

FSP Prototyping module - Hacking Robosapiens

What is hacking?

We usually hear about hacking as a destructive, illegal activity carried out in secret. The truth is that hacking is nothing more than a curiosity about how things work. It is also a way of learning about the systems around us, taking control of these systems, and changing them to suit us.

This is all about treating technology as a craft. It's about becoming skilled, becoming a maker, a builder. There is an enormous amount of satisfaction to be gained by making your own thing.

Examples of hacked systems:

A piece of string going from your bed to the handle of your door.

Two remote controls sellotaped together so you don't lose one.

Using a chair to keep a door open.

The system we will focus on in this project is Robosapiens. This was one of the best selling toys at Christmas. It was designed by Mark Tildens, who previously worked at NASA making the Mars rover. Robosapiens is a bit more than a toy, it has some fantastic moving electronics, and was designed to be hacked. Mark has said:

"I want people to take the thing apart and come up with some other variants on the toy -- I want them to hack into it as people do to computer games and programmes,"

Hacking is also about sharing.

Hackers often document their projects, and provide images and code for others. This way a community builds up around a particular system, hacks are shared, extended by others, modified and added to.

In this 4 weeks we will become part of the hacking community of Robosapiens. We will document our project as a website, make contact with other hackers, create our own hack, and show our new system to other people.

Day 1: Thursday 27th January

Morning

Buying a Robosapien from Argos then taking it apart to understand how it works. This must be done carefully, and documented with photos. Photos are a way of remembering what goes where, and provide a set of steps for others to follow.

Afternoon

Learning about the community, and researching existing projects. So what's going on, what is out there, what has been done, what is interesting? Again, keep images and bits of writing which you find interesting.

