

The Centre for Digital Technology and Management in Munich is helping drive and promote innovative and creative practice

A Munich business angel

In this article we approach the innovation ecosystem in Munich from a personal angle, by following an evening of a hypothetical (but plausible) Munich-based business angel. We start the story when the plane he is travelling on touches down onto the tarmac at Munich Airport:

“Soon after the wheels of the plane touched the ground and had taxied to the gate, Tyler toggled the ‘flight mode’ setting on his smartphone. He was among the last ones to do this, a habit he liked to claim had something to do with the ‘Zen’ he had developed (or at times, needed to develop, as he sometimes joked), through his role in advising human resources software development firm, Soma Analytics, on commercialising their stress detection algorithm. Stepping off the plane, having also been involved in the indoor mapping exercise conducted by Munich Airport with Navvis; he could find the fastest route through the airport practically with his eyes closed.

“Perhaps equally importantly as travelling light, having his Unu scooter parked just outside the train station would enable Tyler to travel home rapidly, quietly and comfortably. This meant that it wasn’t necessary to catch any particular train. Any waiting time could be used productively; for example, to buy clothes from online personnel shopping service, Outfittery, for an upcoming trip some six time zones and 20 degrees centigrade away.

“He’d initially been sceptical of the idea when meeting with Outfittery in a ‘dragon’s den’ type of sparring session organised by Munich’s Centre for Digital Technology and Management (CDTM). However, this had soon changed when the Outfittery team pointed out that 90% of men (and 95% of their spouses) have a difficulty in choosing between a dentist’s appointment and an hour at men’s clothing department in a store.



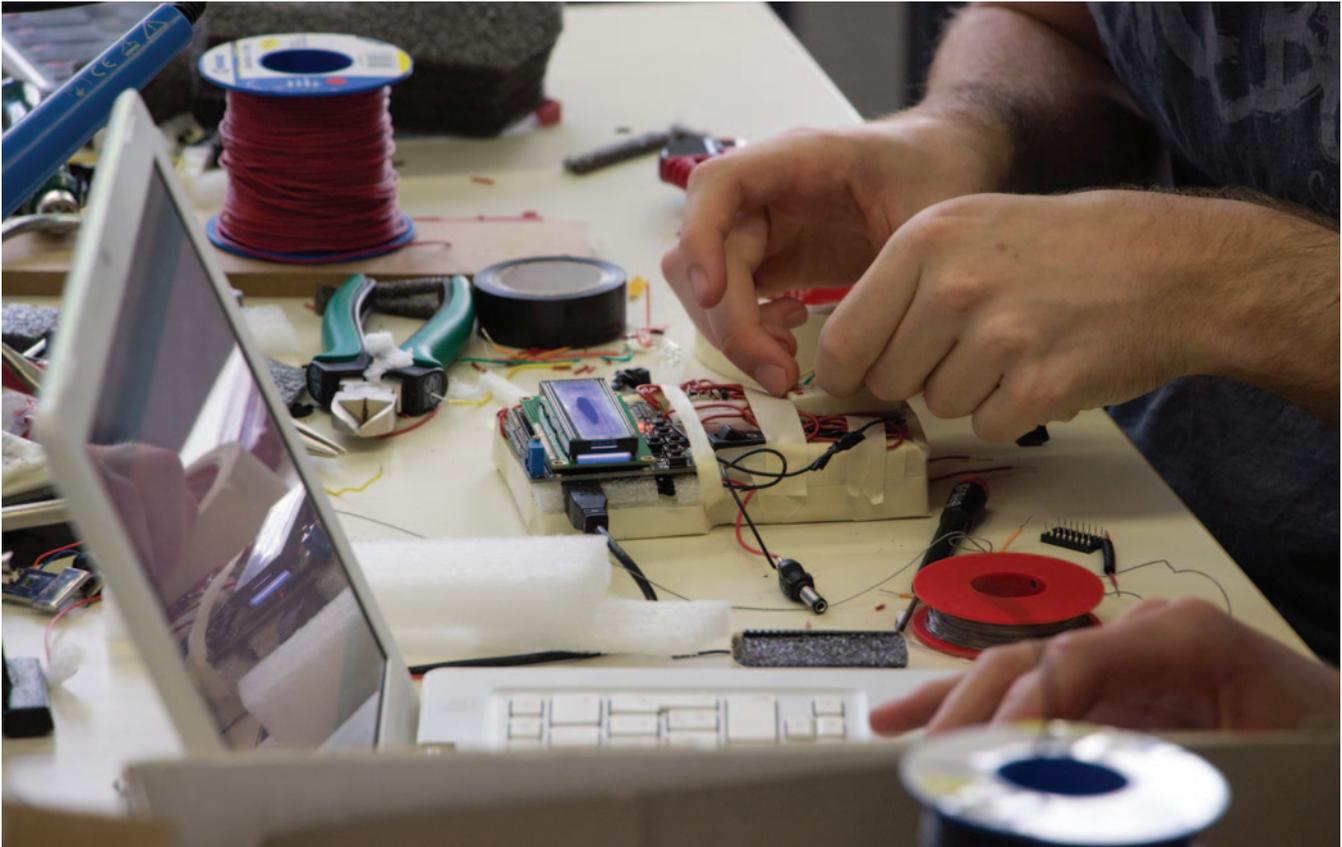
“While on the train platform leaving the airport, his phone alerted him to the next morning’s meeting with potential investors who wanted to talk about interesting start-ups in the Munich area. Looking at their list of companies, he realised that his evening would allow him to talk about most of them based on very recent first-hand experience dealing with companies such as Navvis, Konux, Stylight, Outfittery, Kisi and so on. This meant that he would have time for a longer Freeletics workout in the morning, before heading to the meeting at the Primo Espresso – a very fitting location for the investor meeting; that seemed to also be turning into a CDTM alumni event.”

While Tyler is a fictional character, every company mentioned in the story exists and has close, organic links with the CDTM. CDTM is a joint institute of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU) and Technische Universität München (TUM). Students from both universities are encouraged to include the add-on study programme technology management in their master’s studies. The programme focuses on three topics:

- Innovation;
- Product development; and
- Entrepreneurship.

All of these categories are approached in a hands on manner: usually teams are sponsored by companies. The students are often given a





'mission impossible'; the goal can, for instance, be the developing of a new product or service concept within a project that lasts only a semester; all with minimal resources.

Time constraints on the teams are especially severe: the CDTM programme runs parallel to other courses, which drives home the importance of prioritisation and focusing on a 'minimal viable product' that can be demonstrated and tested on the market. The course culminates with the hosting of design fair events, very popular public demonstrations where the results are pitched to a panel consisting of sponsors, other experts, and the general (interested) public.

This 'boot camp' approach has proven itself very successful throughout the years. While the focus of the programme is teaching the skills and approaches that are needed in different parts of the innovation value chain, it has – as a welcome 'side-effect' – acted as an incubator for several ventures. Since 1998 CDTM has spawned more than 110 start-ups. In fact, some of them – like Freeletics mentioned in the story above – have come back as sponsors for subsequent CDTM teams.

Strengths in Munich

Part of the recipe of success for CDTM has been its home base in Munich. Perhaps

somewhat stealthily, Munich has developed into one of the top three innovation hubs in Europe. This was highlighted by the recent EU Atlas of ICT Hotspots study that ranked Munich as the best performing region in Europe based on a composite indicator bringing together 42 different aspects of ICT activity.

Munich has longstanding industrial history, high standard educational institutions and a long term approach to research and innovation policies; aspects it shares with ICT hubs outside Europe, such as Silicon Valley in the US, Changzhou in China or Bangalore in India.

CDTM can thus provide an attractive entry point to a most vibrant ICT ecosystem – independent of whether the interest in innovation is of a hands on nature or perhaps something more academic. In addition to contacts in the Munich area, CDTM also benefits from being part of international initiatives (such as founder.org and the EIT-ICT Labs) and from having an active alumni network that makes it possible to organise pitch events, competitions and mentoring in a way that is relevant and directly applicable in today's digital economy, serving as an example for innovation realised in Europe.

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