HANDBOOK:
HACKATHONS
AS A CATALYST FOR
UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS-COOPERATION
This handbook contains info for universities and innovation support organizations interested in organizing a hackathon. Content is written from this perspective in mind.

Handbook is structured chronologically - what are the key learning points you should consider before, during and after hackathon.

WHAT IS A HACKATHON?

A “hackathon” is an event, where entrepreneurial people come together to create solutions for a real-life challenge in a limited time.

WHO ARE INVOLVED?

- Challenge-owner(s)
- Participants
- Mentors
- Co-organizers and partners

OUTCOMES OF HACKATHON CAN BE ...

- Service
- Product
- Concept
- Insight and knowledge
- Startup
- Initiative
- Joint-project
A hackathon should have a real-life challenge-owner, who helps to set the direction for participants.

Challenge-owner can be an external organization such as a company, network of companies, public sector organization. Alternatively, a wicked problem coming from the society can be seen as a challenge.

Hackathons are excellent tool for universities in exploring new opportunities and needs in themes that challenge-owners find relevant.

Ideally, the challenge-owner has interest and capacity to utilize the results of the hackathon.
Hackathon participants are responsible for creating the solutions during the event. They can be teams of students; researchers and staff members; NGOs and public organizations; private individuals; existing startups / early-stage businesses, or mix of these.

Decision to focus on certain types of participants will directly effect on what level of support they might need, as well as what outcomes and impact you can expect from the hackathon.
MENTORS

Role of the mentors in a hackathon is to help participants to find focus, give advice and perspective; connect participants with their networks, people and resources; and be a person with whom participants can test ideas.

An organizer can involve various mentors from different backgrounds to build a pool of experts within relevant theme.

For example, you can bring your own staff members, as well as external experts, such as entrepreneurs, ecosystem players, representatives from the partners / co-organizers or challenge-owners onboard. You can also use your alumni as mentors.
CO-ORGANIZERS AND PARTNERS

Anyone with resources and passion can organize a hackathon. However, this handbook assumes either an university or innovation support organization is the primary organizer.

Hackathons are an excellent tool to create and nurture partnerships in themes that are relevant for you. This doesn’t mean that you cannot have co-organizers / partners alongside your own organization in a more official role. They can bring in additional resources at your disposal.
EU for Innovation

BEFORE HACKATHON

MATERIALS

bit.ly/eu-innovation

MAKE TALENTS AND
ISIIBLE

HACKATHON

Test your idea
prototyple

17.00 - 17.10
17.10 - 17.20
17.20 - 17.30
17.30 - 17.40
17.40 - 17.50
17.50 - 18.00

Tag 4 new socie
trepreneur

in 36 h

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE HACKATHON

• How to formulate the challenges?

• Hackathons are starting point for new beginnings

• Recruit co-organizers, partners and mentors strategically

• What are roles within organizer team?
FIND A GOOD BALANCE FOR YOUR CHALLENGE

A BROAD CHALLENGE
 e.g. What is the future of structural engineering?

VS.

A SPECIFIC CHALLENGE
 e.g. How to improve effectiveness of our process by 30%?

A challenge that is too narrowly defined tends to limit the imagination and interest of participants.
A GOOD HACKATHON CHALLENGE SHOULD BE

**Relevant:** Finding solutions to the challenge addresses the strategy of the challenge-owner.

**Actionable:** Challenge-owner has resources and possibility to implement / make use of new solutions.

**Meaningful:** Challenge is interesting for participants from different backgrounds, as well as for the organizer.

*Think of hackathon challenge as a resource magnet!*
Hack the Crisis Albania hackathon looked for solutions to help Albania cope with covid-19 crisis to save communities, businesses and lives.

Within 1.5 weeks, the event gathered over 200 participants, 30 partner organizations and over 40 mentors who contributed their time and expertise.
HACKATHONS SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS A CATALYST FOR NEW BEGINNINGS
ROLE OF HACKATHONS IN INCREASING UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS-COOPERATION

RESOURCES REQUIRED FROM THE UNIVERSITY

+ RESOURCES REQUIRED FROM THE INDUSTRY

- INVESTMENT
- JOINT R&D & PROJECTS
- PILOTING RESULTS FROM HACKATHON
- ACCELERATING HACKATHON TEAMS
- MENTORING & SPARRING
- SHARED SPACES & RESOURCES
- STUDENT COOPERATION
- HACKATHONS
Oftentimes the biggest failure of hackathons is not the event themselves, but the fact there is no effort or plan in leveraging the results further.
HACKATHONS BUILD AND NURTURE POSITIVE UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS-COOPERATION CULTURE
HACKATHONS
INSPIRE PEOPLE

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
HACKATHONS SHOWCASE UNIVERSITY TALENT

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
HACKATHONS INCREASE IMPACT-Thinking & Understanding Of Mission-Driven Approach
HACKATHONS TEACH ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND DESIGN THINKING

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
Hackathons create stronger business linkages in relevant themes for the university.
IF YOU ARE ORGANIZING A HACKATHON, RECRUIT STRATEGICALLY

• With whom do you want to strengthen cooperation and build ecosystem?

• Who are enthusiastic and committed about creating impact with you?

- CHALLENGE-OWNERS
- CO-ORGANIZERS & PARTNERS
- PARTICIPANTS
- MENTORS
ROLES WITHIN HACKATHON ORGANIZING TEAM

• **Hands-on organizer / producer:** Takes care of practical arrangements, ensures delivery

• **Stakeholder communicator:** Ensures that challenge-owners, partners, co-organizers and mentors are up to date

• **Content designer and facilitator:** Makes sure the event goes smoothly

*Remember that different organizations can participate in the organizing team.*
CHECKLIST

• Formulate a challenge that balances well between broad / specific, and remember to make sure it is meaningful and inspiring.

• Use hackathons as a catalyst for further cooperation with desired organizations and stakeholders. Have a plan for how results are used.

• Recruit strategically the right challenge-owners co-organizers, partners, participants and mentors.

• Cover key roles: hands-on organization, stakeholder communication and facilitation.
THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING HACKATHON

• Structure of the hackathon according to “double diamond” process.

• You can also organize an online hackathon, but remember to keep tools straightforward.

• How will the solutions be presented and evaluated?
DOUBLE DIAMOND PROCESS

Ideal length of a hackathon is around 24-48 hours

PROBLEM

DEFINITION

Love the problem, not the solution

DEVELOP

SOLUTION

Prototyping, build & learn

Love the problem, not the solution
DOUBLE DIAMOND PROCESS IS ALL ABOUT DESIGN-THINKING

**PROBLEM:** Start the hackathon by focusing participants’ efforts on “love the problem, not the solution”. Don’t let them fall in love with their idea! Help them to understand what is the real need / opportunity they are solving, whose need it is and how it impacts the user / customer.

**DEFINITION:** After this, shift participant’s attention to ideating early-stage ideas and alternative approaches to solution. They test their ideas with mentors, prioritize and finally they choose the best potential approach, and start creating a prototype.

**SOLUTION:** You should end hackathon by allowing teams to present the solution (e.g. short pitch). Give them training on how to deliver a basic pitch.
FROM WHY . . .
(PROBLEM AWARENESS)

Love the problem, not the solution

 e.g.  DAY 1

DEFINITION

Delivering

DAY 2

SOLUTION

Prototyping, build & learn

DAY 3
IF YOU ARE RUNNING ONLINE HACKATHON, KEEP THE TOOLS SIMPLE

Tool for live events

Tool for team interaction

Optional tools: Mentor matchmaking, online whiteboard, etc.
MAKE PARTICIPATION VISIBLE IN ONLINE HACKATHON
CREATE SHOW AROUND
PRESENTING & EVALUATING SOLUTIONS

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
EXAMPLE OF EVALUATION CRITERIA IN EU FOR INNOVATION HACKATHONS

NOVELTY: How innovative the solution is?

ACTIONABILITY: How realistically the solution can be tested / piloted in practice? How sustainable the business / operational model is?

IMPACT: How clear benefits the solution has for the challenge?

Remember that in addition to a short 3-5 min pitch, you can include Q&A segment as well as ask teams to include additional material that will be used in evaluation.
CHECKLIST

• 24 - 48 hours is generally a good hackathon length

• Consider using the “double diamond process” as a way to structure the hackathon agenda

• Online hackathons work - but keep tools and process simple

• Create show around pitches and storytelling
KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER AFTER HACKATHON

• How will you offer support for top-performing teams?

• How will you follow-up with the teams and challenge-owner on co-development, piloting and implementation of solutions?

• What is your stance on IPR (intellectual property rights)?
Offer support for top-performing teams and don’t forget the importance of follow-up: Give teams a homebase, where to continue development after the hackathon. You can connect them with your business development services / accelerator, or link them with services offered ecosystem partners / co-organizers. Remember that if you have the right kind of partners onboard with you as mentors, partners and co-organizers, they can offer also support for teams.

Plan in advance with the challenge-owner how they will be involved in co-development, piloting and implementation of the solutions. For participants, an opportunity to test and deploy their ideas with the challenge-owners can be one of the biggest benefits.

Keep IPR and ownership of ideas transparent and straightforward: Typically, hackathon participants retain all rights to intellectual property created at hackathons. Note that mere ideas cannot be protected. If the team does not want to continue working on their solution, it can be agreed so that challenge-owner or the organizer have possibility to continue working on it either independently or with another partner. This should be clearly communicated from the start.
MONETARY PRIZES ARE GOOD BONUS, BUT SUPPORT FOR TEAMS IS MORE IMPORTANT

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project
MENTORS, PARTNERS AND OTHER ECOSYSTEM PLAYERS CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE IN FURTHER SUPPORT OF IDEAS.
The contents of this handbook are sole responsibility of the authors.

Mikko Korpela
+358 400 499 242
mikko.korpela@crazytown.fi

Toni Pienonen
+358 400 737 238
toni.pienonen@crazytown.fi