

Max Wertheimer MINERVA Center
for Cognitive Processes and Human Performance

Report of the
Third Advisory Council Meeting
March 29 – 31, 2000

The third Advisory Council Meeting had two parts: a colloquium that took place on March 29 and 30 at the University of Haifa and the Technion, respectively, and the Council's formal meeting on March 31 at the Technion.

Participants at the colloquium: Aaron Ben-Zeev (partly on March 29), Joachim Hoffmann, Peretz Lavie (partly on March 30), Wolfgang Prinz, and Frank Rösler.

Participants at the Council's formal meeting: Aaron Ben-Zeev, Joachim Hoffmann, Peretz Lavie, Wolfgang Prinz, Frank Rösler. Dan Zakay was on sabbatical leave and could not participate.

This report is based on the Center's Report of Activities 1/10/98 – 1/9/99 and the aforementioned colloquium. On the basis of the colloquium, discussions with the two directors, and the Council's discussion, the Council agreed on the following conclusions and suggestions.

(1.)

At its second meeting in September 1998, the Advisory Council concluded that the scientific work at the Minerva Center was in a very good shape and that the Center had had an excellent start. This time the Council was even more enthusiastic. There can be no doubt that the Max Wertheimer Minerva Center for Cognitive Processes and Human Performance is a leading place in this field, in Israel and Europe – and certainly among the leading places on a world-wide scale. This judgment pertains to both subgroups. The University is a leading place in metacognitive functions of memory – leading in the sense that highly original experimentation is going on and new and stimulating theoretical perspectives are being developed. Likewise, the Technion is a leading place in issues related to the control of human performance, with novel experimental techniques, new phenomena,

and new theoretical views on how tasks are implemented and task-sets get changed. The two directors, Prof. Koriat and Prof. Gopher, are the principal investigators in these two programs. The remaining research in the two places, which addresses various aspects of cognitive functioning, is likewise performed at an excellent level. On the Haifa side, this pertains to work on relationships between two basic approaches to perception and the Two-Visual-Systems hypothesis (Prof. Norman), on the development of metacognitive control in children (Prof. Goldsmith), principles of perceptual organization and the matched-priming paradigm (Prof. Kimchi), and extraction of structure information in reading (Prof. Koriat). On the Technion side this pertains to Prof. Erev's work in the field of game theory and decision making. All of these projects are performed on an internationally competitive level and the results are being published in highly renowned journals.

(2.)

There is an excellent research atmosphere in both places. This is evidenced by the way the research presentations by graduate students and post-docs in the afternoon colloquia of the first two days were organized. Students and post-docs are enthusiastic about their work, and they are competent in both defending it against criticism and still taking up suggestions for further improvement. In both places there appears to be an open and intellectually stimulating atmosphere throughout, providing ideal training opportunities for young students. The Advisory Council concluded that the Max Wertheimer Center is a first-rate place not only for research itself, but also for educating young people in doing it.

(3.)

Also, the Advisory Council was very pleased with the format the overview of research activities was given in both the written report and the oral presentations. Oral presentations were made up of two parts, overview lectures by the PI's and exemplary research presentations by the younger researchers in the afternoon colloquia. Also, the written reports were well-structured in its format, and comprehensive in their content.

(4.)

In both places there is special lab space available dedicated to Minerva-sponsored research activities. Minerva funds are used in two ways: as a direct support for ongoing projects and as seed money for preliminary work on projects for which additional money is

then attracted. Both places have been successful in winning a number of additional grants from various sources. This has also allowed them to enlarge their groups of graduate students and post-docs, so that each of the two groups has clearly reached, and exceeded, a critical minimum of mass for productive scientific interaction. Once more, the Advisory Council concluded that the Center has made optimal use of the resources made available by Minerva.

(5.)

The Council was delighted to see that scientific contact with Germany has been strongly intensified during the period under review. Yet, so far, most of the contacts pertain to the level of directors and principal investigators. Less substantial research contacts have been developed on the level of graduate students and post-docs. This point had already been raised in the Council's last report. The Council and the directors discussed at some length how the situation could be improved. It was mutually agreed that measures should be taken to encourage young scientists to go abroad for some time. In the case of graduate students one should certainly maintain their main academic affiliation to their home universities which does, however, not preclude that part of the experimental work is done elsewhere. In that respect it was also mentioned that the Minerva foundation has a special program for additional funding of research exchange at the level of graduate students and post-docs.

(6.)

The Advisory Council encouraged the two directors to further improve scientific exchange between Haifa University and the Technion. In doing so one should certainly not aim at merging, or combining, projects. Instead, it would be desirable to capitalize on the fact that the city of Haifa houses two excellent research groups on very closely related topics – to the effect that either of the groups (particularly the young scientists) can only benefit by being exposed to the other group's theoretical and experimental approaches. In a way, more exchange between the two groups would help to multiply, rather than merely add, their potentials. In their reaction, the two directors strongly agreed. They are planning a common administration for the groups anyhow, expecting that this will also contribute to closer scientific interactions.

(7.)

Given the excellent shape of the Center, the Council concluded that its next meeting in Haifa should be scheduled in spring 2002. It would be desirable to have that meeting in a similar format as the present one. Yet, in order to satisfy the need of the Minerva Foundation to have an annual report, it was agreed that the directors prepare an interim report in spring 2001 about the time 1/10/1999 – 30/9/2000. This interim report should just consist of a package of papers and reprints that have been published during that time, accompanied by a letter that relates these papers to the various projects in the Center. This package should be mailed to all of the Advisory Council members, and on the basis of the individual reactions the Council will make out a short interim report for the Foundation.

(8.)

During its internal session the Advisory Council took the following formal decisions:

- The report of activities 1/10/98 – 30/9/99 is fully approved. (For the evaluation of scientific activities, see above).
- The financial report (p. 45) is fully approved, too.
- The Center's plans for future scientific activities which form part of its report on previous activities is fully approved. The Council does not believe that a more detailed plan (at a lower grain level) would make any sense.
- The two budget proposals (1/10/98 – 30/9/99– 30/9/2000; p.46/47) are fully approved.

These decisions were taken in accordance with all Council members.

(9.)

The Advisory Council gave its unanimous consent to this report.

Munich, April 17, 2000

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Prinz