

# The Constructs of a Divisive Coworker and Its Effects on Deadlines and Team Goals

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## Abstract

In any professional environment, teamwork is essential for achieving organizational goals and meeting deadlines. However, the presence of a divisive coworker can undermine team cohesion, slow progress, and derail efforts to meet deadlines. This paper explores the characteristics of a divisive coworker, how their behavior impacts team dynamics, and the effects on overall productivity and goal attainment. By examining real-world scenarios and psychological frameworks, this paper offers insights into how organizations can mitigate the negative effects of divisive coworkers to ensure teams stay on track and meet their objectives.

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## Introduction

Teamwork is often cited as one of the most critical components of success in any organization. When individuals collaborate effectively, they can generate ideas, solve problems, and achieve common goals more efficiently than they would individually (West, 2012). However, the presence of a divisive coworker—someone who disrupts team harmony through negative behaviors such as gossip, passive-aggressiveness, or refusal to cooperate—can significantly hinder a team's ability to perform. Divisive coworkers can create a toxic work environment, slow progress toward deadlines, and negatively affect team morale.

This paper seeks to explore the traits of a divisive coworker, analyze how such individuals impact team dynamics, and assess the broader effects on meeting deadlines and achieving team goals. Through an exploratory examination, we aim to provide strategies for both employees and managers to address these challenges, minimize disruption, and foster a healthier, more productive work environment.

## Research Objectives

1. To explore the defining traits of a divisive coworker in the workplace.
2. To examine the negative effects of divisive coworkers on team performance, deadlines, and goal attainment.

3. To propose strategies for mitigating the impact of divisive behaviors and promoting teamwork and cohesion.
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## Constructs of a Divisive Coworker

A divisive coworker can manifest their disruptive behavior in several ways, all of which pose threats to a healthy team dynamic. These individuals can foster conflict, weaken trust among team members, and cause distractions that derail productivity.

### 1. Characteristics of a Divisive Coworker

Divisive coworkers often exhibit specific traits that contribute to the breakdown of teamwork. These traits can vary but are typically rooted in behavior that prioritizes personal agendas over team objectives (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Key characteristics of a divisive coworker include:

- **Gossip and Rumor Spreading:** Divisive coworkers frequently engage in gossip or the spreading of rumors. This behavior undermines trust and can create an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility, distracting team members from their work (Kniffin & Wilson, 2010).
- **Passive-Aggressive Behavior:** Instead of addressing issues directly, divisive coworkers often employ passive-aggressive tactics, such as backhanded compliments, intentional inefficiency, or subtle forms of sabotage. These behaviors can confuse and frustrate other team members, leading to delays in project completion.
- **Refusal to Cooperate:** Divisive coworkers may exhibit a lack of willingness to collaborate with their peers, choosing instead to hoard information or refuse to participate fully in team activities. This refusal often hinders progress and forces other team members to compensate for the lack of contribution (Fisher, 2000).
- **Manipulation and Favoritism:** Some divisive coworkers engage in manipulative tactics, such as aligning with certain team members to create factions or engaging in favoritism to gain an advantage. This creates an “us versus them” mentality that further fractures team cohesion (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009).

### 2. Root Causes of Divisive Behavior

The motivations behind divisive behavior can vary, but they often stem from personal insecurities, power struggles, or an attempt to assert dominance within the team (Felps et al., 2006). Divisive coworkers may feel threatened by more competent colleagues, leading them to undermine others to feel secure in their position. Alternatively, they may seek to control or influence team outcomes by pitting team members against each other, thereby positioning themselves as a necessary or irreplaceable part of the group.

Another common root cause of divisiveness is poor management. Inconsistent communication or a lack of clarity around roles and expectations can create an environment where divisive behavior thrives (Williams, 2013). When there are unclear boundaries or unresolved conflicts within a team, individuals with divisive tendencies may take advantage of the situation to further their own interests.

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## **Effects on Deadlines and Team Goals**

The presence of a divisive coworker can have significant and measurable effects on a team's ability to meet deadlines and achieve its goals. Teams rely on trust, open communication, and a shared sense of purpose to function effectively. Divisive behaviors erode these foundational elements, leading to decreased efficiency and missed deadlines.

### **1. Disruption of Communication and Collaboration**

Effective communication is the cornerstone of any successful team. A divisive coworker can disrupt communication by fostering distrust among team members, leading to a breakdown in the flow of information. When team members feel unsure about each other's intentions or worry about being undermined, they are less likely to share critical information or seek help when needed (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Divisive coworkers can also disrupt collaboration by creating cliques or causing conflict within the team. When team members are divided into factions, they may prioritize their loyalty to specific individuals over the collective success of the group, leading to inefficient workflows and duplicated efforts (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). This fragmentation often results in delayed decision-making and missed opportunities to complete tasks on time.

### **2. Negative Impact on Team Morale**

A toxic work environment fueled by a divisive coworker can have profound effects on team morale. When team members feel they are working in a hostile or untrustworthy environment, their motivation to perform well decreases (Bakker et al., 2011). Low morale can lead to absenteeism, disengagement, and a general lack of enthusiasm for meeting team goals.

Additionally, the constant stress of dealing with a divisive coworker can lead to burnout among other team members. The emotional toll of navigating a toxic environment drains energy and focus that could otherwise be directed toward productive work (Salin, 2003). Burnout not only affects individual performance but also contributes to missed deadlines and decreased overall productivity.

### **3. Delays in Project Completion**

The behaviors of a divisive coworker often lead to delays in project completion. Passive-aggressiveness, refusal to cooperate, and hoarding of information can create bottlenecks in the workflow, requiring other team members to spend extra time compensating for the lack of cooperation (Driskell & Salas, 2017). Moreover, unresolved conflicts can result in prolonged meetings, debates, or rework, all of which delay progress on key milestones.

In some cases, the divisive coworker may intentionally delay tasks to sabotage the team's efforts or to seek attention. This behavior can be particularly detrimental to meeting tight deadlines, as it forces the team to rush through tasks in the final stages of a project, potentially leading to lower-quality work (Williams, 2013).

### **4. Compromise of Team Goals**

Ultimately, the presence of a divisive coworker compromises the team's ability to achieve its goals. Whether the goals are related to project outcomes, quality standards, or meeting deadlines, divisive behaviors undermine the shared purpose that drives team success (Sarker & Valacich, 2010). When team members are more focused on navigating internal conflicts than on working together toward a common objective, the likelihood of achieving meaningful outcomes diminishes.

The long-term effects of divisiveness can also be damaging to the organization as a whole. Teams that consistently fail to meet deadlines or deliver on goals due to internal conflicts may lose credibility with stakeholders, leading to lost opportunities for promotions, funding, or future projects (Jehn, 1995).

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## **Strategies to Mitigate the Impact of Divisive Coworkers**

While divisive coworkers can create significant challenges for teams, managers and team members can take steps to mitigate their impact. By fostering a culture of open communication, addressing conflict early, and implementing clear roles and expectations, organizations can reduce the disruptive influence of divisive individuals.

### **1. Promote Open Communication and Feedback**

Open communication is essential for mitigating the effects of divisive coworkers. Team members should feel comfortable expressing concerns or addressing conflicts directly with each other and their managers. Encouraging regular feedback sessions and promoting transparency can help identify and resolve issues before they escalate into larger problems (Pinto et al., 1993).

### **2. Set Clear Expectations and Boundaries**

Establishing clear expectations for behavior and performance can prevent divisive individuals from exploiting ambiguities in the team's dynamics. Managers should outline specific roles, responsibilities, and deadlines for all team members, ensuring that everyone understands their contribution to the team's success (Williams, 2013). By setting firm boundaries, managers can minimize the opportunities for divisive coworkers to manipulate situations or create conflict.

### **3. Address Conflict Early**

Proactively addressing conflict is crucial for maintaining a healthy team environment. When divisive behaviors are identified, managers should intervene early to mediate and resolve issues before they spiral out of control (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Conflict resolution strategies such as mediation, one-on-one conversations, or team-building exercises can help rebuild trust and improve collaboration.

### **4. Foster a Positive and Inclusive Team Culture**

Creating a positive and inclusive team culture can counteract the negative influence of divisive coworkers. Teams that emphasize collaboration, mutual respect, and shared accountability are less likely to be derailed by toxic behaviors. Managers can promote team-building activities, recognize and reward teamwork, and provide opportunities for professional development to strengthen team cohesion (Tjosvold, 1998).

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## Conclusion

Divisive coworkers can have a profound impact on a team's ability to meet deadlines and achieve its goals. Their disruptive behaviors—whether through gossip, passive-aggressiveness, or refusal to cooperate—erode trust, communication, and collaboration. These behaviors often lead to delays, reduced productivity, and compromised team goals. However, by fostering open communication, setting clear expectations, addressing conflict early, and promoting a positive team culture, organizations can mitigate the effects of divisive individuals and ensure that teams remain focused on their objectives. In the long run, addressing divisive behavior not only benefits the team but also contributes to the overall success of the organization.

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## **Keywords**

divisive coworker, team dynamics, workplace conflict, missed deadlines, team goals, passive-aggressiveness, team morale, collaboration, communication breakdown, conflict resolution