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IT as a Utility Network+ and the Digital Economy: a UK model for supporting cross-disciplinary research

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Impact

The Network promises an impact in terms of the focus on users and usability and also the international dimension. ITaaU is placing users and usability at the heart of its projects in order to investigate how people and organisations will use and exploit ubiquitous digital technology. It will be vital to understand the human aspects of technology and services as they are developed and the barriers, perceived as well as real, to them.

Pilot projects will be funded throughout the course of the three-year project in order to inject further investigation into certain areas as well as to motivate cross-disciplinary research and develop the Network itself. The Network will also be extended through the use of secondments whereby academics will exchange places with researchers from other environments such as industrial, commercial or governmental organisations.

The other key to growing the network is an international focus. The Research Council UK has offices in India, China and the USA and there are other opportunities to develop mutually beneficial collaborative research. Across the developing world mobile phone networks have emerged as the platform upon which economic and cultural networks are being constructed. Some of the other key areas include smart energy, bioenergy and biofuels, health and medical devices, soil security, sustainable rural living, food and agriculture and the Internet of Things.

Summary

As grid infrastructures, super computer networks and other forms of distributed computing become more prevalent, so our understanding of their impact on our lives becomes a broader topic for investigation across all research disciplines. To address this situation the Research Council of the United Kingdom (RCUK) has initiated a cross-disciplinary theme addressing the transformational impact of digital technologies on many aspects of our lives.

IT as a Utility Network+ is one of four sub-themes that have been funded to coordinate and inspire research in priority challenge areas. This will be achieved by funding scoping studies, running placements between business and academia, identifying challenges and other traditional networking activities such as meetings and workshops.

The IT as a Utility Network+ provides a technical perspective on the Digital Economy topic and themes such as accessibility and usability will permeate these events, reports and research in this domain.

URL

http://www.itutility.ac.uk

Description

This presentation will describe the work of the RCUK Digital Economy theme including the four sub-themes. These sub-themes relate to Communities and Culture, New Economic Models, Sustainable Society and IT as a Utility.

We will began by expanding on the Digital Economy theme in terms of what it means and why it matters. The Digital Economy vision is of the transformational impact of digital technologies on all aspects of life. The cross-disciplinary research theme has been established to capture the demands and opportunities offered by bringing together the best ideas from academia, industrial research and development departments and the most dynamic start-ups untrammelled by traditional disciplines and domains.

The purpose of the IT as a Utility sub-theme is to promote and enhance the community interested in this aspect of the Digital Economy programme and help stimulate and co-ordinate activities in this area. A number of topics have been identified for investigation but others will emerge during the course of the network activity. Initial topics include the following:

- Security and trust
- Standards, convergence and analysis
- Usability and the user experience
- Economics and sustainability of services
- Smart spaces: the Internet of Things

Focussed workshops will be run to investigate these topics with experts from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. Furthermore, designated reporters will participate in the events to ensure a steady flow of topical reports including blog posts from the meetings emerge swiftly into the light of day.

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