Responding to peer reviewers

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Overarching rules

• Be congenial
• Be constructive
• Be clear
• Be concise
• Be comprehensive
• Be authoritative
Make it easy for the panel

• Some people will read this first
• To score the proposal, the panel need to determine
  – Where there is a problem
  – Where there isn’t really a problem
• Look at the introducer forms
Introducer forms

• Summarise the key strengths of the application made by the reviewers
• Summarise the key concerns of the application made by the reviewers
  – Minor/major concern
  – Mentioned by all reviewers?
  – Did the applicant respond?
Quality of the reviewers

• For each reviewer, please indicate whether they were an appropriate choice for the application and the overall quality of their responses
  – 1. inappropriate, 2. marginal, 3. appropriate, 4. highly appropriate
  – 1. disregarded, 2. adequate, 3. useful, 4. thorough and helpful.

• Do you have any other comments regarding the quality of the reviewers?
Constructing your response

• Take a step back
• Try to be dispassionate
• Remember that it’s difficult to write proposals
• Remember that it’s difficult to review proposals
• This is an opportunity to get your research funded
Look for themes

Quality

Please comment on the degree of research excellence of the proposal, making reference to:
(1) The novelty, relationship to the context, and timeliness;
(2) The ambition, adventure, and transformative aspects identified;
(3) The appropriateness of the proposed methodology.
(For multi-disciplinary proposals please state which aspects of the proposal you feel qualified to assess).

The work seems novel in the application context, though of course there is very long-standing research into behaviour capture and it would have been good to have seen more recognition of this in the CfS. In particular the investigator might like to check out work in multi-modal interaction in general and specifically, social signal processing, which tries to tie recognition of gesture, posture, glance, facial expression etc to social intentions. The ambition is somewhat high for the suggested length of the project since it goes from a large-scale user study, via both model formation and data-driven analysis to the development of software and its evaluation.

And this assumes that the error rates in identifying the meaning of behaviours will not be too high: I'd have liked more acknowledgement of the costs of getting this kind of thing wrong in terms of user stress and frustration. I refer the investigator to the Virgin Media TIVO system for an example of how badly wrong assuming you know what the user wants can go; or even MS Word's insistence on helping users write their letters. I'd have been happier had there been some concept of user correction of the system, given some degree of error is inevitable. In the absence of this, it seems moot to me to go as far as embedding the system into software and testing that. A degree of mixed initiative seems inevitable, and I would expect this to emerge during user-centred design.

A second concern lies in what I perceive as vagueness about how the model-driven and data-driven aspects of the system will be combined. The data-driven aspects are very under-specified in my view; one reference to 'extensive data-mining' in
Organise your response

• Categorise according to comment themes/reviewer/introducer forms
• Provide a narrative

• ‘Reviewers A and B were wholly positive about the proposal, and we therefore focus on clarifying points from Reviewer C, before addressing the issues raised by Reviewer D.’
Start and end on a positive

• ‘We are pleased to read the reviewers’ unanimously supportive comments regarding the PI’s track record, the suitability of the methodology and the project team, and, most importantly, the ambition, novelty and timeliness of the research.’
Handle comments tactfully

• You think:
  – ‘this person has no idea what they’re talking about.’

• You say:
  – ‘the reviewer is considering the research through the paradigm of X (in line with their expertise)…’
Reviewer said:
- ‘there is a great deal of work in social signal processing looking at the issues of combining approaches as well as evaluation of techniques for processing sensor data.’

I said:
- ‘Social signal processing is suggested as being particularly relevant; this also uses related behaviour capture techniques, but as it focuses primarily on understanding emotions and social cues (rather than cognition and motor control), we do not share the view that it is the most pertinent area of related work.’
Answer questions

• ‘13 months RA time are requested because the School of Computer Science has agreed to fund the 14th month, in support of the project (see Justification for Resources).’
Provide clarification

• The reviewer says:
  – ‘more detail is required about the method in areas X, Y and Z’

• You say:
  – ‘There are three areas in which Reviewer D would like us to clarify the method…’
Be pragmatic

• Always submit a response
• Expend effort when:
  – There is one negative score
  – There are negative comments
  – The comments don’t match the scores
• Respond to as much as you can
  – Prioritise
• Write your response in full and ruthlessly edit
Questions?