



Academic Review: Success Factors of European Research and Innovation Projects

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Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting and enlightening manuscript. We appreciate the effort that has gone into this work and offer the following comments with the intention of helping to further strengthen the manuscript.

Overall Comments

We have identified a few key areas for improvement, many of which are highlighted within specific sections of the manuscript. Overall, we believe some structural modifications would benefit the clarity and readability of the manuscript. It may be helpful to follow the standard structure commonly used by scientific journals (including PLOS One), which is: Title page, Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusions, which is then followed by the Acknowledgements, References, etc. Currently, the manuscript includes a Background section, and the Results and Discussion are somewhat combined. The Conclusions section also overlaps with the Discussion, which could be separated in the revised version.

We found the manuscript a bit challenging to read at times due to some repetition and length. A more concise approach would allow the key points to come across more clearly. We recommend a thorough revision of the text to eliminate any redundancy and ensure that the manuscript reflects the most succinct version of the authors' work. We have offered a few examples of repetition throughout the manuscript. Reducing the length will also help guide readers through the manuscript more effectively. We especially suggest revisiting page 17, which would benefit from reducing the length.

Finally, all sections could benefit from a tighter focus on presenting only the necessary information. For instance, the background section on EU funding processes, currently spread over five paragraphs, might be condensed into one or two paragraphs. We have highlighted one area that could be further streamlined but suggest considering a broader revision throughout this section.

We have included more specific comments below, organized by sections:

Background/Introduction

It would be beneficial to provide additional details regarding the evaluators for EU proposals and how they are selected. For example, how many evaluators review each proposal, and

how are decisions made when two proposals receive similar scores? As the evaluation process is critical to the outcome, elaborating on this would provide valuable insight.

Additionally, it would be helpful to know how many projects were funded by H2020, to provide further context for readers.

Methods

The authors mention that 16 proposals were sampled, all from their own institution. This might introduce sampling bias, as these proposals may not be representative of the broader pool of H2020 proposals. It would be helpful to address this potential limitation and offer the justification behind this decision. Additionally, providing more details on the distribution of these proposals across themes/subjects and the overall proportion represented in H2020 would offer further clarity.

The rationale for limiting each call to two projects could also be explained in more detail. How many accepted and rejected proposals did the authors have for each call? A flowchart in Section 3.1 might help clarify the numbers and improve readability.

Results/Discussion

The Results and Discussion sections should ideally be clearly separated to allow a clearer distinction between the findings and their interpretation. While comparisons with other studies are valuable, these should be reserved for the Discussion section and removed from the Results section. In the Results section, we recommend focusing on presenting the findings concisely and clearly, without interpretation. However, the findings in this study can be compared with each other (i.e., Compare Table 5 with the parsimonious solutions to Table 6 with the intermediate solutions). Again, these comparisons should be without interpretation; only facts and findings should be stated without the author's opinion on what these findings suggest, which can be closely examined in the Discussion section.

The manuscript includes a large number of results tables. To improve clarity, we suggest selecting the most critical tables to present in the main text and moving the rest to supplementary material. This would streamline the presentation of findings and improve readability. For instance, Table 9 may not need to be included in the main text, as the most important information (such as summary statistics) is already presented in the text. Similarly, the raw or unique coverage values in other tables could be summarized instead of presented in full detail.

Finally, rounding numbers to 1 or 2 decimal places would further enhance readability.

Conclusions

The Conclusions section currently reads as a mix of the Discussion and Conclusion sections. We recommend clearly distinguishing these two sections. The Discussion section might begin with a brief statement on the importance of the study/what this study adds to existing knowledge on the topic, followed by a brief (2-3 sentences) summary of the key results. The

Conclusion section can then summarize the main findings of the study in a concise paragraph (5-6 sentences), emphasizing the significance of the research.

In its current form, the conclusions are somewhat difficult to follow, and the key findings are not as clearly presented as they could be. A clearer summary of the main results and a more focused discussion of the factors influencing proposal acceptance would strengthen this section. Here, the information in the Discussion section which should remind readers of the main results found, compare the results to those of other studies, and then summarize what the finding suggests overall, given all the evidence – should be moved to the Discussion section. The authors could rework the discussion section to more concisely state their findings and remove all redundant sentences.

Additionally, the authors included a section concerning the limitations of their study but not the strengths of their study. We suggest adding a discussion of the strengths of the study alongside the limitations. For example, while “the binary encoding method simplifies the complex characteristics... but, by using a binary coding method, we were able to...”.

Suitability for PLOS One

The manuscript would benefit from alignment with PLOS One’s formatting requirements. We encourage the authors to review the journal’s guidelines carefully, including the required structure (Title Page, Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion (optional), Acknowledgements, References), and basic formatting details such as double-spacing, page numbers, and continuous line numbers.

Additionally, the reference formatting needs to be adjusted to fit the journal’s style. For example, after six authors, "et al." should be used, and brackets around publication years should be removed.

When submitting a manuscript to a particular journal, it can be invaluable to examine a few examples of papers that have already been accepted and published within that journal. If you have not done this already, we would suggest going through a few to see the commonalities. Please see an example of a journal [article](#) on a similar topic here from PLOS One.

We suggest reviewing an article on a similar topic from PLOS One as a reference for formatting and carefully following the submission guidelines available on the PLOS One website: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/submission-guidelines#loc-reference-style>

Adhering to these guidelines will enhance the manuscript's suitability for submission and increase the likelihood of acceptance.

Once again, we appreciate the opportunity to review this manuscript and hope these comments are helpful as you prepare the revisions.