

Evaluation Report of the Advisory Board of the Madeira Interactive Technologies Institute (M-ITI)

Time: 28. January 2011, 10:00 – 18:30

The evaluation meeting took place after the TEI'11 conference which was successfully organized by the conference co-chairs Dr. Nuno Nunes (University of Madeira) and Dr. Mark Gross (CMU) and members of M-ITI in Funchal, Madeira. It also offered some insight in the work presented by members of M-ITI.

Place: Casa das Mudas, Calheta, Madeira.

Evaluation Committee:

Dr. Gregory Abowd (Georgia Tech), Dr. Don Norman (Nielsen-Norman Group), Dr. Norbert Streitz (Smart Future Initiative). Other members of the Advisory Board could not attend and were excused. Also attending was Dr. Justine Cassell (CMU-HCII).

Comments and Recommendations

Beyond the immediate feedback which was provided right after the meeting, the following points provide a summary of the evaluation.

Goals and Content

- 1) The Institute needs a single strong focus that can be communicated as an umbrella vision stating a research agenda to which all members of the institute can contribute and collaborate in more group-oriented projects. In order to do this, consider doing a cluster analysis of interests of faculty, application domains, and technologies. The umbrella vision can be used to develop a “brand” for M-ITI that is able to succeed nationally and internationally.
- 2) One suggestion is that the focus and vision exploits the specific characteristics of Madeira being an island and the local geographical expertise. Proposals for such a focus were the theme of developing a “Smart and/or Sustainable Island”.
(Once having agreed on such a vision, it could be used to initiate a European effort with several other islands and their academic/research institutions on this common theme.)
- 3) This would also provide a framework for cooperating with other institutes of the University of Madeira and institutions beyond the university in Madeira developing an “island-centric” approach, focusing upon energy, transportation, tourism, health, quality of life (and whatever the other units do), coupled with a human-centric design approach to provide the necessary information technology, communications, and understanding that will be essential to make the island-wide initiative succeed.

- 4) Funding opportunities in the very fields that M-ITI is known for, that is, HCI should be improved. Funding should not only come from computer science and electrical engineering. The umbrella vision and the collaboration within and beyond the institute could help in obtaining more collaborative funding and in common application domains.

Space, Administration, and Careers

- 5) Collaboration depends on contiguous and sufficient space. Therefore, additional space is needed so that faculty and graduate students can be close to one another, with brainstorming spaces and collaborative work spaces, and spaces for industry-funded future research projects.
- 6) There is a need for significant funding for administrative support, to contact alumni, and to do marketing of the academic programs and research initiatives, to produce documents, to maintain websites with publications and new events, to manage relationships with industry, etc. Funding for administrative help will put this important work in the hands of people who have the training and background to be effective in this role (not faculty).
- 7) There is some concern about the Portuguese university strategy for offering career tracks for interested researchers. From what the Advisory Board was told it seems that there are not sufficient open positions at the tenure track level. Therefore, M-ITI cannot attract world-class people if they have no chance of career advancement. The criteria of the seemingly very formulistic evaluation of faculty may also limit flexibility and curtail innovation.

International Relationships

- 8) It has proven very successful to have a CMU-Madeira relationship, and Madeira is building an important organization, but until the Madeira, that is, M-ITI brand, is well established it is too early to spread the relationship to other fields than HCI and to other Portuguese universities.

Conclusions

The evaluation of the current situation of M-ITI after being only one year in operation shows a good start, very promising research initiatives and very good individual contributions. The next step is now to come up with a set of common themes and a clear statement for an umbrella vision that allows developing a unique brand. This will facilitate more collaborative research and funding and connect to complimentary activities at the University of Madeira and beyond.

Date: 11. March 2011

Gregory Abowd, Don Norman, Norbert Streitz of the M-ITI Advisory Board
and Justine Cassell

Agenda of the Evaluation Meeting:

- 10:00 - Opening - Nuno Nunes Overview of M-ITI Self. Evaluation report
- 10:45 - Research & Finances - Jos van Leeuwen
- 11:15 - Infrastructure & Academics - Leonel Nóbrega
- 11:30 - Educational Programs - Ian Oakley
- 12:00 - Discussion
- 13:00 - 14:00 - Lunch at Casa das Mudas
- 14:00 - Research Overview - Nuno
- 14:30 - Cognitive Systems and Learning Technologies - Eduardo Fermé and Paulo Sampaio
- 14:45 - Social Computing - Laura Rodriguez and Vassilis Kostakos
- 15:00 - Human Assistance - Evangelos Karapanos and Sergi i Badia
- 15:00 - 16:00 - Discussion
- 16:00 - Enabling Technologies - Nestor Catano and Pedro Campos
- 16:15 - Digital Art, Culture and Design Research - Valentina Nisi and Yoram Chisik
- 16:30 - Discussion
- 17:30 - Closing Remarks and Initial Feedback to M-ITI members

(The actual agenda deviated a bit due to an intensive exchange of questions and answers.)