



Software Engineering Conference: Getting the hive buzzing

Case Study

Overview

A leading, digitally-enabled financial services organisation in Africa is on a multi-year journey to build a cohesive and empowered engineering community. Spearheaded by the Head of Enterprise Architecture, this initiative stems from the critical role Software Engineering plays in driving innovation for the business.

The goal is to move toward a collaborative “beehive”, where engineers come together to solve complex challenges and produce the “honey”: solutions that shape the future of the bank’s technology.

Their 2025 Software Engineering Conference marked a pivotal moment in this journey, bringing together more than 1,500 engineers - online and in person - to formalise the community and create momentum.

The Challenge

With strong foundations already in place, the next step was to develop a structured, group-wide programme to mature software engineering practices across the organisation. But this couldn’t be a top-down initiative. Real change would require a shift in culture, one that empowers engineers to take ownership of their practices.

The key challenge? How to engage 1,500 participants - 900 online across sub-Saharan African countries and 600 in person - in a dynamic, collaborative process over just two days.

Solution

To get the hive buzzing, the organisation partnered with [Customer Diagnostics](#), specialists in co-creating and implementing strategies around which people are aligned, to create an experience that would involve, engage and energise participants at scale. As the division’s head explains, “I knew Alan and his team were the right partners to help design an experience that would truly involve everyone.”

Together, they developed a dynamic, hybrid process using two large-group methodologies: Open Space Technology and World Café.

Open Space Technology

The conference was intentionally designed without an agenda. Instead, delegates shaped the content by submitting topics they felt were most relevant to them and the bank. Over 130 topics were submitted. AI was used to analyse and synthesise these into 25 themes, ensuring the agenda was driven by the voice of the community.

World Café

This methodology powered the breakout sessions, both in-person and online. Participants chose which of the 25 topics to explore and engaged in small group conversations. Digital tools were used to enable communication, collect feedback and capture the outcomes of each conversation. The sessions concluded with a collective harvest, where AI analysed the submissions to extract key trends and actions.

This was a true co-creation, underpinned by a massive technical and audiovisual effort. The technical setup and support was led internally, while Customer Diagnostics focused on process design and facilitation. The team played key roles in preparing for and delivering the conference, with Alison du Toit co-facilitating alongside Alan.





The successful execution of this event was made possible by advanced digital tools and a carefully coordinated facilitation structure. Communication technologies managed timing, questionnaires and live messaging, ensuring a responsive experience for all. Roles were clearly defined across a large operational team, including technical, online and in-person facilitators and breakout chairpersons.

“We were all nervous about hybrid going in, but amazed by the results,” shares the division head. “What struck me the most, was what people said afterwards: ‘My voice was heard.’ For many, it was the first time they’d been invited to participate in shaping the future of software engineering.”

Impact

The conference received overwhelmingly positive feedback and successfully laid the foundation for the formal Software Engineering Program. The delivery of the hybrid format was a major achievement in itself, with the majority of participants describing the experience as fantastic.

Key Outcomes

Deep connection at scale: Successfully connected the globally dispersed community in a meaningful and effective way. It seamlessly integrated in-person delegates with online participants, ensuring everyone had an opportunity to speak and be heard.

Engagement and participation: Created a collaborative environment that enabled cross-business unit networking and idea-sharing to address key challenges. This opportunity sparked a noticeable shift in mindset toward greater ownership.

Buy-in and ownership: Enabled the community to surface clear topics, define specific actions and establish workstreams, with people volunteering to take them forward. This provided strong input from the community on what they are committed to driving over the next two years.

Efficiency and innovation: Used AI throughout the process, synthesising insights and summarising outcomes in real-time. In line with the Beehive theme, AI helped distil 25 topics into six strategic frames. Each business unit is sponsoring one, supported by community members who will help drive the plans forward. The goal now is to sustain this momentum by growing participation.

Closing

These outcomes were the direct result of a deeply collaborative process, made possible by the combined skills, insight and commitment of everyone involved. As the division’s head reflects:

“It took belief on my side that it could work, but it was Alan’s planning and facilitation that pulled it together. He really plays that facilitative role - bringing conversations together, guiding the group and using techniques that ensure participation. The more you experience those techniques, the more you see how powerful they are.”

Partnering with clients to design processes that align people, enhance the quality of collective thinking and deliver real results, speaks to the heart of our work. We were honoured to be part of this incredible journey and look forward to seeing the hive continue to buzz.