

Referee: 68690

Date: 07/10/2009

Reference Nr: 09-ESF-EMBO-002

Suggested by EMRC, MMN - Pool

Title: Actions, Not Responses: How Neuroscience Changes The Way We Think About The Brain And Human Nature

1. Scientific scope and interdisciplinarity of the proposal:

Which disciplines are covered by the proposal?:

Please rate the scientific scope of the proposal: **3**

Please explain your assessment:

It is an ambitious and innovative proposal to bring together several areas of neuroscience research which have the potential for leading to a better and more integrated knowledge and understanding of human behavior

2. Scientific relevance in terms of novelty, originality and timeliness :

Please assess whether the subject and related community are at the frontier of research; whether the conference outline and content is novel, original and timely; whether the proposal has a clear aim?

Please explain your assessment: **4**

The conference content and outline are original and timely, as new developments in neuroscience are bringing to light new ways of understanding behavior and how the brain works. Lead researchers as well as young and talented scientists are brought together for this conference. The aimed is to promote discussion and bridges between different but interrelated fields. While there are not the most prominent scientists in each of the particular fields included, I got the impression that the quality of the proposed speakers are very good. Giving young scientists this opportunity is also excellent and seldom seen.

3. European dimension and added value

How is the research in Europe in this area reflected in the Programme?
Is there European added value? How will science in Europe benefit from this event

Please explain your assessment: **3**

Most researchers will be coming from Europe and I believe there is an added value in proposing a conference that provides for communication between diverse fields, so science can flourish as a result.

Is there also an international dimension (involvement of scientists from outside Europe), what is the benefit to the conference programme?

Yes, the conference proposes to bring researchers from a variety of countries (several from the US where a lot of the research in these fields are undertaken) outside Europe can bridge the gap between different "thinking" cultures, above all. Science is not neutral and the perspectives of different researchers when interpreting data can bring more fertilization to the field.

4. The Draft Programme

How do you rate the international scientific standing of the proposer and the quality of the proposed scientific programme?

Please explain your assessment: **4**

The program seems well constructed, and the chairs are rising stars or already well recognized in their fields.

Are key scientists in the field concerned missing in the scientific programme?

5. Overall Grading and Appraisal

Please rate the proposal on the following scale:

Overall comments on this proposal: **4**

Neuroscience is an enormous field which is growing exponentially and new knowledge from several areas needs to be discussed in an integrated way. I believe this proposal is an attempt to do that and therefore generate and validate new hypothesis that can accelerate progress in understanding human behavior.

Should ESF fund this proposal? Yes

6. Other comments (if any) :

Referee: 68689

Date: 26/10/2009

Reference Nr: 09-ESF-EMBO-002

Suggested by SCSS, FK - Pool

Title: Actions, Not Responses: How Neuroscience Changes The Way We Think About The Brain And Human Nature

1. Scientific scope and interdisciplinarity of the proposal:

Which disciplines are covered by the proposal?:

Please rate the scientific scope of the proposal: **1**

Please explain your assessment:

The proposers propose a conference that should explore what is the function of brains (pl., sic.) on the epistemological assumption that it produces behavior as action rather than responses. They suggest, in addition, to tap the relationships on how these actions are controlled by the brain to explain psychiatric disorders. However, while the ideas might be interesting, it is difficult to understand how the relationship between all these levels is established.

2. Scientific relevance in terms of novelty, originality and timeliness :

Please assess whether the subject and related community are at the frontier of research; whether the conference outline and content is novel, original and timely; whether the proposal has a clear aim?

Please explain your assessment: **1**

Here again, the proposers speak on the relevance of the topic, its novelty, its importance its role into a major transition in the neurosciences. However, it is very difficult to understand how all these ideas are related to each other.

3. European dimension and added value

How is the research in Europe in this area reflected in the Programme?
Is there European added value? How will science in Europe benefit from this event

Please explain your assessment: **1**

Unfortunately, European research is represented only through the three proposer, as many of the proposed speakers are from outside Europe (11 from USA out of 25). Besides, there are only few speakers from different European countries (in the best of cases, 5 from UK and 3 from Germany)

Is there also an international dimension (involvement of scientists from outside Europe), what is the benefit to the conference programme?

As discussed above, the proposal has an important international dimension, at least with regard to the USA.

4. The Draft Programme

How do you rate the international scientific standing of the proposer and the quality of the proposed scientific programme?

Please explain your assessment: **3**

The three join proposer have a sound publication background with many paper in the best journals (such as Science, Neuron, PNAS, etc.), Unfortunately, they all come from the same discipline, so that the multidisciplinaryity is not broadly represented in the organization of the conference. Remaining proposed speakers meet international standards.

Are key scientists in the field concerned missing in the scientific programme?

5. Overall Grading and Appraisal

Please rate the proposal on the following scale:

Overall comments on this proposal: **1**

The proposal draws on the assumption that brains organize their behavior as action instead of responses to the input. It is suggested that this new conceptualization of brain functions should have important implication in a wide range of disciplines (from medicine to art and philosophy). Unfortunately, it is not clear how can these implications be reached. Moreover, the proposal lacks clear European dimension whilst most of speakers come from the USA.

Should ESF fund this proposal?

No

6. Other comments (if any) :

Referee: 68808

Date: 24/10/2009

Reference Nr: 09-ESF-EMBO-002

Suggested by SCH, EH - Pool

Title: Actions, Not Responses: How Neuroscience Changes The Way We Think About The Brain And Human Nature

1. Scientific scope and interdisciplinarity of the proposal:

Which disciplines are covered by the proposal?:

Please rate the scientific scope of the proposal: **4**

Please explain your assessment:

The proposed conference will focus on the multidisciplinary understanding of the creative mind by considering the seminal role of action generation as studied in the different disciplines involved. The topic of the proposed conference is timely because of the significant recent methodological advances in fields such as neurosciences and medicine, as well as because of a "paradigm shift", as correctly identified by the applicants, in the empirical study and conceptualization of human behavior. The scope of scientific question asked in this conference will be broad, as the proposers acknowledge in their application, but I believe that the structure of the meeting will allow the development of a genuine understanding between the disciplines involved. I therefore think that the outcomes of this meeting will have significant scientific reach across disciplines.

2. Scientific relevance in terms of novelty, originality and timeliness :

Please assess whether the subject and related community are at the frontier of research; whether the conference outline and content is novel, original and timely; whether the proposal has a clear aim?

Please explain your assessment: **4**

The conference outline is clear, and the content is timely. The proposal aims at putting our understanding of how the brain generates actions at the centre of our understanding of human behavior. Even though, similar meetings have been organized in within and outside EU, I believe that the current proposal is novel because of its focus on actions as the main drive of creativity and novel understanding of the world. To that extent the content aims at going beyond classical deterministic accounts of the human brain, and the contribution of disciplines such as ecology, arts and ethics will be important for achieving this aim.

3. European dimension and added value

How is the research in Europe in this area reflected in the Programme?
Is there European added value? How will science in Europe benefit from this event

Please explain your assessment: **4**

The topic of the conference is timely and I therefore consider the role of the European scientific community central in the further development of this field. The conference, apart from allowing established European scientists to present their work, will also allow junior European scientists (e.g. phd students, post-doctoral assistants) to participate and be inspired by the proposed interdisciplinary approach.

Is there also an international dimension (involvement of scientists from outside Europe), what is the benefit to the conference programme?

There is a large international participation in the conference (<30%). The invited speakers from countries outside EU will bring along their expertise from their host institutions and more importantly their contributions will highlight potential similarities and differences in the conceptualization of the "paradigm shift" that the proposers are interested in investigating in this conference.

4. The Draft Programme

How do you rate the international scientific standing of the proposer and the quality of the proposed scientific programme?

Please explain your assessment: **4**

The applicants are among the best-equipped young researchers in Europe to carry out this ambitious project. The selected speakers are experts in their fields and were selected carefully. They invited speakers consist of a large multi-disciplinary cohort working on the forefront of their respective disciplines.

Both the scientific standing of the proposers and the quality of the scientific programme are excellent. I am confident that if the meeting is funded, it will result in significant scientific outputs (e.g. publications and the proposers may want to consider this possibility) as well in the development of new synergies among the involved disciplines.

Are key scientists in the field concerned missing in the scientific programme?

I would suggest including researchers working on the mirror neuron system, as well as researchers whose work may challenge the functional role of the mirror neuron system. Given the emphasis on actions as a tool of understanding the human brain, I believe that the inclusion of the topic of mirror neuron system is highly relevant here.

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And Human Nature

5. Overall Grading and Appraisal

Please rate the proposal on the following scale:

Overall comments on this proposal: 4

Overall, this is a well-structured proposal for a conference that will focus on a timely topic in a novel and multidisciplinary way. The proposers have developed a coherent conference proposal in terms of content, participants and structure of the conference.

Should ESF fund this proposal?

Yes

6. Other comments (if any) :