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Online hackathons are boosting student morale, inspiring them to innovate

A Hackathon works on empowering the youth through practical exposure and the sheer you-can-do-it attitude among each of its participants

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The lockdown has dampened the plans of many. However, the lockdown has also witnessed the determination of many to innovate and many others who wish to contribute to society for the greater good. Inviting the youth to come together and applying their knowledge to solve some of the various problems impacting our community and economy are ideathons and hackathons for students.

The hackathon culture has now been embedded across various educational institutes in the past few years. These hackathons are a culmination of various specialties and practical sector challenges that allow students to explore different fields of interest within their subjects in higher education. Hackathons enable students to work as a community where they can come together to connect, collaborate, and create. Inter B-school competitions/hackathons are based on real-time, pre-decided problems based on themes where students are required to design workable solutions to help solve the problem. These problems are generally related to the present economic and social circumstances in any particular country or city.
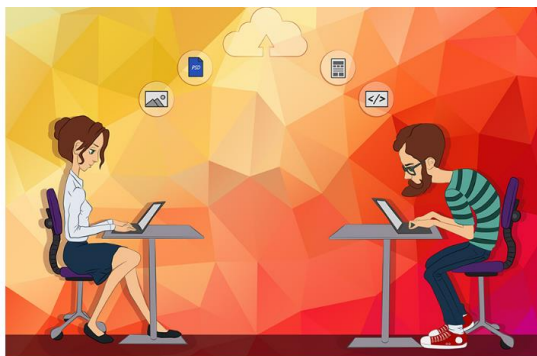

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Educational institutes in India have seen a rise in the popularity of hackathons as more students showing enthusiasm for experiential learning. They are going the extra mile to prepare, strategise and design required solutions.

Initially, hackathons were called "code fests" where only students who were inclined towards coding participated. Today, international student-run conferences such as the Harvard College Project for Asian and International Relations (Hpair) 2020 conference and government/institute led hackathons are empowering students by aligning their thought process to the real-world challenges.

The broad themes of the first virtual hackathon in India were water, renewable energy, waste management, smart communication, healthcare & biomedical devices, agriculture & rural development, smart vehicles, food processing, robotics & drones, security & surveillance and also technology ideas in sectors of Hospitality, Financial Service, Entertainment, Tourism, and Retail.

Practical Exposure: Hackathons are encouraged amongst students to familiarise themselves with various industries and markets. These fests offer peer-to-peer learning, a hands-on experience to execute the project, and professional industry feedback. Working as a part of a sizeable team, every participant realizes his/her potential and areas for improvement. Their conceptual understanding, execution ability, and presentation of ideas are refined.

Hackathons are a great platform for networking: One has the opportunity to interact with fellow student participants from a diverse educational background and industry professionals as mentors or jury. The event format allows students to form and establish prospective professional connections helping them to broaden the scope of potential internship and job opportunities.

Adding new skills: Experiential learning adds valuable learning as students can apply their theoretical knowledge to design solutions that benefit society as well as corporate organizations. One begins to think to apply critical thinking techniques to find an accurate solution to a given problem statement. Through technology, students can design a workable live framework or a prototype that could later be launched in the market.

Year after year national level competitions shapes young talent offering them the opportunity to apply their knowledge and help them acquire experiential learning. These young ideators could someday be inspired to do phenomenal work as entrepreneurs and most of all as design thinkers in their managerial and leadership roles. Virtual hackathons bring to light the brilliance of young minds from across campuses in India. These are the kind of initiatives in India that bring out the joy of learning through peer-to-peer interaction and industry-academia connectedness.

A hackathon models on empowering the youth through practical exposure and the sheer you-can-do-it attitude among each of its participants. These are the kind of initiatives in India that bring out the joy of learning through peer-to-peer idea exchange and industry-academia connectedness. Moreover, contribution to self and society and organisation makes for an active citizen who brings to life the knowledge received from classrooms to the marketplace and society. I look forward to seeing experiential learning opportunities multiply.

- The article is contributed by Prof Dr. Uday Salunkhe, Group Director, S. P. Mandali's Prin. L. N. Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research (WeSchool).

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