Building a Professional Narrative
Aveena Mothilall
12pm

**Connect.
Create.
Collaborate.**

Speaker Bio

Aveena Mothilali

Director Data & Analytics Twinings Ovaltine

CEO & Founder Change Catalyst

- ❖ Business Leader 10x unleashed
- ❖ Thought leader and shaping industry to a digital future.
- ❖ Winner Global CIO South Africa 2026 – Legend Award
- ❖ Nominee Women in Tec Africa 2026 – Global Leadership Women in Tech
- ❖ Nominee Wired4Women 2024 – Women Tech Leader of the Year
- ❖ Nominee CIO of the Year 2024, Winner of the CIO – Smart Data 2024
- ❖ Collaborator and Connector in various communities such as AFSUG, CIO South Africa, WomenInTech SA, ISC2, Global CIO Forum (GCFSA), Inov8Her

Strategist and thought leader, with over 20 years technology experience fulfilling various lead roles to enabling business transformations. Passionate about technology as a catalyst of change to building resilient, insights driven organisations.

Enthusiast for Future of Work and building high performance teams.

Driving digital for good; as a leader positively impacting our youth with mentorship, creating youth employability and jobs for unemployed drive. Advocate of Digital literacy for all.

"Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It's about impact, influence and inspiration.." (Robin S. Sharma)



Learning Objectives



Build a Personal Brand That Sets You Apart

Understand the difference between a CV and a professional narrative, and why both play an important role in your career journey.
Discover why personal branding matters and how your story can help you stand out in a competitive world.
Learn practical steps to craft an authentic professional narrative and develop a compelling personal brand statement.



Turn Your Story into Opportunity Through Networking

Understand that even the most powerful story needs an audience.
Learn the art of networking and how meaningful connections can open doors to new opportunities.
Explore practical ways to build visibility, expand your network, and confidently share your personal brand.



Take Ownership of Your Career Journey

Recognise that careers evolve over time as you gain experience, skills, and new perspectives.
Learn how intentional career planning puts you in control of your professional narrative and future direction.
Understand the value of mentors and sponsors, and how they can help accelerate your growth and career success.

“Your CV tells people what you've done. Your narrative tells people who you are. Your network helps ensure your story is heard. Your career plan determines where the story goes next.” (Aveena)

What you will leave with

A clear story, a practical brand statement and a way to make it visible.

1

Build your narrative

Know the difference between a CV and a narrative. Connect your experience, strengths and direction.

2

Make it memorable

Create a short, authentic brand statement that is easy to understand and repeat.

3

Put it into action

Practise your story through networking, visibility and intentional career choices.

Think → Write → Say → Share → Evolve

Three moments shaped my professional narrative

Not a chronology. A thread of choices, learning and contribution.

1

Where I started

Curiosity, technology and a willingness to learn before I felt fully ready.

2

A turning point

A moment when I chose growth over certainty and started connecting people, data and opportunity.

3

What I enable now

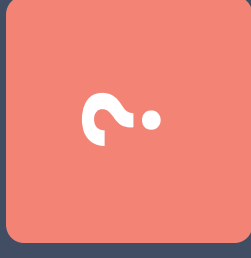
Helping organisations and communities use data, analytics and technology to make better decisions.

My CV records what happened. My narrative explains what it means and where I am going.

START WITH THE QUESTION

If your job title and degree disappeared, could you still explain the value you bring?

Your answer is the beginning of your professional narrative.



Your CV is evidence. Your narrative is meaning.

You need both, but they do different jobs.

CV: a record of your past

- Roles and qualifications
- Skills and responsibilities
- Dates, facts and keywords
- Designed to be scanned

“What have you done?”



Narrative: a story about your value

- The thread connecting your choices
- Proof of how you create impact
- Your values, strengths and direction
- Designed to be remembered

“Why you, and why next?”

CV = data | Narrative = insight

Your brand is the pattern people remember.

It is shaped by what you say, what you do and what others experience.

SIGNAL

What you want to be known for

Skills • values • direction

PROOF

What you consistently show

Projects • choices • contribution

ECHO

What others repeat about you

Trust • reputation • opportunity

BRAND = SIGNAL + PROOF + ECHO

Four anchors make your story authentic and useful.

Start with truth. Add proof. Point it towards the future.

1

ORIGIN

What shaped your interest?

“I became curious about...”

2

STRENGTH

How do you create value?

“I am at my best when...”

3

PROOF

Where have you shown it?

“For example, I...”

4

DIRECTION

What do you want next?

“I want to contribute to...”

I am a [strength / identity] who uses [skills] to create [impact] for [people / context].

Five useful tips

Strong statements are specific enough to be remembered and flexible enough to grow.

01

Start with truth

Use strengths and interests you can prove.

02

Name the value

Explain the result you help create.

03

Choose an audience

Who benefits from what you bring?

04

Use plain language

Remove jargon and vague superlatives.

05

Point forward

Show the problems you want to solve next.

What makes a good professional brand?

Not fame. Not a logo. A clear and credible pattern of value.

AUTHENTIC

True to you

RELEVANT

Useful to others

DISTINCT

Easy to differentiate

CONSISTENT

Repeated in behaviour

VISIBLE

Easy to discover

EVOLVING

Updated as you grow

Clarity earns attention. Proof earns trust. Consistency earns opportunity.

Before you publish or say it, test it

Your brand statement should pass all five questions.



Is it true?



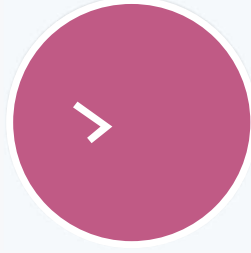
Is it specific?



Can I prove it?



Does it show value?



Can someone repeat it?

If the answer is “no”, edit the sentence, not your identity.

Choose adjectives that describe how you work

Select three that are true, useful and supported by evidence.

Adaptable

Analytical

Calm

Collaborative

Curious

Dependable

Encouraging

Imaginative

Organised

Resilient

Resourceful

Visionary

Avoid a long list. Three credible words are stronger than ten generic ones.

EXERCISE

Make your strengths useful

A strength becomes part of your brand when someone can recognise its value.

1. NAME IT

Write one positive adjective that genuinely describes how you work.

2. CONNECT IT

Add one skill or capability that lets you apply the strength.

3. VALUE IT

Explain who benefits and what becomes better because of it.

CURIOUS + DATA ANALYSIS → I ask better questions that reveal useful patterns.

Lead with value, not only a job title

Use a simple structure that sounds natural when spoken.

HELLO, I AM [WHO] + I HELP [WHO] + BY [WHAT I BRING] + SO THAT [IMPACT].

Generic

“I am an IT student looking for opportunities.”

Memorable

“I use SAP and data skills to simplify processes and help teams make faster decisions.”

Eight principles to keep

Aim for credibility, not perfection.

SPECIALISE

Lead with a clear strength.

LEAD

Build authority through contribution.

BE HUMAN

Let personality support credibility.

DIFFERENTIATE

Know what makes your approach distinct.

BE VISIBLE

Let relevant people see your proof.

ALIGN

Match words, choices and behaviour.

PERSIST

Build recognition over time.

ADD VALUE

Make the brand useful to others.

Three exercises that strengthen your narrative

Your story becomes clearer when observation and feedback meet.

1

REFLECTION LOG

Capture moments of energy, challenge and achievement. Look for repeated patterns.

2

JOHARI WINDOW

Compare what you know about yourself with what trusted people observe.

3

STRENGTHS + GAPS

Connect your strengths and development areas to the career you want.

Ask: What do I do well? What proof do I have? What do I want to develop next?

Visibility is a practice, not a personality type.

- | | | |
|----|------------|-----------------------------|
| 01 | SAY IT | 30-second introduction |
| 02 | SHOW IT | Share one proof |
| 03 | GROW IT | Ask one thoughtful question |
| 04 | SUSTAIN IT | Follow up and contribute |

WHO I AM + WHAT I BRING + PROOF + WHAT I SEEK



NETWORKING

Your story is only useful if the right audience can hear it.

Connection turns a private strength into a visible opportunity.

How branding links back to networking

Your narrative gives people something useful to remember and repeat.

1 BE CLEAR

Say what you are good at.

2 BE AUTHENTIC

Choose to be consistently you.

3 BE MEMORABLE

Use one proof point or example.

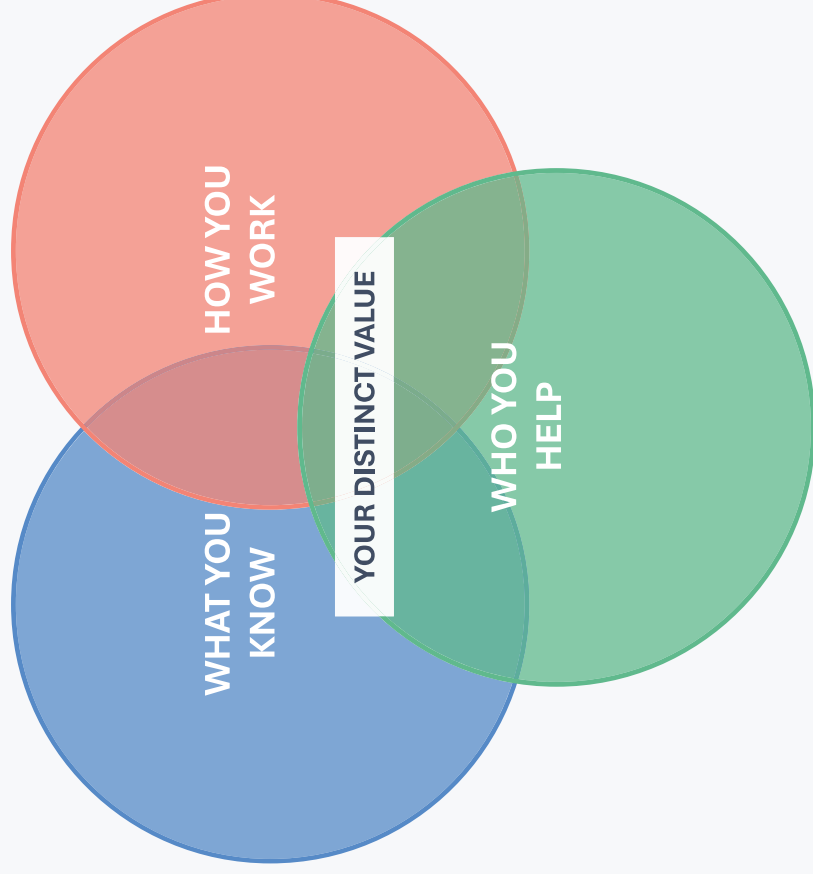
4 BE GENEROUS

Share value before asking for help.

Not communicating your value is like blinking in the dark. You know you are doing it, but no one else does.

Focus on the intersection, not a single label

Your advantage is the combination of your experiences, skills and way of working.



Five places to practise purposeful networking

Start where access is easiest, then build outward.

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Inside your organisation | Events, training, communities and cross-team conversations. |
| 2 | Online platforms | A clear profile, useful comments and visible proof of work. |
| 3 | Industry events | Ask thoughtful questions and follow up with context. |
| 4 | Give before asking | Share a resource, insight, introduction or encouragement. |
| 5 | Mentors and sponsors | Learn from experience and build trust through action. |

Networking is a long-term strategy, not a one-time event.

Make networking easier before the conversation starts

Confidence grows when you know your message and your purpose.

1

CHOOSE

Select events, people and communities aligned to your goals. Depth is better than working the whole room.

2

PREPARE

Practise a natural 15–30 second introduction and two thoughtful questions.

3

CONTRIBUTE

Enter the conversation knowing the insight, curiosity or support you can offer.

Introverts can network successfully by being intentional about where, when and with whom they connect.

Aim for meaningful, not maximum

Good conversations are built on attention, relevance and follow-through.

1 LISTEN

Listen more than you speak.

2 SIMPLIFY

Do not overload people with information.

3 ACKNOWLEDGE

Thank people and recognise contribution.

4 FOLLOW UP

Reconnect with context and value.

Two or three meaningful connections can be more valuable than collecting twenty names.

TASK

Give your networking a purpose

A useful network is designed around goals, gaps and contribution.

1 What goal should my network support?

2 Who is already in my network?

3 What perspectives or access are missing?

4 What value can I offer in return?

ASSESS → PLAN → ACT → REASSESS

Your career is a journey. Your narrative should evolve intentionally.

You do not need to know the final destination to choose the next useful step.

Seven steps to intentional career planning

Treat the plan as a living hypothesis, not a fixed contract.



Career success is multi-dimensional

Choose the measures that matter to your values and current season.



You need wisdom and advocacy

Both relationships matter, but they create value in different ways.

MENTOR

Talks with you

- Shares perspective
- Challenges your thinking
- Helps you learn from experience
- Can sit inside or outside your organisation

SPONSOR

Talks about you

- Advocates when opportunities arise
- Connects your name to credible proof
- Uses influence to open access
- Requires trust built through delivery

A mentor helps you prepare. A sponsor helps others see that you are ready.

YOUR STORY IS NEVER FINISHED

**Build it.
Prove it.
Share it.
Evolve it.**

Your CV tells people what you have done.
Your narrative helps them understand the value you bring.
Your network helps the right people hear it.
Your career choices determine where the story goes next.

AFSUG STUDENT INDUSTRY CONNECT

ONE ACTION IN THE NEXT 7 DAYS

UPDATE

One profile line

SHARE

One proof of work

CONNECT

One purposeful conversation

FOLLOW UP

One contribution of value