



SCARF Diagnostic

GUIDE

Introduction

This guide helps you quickly apply the SCARF model in real workplace situations. You'll use it to anticipate and address the hidden social and emotional triggers that often drive stakeholder reactions, especially during sensitive conversations or change initiatives.

Inside, you'll find a practical analysis template to map out potential risks in your stakeholder relationships and concrete language cues and action ideas you can immediately use in your day-to-day interactions.

This tool helps you move from theory to practice so you can influence with less friction and more trust.



What is SCARF?

SCARF is a practical framework for understanding the social and emotional triggers that shape how people respond to influence attempts. It stands for:

Status

Sense of respect and importance

Certainty

Clarity about what's happening

Autonomy

Sense of control

Relatedness

Feeling included and connected

Fairness

Perception of justice and equity

By proactively managing these triggers, you can reduce resistance and build trust in stakeholder relationships.

Part 1: SCARF Analysis Tool

The table below outlines some common behaviors that signal threats to each SCARF domain, provides you with options to mitigate the risks, and gives you a few specific ways you can respond in the moment.

Use this table to guide your thinking as you analyze your own stakeholders in part two.

	RISK SIGNALS What might you see or hear?	MITIGATION TACTICS How will you address this risk?	TAILORED LANGUAGE/ACTION PLAN Specific phrases or actions you will use
Status <i>Do they feel their expertise or position is challenged?</i>	• Correcting others, defending ideas intensely, comparing credentials • Defensiveness, dismissiveness, over-explaining	Acknowledge expertise, assign meaningful roles, spotlight contributions.	“Your experience will be key to shaping this.” “What’s already working well from your perspective?” “Would you be open to leading that part, given your background?”
Certainty <i>Are they worried about unknown impacts?</i>	• Repeated questions, asking “What if?” scenarios, delays due to indecision • Anxious questioning, fixating on unknowns, skepticism about process	Share knowns/unknowns, provide regular updates, explain decision processes.	“Here’s what we know now, and here’s what’s still in progress.” “By next Friday, we’ll have clarity on X.” “Let’s create a quick FAQ for the team. I’ll start and you can add what’s missing.”
Autonomy <i>Are they resisting loss of control?</i>	• Challenging deadlines, proposing alternatives, disengaging from mandates • Pushback against top-down decisions, preferring local solutions	Offer choices, clarify non-negotiables, co-design local implementation.	“How would you like to approach this for your team?” “What would make this easier to implement locally?” “Here are the nonnegotiables—beyond that, you’ve got room to adjust.”

Relatedness

Do they feel excluded or disconnected?

- Not joining optional meetings, withholding opinions, sticking to in-group
- Withdrawing, “us vs. them” language, questioning motives

Build rapport, create joint wins, include in small group syncs.

“I’d love to hear your take on this.”

“I’ll circle back next week so we can stay aligned.”

“Let’s do a quick sync so you’re not left out of the loop.”

Fairness

Are they skeptical about equity or bias?

- Passive resistance, sarcastic remarks, asking “Why them?”
- Cynicism, disengagement, challenging process fairness

Be transparent, explain criteria, ensure voice even if outcomes stay the same

“Here’s how decisions were made and why.”

“If any concerns come up, I want to hear them.”

“Even if the decision doesn’t change, your input could shape how we adjust going forward.”



Part 2: SCARF Stakeholder Planning Template

Now it's time to apply the SCARF model to your real-world relationships. Use this template to prepare for a key conversation or collaboration. For each SCARF domain, reflect on what might trigger a threat response based on the stakeholder's personality, preferences, and the broader context.

The prompts below will help you anticipate how they might react and give you space to plan how you'll respond: with empathy, clarity, and influence.

Feel free to use the table from part one to guide your mitigation tactics and language plan, but don't be afraid to flex and improvise based on the requirements of your specific context.

Once you've reflected across all five domains, step back and ask:

- Which SCARF domain(s) are most likely to be triggered for this person?
- Where do you need to be most mindful in your communication?
- What's the one move that could build trust quickly?

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Status

Do they value being seen as an expert? How might they respond to feeling sidelined or under-acknowledged?

Certainty

Are they likely to be concerned about unclear outcomes, changing priorities, or information gaps?

Autonomy

Do they prefer to lead or shape decisions? Might they resist imposed plans or micromanagement?

Relatedness

Do they thrive on collaboration and connection? Could they feel left out or misaligned with the group?

Fairness

Are they sensitive to inconsistent treatment, bias, or process transparency? What might spark a fairness concern?

Stakeholder:

	RISK SIGNALS What might you see or hear?	MITIGATION TACTICS How will you address this risk?	TAILORED LANGUAGE/ACTION PLAN Specific phrases or actions you will use
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Certainty <i>Are they worried about unknown impacts?</i>			
Autonomy <i>Are they resisting loss of control?</i>			
Relatedness <i>Do they feel excluded or disconnected?</i>			
Fairness <i>Are they skeptical about equity or bias?</i>			