

# Study finds people have expectations of the ideal number of collaborators to make a product

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“People have an estimate in their minds for the best number of collaborators to make the best possible product,” says Sam Maglio, associate professor in the department of management at U of T Scarborough. Credit: Yana Kaz

When it comes to how people view the group size of a collaboration, new University of Toronto research finds there's such a thing as too many—and too few—cooks in the kitchen.

The research, published in the journal *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, looks at what people expect from collaborations of different sizes.

"People have an estimate in their minds for the best number of collaborators to make the best possible product," says Sam Maglio, associate professor in the department of management at U of T Scarborough and the Rotman School of Management.

There's a lot of existing research looking at how managers can best construct their teams, but Maglio says this is the first to look at how outsiders evaluate collaborations of different sizes.

In one study, participants were asked to judge the tastiness of a cookie after being told that it was made either by one, four or eight bakers. Despite sampling the same cookie, participants judged the cookie made by four bakers to be the tastiest.

"This shows how our expectations shape the way we interact with goods and services," says Maglio, who is an expert on consumer behaviour.

"If people have high expectations for what they are about to encounter, then they'll usually find a way to see that product as meeting those expectations."

The complexity of a task does seem to change our opinion of ideal collaboration size, Maglio notes. In two studies, participants were asked for the ideal number of collaborators to make more complex products, such as a pen, watch and lock. A more complex task made participants

want more collaborators working on it.

"It seems people believe in an ideal number of collaborators that's often bigger than two, especially for [complex tasks](#). At the same time, we never saw that ideal number go into the triple digits, so there needs to be a balance between not too many and not too few," he says.

Once a collaboration becomes too large, we tend to view it as excessive, costly and unwieldy—and it can dampen our enthusiasm for it, he adds.

Maglio was first inspired to do this research after witnessing the hype generated by a new beer made by a [collaboration](#) of three independent brewers in San Francisco.

"We tend to think of co-branding as only two brands, but here were three brewers and people were lining up around the block for a beer they hadn't even tried," he says. "It seemed, at least in this case, that three was better than two in terms of generating enthusiasm."

Maglio says there are clear lessons for marketers: They can do more to find the number of collaborators their customers would prefer and then promote it. At the same time, it's also important to know when too many collaborators can ruin enthusiasm.

"It's important to know the number and not exceed it. Having three independent brewers may be close to ideal, but having 22—which has actually happened—may cause consumers to walk away," he says.

**More information:** Sam J. Maglio et al. Perceptions of Collaborations: How Many Cooks Seem to Spoil the Broth?, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550619849108](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619849108)

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