

Review for the fteval preprint

Much promise, little practice: counterfactual impact analysis in Austrian RTI evaluation

Authors: Jakob Kofler, Jürgen Streicher, Verena Régent, Isabella Wagner

Reviewer: Balázs Borsi

The study is a unique and highly valuable reflection on a specific evaluation approach – counterfactual analysis – in the Austrian research, technology and innovation (RTI) policy context.

The following improvements are advised:

- Justify the focus on counterfactual studies and acknowledge their limitations in the introduction. What exactly is their significance, and why is it important to provide a snapshot at this moment? What can they demonstrate under ideal circumstances, and what are their limitations? A short but defensible overview, perhaps in the form of a table, would be useful as a basis for a more robust evaluation of the findings in Sections 3, 4 and 5. Some of these arguments are already presented in Section 6. Overall, counterfactual analysis is important, but it is not a panacea.
- "Where Austria stands" should be preceded by a short methods section, devoted exclusively to methodological and procedural details.
- In the methods section:
 - State explicitly that no lower time bound was set for the search.
 - Provide a breakdown of the 769 entries by type (evaluations, other reports, etc.).
 - Provide brief details of the interviews, including when they were conducted, the guiding questions (if any), and the interview format.
- Provide an Appendix, including:
 - the exact search term used,
 - the prompt used in Google Notebook LM for the pre-screening
- In Section 5, distinguish between findings directly relevant to the 17 studies and broader contextual observations, such as the flexibility in the choice of methods and the difficulties encountered during data examination. The latter reflections are valuable for broader interpretations that extend beyond the direct scope of the paper.