Mentoring at Singapore's first women-only hackathon

19 July 2018 | **Business Innovation, Insight Zuhlke, User Experience** | **Nadine Broghammer**, **Chloe Tarbet**, **Florian Besser**
Reading time: 7 minutes

Three employees of Zuhlke Singapore participated as mentors in the country's first women-only hackathon. They met participants who showed great motivation, creativity and camaraderie.

On the weekend of July 14-15, The Codette Project hosted a hackathon for over 100 people. The Codette Project is a non-profit organization in Singapore whose mission is to build sustainable economic impact through providing minority women with awareness and access to the tech industry (thecodetteproject.com). Bringing together women from across Singapore, the idea hackathon focused on the theme of "Tech for good" – creating innovative tech solutions with the specific aim to benefit our communities and societies. The end goal for each hackathon team was to create an idea, build out a first draft / mock of their technical solution, and pitch it to a panel of judges.

Learning to grow

Many participants signed up for the hackathon on their own or with one or two other friends, so when everyone gathered together on the Saturday morning, it was mostly a room full of strangers. That quickly changed as soon as the hackathon began. Participants enthusiastically formed groups and began brainstorming. Saturday was jam-packed with workshops on various topics ranging from learning about design principles, innovation toolkits, prototyping, coding, etc. The sessions were facilitated by brilliant experts from the community who volunteered their time to share their knowledge. After a full first day dedicated to learning, exchanging ideas, networking, and designing, day two/Sunday was highly focused on product design and practicing pitching.

It was an amazing opportunity for participants to learn about and further their skills in various tech-related fields. We also loved that the "Tech for good" hackathon challenge was inspired by some of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, otherwise known as "Global Goals", are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs that were chosen as the focus areas for the hackathons were:

1. Goal Three: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
2. Goal Five: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

3. Goal Eight: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Being a mentor and coach

We saw incredible ideas come alive and transform into viable concepts of products with lots of potential. We saw apps with goals ranging from reducing food waste, providing better care to senior citizens, connecting families, and building community through book exchanges. The first-place team created a concept for an app aimed to support those with mental illnesses.

Tech for Good makes the good tech impact visible and accessible to everyone. (Zuhlke)

As mentors, we were there to listen, to coach, to challenge, to share from our experience, and to support next steps towards a new product. The diversity of the entire group of mentors was fantastic to see: some came from a background in software engineering, marketing, mechanical engineering, entrepreneurism, journalism, project management, recruiting, event organization, and more. We had the chance to work with all 14 teams, so that they could gather different perspectives on their product.

An important event for everyone

The hackathon achieved so much and The Codette Project should be so proud of what they made happen over the course of 48 hours. This hackathon brought women together in an inspiring space, created opportunities to learn from experts and develop their brilliant ideas into a promising product, and most of all, it hopefully created an opening for the participants to see a career and future for themselves in tech (if they didn't already). It was also fantastic

to see that, although this event was specifically for women, anyone could be a mentor and we saw many guys sign up to help out.

This weekend was a huge success for everyone. Personally, the three of us learned a lot, we had a blast, we made a lot of new friends, and it was very inspiring and fulfilling. You can bet that you'll be seeing us at more of these important events around Singapore.

Insight from the mentors

Zuhlke: Nadine, can you tell us about an interesting challenge you came across as a mentor?
Nadine Broghammer: There were all different kind of questions, ranging from career advice to what a user story is. A moment from the weekend that stands out to me was when one team asked me for advice on how to get all the work done before deadline. Together we collaborated and discussed the idea of making work transparent to everyone, and the benefits this could bring to the team. We got rid of the to-do list and tried out a more flexible, colorful, and fun approach using post-its, which quickly led to the creation of a Kanban board. The team was so open to new ideas and keen on trying new ways of working – it was an amazing experience for me as their mentor. When I later came back to this same group, they had even added a new column to their board – truly agile to the bone.

Florian, what is the one thing that you will remember from this day?
Florian Besser: Oh, there are quite a few things. Firstly, it was impressive to see how everyone was really committed to the hackathon challenge. They were bought into it, were passionate about their ideas, and were laser-focused the whole weekend. As it was an idea hackathon, the topic was quite open, so the groups had to formulate their own goals and slice-and-dice the problems they wanted to address. It was quite the undertaking, but all 14 teams did very well.
This was my first idea hackathon ever. It required quite a bit of tool and technique know-how that comes along with the challenges of user journey, focused research, and thinking outside-the-box before you even begin on mockups and coding. Some of these topics were quite new to a lot of the participants and given that my background is mostly in software development, it was quite the challenge for me as a mentor to provide guidance, but it was rewarding when I was able to provide insights to areas like user flows, general UX, challenges they will face when implementing the app or data protection laws.

Chloe, you were the one who first caught wind of the hackathon, and motivated the team to sign up as mentors. How are events like these relevant to you as the Recruiter for Zuhlke Singapore?
For me, I see these kinds of events and spaces as very important opportunities for us to be a part of. We have a very real opportunity to embrace the responsibility we have to make the

tech industry more accessible to more people. The tech industry is heavily shaping our world's future and we truly need everyone to be influencing how that future looks. Zühlke is filled with exceptionally talented individuals who are really passionate about sharing and collaborating, so being actively involved in and supporting initiatives like The Codette Project just makes so much sense.

As for our team in Zühlke Singapore, I'm really proud of how diverse the team is in many different ways, but supporting women in tech is in focus. This hackathon was incredibly inspiring, and further drives me to keep at it. Because Zuhlke works with so many different clients across different industries, it's important to me that we are leaders and role models paving the way for how diversity and inclusion should look like in tech.