

I'd like to thank... myself

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When Leonardo DiCaprio accepted his Oscar for Best Actor in "The Revenant" this year, he acknowledged the hard work of the movie's entire team. But such generosity isn't always the case. On large teams—such as big film production crews—size can lead people to inflate their own contributions while diminishing their team members' work.

A new study finds that the bigger the teams, the more individual members of a team "over-claim" their contributions. It's not that [people](#) intend to take more credit than due. Instead, people inadvertently fail to account for everyone's contributions because they are naturally egocentric. It is harder to consider everyone's contributions when groups are larger.

"People were surprised about the extent that over-claiming occurs. They think their reporting is accurate," says Juliana Schroeder, an assistant professor of management at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

"Many Hands Make Overlooked Work: Overclaiming of Responsibility Increases with Group Size," co-authored by Schroeder along with Eugene Caruso and Nicholas Epley, both of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, is forthcoming in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*.

In the first of four experiments, the study participants—699 MBA students enrolled in a negotiations course—answered six questions to measure how much work they claimed. For example, they were asked,

"Of the total work that your study group did last semester, what percent of the [work](#) do you feel like you personally contributed?" based on categories such as preparing case write-ups; providing insights; proposing teamwork suggestions, raising key questions; and providing answers to other group member's questions. The study offered no reward for over-claiming one's contribution.

The math didn't add up. The percentages consistently added up to more than 100 percent, indicating over-claiming. Teams with eight or more members claimed credit totaling more than 140 percent!

The researchers also conducted experiments with academic authors, museum visitors, and a large-scale national sample—producing similar results supporting over-claiming.

Schroeder suggests ways to reduce over-claiming. "When you have large groups, you might want to consider breaking down the group into smaller teams," says Schroeder. "It is also important to make the workflow very clear. If assignments are clearly divided, it's easier for people to remember who is doing what."

While the participants of the study's four surveys were anonymous, what happens when group [members](#) in the real world learn that their colleagues are over-claiming their contribution to the team? Schroeder says asking people to report others' contributions before their own tends to force people to be more accurate about self-reporting and ultimately, not "thank" themselves too much.

More information: *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2016-09711-001/

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