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To whom it may concern,

It is a pleasure to provide a review of CICPSI (The Center for Psychological Science) at the University of Lisbon. I base my review primarily on the documents that the Center has shared with me regarding its activity during the period that goes from 2013 to 2017 and the grant proposal associated with the renewal of its funding in 2019-2024.

The Center's focus on adaptation to context is admirable and impressive. Given the considerable plasticity in the brain at all levels of its cognitive, affective, and behavioral operation, understanding how this plasticity adapts to context is essential for understanding human intelligence. Notably, no other international center focuses on this theme (that I know of), making CICPSI unique and significant. For this reason alone, CICPSI is well positioned to make significant contributions, in both basic and applied domains, and to establish international visibility.

The two primary groups within CICPSI –CO2 and ProAdapt—reflect natural clusters of researchers, projecting the theme of contextual adaption in two important directions: (1) basic cognitive and neural mechanisms, (2) applications in clinical, education, work, organizational, and social domains. Each group embodies the theme of contextual adaptation at its core. CO2 focuses on how cognitive processes adapt to current context, and how various contextual conditions promote stability and flexibility in cognition and behaviour. Similarly, ProAdapt develops evidence-based assessment instruments and intervention programs adapted to current social conditions, along with promoting active debate on these conditions between academic and relevant non-academic stake-holders.

As evidenced by the publication lists associated with CICPSI's renewal report, researchers in in both CO2 and ProAdapt have been highly productive, producing numerous articles in international journals, and to a lesser extent in national ones. These publications represent the many productive labs in each group, along with the state-of-the-art level they are performing. CICPSI clearly encompasses and fosters a vibrant research community.

It is also evident from the renewal report that both CO2 and ProAdapt are actively training future researchers, clinicians, and teachers in their labs. These students and post docs are likely to contribute significantly to scientific, health, educational, and government infrastructure over the coming decades. Although some of these trainees may not ultimately focus their careers on research, their research experience will nevertheless be invaluable in supporting the evidence-based approaches they are likely to take.

Finally, both CO2 and ProAdapt are heavily engaged in important social issues, even when basic science is also central. In CO2, researchers are engaged in research that bears on literacy, dyslexia, mental health, social prejudice, and consumer decision making. In ProAdapt, researchers engage with leadership, the work force, cyberbullying, well-being, burn out, and the stress associated with economic and health adversity.

I have several potential suggestions for how CICPSI could consider developing itself further in the future. I hasten to add that some of these suggestions may have been implemented. If so, I'm not aware of them because they weren't mentioned in the report.

First, it could be useful to think about how to further foster interaction at multiple levels within CICPSI. From my experience working with various centers and groups, I have several suggestions. First, and most basically, it's generally important and useful to have talk series that operate at multiple levels, including series where external speakers present finished work, series where internal speakers presenting finished work, and series where internal speakers present work being planned (or work in progress). I'm especially a big fan of the latter kind of series, given the importance of receiving critical feedback before work has been performed, rather than once it's completed (or at critical points while it's being performed). Another factor to consider is whether it's useful to have separate internal series for faculty vs. PhD students and post docs, or whether to mix them together. I can see going either way, depending on what works best in a particular environment. Nevertheless, it's essential to have PhD students and post docs presenting their work regularly, and having the chance to interact about it. They should be actively engaged in public events, not hidden away in labs and audiences.

Second, it could be useful to periodically promote various kinds of events, such as symposia and debates on current issues of interest, with multiple internal and/or external speakers. A related possibility is to extend such events in time, have a series of speakers talk occasionally on a current issue, distributed over a few weeks or months (instead of all at once). For both models, faculty and students could meet in the weeks before to read the work of relevant researchers, both to become acquainted with the work, and to select the most relevant speakers. In some centers, this kind of preparation along with the subsequent event, is used to develop interest and expertise in hot new areas that influences related research in the center. I also know of several places that offer modest amounts of funding to support such events (e.g., to bring in speakers), sometimes along with seed money for pilot studies, should ideas for funding follow. Still another possibility is to have competitions for such funding, using the competition to foster whatever goals the center might have (e.g., inter-disciplinary discussion and collaboration, compelling new funding ideas, etc.). Whatever proposals best satisfy these goals receive funding.

Third, in this day and age, it's critical for a center's website to be effective, constantly updated, and vibrant. Because the CICPSI website is in Portuguese, I can't make this evaluation. Nevertheless, it might be worth evaluating the website's effectiveness. Increasingly centers are allowing individual center members to upload their articles, data, course materials, presentation slides, etc. onto their websites, so that they are immediately available to anyone interested (using a variety of clustering and tagging schemes to make searches by interested users effective). Centers are also increasingly using their websites to document lab events and outputs in various ways that again increase visibility of a center's work. If CICPSI were to promote the kinds of events suggested above, they could be broadcast and archived on the website as well. Another thing to consider is how effective the center's website is in recruiting new faculty and new students at all levels.

Finally, it was informative to see how the center wants to expand its previous venues. But it might also be useful to consider areas not currently covered that would bring even greater visibility and resources into the center.

Sincerely,



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Professor