Hacking Academia

How Academic Communities are Evolving a New Breed of Hackathon

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Hack Weeks

Hack weeks are designed to build out infrastructure, practices, and culture for members of an academic discipline or sub-field.

Our access to longitudinal data from multiple iterations of various hack weeks, as well as our ability to triangulate analysis using survey responses from participants, have allowed us to explore some of the motivations that draw participants to hack weeks and how these events are perceived to fit into the broader ecology of academia and scientific exploration.



How Participants describe Hack Weeks

"A week of intensive, but heart-warmingly supportive and compassionate, exposure to a wide suite of technologies for improving data science workflows, accessibility, and scientific reproducibility.."



Methods

- Ethnographers embedded within academic data science environments
- 175+ hours of participant observation
- Observations of multiple iterations of hack weeks and organizing work in advance

Findings

- Motivations for participation:
 - hack week community
 - space for a different kind of work
- Lenses for institutional change:
 - stopgap measures
 - response to material exigencies