

The Pressure Cook

A Commentary on Social Harmony
and Technical Optimisation

Problem space

Social cooking often reveals uneven participation and tension during collaboration. People say they want balanced teamwork, but real life rarely delivers it.

Our Question: **Can technology truly help us change our behaviour or does it just make us perform it?**

What are we exploring?

By turning collaboration into a **measurable** system, the installation exposes the absurdity of "**perfect teamwork**".

It questions the role of technology in shaping behaviour and challenges the idea that fairness and harmony can be engineered. **It's not about cooking but the control disguised as collaboration.**

Social & Mobile aspect

The project is intended to **be part of a public space or art exhibit** where strangers or friends can test their coordination and reflect on how their actions influences collaboration and on how technology shapes their interactions.

Concept

A buildable social cooking simulation using tools, fruits, and rule cards.

The system observes and **regulates** behaviour by **tracking** tools, rotating roles, and **monitoring** social interaction.

Our interactive installation **satirises** the ideal "smart kitchen". Participants cook while exposed to overbearing alerts and flashing lights that attempt to enforce "**perfect teamwork**".

Instead of harmony, it produces chaos and discomfort, exposing how **systems that promise cooperation** can actually erode human connection.

Core Commentary: **What happens when technology tries to optimise emotion?**

The design uses **exaggeration** to reveal the **absurdity of technological control** in emotional, social contexts.

Key Technology Behaviours:

- Task rotation
- Detect counter cleanliness
- Alerts when users are "too quiet" (not socialising enough) or "too loud" (arguing)

Overview of technical aspects of the project.

Our system uses arduino, LEDs, camera, ArUco markers, and sound sensors to track how participants interact with each other.

Ethical Considerations

The installation uses pressure, flashing lights, and constant feedback, which can sometimes cause stress or sensory overload.

To make sure people feel safe, **we start each session by explaining what to expect and letting participants know that they can pause or stop at any time if it feels too intense.**

The **design never targets or calls out individuals**. It speaks to the group as a whole to avoid embarrassment or blame.

The tension and confusion are shared, turning the experience into a **reflection on control and cooperation** rather than a test of performance.

User testing data

After several rounds of user testing, we saw how the system's exaggerated control changed how people behaved.

The flashing lights made participants feel like they always had to be doing something. They **became more self-conscious and started moving just to stay active**.

The secret cards made people think more about their role in the social cook and pay attention to who needed help. It pushed them to participate instead of standing back.

Even though everyone was working together, the constant rules and feedback made it feel strict and forced rather than natural teamwork.

The testing showed that too much control creates pressure and confusion. We kept that feeling in the design to show how systems that claim to improve teamwork can actually make people act mechanically.

The point is not to remove the discomfort but to use it to **show how control affects behaviour and emotion**.