

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS IN SHAPING MANAGERS' EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE SCARF MODEL

Inga RINKEVIČIENĖ

School of Economics and Business, Kaunas University of Technology
Gedimino str. 50, LT-44239 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: i.rinkeviciene@gmail.com
ORCID ID: [0009-0009-1384-4951](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1384-4951)

Asta SAVANEVIČIENĖ

School of Economics and Business, Kaunas University of Technology
Gedimino str. 50, LT-44239 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: asta.savaneviciene@ktu.lt
ORCID ID: [0000-0003-3132-860X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3132-860X)

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-37-02-06

Annotation. *The paper examines the influence of positive and negative organizational factors on the experience of Companies CEOs (hereafter referred to as managers) through the SCARF model framework. Managers play an important role in ensuring process efficiency in the organizations; therefore, the manager's work requires a lot of emotional and psychological resources, which are influenced by various external factors such as the nature of the organization's activity, competitive environment, organizational changes, as well as the managers' characteristics such as management and/or leadership style, behavioral and communication styles. A manager's ability to work effectively with employees, both direct reports and others across the organization, in routine and stressful situations is a critical factor that influences not only the organization's performance and quality outcomes, but also employees' job satisfaction and emotional well-being.*

This article presents a study that applied the SCARF model to analyze how managers' experiences working with employees are influenced by the SCARF factors: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. The study aims to explore how these elements are perceived by managers, what they mean in the context of their work, in which situations they are positively or negatively affected, and which of them has the greatest impact on managerial stress.

The study revealed that managers tend to invest in building relationships with employees and creating a positive working environment, so the relatedness is one of the key factors that can have positive and negative impacts on the managerial experience working with employees. In contrast, participants perceive autonomy as a 'territory' granted by shareholders, a relatively stable element that does not significantly affect managers' experience in working with employees.

Keywords: *manager, organizational factors, SCARF*

Introduction

Management of the company is an emotionally and psychologically demanding activity, but also one that adds significant value to the Company. It is often not only objective factors, such as processes, and performance, that contribute to Company's effectiveness, but also subjective reasons, such as the relationship between the manager and the employees. Researchers (see, e.g., Wood and Vilkin, 2004; Shi et al., 2019; Awan, 2021; Georgakakis et al., 2022; Christensen-Salem, 2023; Zhao and Zhang, 2024) have observed that a manager's communication style, performance management skills, and the interactions between employees and the manager all have an impact on the quality of leadership. The performance of the manager often depends on how well he or she feels psychologically. Recently, the SCARF model, which emphasizes the importance of the five factors - status, certainty, autonomy,

relatedness, and fairness - has been increasingly applied in management research. Meeting a manager's SCARF needs is not only a personal well-being issue but also a factor of organizational culture and performance. The manager who feels good in all five areas naturally builds healthier relationships with employees, makes more balanced decisions, and becomes a stronger leader.

Study object – organizational factors that affect the experience of managers exploring the SCARF model.

The aim of the study is to explore the role of organizational factors in shaping managers' experiences using the SCARF model.

Research methodology employs a qualitative approach. A semi-structured interview was constructed using the SCARF model to collect data. The interviews were carried out with 10 managers from different companies with between three and eleven direct reports. The work experience of managers in the same company is between one and thirteen years. The industries of the participants' workplaces include manufacturing, services, retail and wholesale, and the number of employees varies from 10 to 1300. Data collected during interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The study is based on ethical requirements for qualitative research.

The results showed that, according to the SCARF model, the most challenging and stressful situations for managers' experience working with employees are related to relatedness, while status and autonomy are less challenging and stressful. Managers make efforts to find solutions to eliminate stressors and turn them into positive experiences.

Theoretical provisions

Research on managers' experiences working with employees highlights that this is influenced by a variety of factors both positive and negative. In this paper, the positive and negative experiences of managers are revealed through the SCARF model (Rock, 2008), which has gained much attention in recent academic debates.

The model captures five key social factors (Rock, 2008, 2009; Rock and Cox, 2012) that affect how people feel and behave as part of a group. Different individuals respond in different ways to these social factors. The five factors that make up the SCARF model are: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness.

Status. Status is related to the social importance of members of the group. Everyone wants to feel important and if the person does not feel that way, he can feel less valued and less secured in the workplace. When the status is threatened, the person can feel strong emotions and potentially experience a threat response.

Certainty. Certainty is related to the ability to predict the future. The better someone does this, the happier and more certain he is. If we cannot predict the future, we feel uncomfortable and we can start to feel unsafe. The less certainty we have, the more anxious we tend to feel and the more emotional energy we tend to spend on doing things like predicting the future and trying to ensure the future.

Autonomy. Autonomy relates to our sense of control over ourselves, what we do, and the events around us. The more control we have, the more positive we feel. When we experience the sense of autonomy, we feel safe and in control. However, when we do not experience it, we risk feeling psychologically unsafe and we can feel out of control. In fact, we may feel controlled by others, which can be a very negative feeling.

Relatedness. Relatedness relates to our sense of security with others. If we are surrounded by colleagues at our workplace who wish us well and whose goals are aligned with our own,

then we will tend to feel safe and positive. If we do not feel like we are able to relate to those around us, then we may experience threat responses.

Fairness. Fairness is related to our sense of justice and equity in the interactions that take place around us. If we work in an environment in which effort is rewarded, leaders value playing by the rules, then we are likely to feel that things are fair. If instead we sense that things are not fair, then we may feel unhappy and unsafe. Examples of unfair behavior can lead to a response to a threat.

The SCARF model has been applied in the last decade in a variety of fields such as healthcare, education, nursing programmes (Campbell et al., 2022, Javadizadeh et al., 2022, Monsen and de Blok, 2013). The SCARF model has also received considerable attention in the research literature for its usefulness and applicability in the field of leadership development (Rock, 2008, 2009; Rock and Cox, 2012). The model allows us to analyze and understand how five model factors can influence a manager's experience of working with employees.

The manager's experience of working with employees is influenced by a variety of organizational factors, such as leadership and communication style (Awan, 2021; Zhao and Zhang, 2024), performance management (Christensen-Salem, 2023), the role of direct reports (Wood and Vilkin, 2004; Kappal and Mishra, 2023), communication and coordination (Shi et al., 2019; Georgakakis et al., 2022), and ethical and social responsibility (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008).). All of these organizational factors can have both positive and negative effects on the manager's experience; if the wrong methods and techniques are chosen, the application of any of these factors can provoke stressful situations and have a negative impact on the manager-employee relations and performance. And vice versa - by changing the methods and techniques, the manager's experience can be changed and can be seen as lessons learned in later stages.

In terms of positive organizational factors, performance management skills, goal setting, clear expectations, constant focus on feedback (Christensen-Salem, 2023), mindfulness and initiative (Basker et al., 2020), relationship-oriented leadership (Wang et al., 2011; Xi et al., 2017) are becoming very important. Another important organizational factor is the role that the manager plays himself, i.e., how he interacts with his direct reports, what kind of atmosphere he creates and influences the employees, i.e., what they talk externally about the manager, how manager is treated by the team, and so on (Wood and Vilkin, 2004; Kappal and Mishra, 2023). Ethical and social responsibility and its enforcement, as De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) note, create a culture of trust, reduces stress in the organization, and encourages employees to have a more positive view of the organization, and, therefore, of the role of the manager. Communication and its coordination is also an important organizational factor, as employees' trust in the manager and their attitudes towards the manager and the company depend on communication and its coherence within the company (Shi et al., 2019; Georgakakis et al., 2022).).

Effective communication and positive relations are influenced by a manager's empathy and caring attitude toward employees, as well as goal orientation and integrity (Wood and Vilkin (2004). As Wood and Vilkinas (2004) note, a manager with these characteristics is perceived by employees as trustworthy, successful, and human. This often contributes to effective organization performance and creates the conditions for positive relations between the manager and employees. All these organizational factors are interrelated and interdependent. Therefore, the manager's task is to combine and integrate these positive influencing factors.

Regarding the negative organizational factors of managerial experience, it is appropriate to consider strategies that can eliminate such risks. For example, isolation and detachment of the manager, avoiding contact with direct reports in order to avoid stressful situations, should

not be an option. As Kappal and Mishra (2023, 2024) point out, managerial disengagement can have a negative impact, as a disengaged manager tends to make decisions alone, and thus impose them on employees, reducing their authority and engagement. The literature also identifies organizational factors such as organizational change (Gligorovski, 2018), the work environment (Taap Manshor et al., 2003), and economic and social pressures (Haberey Knijessi, 2011) that can have a negative impact on managerial experiences. Such stressful experiences can negatively affect managers work-life balance (Trakaniki et al., 2022; Hansen et al., 2025), health and well-being (Gui, 2021), influence productivity and performance (Gui, 2021; Chimenya and Hyams-Ssekasi, 2023), and affect the task delegation process (Bonnesen et al., 2022). It is therefore essential to analyze what factors are prevalent in the organization, what determines them, on whom, managers or employees, they depend, and to initiate the necessary changes in this context.

It can be assumed that many of the organizational factors listed above can have both positive and negative effects on the experience of managers and can lead to stressful situations. As noted by Toderi and Balducci (2018), McCarthy et al. (2019), Toderi et al. (2024), managers who are able to manage their own stress exhibit prosocial behavior (e.g. they share knowledge and merit with their direct reports, which has a positive impact on employee turnover), and they can apply stress prevention measures.

In summary, organizational factors such as a manager's leadership style, communication, feedback, goal orientation and integrity, empathy, fair treatment are important components for effective management and positive performance. It is therefore important to analyze which organizational factors influence the manager's positive and negative experience most working with employees. In this context, an empirical study on this issue is presented below.

Methodology

This paper presents a study that surveyed CEOs of Lithuanian companies to find out how organizational factors affect their experience as managers.

Semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview protocol was used, which maintains the structure of the interview, but also allows additional questions to be asked if necessary in response to the participant's answers and to expand on the information needed. The semistructured interview questions were based on the SCARF model developed by Rock (2008), which provides a better understanding of participants' reactions and satisfaction in the work environment. The questions were guided through the five factors of the SCARF model: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. The first set of questions was designed to find out what the key factors of the SCARF model - status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness - mean to the participants. The second set of questions was designed to find out the situations in which each of these SCARF factors was strengthened or weakened. The third group of questions was designed to find out which of the SCARF factors are the most influential in a manager's stress when working with employees. In this way, it was analyzed how each of the components of the model influences the experience of the participants, i.e. managers, in working with employees and their satisfaction.

Study sample. A convenience sample of 10 participants was selected for the study. The selection of the participants was based on the following criteria: (1) they had been in a CEO position at the time of the study for at least one year; (2) they had experience in managerial activities. The composition of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of participants in the study

Code	Gender (M/F)	Length of service with your current company	Number of direct reports	Number of Company's employees	Company's activity
1IN/25	M	13	8	300	Manufacturing, wholesale and retail
2IN/25	M	4	6	60	Manufacturing, wholesale and retail
3IN/25	F	1	10	400	Manufacturing
4IN/25	M	7	7	65	Services
5IN/25	F	6	10	1300	Manufacturing, wholesale and retail
6IN/25	M	30	4	13	Production and services
7IN/25	M	8	3	15	Freight forwarding, international transport
8IN/25	F	6	8	35	Wholesale and retail trade
9IN/25	M	8	10	10	Services
10IN/25	F	22	11	11	Services

As can be seen in Table 1, the characteristics of the managers who participated in the study are broadly similar in terms of the number of direct reports. It is important to note that, despite the differences in size, seniority, or gender, the study did not set out to analyze similar traits among the study participants. It is more of an exploratory study, focusing on different experiences in order to see commonalities in the communication between managers with different experiences and their employees.

Method of data analysis. Qualitative data collected during the study was analyzed using the exploratory analysis method. Qualitative content analysis was based on the qualitative data analysis stage identified by Gaižauskaitė and Valavičienė (2016): (1) data organization and preparation for analysis - the information gathered during the interviews was transcribed and prepared for further analysis; (2) data decomposition - the data were divided into significant fragments and coded; (3) merging of the obtained groups of primary data - the categories that emerged were distinguished; data interpretation - the obtained themes were analyzed, interpreted, illustrated with the thoughts of the research participants; conclusions were formulated - the results were summarized on the basis of the data obtained.

Research ethics. The study, in accordance with Bos (2020), ensured the essential ethical requirements for qualitative research: participants' privacy - their space is not violated, they have the right to provide as much information as they want, confidentiality - data are coded, de-personalized, data protection - data are not shared, stored in secure media, or shared with others, and informed consent - all participants were informed about the study, consented to take part, and were able to withdraw from the study at any point.

Results

The results were analyzed in the context of the five factors of the SCARF model: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. The results revealed how each of these factors and its importance in their work is identified by the participants, which stressful situations affect them positively and negatively, and which of these factors, in the opinion of the participants, play the most important role in their work with their employees.

Status

To understand the positive and negative impact of the managerial status of working with employees, the study first sought to find out what kind of status perception the participants have in their work. The study revealed that, according to the participants, the manager's status in the context of performance can be defined along three different lines:

- status as a "given" with responsibilities;
- professionalism;
- responsibility

Status as a "given" that comes with being a manager is highlighted by research participant 1IN/25, who states that *"Every manager acquires status when they start working. Shareholders confer status"*. In a slightly different manner, but also referring to the often prevailing view that status comes as a consequence of position, research participant 5IN/25 says that *"when it comes to status, sometimes people say that I don't have 'shoulder blades' and because of that they don't listen to me, i.e. managers tend to believe that if you don't have a position and the status that comes with it, you cannot expect your employees' obedience"*.

Regarding status as an outcome of the relationship with employees, participants in the study say that status is often not related to a specific job title but to the manager's qualities and professionalism. 3IN/2025 states that *"there is also a status outside of the job which is related to specific qualities that people bring"*. Participant 5IN/2025 highlights that he encounters situations where *"status is not about what job title you have written down, but about how people identify you and that is related to your professionalism. Because people are very quick to recognize if the status is verbal, just for the sake of beauty. For me, status is about how you are perceived and perceived by people. You have to earn it."* Participant 6IN/2025 states that when the company is not big, *"status is an example because there are not many people, you have to communicate with everybody, you have to give them tasks to do, you are listened to, you agree, you communicate"*.

The analysis of the participants' perceptions of status also shows that they perceive status as a kind of **authority and responsibility** to act and achieve goals. Participant 4IN/25 states that *"Status is when you can make decisions on your own, influence strategy, and enjoy the results. I have no need to show the status"*. 7IN/2025 sees status as being responsible for the planned goals and results of the employees: *"Status is more about being responsible for the whole company, the employees, the results, achieved and not achieved."* A couple of participants also add to this by stating that status *"is an opportunity to recall decisions quickly and effectively to make changes"* (2IN/25), while 1IN/25 sees status as *"one of the prerequisites to be a manager. Well, in my case, it is also the reason why I want to be one"*.

Participants also reflect on how they feel about their status in the company. One of the participants (3IN/25) states that *"I feel quite comfortable because it is not important to me in itself, because I sometimes identify myself as a simple person"*, i.e., as if to reinforce the already expressed idea that status alone does not have a big impact. However, e.g. the next assessment of the research participant 4IN/25 already has both positive and negative connotations: *"I don't want hierarchical status, but it is very good for communication. Because sometimes semi-formal communication starts to get in the way."* Meanwhile, other participants in the study answer unequivocally that they are satisfied with their current status at work and the opportunities it offers.

When analyzing the relationships between the study participants as managers and their employees, in which the status of managers can be positively or negatively affected, the data revealed key elements that emerged, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors influencing managerial status positively and negatively

Impact on the status of managers	Factors influencing the status of managers
Positive	Clear clarification of responsibilities and roles
	Communication with staff
Negative	Intolerable practices related to staff behaviour
	Restriction of status for other positions
	Rising to the position of Company manager from the same level as other employees

As can be seen in Table 2, participants in the study identify both positive and negative experiences that affect their status. First, on the positive side, it can be observed that the study participants consider that **clear clarification of responsibilities and roles** and **communication** with employees have a positive impact on the status of managers. As research participant 3IN/25 notes, *"I felt from the employees that the status is not earned, and after discussing the roles in the company, both mine and theirs, I felt that I have and can have the status rightly"*. Status can be reinforced through internal communication - 1IN/25 commented on an example of investing heavily in promoting teamwork and communication - during one team event, the manager was thanked for creating a good organizational climate, which reinforced his status within the team of subordinates: *"during a management team event, if somebody says, I want to thank the manager, < > because it makes us feel good and we want to continue to work well together"*.

In terms of negative impacts, managers stressed that they experience when **intolerable practices related to employee behavior** occurred, as exemplified by a participant in the study 7IN/25: *"There are always one or two employees who are often not only detrimental to the company, but also a nuisance. They are always saying that the director has come up with something again, that they will have to work harder again. It's important to control such people, to work with them, and if you can't, then it's better to say goodbye. This has led to dissatisfaction, stress."* Another respondent, 4IN/25, shared the **status-limiting factors due to other positions** on the part of the shareholders, which also influenced stress: *"there are untouchable employees, this often demotivates the team. For example, there is an employee whose position is deputy CEO, because of this "pseudo-status" we have a clash on the quality of work, the non-standardized process. This has been stressful for me as a manager, because I have to go around all the time. And there are more than a few employees like that."*

When a **manager is appointed from among colleagues**, it takes time to build status as the relationship and dynamics within the team change. 5IN/25 shared the experience that *"I became CEO from among my colleagues, and it took some time to go through the vetting process. It was a period of time, maybe a couple of months. There was a conversation with one of my colleagues about whether I would be able to do it, whether I was too democratic, and in that conversation I heard a situation where I was being questioned."*

Certainty

As a follow-up to the interview, managers were asked about the second SCART factor as certainty when working with subordinates. Based on the thoughts and examples of the participants, the following are the main influences on managerial certainty.

- ability to forecast;
- knowing that you can cope with the challenges;
- financial security.

Participant 5IN/25 describes certainty as a process, *"when you have a clear direction, a vision, a communication, then that's enough for me"*. Another participant, 6IN/25, relates certainty to the **ability to predict**, clear plans, and outcomes: *"Certainty is what we plan, what happens"*. Participant 3IN/25 says that *"in a relationship with employees, certainty comes from having a direction and feeling that it is agreed. I feel confident at work when I am quite clear about what is most important and what the direction and decisions are."*

At the same time, however, most managers talk about balancing between certainty and uncertainty, with research participant 1IN/25 saying that *"as a manager, you never feel completely certain because you have to balance unlimited expectations and limited resources all the time. And those resources are always scarce. So when it comes to achieving goals, you have to choose the path and the means, and there is never a certainty that this is necessarily the right path. It could be either one way or the other"*. Another participant, 10IN/25, emphasizes that confidence is related to **knowing that you can cope with the tasks at hand**: *"Confidence at work for me is that I trust people to do the right thing,"* while 8IN/25 says that *"I am a results person. The team is great, but if there is no result, there is no confidence"*. The interview respondent 9IN/25 says that he associates security with **financial security**: *"we are a small company, I feel calm when I know I have the means to pay my suppliers and employees."*

The balancing act between what a manager can control, the dynamics of certainty and uncertainty, is often stressful for managers. One of the study participants, 2IN/25, says that *"when certainty is reduced, stress arises. In the case of the direct team, it's more fog than fact.(...) A fifth of the planned income was a dream and the certainty disappeared in a flash. Certainty increases when team members exceed expectations."*

When analyzing the employment situations of the study participants, in which managerial certainty decreased or increased, the following key points emerge in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors influencing managerial certainty positively and negatively

Impact on managerial certainty	Factors influencing managerial certainty
Positive	Situation control, monitoring
	Clear communication
	Control of targets and indicators, clear and transparent reward system
Negative	Failure to recruit staff
	Uncertain situations, value dilemmas and mistrust.

Table 3 shows the factors that have a positive or negative impact on managerial certainty. The study participants say that one of the factors that contribute to certainty is control and monitoring of the situation. Manager 5IN/25 tells of a situation where a major project, the introduction of a new technological line, had been in preparation for a long time, and the manager was confident that the preparations had been successful, but when day x came, he saw that *"the team was not delivering, the potential was lacking, and then the confidence dropped. You seemed to have done everything to prepare. You had to change members, you had to make drastic changes. The stress was healthy, and naturally, the nerves started. We made an effort, we renewed the team"*. The situation was brought under control, control and monitoring helped to restore certainty.

Some managers emphasize clear and timely communication to maintain certainty; interview participant 1IN/25 says that *"to build confidence, you need to talk all the time. If something is unclear, if things are not going well, if conditions are different, if things are more complicated than we thought, if something has happened, then you need to rebuild that"*

certainty". He gives the example of a situation where there was a lack of clarity about the division of roles, there were doubts about the manager's interference in the operational activities and then there was "a reinforcing discussion where the division of roles was reinforced, that the scope of work, which is related to the production, that I don't go there, and that took away the tension, saying that I had other competences. So we can then support each other and not compete."

Participant 6IN/25 speaks about the **control of objectives and indicators**, baselining and discussions on the following topics: *"when I am setting objectives, we have sessions with the management team where we check if we are in line with the strategy, ambitions, vision, values, if we have a baseline, this kind of debriefing really gives you that reassurance and a good feeling."* A **transparent and clear reward system** also contributes to this reassurance, as the participant 4IN/25 says: *"A very clear reward system - sales-results, the employee knows what he is going to get and what he gets. He needs to be reassured that we will add the opportunity to earn more. As long as we are doing well, we have certainty."*

All of the above examples are positive factors, but the situations are also indicative of managers who balance reassurance in reassuring situations. The participants also mention the factors that are more likely to reduce certainty. One of them is when **the selection of the right employees fails** or their motivation is reduced. Participant 6IN/25, who represents a manufacturing company, says that *"it takes time to find good people. Sometimes they come in, make mistakes. They drill the wrong way, sometimes they have to restart production. That's why good people have to be appreciated. Assurance is usually undermined by wrong people. This makes development very difficult."* Another participant 7IN/25 speaks on the same theme: *"There have been situations where you take on a new person, you actively work with them, the results are poor, and then you have to work harder personally to see how you did every day. You work harder for a while and you see that nothing is working. Only a third of the staff survived."*

Uncertain situations, value dilemmas, and mistrust also undermine certainty. One of the managers in 1IN/25 quotes a situation regarding vaccinations during the Covid period and the difficult situation of a disagreement between the organization's and one of the managers' views on vaccination: *"here we had a complete difference of values. So, how do we do it? Do we let this person go, but he is a very important person to us. So that's where there was this uncertainty about how to deal with this kind of situation. I tried to counteract that(...) You can, for example, if you personally don't want to be vaccinated, you can not be vaccinated. But you don't have to tell your subordinates that this is nonsense, if that is the general policy of the company."* Another respondent in 4IN/25 shared a situation of mistrust in relation to certainty, where *"there are about 10 employees out of about 60 in the team that I do not trust. I am also not confident about my job because I don't know if I want to stay here"*.

Autonomy

When asked about the impact of autonomy, most managers stressed that it is more related to relations with shareholders and the Board and less to employee situations. Autonomy was described by most as:

- a ship to operate, your "territory";
- the power to influence and make decisions;
- agreed rules

Participant 5IN/25 described autonomy as *"one of the greatest values, the **ability to act**".* Another interviewee, 1IN/25, said that *"autonomy comes from my shareholders - this is **my***

territory". Interviewee 7IN/25 said that for him autonomy is *"the main fun of being a manager, that you can make your own decisions"*.

Regarding employees, the participants emphasized agreed rules, defined territories, and the stress on both themselves and their employees if this autonomy is violated. Participant 1IN/25 comments on employees that *"my subordinates also have autonomy. Each of them has a smaller part of that territory, but they each have their own. They are responsible for their own area. I think that autonomy is very important because if that autonomy is violated, especially if there is an agreement on how things are and it is not respected, there is a lot of stress"*. Participant 2IN/25 says the following about his autonomy and that of his employees: *"I have autonomy, I have it worked out with the board, with the shareholder. I try to establish the same with the employees by setting rules, expectations"*.

When asked what could have a positive or negative impact on their autonomy as managers working with employees, most managers did not give examples but rather stressed the stress that both sides experience when autonomy is not respected. One of the managers in 1IN/25 gave the example of a worker who decided on his own and gave an interview to journalists instead of the manager, thus violating autonomy and agreements. In response, the 1IN/25 manager reflected: *"Maybe you wouldn't call it stressful at all, but it's a kind of discomfort and deviation"*.

Relatedness

When talking about the importance of relatedness when working with employees, managers mainly emphasized their role and responsibility as managers in building and maintaining relationships. Managers described relatedness as:

- listening to employees;
- promoting values;
- separation of work and personal relationships, setting boundaries.

Participant 5IN/25 stressed the importance of **listening to and hearing employees** and finding the right ways to do so: *"We are not only building a relationship in the top management team, we have almost 300 employees in the administration, so it was very important for me to find a format for hearing the employees"*. Most managers see building relationships with employees and a supportive organizational culture as their main task. The interview participant 1IN/25 says that *"my main task is to create an environment or atmosphere where everyone can make the most of themselves and make the greatest contribution. For this, it is important to have the right relationships between people."* Managers characterize good relationships with employees as being based on important values, and at the same time most of them talk about the importance and the need for organizations to distinguish between work and personal relationships: *"a good relationship is one based on respect, openness, honesty, it's not about friendship, it's not about family"* (2IN/2525); *"we are all gathered together at work and it's a work relationship. I believe in working relationships; it's important to me because the results depend on it. If the relationship is bad, the results will suffer. I pay a lot of attention to relationships"* (5IN/25); *"Working relationships have never been on a par with friendly relationships. I have always had that distinction. You could have a personal relationship with someone, but it didn't affect them in any way or as little as possible. The relationship is work related"* (3IN/25). One of the participants, 9IN/2025, relates the relatedness with staff to status and talks about different leadership practices and **boundary setting**: *"the director has to keep the status as well, but he has to be first and foremost a leader, a coach, a teacher, a pusher, a*

motivator. One has to feel the boundary against becoming a friend, because then the abuse can start again".

Analysis of the situations presented by the study participants regarding their relatedness with their subordinates highlighted the following factors in Table 4, which positively or negatively affect managers' relationships of managers with their subordinates.

Table 4. Factors influencing managers' relatedness with employees, both positively and negatively

Impact on managers' relatedness	Factors influencing managers' relatedness
Positive	Focus on teams and individual, informal activities
	Crisis management and problem-solving
	Objectivity
Negative	Misalignment of employee values with expectations
	Lack of personal qualities such as empathy, respect and openness.

When talking about relatedness, managers not only stressed the importance of relationships, but also gave many examples of what had helped to strengthen relationships in their practices. There were many examples of **showing attention to both teams and individual employees and informal activities**. Participant 4IN/25 also describes his role as a manager: *"I am an introvert, but the team needs unification, so we have programmes for unification. We go on trips with the team when you are around and you can feel the mood. Respondent 5IN/25 says that "the most powerful thing is to strengthen the relationship, the same example when we go to the workshops, I moderate them".*

Crises, coping with them together and being supportive are factors that strengthen not only relatedness but also the team, so **managing crises and resolving problematic situations** is the second factor that contributes to the positive impact of the relationship. Research participant 5IN/25 cited an example of a difficult situation where there was a major fire in a production facility, during which the organization was very focused: *"we had a crisis in the organization, we had the saying 'I will survive and you will survive'. We all understand what we went through".* Participant 7IM/25 talked about situations where the company's results and financial situation were not favorable and the continuity of the business was threatened: *"I used to say, there are problems, it's not a problem, it's not solving them that's the problem. We need to sit down and find the best solution. Sometimes the speeches were heated. But it is better to agree. As a manager, I did not run away from problems."*

Relatedness are positively influenced by **objectivity**, analyzing situations, and finding solutions. Participant 3IN/25 says that *"accessibility strengthens the working relationship, because even when I find out about problematic situations from the wrong person, I never look for the guilty party, but I say that it is a topic and look for a solution. Relationships are uplifted by pragmatic, practical analysis of all topics. We look at what we have and how we move on. That is both positive and negative. Let's not dwell on the past, let's figure out what to do."*

When asked what has a negative impact on their relatedness when working with employees, the interview participants most frequently highlighted **a lack of alignment of employee values with expectations and a lack of personal qualities such as empathy, respect, and openness**. Participant 1IN/25 gives an example of a team's frustration with the attitude of one of its members: *"a new manager has come in, who is of a younger generation perhaps, and it is not natural for him to try hard for others. (...) We're having a training session for our team leaders, it's warm, we go outside from the auditorium, we have chairs and armchairs and the sun is beating down, and we have to put up an umbrella to make it more*

comfortable. The one who came out is the new one, he didn't go to spread the umbrellas. He sat down himself, took a drink, and waited for someone to do it for him. Everybody else is a joke, how come you didn't do it here. You didn't think of others. Here is an example of how he didn't think, he didn't think it was necessary, he was more concerned about how he was personally." Managers acknowledge that not only the behavior of employees but also that of managers themselves can also negatively affect relatedness. Research participant 5IN/25 shared a situation that he identified as a lesson for himself, when you *"say something inappropriate to an employee and the relationship falls apart. I said in a meeting 'you are trying to come from your narrow experience', I got very offended, then I had to apologise. But I destroyed the relationship, it was stressful for both me and him."*

Participant 2IN/25 highlights the lack of personal qualities such as openness, respect, which also has a negative impact on relatedness: *"I feel stressed about relationships when team members are not open, trying to please, not necessarily showing humanity and respect to the teams. The result is either you have a team that is organized around certain values. Others find that they are better off in a different environment. Now there are good relationships, we don't hide anything, we share, we express our opinions openly."*

Fairness

When asked about the last component of the SCARF model, fairness, the participants mainly described it as:

- objectivity and fair appraisal;
- presenting the facts, distancing yourself from emotions.

Participant 1IN/25 stressed that *"fairness, in my opinion, is not about everyone getting the same amount of money, but about everyone being rewarded equally for their efforts. If one puts in more effort, it is fair that he gets more. The one who puts in less effort may receive less. Objective and fair appraisal* was identified by many as an important part of their role as managers, with the interview participant 4IN/25 stating that *"it is important to me that everyone's performance is assessed fairly. There are stars because there is a result and there is effort. You can't put a good one on one person and a hard one on another. It is stressful when you are promoted undeservedly - we also had a situation where we took a good employee, got the same salary as a weaker one, but found out and left quickly. We regret it very much".*

This is echoed by the research participant 5IN/25, who says that *"for me, fairness is about objectivity, where there is no love/no love. For some, a relationship is formed because the chemistry matches. We come to work to work and to achieve results, it is important to me that, whatever experience you have had, if there is something wrong, then we say objectively and straightforwardly that it is okay. We don't make a love/dislike distinction, we treat everybody the same".* There is an element of detachment from preconceived personal opinion of being able to assess as objectively as possible. Another participant in the 3IN/25 study bases the objectivity of fairness on the need to **present the facts**, to **distance oneself from emotions**: *"no matter who you are talking to, be open with the facts. It is important to distance yourself as much as possible from emotional judgements and stay on the facts. Your circle is usually your circle of like-minded people. Being able to distance yourself from the fact that like is better, that is fairness. Judging by the facts."*

The key factors that emerged from the analysis of the participant situations in which fairness may be affected positively or negatively are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Factors influencing the fairness of managers, both positively and negatively

Impact o the fairness of managers	Factors influencing the fairness of managers
Positive	Transparent reward system
	Equal working conditions
Negative	Single person exclusion

Most of the examples given by the participants reflected situations where fairness was violated or diluted and how this affected motivation. The participants talked about reward systems and the importance of fairness in the introduction of transparent reward systems and in providing equal working conditions for employees. Participant 10IN/25 gave the example that *"our company is not a big company, all employees in the same position are paid the same salary and everybody knows it. This is what we wanted to avoid demotivation and comparison. The difference may be in overtime, per diems for business trips, the size of the post, but everything else is the same. For me, this reflects the right approach."* Another participant in the interview, 5IN/25, also gives the example of the implementation of remuneration policies: *"how we pay here in the regions, in the cities, this is very important, the transparency of remuneration policies is now happening, and this is the "key thing".* The same participant went on to say that equally important is the methodology of setting targets, which can weaken or strengthen equity: *"it's how we set them, cascade them. When you look at the end, you see that one is setting easy goals and the other is setting hard goals".* The participants also talked about how, even in the workplace, different working conditions can be demotivating. Participant 9IN/25 said that *"it is important to standardize the standard. Why one office has movable desks according to height and another has old ones? This gives motivation and demotivation. It is a very big job to manage equity within the organization".*

Most of the participants cited the exclusion of one employee in relation to other employees as a negative factor affecting fairness. Participant 3IN/25 mentioned that *"there have been situations where, as if the working relationship were closer in terms of values, you would pay more attention, more effort to the area represented by that person, you would represent that area with more enthusiasm. Another situation was the subordinate's demand for a change of reward or other benefits; there were situations where this led to a greater response. And I don't think that was good. Justice was compromised."* Research participant 1IN/25 gave another example of the exclusion of an employee in relation to others and the consequences that followed: *"Justice is weakened if, for example, there is no profit, nothing, you have to work hard, save a lot. So we all go, we live in double rooms, we take uncomfortable flights, but they are the cheapest. (...) A new colleague comes in, he thinks, what am I doing here, I'm going to fly business class now, and he takes a comfortable, nice hotel. This is a sense of injustice, it is stressful for those people who are trying hard and see that they are being treated unfairly, that if you can get more without trying harder, then what is the point of doing it. My job is to make things right, to prevent injustice from happening."* Research participant 2IN/25 gives another example of the dilution of fairness: *"company summer event, a colleague starts bragging to others about his salary. He has a higher salary than the others, we bought it on the market, and he bragged about it. Then justice is weakened. What we did then was to speak openly, we had to turn on openness. It's a long marathon to restore justice, you can't do it in a day or two. You can demolish it overnight, but it's hard to build."*

The SCARF model factors that are most and least influential on managerial stress when working with employees

At the end of the interview, all managers were asked in a summary question which of the SCARF model factors, status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness, have the greatest and least influence on the manager's stress in working with employees. A summary of the responses is given in Table 6 (positive - T, negative - N).

Table 6. SCARF model factors influencing managerial stress when working with employees

	Status		Certainty		Autonomy		Relatedness		Fairness	
	T	N	T	N	T	N	T	N	T	N
1IN/25		X				X	X			
2IN/25		X					X			
3IN/25		X	X							
4IN/25		X			X					
5IN/25						X	X			
6IN/25		X	X							X
7IN/25							X			
8IN/25						X	X			
9IN/25		X	X							
10IN/25							X			X

Most managers mentioned relatedness as the most stressful element when working with employees, several also mentioned autonomy, none mentioned status, and fairness. The least stressful element was the status, which managers had already described as a "given", as a tool for action. Autonomy and fairness were also mentioned among the less stressful elements; certainty and relatedness were not tracked.

Conclusions

The interaction between the manager and his/her direct reports can have both positive and negative effects on the manager's experience. Organizational factors such as leadership style, clear communication within the staff, focus on team and individual performance, objectivity, transparent reward, equal working conditions, are critical in achieving effective organizational management, good performance, and smooth relations. Despite the important positive benefits they can bring, these factors, if they are at risk of being neglected, can lead to stressful situations in the context of the manager and his/her direct reports. The analysis of these factors, therefore, remains an important area of research.

According to the interview data, the biggest challenges for managers in stressful situations are relatedness, while autonomy is the least. Relationships with employees and the creation of a supportive organizational culture have a significant impact on Company's overall performance and quality of work, while autonomy is characterized more as a 'territory' granted by the shareholder(s), over which employees do not have a significant influence. The results of the interviews reveal the need for participants to change their roles as managers to transform negative influencing factors into positive influencing factors and, at the same time, to eliminate stressful situations.

Limitations of the study - the study could in the future include a wider and more diverse sample of participants, taking into account the size of the sample of companies represented, and the diversity of the industry.

Based on the theoretical part and the results of the empirical research, recommendations are formulated for managers and HR specialists of organizations on how to assess the positive and negative factors influencing managers' work with employees, to anticipate possible negative consequences, and to find measures for their correction. The results of the study can be used to address the development needs of managers, study employee engagement, and discuss the creation of a supportive organizational culture. In the future, the study could link the application of the factors of the SCARF model to different leadership styles.

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