

The success of a weekly R group at UNE

The connected researcher: Engagement and cultural changes Lightning Talk Submissions

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DESCRIPTION

Creating cultural change around programming, sharing and adoption of technology is a challenge. The R support group at UNE is a great example of how to increase engagement, knowledge, sharing, and learning opportunities in R. It would be fantastic to see this kind platform adopted by other institutions. I hope the experience of UNE can inspire cultural change throughout the sector.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this lightning talk is to share the success of the establishment of an R support community at the University of New England (UNE), located in Armidale NSW. Many researchers and HDR students at UNE are expert users of R, however, they had little interaction. On the other hand, there are many novices, who are trying to learn R and use this tool to enhance their research but learning a programming language can be challenging. General staff from IT, technical assistants, and analytical services around the university also use R on a regular basis. To better understand and capture the demand and needs, an expression of interest was circulated regarding the formation of an R support group. Approximately 90 responses were received, which clearly indicated the need to establish a community where users can share knowledge, assist and support researchers who are new in programming. Therefore, a plan was put into action. We called upon our expert users to come up with presentations or tutorials on how they use R and detail some of the useful things R can do. Weekly two hour sessions were booked on alternating days to develop a community of users, where participants can learn and share useful tips and tricks. As a consequence of the increased understanding of R through this group, training is becoming more meaningful and useful as users can now differentiate between the various courses offered at UNE and can associate the training to their research problems and challenges. The biggest achievement of this community is that people are now supporting and talking to each other about their research problems and how to solve them. About 130 people are currently involved in the community. If a small institution like UNE can create a community like this, imagine the possibilities elsewhere!