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THE PHILOSOPHY OF HACKATHON

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ФІЛОСОФІЯ ХАКАТОНУ

The Philosophy of Hacking originated in Ancient Greece. Rooted in Stoicism, this philosophy implores us to have the right outlook, take the right action, and have the will to power on, even as the obstacles keep coming until we ultimately triumph and succeed. The Stoics – which included philosophers Seneca and Epictetus, as well as Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, amongst their ranks – advocated a way of life ruled by logic and correct action, free from impulsiveness, reactivity, and destructive emotions.

Everything is negotiable, and everything's solvable, as long as we see clearly enough to find the solution, often hiding right under our noses. Hackers know this. Design thinking, which is very influential in the tech community, emphasizes exactly this. Objectively, and without prejudice, evaluating the situation – or “problem” – in order to find the right solution. Removed from the fear of failure, hackers are not afraid to take a leap of faith, to take their chances, to risk everything. From Steve Jobs to Mark Zuckerberg, Silicon Valley is filled with people who put themselves out into the world – in direct defiance of legions of haters, common wisdom, and seemingly the universe itself – and profoundly changed the world around us. Innovation with digital technologies continues to emerge, but increasingly there are efforts to help nurture such innovation. The hackathon phenomenon has emerged as an effective approach to encouraging innovation with digital technologies in a large range of different spaces (music, open data, fashion, academia, and more).

Hackathon is a periodic event where computer programmers and others in the field of software development such as graphic designers, interface designers, UX experts, project managers and others collaborate intensively over a short period of time on software projects. It also known as a hack day, hack fest, code fest.

The term hackathon was coined from the words “hack” and “marathon”, where ‘hack’ is used in the sense of playful exploratory programming (not its alternate meaning to committing a cybercrime), the ‘marathon’ part refers to the duration of the gatherings. Although no one is 100% sure of the exact origin of the term, it seems to have created independently by both the developers of OpenBSD and the marketing team of Sun.

OpenBSD's apparent first use of the term referred to a cryptographic development event held in Calgary on June 4, 1999, where 10 developers came together to avoid legal problems caused by export regulations of cryptographic software from the United States. Since then, a further 3-5 events per-year have occurred around the world to advance development, generally on University campuses. For Sun, the usage referred to an event at the JavaOne conference from June 15 to June 19, 1999; there John Gage challenged attendees to write a programme in Java for the new Palm V using the infrared port to communicate with other Palm users and register it on the Internet.

Starting in the mid to late 2000s, hackathons became significantly more widespread, and began to be increasingly viewed by companies and venture capitalists as a way to quickly develop new software technologies, and to locate new areas for innovation and funding.

Hackathons typically start with one or more presentations about the event, including the challenge prizes if available. Aims or challenges can be gathered beforehand, and they can be shared or kept secret depending on the format of the event. Alternatively, they can be generated at the event, or the event may be focused around a specific task. Then participants

suggest ideas and form teams, based on individual interests and skills. At the end of hackathons, there is usually a series of demonstrations in which each group presents their results. Hackathons require personalities comfortable with working informally with new people in small teams, as well as strong computer programming skills. Also, the ability to work intensely under time pressure, and the ability to present one's work to others in a compelling way in a short time (i.e. pitching to potential investors).

The objectives and themes of hackathons vary immensely. Some hackathons target different groups while other target different subjects. From students to corporate employees through programming language and operating system types to specific niches, purposes and products, hackathons are spreading in width and depth nowadays. Here are some types of hackathon: Language and framework: Some hackathons are organized for development of applications in a specified programming language or framework such as JavaScript or HTML5 while others differ according to usage of particular API's. Application programming interface (API's) is a software component that consists out of specific tools, routines, and protocols for building applications. For example, individual hackathons are held by Yahoo, Google, and Lonely Planet according to their corporative API's.

Application type: Many hackathons are organized as a platform for development of application types such as mobile applications, operating system variations as well as web and video game upgrading. These gatherings are usually niche-oriented. For example, Music Hack Day focuses on software and hardware developments in collaboration with music enthusiasts while Science Hack Day is oriented towards different science-related applications. These kinds of hackathons are extremely popular worldwide and attract massive amounts of media attention – and sponsors. Internal company hackathons: some companies such as Netflix, Syntel, Cognizant, Facebook, Amazon, Google, SendGrid, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Pegasystems and Kareo, hold internal hackathons to promote new product innovation by the engineering. For example, Facebook's Like button was conceived as part of a hackathon. Demographic and Level of Expertise: Hackathons can be held for a specific demographic group such as teenagers, students or women. Many technology universities (UCLA, Princeton, Yale and many others) hold hackathons for members of their community as well as students from other universities. These are usually competitive in type with awards in the form of sponsorship (from HackTX, PennApps, HackMIT and others).

Altruistic: A variety of gatherings of programmers has been organized in an effort to promote acts of altruism. These hackathons have dealt with issues of politics, transit systems, local economies, education, disasters and crisis as well as psychological health (for example, DementiaHack was focused on improvement of lives of people suffering from dementia). Moreover, several hackathons were held as homage to Aaron Swartz – the late computer programmer and internet activist. The greatest potential and value of hackathons is in providing an opportunity for people to meet and collaborate to create new links in the medium to long term, rather than the short term focus of the event. Generally, the success at the event is not realized until later, given that it is essentially a prototyping exercise technically speaking, but it is similarly a prototyping exercise of new working and personal relationships/collaborations for the participants.

Hackathons were first developed by computer programmers as a forum for coming together, sharing ideas and intensely collaborating on software projects. Nowadays, the concept is gaining popularity globally with companies seeking solutions, ideas and new talent. Everything's solvable. Everything's instructive. Everything's valuable. This is the Philosophy of Hackathon, and it's why hacker culture has affected so much change on the world.