



PEOPLE, PROJECTS AND THE HUMAN SIDE OF DELIVERY

A Know Your Teams perspective on project team dynamics, and what happens when teams are assembled and we don't ask all the questions.

June 2026

THE PROBLEM

You can read a programme. You can read a P&L. But you can't always read a room or see the potential impact on people and projects on the horizon.

Most project problems have a people precursor. The client rep and your PM never quite clicked. Two senior engineers competing rather than collaborating. A JV partner or Tier 1 whose site manager operates nothing like yours yet holds the authority in the relationship. These dynamics don't appear on a risk register, but they shape outcomes every day.

Even in the largest organisations, project teams are often assembled the same way they always have been — skills, availability, whoever fits into the gap. Very few ask whether these people will actually work together. Even fewer map the pressure points before they become breaking points. The human risk is invisible right up until it isn't.

THE PERSON BEHIND THE PROBLEM NO ONE SPOKE ABOUT

Every project that experiences a breakdown has a moment where someone looks back and says: we could see that coming. Not the programme slippage. Not the commercial dispute. The person. The one who went quiet. The one who stopped pushing back. The one who was clearly not okay but whose not-okay-ness never quite made it into a conversation that mattered.

“Stress, depression and anxiety at work account for more than half of work related ill health” — HSE Statistics 2024/25

Behind these statistics are skilled, committed professionals, many were placed into environments never assessed for fit and never questioned until something broke.

Here are five patterns worth understanding. Not because they are inevitable. Because they are observable and preventable.

The Invisible Misfit

On paper, a strong fit. In practice, someone whose natural working preference is at odds with the people around them, key interfaces and the pressures coming to bear. They don't fail visibly — they adapt. They work harder than everyone else just to appear at ease. That effort can accumulate quietly until the stretch becomes too much and reversion to natural profile often occurs with potential impact for the individual and their principal touch points with the team.



The Senior Leader Tone



Every senior leader sets a tone whether they intend to or not. A strongly directive leader can make care, consultation and caution feel out of place. People adjust accordingly. What can look like a high-performing team may also be a team with people carrying sustained pressure and adaptation — with no shared language to name it and no perceived safe channel to surface it, other than peers. The conversations with the leader are different to the conversation around the water cooler. Breakdown has begun.

The Opposite-Colour Interface

Two senior project leaders. Different organisations. Opposite instincts. Every interaction effortful. Every misread personal. That friction doesn't stay at the top — it moves through both organisations, quietly eroding the trust that people on both sides depend on. Trust lost at this level is rarely recovered without someone paying a personal price.



The Escalation Gap



Someone sees something worth raising. They know it, they see it every day. But the leadership channel moves fast and leaves little room for conversation. The moment closes before it opens. Not because they failed — but because the gap between their natural style and that of their peers and leaders can make speaking up feel disproportionately difficult. A human cost, paid quietly, bottled up by the person who sees the things worth acting upon.

The Line Friction

The employee cares about doing it properly — care in the detail, stick to process, key relationships intact, failure costs avoided. Their line manager cares about pace, snap decisions, decisive action. In that environment, thoroughness can look like slowness and the instinct to bring people with you can feel like an obstacle.



The team member adjusts. They apply the mask. They carry the care more privately. And the line manager — not wrong, not unkind, simply wired differently — never knows what was quietly held back. The cost rarely announces itself. It accumulates.

THE COST OF NOT ASKING

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that doesn't show up in any project metric. It belongs to the person working quietly, continuously, at a distance from where their natural strengths actually lie. Not struggling visibly. Not failing yet. Just spending more energy than their role should require, in ways that nobody around them has thought to ask about.

Many organisations have invested in colour profiling to understand exactly this. The workshop happens. The reveal is engaging — often genuinely moving. People recognise themselves and each other with real relief. Good intentions are stated. And then the insight is filed, overtaken by the next deadline, the next milestone, the next thing that feels more urgent than a conversation about how people are actually working together.

That is the first gap. The second is that even where colour profiling becomes a known and valued language, it can rarely make the journey into the operational reality of a live project — the specific relationships under pressure, the individuals carrying excessive flex between their natural strengths and what their environment is demanding of them, the channels of communication that some may find difficult to access.

What gets carried in that gap is often invisible. The prolonged effort of presenting differently than you naturally are. The process of reading a room that never quite feels safe to express ones real self. The loneliness of having key project interfaces that work differently to you and may lack the awareness to flex.

It can begin with a hesitation, or a visible tension in certain relationships, a lack of inter team exchange, heightened levels of e-mails instead of conversation. A good idea not shared because the room doesn't feel receptive. A concern not raised because the moment closed too quickly. A strength not offered because the environment has begun to signal, quietly and consistently, that this particular kind of contribution is not what is needed here. Over time those hesitations can become habits — and the person becomes, to those around them, a slightly diminished version of what they could be. They are not less capable, they are just less able to access their capability in this environment, under this pressure, alongside these particular people (at the moment). That distinction matters. It is the difference between a personal failing and a structural one.

The HSE tells us that stress, depression and anxiety account for more than half of all work-related ill health. Stress does not arrive fully formed. It accumulates — in the gap between who someone is naturally and what they perceive their environment is asking them to be.

The profile was always useful. The question is what happens to it next.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE WHEN COLOUR PROFILES ARE FED INTO A TEAM DYNAMICS REPORT?

The profile was always useful. It told someone something they could see in themselves — how they prefer to work, where their energy naturally goes, what works when you communicate with them, what they find energising and what they find draining. For a moment, often in a room with colleagues, that truth felt relevant and alive for everyone. They saw each other for their strengths, how they each can give their best.

Then the project moved on. And the insight and opportunity didn't travel with it.

A Team Dynamics Report doesn't replace these individual profiles. It picks them up from where they were left and puts them to work. It takes what was learned about individuals and asks the next questions — the one that rarely gets asked: what does this mean for these people, in the context of this specific project environment and primary touch points, when we put them all together. Because in construction, and in particular in multi stakeholder projects, hitting the ground cohesively and productively is paramount.

But it goes beyond that. The Climate TDR assesses the human factors that may have contributed to a breakdown in values, an incident or pattern of near misses. The Foundation TDR provides the senior contracts director and operations director with the human risk factors without the detail, the flags but not the full narrative.

The answers are practical. Which relationships are likely to need the most investment. Where a senior leader's natural strengths may be creating conditions that are harder than they need to be for the people they lead. Who is showing early signs of working at a significant distance from where their strengths actually lie — and what a supportive conversation at this stage might prevent.

None of this requires a new initiative. It requires taking what is already known and acting on it. The profile data exists. The relationships are defined. The programme pressure is real and arriving fast. What the TDR provides is the translation — from individual insight into collective understanding, and from collective understanding into action that is specific, timely and human. It is able to analyse large quantities of complex data and present it in a meaningful way, with colour and project context.

The TDR is not a workshop in itself. Not a reveal. It's a change instrument — built from real profile data, mapped to real relationships, delivered at multiple points in a programme where it can be effective. Planning, forming, incident investigation, targeted intervention, engagement and support.

That is what the profile always had the potential to do. The TDR is how it gets there. It takes all the daunting data and does the analysis for you, delivered in hours instead of days. It details the potential human risks that impact on people wellbeing and project outcomes every day.

WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE & PROJECTS WHEN THE RIGHT QUESTIONS ARE ASKED?



It is quieter than you might expect, but there's a sense of productive interdependence, body language, expression and the time people find for each other that tells you something is different here.

For those immersed in it, there is no dramatic moment. No announcement. Just the gradual, almost unremarkable experience of working in a way that feels natural — because people are able to give the best version of themselves, and they know what draws the best from others. Where the people around you are different enough to make the work better and those differences are recognised as strengths that are fully integrated into team psyche. People understand the value of flexing to accommodate each other's preferences. The atmosphere is different, the energy is heightened, there is a human interest beyond work.

It is a project environment where people are more likely to be working in a way that draws on their genuine strengths.

People in that environment tend not to notice it consciously. They notice its absence when it's gone, when they join a new project, or a new organisation where there is a co-existence of individuals rather than a cohesive team with the common language of colour.

What becomes visible instead is the work. Ideas surface earlier. Concerns get raised before they become problems, the supervisor supports a challenge and there is a project wide feeling of psychological safety.

The person who might have gone quiet — who in a different configuration would have spent their energy on adaptation rather than contribution — brings what they actually have. Not a selective, managed version of it. The real thing.

That is not a small outcome. In environments where safety, complexity and programme pressure are constants, the difference between a team that is genuinely functioning and one that is quietly managing can be the difference between a project that delivers and one that doesn't. Between a person who leaves the job better than they arrived and one who doesn't.

The fit being right is not luck. It is something that can be seen, understood and actively shaped — if someone looks early enough and knows what they are looking for.

That is what we do.

To find out more about the Know Your Teams platform and the Team Dynamics Report, visit www.knowyourteams.co.uk or speak to one of our team.



This piece is not a mental health resource. Organisations such as Mind, Mates in Mind and others provide vital specialist, trained expertise that no colour profiling tool can or should replace. What follows is about something different — the working conditions that, left unexamined, can become the precursor to individual illbeing. The Team Dynamics Report itself also does not and is not intended to address mental health issues. It attends to the human environment and some of the factors which can, if left unchecked, have a negative human impact.

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