



TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

The Teams People Speak Up In



Have you ever asked a question in a meeting and been met with silence? You might assume there are no concerns. Everyone agrees. The team is aligned.

But silence does not always mean agreement. Sometimes, it means people are deciding whether it is safe to say what they really think.

In my work with teams, I have noticed that open communication rarely happens simply because a leader says, "My door is always open." People pay more attention to what happens after someone speaks up. Does the leader become defensive when challenged? Does a different opinion get explored or quickly dismissed? Does the same confident person dominate every discussion? When someone admits a mistake, is the first response curiosity or blame?

These small moments teach a team what is safe to say and what is better left unsaid.



Psychological safety is not about everyone agreeing – A psychologically safe team is not necessarily a comfortable team. There can still be disagreement, difficult feedback and challenging conversations.

The difference is that people can say, **"I see this differently," "I think we may be missing something," or "I made a mistake"** without worrying that doing so will damage their credibility or relationships.

This matters because effective teams need more than cooperation. They need healthy debate. When people can question assumptions and raise concerns early, teams are more likely to identify problems before they become bigger ones.



Leaders also need to pay attention to whose voices are being heard.

Quieter team members may have valuable perspectives but need more space to enter the conversation. Instead of asking, “Any thoughts?” and waiting three seconds, try: “We have heard a few perspectives. What might we be overlooking?” Or invite people who have not spoken to contribute, without putting them on the spot.

A quick leadership check

Before your next team meeting, ask yourself:

- Do I listen fully before responding to a different opinion?
- Do I actively create space for quieter voices?
- Do I ask questions that invite disagreement, not just agreement?
- When someone raises a problem, do I become curious before becoming corrective?
- Can people acknowledge mistakes without being embarrassed or blamed?
- Do I thank people for raising difficult issues, even when I do not agree with them?
- Am I modelling openness by admitting when I do not know, need help or have changed my mind?

Ultimately, leaders cannot demand honest communication. They create the conditions for it. And sometimes, the best measure of team effectiveness is not how quickly everyone agrees but how safe people feel to disagree.



By Shalini Gunarajan

Senior Consultant, Human
Dynamic Malaysia