

# HCRC: Ahead of our times?

Crossing boundaries of institution,  
discipline & sector: advantages &  
challenges

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# 1989 The Way We Were

- State of the nations
- Policy context
- Funding climate
- University environment
- Research landscape

# University & Research Landscape

- Research Assessment was still new
- ESRC (funder formerly known as SSRC)
- RC budgets far smaller than now
- No research themes or grand challenges
- No RCUK & few cross-council activities
- No cross-university research pooling
- Little focus on industry links or impact
- Interdisciplinary Research Centres new

# HCRC & the times they are a changing

- Pretty generous funding for 10 years
- Challenged to work across disciplines
- Research on a broad common theme
- Need to report on range of activities; papers, press, industry links, potential uses etc
- Reports assessed and mid-term review
- Challenge to show quality, impact, added value of long-term Centre funding

# Interdisciplinarity – you say ‘potayto’ and I say ‘potato’

- The challenges of working across discipline boundaries
- Developing a shared language & perspective
- Time and effort involved
- The need to find a common focus
- Why don't we all work together on .....??



**The Map Task. Dialogue - Involves giving route instructions.**

**Instruction Givers and Instruction Followers**

**Speakers never see one another's Map.**

**They may or may not see one another's face – live or via technology**

# HCRC MAP TASK CORPUS

A corpus of 64 Face-to-face and 64 Audio-only dialogues

Multiply coded to support a wide variety of research

For example how visual access affected

- amount of speech
- amount of interruptions
- communication content:  
Conversational Games Analysis
- timing of speakers' contributions
- intelligibility of speech
- patterns of eye-gaze
- Major joint effort which engaged colleagues with  
wide spread of interests

Released as a public resource to the research community

**IG: Neil IF: Craig ( Deviation score = 11 cm. Sq.)**  
**Neil and Craig are undergraduate students**

IG: OK?

IF: Right

IG Right starting at the top left isn't it?

IF: Right

IG: Right – if you come down sort of south – south east – you got a burnt forest?

IF: Aye

IG : Now you come down ....

IG: Have you got a ravine?

IF: Yes

**IG: Lorraine IF: Gordon (UGs) (deviation score = 112 cm.sq)**

IG: OK – if you move down about 4 or 5 centimetres and around to the east about 10 12 centimetres past the springboks\*

IF: What was that last one?

IG: About 10 10 centimetres past the springboks

IF: Springboks mm

IG: And got around the springboks to the northwest

IF: Springboks?

IG: About 3 centimetres

IF: Northwest 3

IG: And to the southwest past the safari truck truck about 6 or 7 centimetres – and along by the field station\*- to the west around 10 centimetres – and around the banana tree around 15 centimetres to the bottom of the gold mine\* - you got that?

IF: Mm suit yourself ...

# Exploring Communication Technologies

- Extending our explorations of dialogue & the role of visual cues and feedback
- Exploring the impact of technologies
- Engaging in collaboration with industry
- Exploring which aspects of technology impact on the communication process and people's perceptions of the experience



**Communicating via a videoconference  
link – and exploring communication via  
non-invasive eye tracking**

# Collaborating with Industry

- HCRC had industry on the Advisory Board
- ESRC encouraged us to engage
- We had some industry funded projects
- We had some industry co-funded PhDs
- We had ESRC-funded research that followed on from industry projects under the Realizing Our Potential Award scheme
- This + our interdisciplinary efforts led to my role as ESRC/EPSRC/DTI programme director

# People@Centre of Communication & IT (PACCIT)

- UK study of collaborative R&D projects in IT/New Media
- Universities & business both funded
- 15 Collaborative projects across UK
- 26 in-depth interviews with lead academic and commercial partners post project
- Exploring the key advantages & disadvantages of the collaboration
- Outcomes & willingness to collaborate again

# Themes from Academic Interviews

- **Advantages**
- **Very positive overall**
- *Grounding in Real World*  
7 out of 11 – e.g. wanting research to have an impact, test theories  
*Complementary Expertise*  
7/11 egg partner's skills  
*Stakeholders Facilitating Access to Key* (7/11)  
*Stronger Relationships* (3)  
Helped in volatile times  
*Discipline of LINK* (4)

- **Disadvantages**
- *Different Perspectives* (5)  
*Egg on Time scales*  
*Bureaucracy Costs* (4)  
*Relevance vs. Depth* (4)  
*Managing Volatility* (4)  
*Funding for Commercials* (3)

# Themes from Commercial Interviews

- **Advantages**
- Overall very positive
- ***Academic input*** (7/12)
- E.g. academic rigour
- ***Skill mix in consortia***
- 6/12 acads+other  
commercial
- ***Understanding Users***  
(4) user studies, theory,  
extended trials
- Time Scale of Projects (3)
- **Disadvantages**
- *None of note* (4/12)
- *Bureaucracy of Process*  
(4)
- *Lack of Support & Advice  
for Commercialization* (3)

# Research Policy Context Now

- Research Councils (RCUK) themes – focus on major interdisciplinary challenges such as Digital Economy or Living With Environmental Change
- More research funding on these themes and on major long-term research investments
- Increasing focus on the impact of research – RCUK & REF
- Increasing importance of knowledge transfer and the economic and social benefits of research –
- KTPs, IKCs, Clark-Maxwell Centres??

# Lessons from HCRC?

- We were ahead of our times
- Many of the present features of research policy we experienced in HCRC
- We know that interdisciplinary work can be tough & time consuming but rewarding
- We know that large scale investments on big questions can be effective
- We know that engaging in the impact agenda, commercialization, collaboration with industry can be worthwhile but shouldn't dominate

*'If we had the chance to do it all again ..... Could we?  
Should we? '*