



October 2023

DigiEduHack Webinar: Becoming a Digital Education Hackathon Winner (30/10/2023)



Organiser

Tallinn University, Estonia.

Guests

- **Mark E. Brown**, Director of the National Observatory for Digital Education in Ireland and Vice-President of EDEN Digital Learning Europe, Ireland
- **Madelin Kivikangas**, Project Manager at Ultrahack, Finland
- **Francisco Bujan**, Senior Innovation Consultant at CARSA, Spain
- **Tomi Kauppinen**, Head, Aalto Online Learning at Aalto University, Finland

Webinar

The 7th DigiEduHack webinar “*Becoming a Digital Education Hackathon Winner*” commenced with hosts Mart Soonik and Kristof Fenyvesi taking the stage, setting the scene for a significant event—the grand finale of the Learning Opportunities webinars. This session promised to be exceptional as it marked the “Ask me Anything” session of the DigiEduHack. Hosts introduced the guest speakers Madelin Kivikangas, Tomi Kauppinen, Francisco Bujan and Mark Brown, further adding to the anticipation and significance of the event. The guests, hailing from diverse backgrounds, were poised to share their expertise and insights on the hackathon.

Pitching for DigiEduHack Hackathon:

The webinar took a dynamic turn as the spotlight shifted to the pitch segment. Each guest speaker was allocated a brief 30 seconds to craft a compelling pitch, motivating potential participants to join DigiEduHack. What was immediately evident in these concise, yet impactful, pitches was the unwavering belief in the transformative power of digital education. The speakers emphasised the profound impact education can have on the world, echoing the sentiments of Nelson Mandela, who famously stated that “*education doesn't just change the world; it changes people, and those transformed individuals, in turn, change the world*”. These pitches served as a powerful catalyst, instilling a sense of purpose and the potential for making a significant impact through participation in the hackathon.

Format and Value of Hackathons:

The discussion flowed seamlessly into a contemplation of the format and intrinsic value of hackathons. The panel acknowledged that hackathons had their origins in the business and IT startup world. While these events often fuel entrepreneurial zeal, they sometimes face scrutiny from educators who find the hackathon format misaligned with traditional pedagogical approaches. To bridge this gap, the panel presented the concept of social entrepreneurship as a conduit between the entrepreneurial spirit of hackathons and the educational sector's pedagogical needs. The key revelation here was that hackathons, particularly exemplified by DigiEduHack, are rooted in the aspirations of social innovation and societal transformation. Sustainability and societal impact emerged as paramount evaluation criteria, underlining their role in addressing pressing global challenges.

Evaluation of Hackathon Solutions and Prototypes:

The discourse transitioned smoothly into the evaluation of hackathon solutions, with a focus on understanding what constitutes a prototype. The panel lucidly articulated that a hackathon prototype should possess functionality, encompassing core features, and possess the potential for user feedback. The guidance was clear: focus on the essence of functionality and ensure that prototypes are testable within a closed environment. Participants were encouraged to involve users, demonstrating how the solution could benefit them. It became evident that a hackathon prototype isn't a finished product but rather a working model that showcases essential functions and invites valuable user input.

The significance of user experiences and the feasibility of prototypes was also highlighted, demonstrating the multifaceted evaluation criteria employed in hackathons. Participants were reassured that the hackathon prototype need not be perfect, but rather a functional representation of the core idea.

Advice for Hackathon Participants:

The session culminated with a plethora of invaluable advice for hackathon participants. A balanced approach was encouraged—both mentally and physically. The guidance was to engage in various exercises, promoting overall well-being and focus. Networking was underscored as a fundamental component of a successful hackathon experience, as participants should actively interact with other teams, hosts, and mentors. The core message was clear: enjoy the journey. Striking a harmonious balance between focused work and social interactions was deemed crucial for an effective and enjoyable hackathon experience.

Participants were reminded that hackathons are not a solitary endeavour but a collaborative process, fostering a community-driven innovation atmosphere. The overarching lesson was to bring one's network into the hackathon context, highlighting the principle of "connectivism" and the power of knowledge sharing. The final piece of advice was to avoid overthinking, emphasizing the importance of having fun throughout the hackathon and creating an environment that nourishes innovation and creativity.

Conclusion:

In summary, the webinar provided profound insights into the potential and purpose of hackathons as platforms for innovation and societal impact, especially in the domain of digital education. Participants gained practical guidance on how to maximise their effectiveness during the hackathon, from prototype creation to fostering a collaborative and enjoyable experience. The event was a testament to the power of knowledge-sharing, community, and creativity, reinforcing the idea that hackathons offer a remarkable avenue for creating positive change in the world through innovation in digital education.