SOCIAL SCIENCES

Many more labs

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Credit: ber1a/Alamy Stock Vector

If we want to understand and make accurate predictions about human behaviour, or understand differences between cultures, then strength lies in numbers. This is the take of many scientists involved in replication studies motivated by the ongoing and lively debate about reproducibility in research.

The latest study of this kind, the Many Labs 2 project, led by Richard Klein and involving 189 colleagues collecting data from 125 different samples across 36 countries, exceeds all previous endeavours in scale. But this and the diversity of labs and participants are not the only reasons why the study stands out. The authors also took a pre-registered approach and worked with the authors of the to-be-replicated projects to ensure the soundness of the research before experimentation began. The study tested 28 different effects, and replicated the results of 14 of these previously published results. Effect sizes were generally smaller than in the original samples. Another finding to highlight was that cross-cultural effects, that is, whether the participants were from non-Western or Western cultures, played a smaller role than previously theorized.

These projects deliver new clarity with regard to previously reported effects in the literature. However, these studies also change the way many scientists think about and plan research — the picture that emerges is that human research, including original research, requires larger samples, and that collaboration is a promising way towards improvement.

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