



Q&A

Ilana van Schalkwyk

Sector Lead of ICT

Q: Ilana let's start with your journey. Why ICT, and how did you get started?

A: Information, communication and technology (ICT) has always been fascinating to me. I started my career at an international bank, working from the ground up in various roles to understand the bank's operational make-up. I've had diverse exposure within the financial services sector, but ICT stood out because it's dynamic and integral to every country's digital journey. I wanted to be part of the digital evolution, especially from a banking perspective, to build my reputation in the ICT sector. Embracing the challenge, I stepped out of my comfort zone, initially covering the manufacturing and diversified sectors and then moving to the dynamic world of ICT. Technology is an intricate part of every country's digital journey and has an impact on its gross domestic product. Being part of this sector allows me to contribute to these broader economic goals, which is both exciting and fulfilling.

Q: Tell us about your role at Nedbank within the ICT space.

A: My personality naturally leans towards helping others, which fits in well with my career journey. As the ICT sector lead, I establish strategies aligned with what's developing in the sector. This involves identifying key emerging themes and opportunities. I thrive on the excitement of the ICT sector's fast-paced environment and the opportunity to shape strategies that keep us ahead of the curve. My role involves constant learning and adaptation, ensuring that we meet the clients core banking requirements.

Q: What sets Nedbank apart in the ICT sector?

A: Nedbank's strengths in the ICT sector lie in our focus on Green energy solutions and ESG initiatives, which align well with the sector's objectives. Data centres, for instance, are high consumers of energy and are increasingly looking for alternative energy solutions to meet the high energy requirements. Our strong foundation in banking the telcos, combined with our shift towards funding the growth within the Fibre and Data centre segments, positions us well to meet the banking requirements within the ICT sector. We are constantly exploring new ways to support our clients and enable the growth within ICT sector.

Q: Which technology excites you most within the ICT space?

A: Predictive data is incredibly exciting. It integrates elements of psychology, providing key insights on consumer buying patterns and how they interact with online goods and services. AI is another fascinating area, particularly as it

relates to smart homes and the Internet of Things. This glimpse into the future keeps me engaged in the ICT fast lane. The continuous evolution of digital technology is both challenging and thrilling. The possibilities that AI and predictive data bring are vast, and they keep me motivated to stay at the forefront of technological advancements. It's about imagining how these technologies will shape our future and preparing for that today.

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your team?

A: Success in my role is deeply rooted in teamwork. Our client coverage model is based on strong relationships. It's about understanding the client's business intimately and providing solutions that make sense to their changing business requirements. This requires always having your finger on the pulse, especially in the fast-paced digital world of ICT. We measure success by the strength of our client relationships, the relevance of our solutions. My team and I work closely with the product teams, leveraging each other's strengths to deliver the best outcomes for our clients. The dynamic nature of our sector demands constant innovation and adaptability, and our success hinges on our ability to meet these demands effectively.

Q: Mentorship seems important to you. How has it shaped your career, and what does it mean to you?

A: Mentorship has been critical throughout my career. I've had multiple mentors who guided me and kept me on the right path. Mentorship is a two-way street; it feeds both the mentor and the mentee. I also mentor others and find it incredibly rewarding. For example, I helped an introverted team member come out of her shell by giving her small challenges, like greeting two people daily. It's the small acts of kindness that can make a huge difference in someone's career. Mentorship has not only shaped my professional journey but also my personal growth. It's about giving back and empowering others to reach their potential. The satisfaction of seeing someone grow and succeed is immense, and it reinforces the importance of supportive and nurturing relationships in the workplace.

Q: Tell us a bit about your personal story?

A: I'm just an ordinary girl with an extraordinary story. I've faced challenges, including a health scare during Covid, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a difficult time, but I overcame it with the support of my family, team and clients. This experience made me realise my strength and resilience. It also taught me the importance of vulnerability and the kindness of others. Despite these challenges, I've continued

to push forward in my career, finding strength in overcoming adversity. My personal journey has been one of growth and learning, constantly evolving as I navigate the complexities of both my professional and personal life.

Q: What advice would you give to women entering the ICT space?

A: My advice is to open yourself up to learning and stay patient. The ICT space is dynamic, and keeping up with the trends is essential. Read, study, and never stop educating yourself. Hard work and patience will eventually pay off. It's also crucial to recognise that change is constant, and you have a voice in this sector. Embrace the opportunities, and don't be discouraged by the challenges. The path may not always be easy, but persistence and a willingness to learn will lead to success. Believe in yourself and your abilities, and remember that every step, no matter how small, is progress.

Q: If you could wave a magic wand for a day, what would you change within the sector?

A: I would focus on getting more young people involved, particularly in underserved areas. Educating and involving them in the digital economy should be the norm, not the exception. This would ensure a more inclusive and dynamic future for the ICT sector. By accelerating efforts to reach underserved communities, we can tap into a wealth of talent and potential that is currently underutilised. This approach not only benefits the individuals but also strengthens the sector.

Q: Lastly, share some fun facts about yourself.

A: Well, I'm a good cook, especially when it comes to Indian and Asian cuisine. I love good music and I'm a secret nerd - I love reading. It feeds my soul and keeps me inspired. Cooking is my creative outlet and allows me to unwind and express myself in a different way. Conversely, reading provides a constant source of knowledge and inspiration, fuelling my passion for continuous learning and personal development.

