Navigating Resistance

Resources adapted from the *Equity Literacy Institute*

SCARF Model

The SCARF Model summarizes five domains of threat or reward:

Status is about relative importance to others, or a perception of where we are in relation to the people around us. Our sense of status goes up when we feel 'better than' someone else, creating a reward response.

Certainty is about eliminating ambiguity. The brain is a pattern-recognition machine that is constantly trying to predict the near future, and so it craves certainty.

Autonomy is the perception of having control over our environment; a feeling of having choices. Our ability to influence outcomes triggers our threat sensors which results in fight or flight response.

Relatedness involves deciding whether we are 'in' or 'out' of a particular social group. People naturally like to form tribes where they experience a sense of belonging.

Fairness in interpersonal dealings is intrinsically rewarding, independent of other factors. People want to know that they will be treated consistently with their peers.

Status - *How important am I?*

Certainty - *Do I know what will happen next?*

Autonomy - *How much control do I have?*

Relatedness - *How safe am I?*

Fairness - *How are others being treated?*

Conversations about Equity Trigger Threat Responses

The five dimensions' fears about equity are often expressed as:	
Status	Are you saying I'm not a good person? Will I lose any of my privileged status? Are you saying I am not good at my work?
Certainty	If we make changes what will be expected of me? How will my life change? Who will help me? What are the proven best practices? Can you just tell me what to do? What does the data say?
Autonomy	Don't tell me what to do. I need professional freedom. I am an educator, not a robot. I need to respond to the needs of the students in *my* classroom. You can't understand my day to day.
Relatedness	My students know I care about them and I would never treat them poorly. I just want *ALL* students to get what they need; we shouldn't single out anyone. Let's not make people feel bad about their work, I am sure they mean well.
Fairness	Things need to be *equal*. We can't give special treatment to some students. Hard work and follow the rules and students will be fine. It's not fair to give special treatment to some students or families.

Common Resistance Roles

The Thinker   "Where's the data?"

The Doer   "Give me the strategies!"

The Believer   "I've done this before/I'm more woke than you."

The Fairness-Seeker   "Equal is fair."

The Minimizer   "Why can't we all just *[go along to]* get along?"

The Thinker "Where's the Data?"

Could look/sound like:	Facilitation Strategies
Resistance from the Thinker comes in a variety of ways, all with the same foundational formula: a request for "proof" and the data to back it up. One way resistance may come from the Thinker is in the form of skepticism– What does the data show? What are your sources? Are they reputable? Another form of resistance in which the Thinker may engage is "Devil's Advocate" behavior; they will likely tell you that they enjoy academic discussions in the form of debate or banter and may cloak their disbelief or disagreement in "playing a role" "for argument's sake." They may even state that they are on board with equity work, but are looking for data to convince others who are struggling to see its importance.	• As the facilitator, have a few data points or research citations prepared. Knowing you are likely to encounter a Thinker, these few points will help to keep them engaged if their questions are genuine. It also validates your role as facilitator. • If the Thinker persists after you have given basic data to support your purpose, it is time to shift focus and move on. Share with the Thinker and the rest of the group that data rarely convinces people who are determined *not to be convinced.* In fact, if data *could* convince people that equity was important, we would not have a need for equity facilitators in the first place. The data has been there for generations; needing "more" of it is a lack of willingness to accept the narrative in the numbers.

The Doer "Give me the strategies!"

Could look/sound like:	Facilitation Strategies
The resistance from this person (or group) is all about "give me/us strategies." Finding the solution to the problem is more important than examining the problem or finding its root cause. The Doer believes it is a waste of time to process through feelings and perspectives because they cannot be implemented as strategies in the classroom tomorrow; all discussion must have practical ends.	• Reframe the Doer's mindset by explaining that mindsets, values and ideologies have to be foundationally sound in order to implement strategies. This is because: • Without an equity mindset or ideology it is very easy to fall back into previous inequitable habits of practice (especially when one encounters even minor setbacks to the strategy or barriers in practice) • Mindset, ideology and deep values are adaptive to ever-changing circumstances and the uniqueness of the people with whom we connect. • Conversely, strategies have the assumption that "one size fits all," which isn't true; strategies will have a disparate impact on different people. Assuming that strategies will work regardless of the situation or people assumes that the target group (for the equity strategy) is a monolith. That often perpetuates the inequities.

The Believer "I've done this before/I'm more woke than you."

Could look/sound like:	Facilitation Strategies
Resistance from the Believer can be especially challenging because they are already "on board" with equity work. It will likely come in the form of frustration with colleagues who "don't get it" and the perceived slow pace with which the work is being done. They may complain that they have "done this before," engage in name- and text-dropping, or monopolize small- and large-group sharing time. The Believer can be especially dogmatic. And those of us who facilitate equity PD (especially white people or other privileged identities) *often become* the Believer when participating in another facilitator's equity session.	• Publicly affirm their belief in equity, then ask how we can effectively and collectively move people towards a shared goal of equity. This is important reframing to help them envision building coalitions instead of identifying the "in group" and "out group" participants (thereby dividing the room and stalling progress for some) and to disrupt any righteous savior identity. • Make this person your "helper" in the space by asking them to encourage effective, productive equity work. • If this person aligns with privilege, remind them they need to recognize how they may be marginalizing other people in the room. This is especially true when they believe they can explain the -isms being discussed (ex: mansplaining); encourage them to be listeners and learners instead.

The Fairness-Seeker "Equal is Fair."

Could look/sound like:	Facilitation Strategies

Resistance from the Fairness-Seeker frequently reveals itself in the struggle to differentiate between equity and equality. They hold tightly to rules, policies, and procedures with little interest in flexibility, even when an inequity has been identified; redistribution of access and resources is difficult for them to understand. They believe fair means equal. Because the Fairness-Seeker idealizes equality it may be especially challenging for them to believe in systemic racism; a common refrain from white people engaging in this type of resistance is, "but I grew up poor!" A lack of experience with racial inequities makes them naive even if their intentions are good– the upside is they can become ardent equity supporters if you can redirect their definition of fairness from equal to equity.	• Explicitly teach the difference between equality and equity as this may be a new concept or new vocabulary for them. One way to do this is to
	
	    ○ Give an example scenario, policy, or practice in which most people would agree that equal is not fair and actually has *unfair* impacts based on people's identities or circumstances.
	
	    ○ Ask the group to share examples of scenarios, policies, or practices where equal is actually unfair.
	
	• Dilute the Fairness-Seeker's voice with other voices in the room; asking others to explain equity (versus equality) or telling stories where equal was not fair can be especially poignant for the Fairness-Seeker

The Minimizer "Why can't we all just {go along to} get along?"

Could look/sound like:	Facilitation Strategies
The resistance from this role is varied and wide-ranging because it is often a large percentage of participants in the room. It can show up anywhere from "I don't see color" to "But the *real world* is not fair and we are living in the real world." The Minimizer may see a facilitator as someone who is there to "stir the pot" because they don't see the inequities in the system and believe it is generally fair. That means they also don't see their own role in perpetuating systems of inequity nor in the possibilities of creating a more just and equitable system. The resistance that follows is a good indicator that the Minimizer is feeling overwhelmed, uncomfortable, and wanting to maintain the peace. Because they don't like public conflict this resistor is less likely to publicly rock the boat, but is more likely to make a snide remark to a colleague in a small group or even in a side conversation in the hallway the next day.	• The Minimizer often needs expanded perspective. Case studies, story-telling, testimony, videos, etc. can be particularly influential in shifting the Minimizer. • Similarly, utilizing small group discussions as a facilitation technique will help build– and diversify– perspectives, relationships and experiences for the Minimizer. • Model and name best practices; Minimizers are more likely to consider trying something new if they have seen it in action. ○ Acknowledge that equity work feels uncomfortable because we don't have enough examples of what true equity looks like. • Engage in thinking mapping by using the phrase "I used to think… but now I know…" This activity models the growth of thought. It may also feel more relational for the Minimizer (like the facilitator is walking alongside them in the journey towards equity instead of talking at them from the front of the room).

"Change has considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the *fearful* it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the *hopeful* it is encouraging because things may get better. To the *confident* it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better. "

King Whitney, Jr.