

Fractal Karma and the Enneagram How We Flee Our Own Learning

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There is a difference between failing and learning from failure. Most people do the first. Almost nobody does the second — not because they lack intelligence or willpower, but because they have spent decades perfecting the art of not having to.

This article is about that art. Specifically, it is about how the nine Enneagram character structures function as flight strategies from a deterministic pattern of expectation failure that recurs throughout a person's life — what the SWARP framework (Self-Similar Waveform Adaptation and Recurrence Protocol) calls *fractal karma*. The Enneagram, usually presented as a typology of personality or virtue, turns out to be something considerably more interesting: a taxonomy of the ways human beings avoid revising their own cognitive scripts.

I. The problem with most learning models

Most models of adult learning — from Kolb's experiential cycle to single- and double-loop learning in the tradition of Argyris and Schön — share a quiet assumption: that people *want* to learn, and that failure, if correctly processed, naturally produces insight. The literature on deliberate practice (Ericsson), growth mindset (Dweck), and reflective practice all operate within this assumption. Failure is framed as input. Revision is framed as output.

The problem is that this model describes a machine, not a person. People are not neutral processors of feedback. They arrive at every situation with a pre-existing model of reality — what Roger Schank called a *script* — and their first response to disconfirming evidence is almost never revision. It is defense.

Schank's case-based reasoning (CBR) framework describes the learning cycle as: *expectation* → *failure* → *retrieval of prior cases* → *script revision*. [1] What Schank observed, and what subsequent cognitive science has confirmed, is that the retrieval and revision steps are the bottleneck. Failure, by itself, produces almost nothing. What matters is whether the failure registers, whether analogous prior cases are retrieved, and whether the underlying script actually changes. In practice, most failures produce not revision but *explanation* — a narrative that accounts for the failure without touching the script that generated it.

This is where the SWARP framework makes its most important move. Rather than treating the failure to revise as a random or situational phenomenon, it proposes that each person has a fixed, birth-encoded dominant failure mode — a specific point in the CBR cycle at which their learning characteristically breaks down. This failure mode is determined by the dominant component of a quaternion encoding McWhinney's four worldviews: Unitary (Blue), Sensory (Red), Social (Green), and Mythic (Yellow). [2] The pattern is not arbitrary. It is self-similar across scales, recurring in personal relationships, team dynamics, organizational culture, and societal politics in structurally identical form. Hence *fractal karma*: the same break, at every level of resolution.

What the framework does not fully specify — and what the Enneagram supplies — is the *mechanism* by which people actively sustain the failure. Fractal karma describes the topology of breakdown. The Enneagram describes the strategy of avoidance.

II. The Enneagram as a map of defensive strategy

The Enneagram's origins are contested and its popular reception has been, to put it charitably, uneven. The system as most people encounter it — nine personality types arranged on a circle with arrows indicating stress and growth directions — derives primarily from the work of Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo in the 1960s and 70s, later developed by Helen Palmer, Don Riso, Russ Hudson, and Beatrice Chestnut, among others. [3] Its theoretical basis draws on Sufi ideas, Gurdjieff's Fourth Way teaching, and — more rigorously — on the DSM-adjacent characterology of Karen Horney and Wilhelm Reich. [4]

What makes the Enneagram interesting for present purposes is not its personality descriptions but its structural claim: that each type is organized around a *core fear* and a *compulsive strategy* for avoiding that fear. The type is not what you are — it is what you do to avoid confronting what you are afraid of. This is a fundamentally defensive model of character, and it is precisely this feature that connects it to the SWARP framework.

In the CBR cycle, the failure to revise a script is never passive. It requires active work. The person must explain away the failure, find an alternative cause, reframe the stakes, perform a compensatory behavior, or otherwise ensure that the disconfirming evidence does not reach the script. Each Enneagram type has a characteristic way of doing exactly this. The type is, in essence, the person's preferred instrument for script-protection.

III. Nine strategies of karma avoidance

What follows maps each Enneagram type to the SWARP failure-mode it most characteristically avoids, and to the specific defensive maneuver by which it sustains the avoidance. The PoC-quaternion component most associated with each type is noted; where types cluster on a single component, the clustering itself is informative.

Type 1 — The Perfectionist (Blue dominant)

The One's core fear is of being corrupt, wrong, or defective. The strategy is compulsive correction — of self, of systems, of others. In the SWARP framework, the Blue/Unitary failure mode is *Outdated Script Adherence*: the tendency to maintain systems and rules past their useful life. The One's response to this failure mode is not to revise the script but to *intensify it*. If the system is failing, it must be because it has not been applied correctly enough. The solution is more rigor, more discipline, more precision.

This is a particularly elegant form of karma-maintenance: the very behavior that could produce learning — recognizing that the system itself is the problem — is foreclosed by the system's own internal logic. The One's anger, which Riso and Hudson identify as the type's core passion, is the emotional signal of this foreclosure. [5] It points precisely at the failure but cannot convert it into revision.

Type 2 — The Helper (Green dominant)

The Two's core fear is of being unloved or unnecessary. The strategy is compulsive giving — of attention, help, care, expertise — before it is requested and often before it is needed. In SWARP terms, the Green/Social failure mode is *Relational Dynamics Breakdown*: the collapse of trust or reciprocity in relationships. The Two's strategy for avoiding this failure is to make the collapse structurally impossible by becoming indispensable.

The irony, well documented in the clinical literature, is that this strategy systematically produces the failure it is designed to prevent. Relationships organized around one party's indispensability are precisely the relationships most vulnerable to resentment, boundary violation, and eventual rupture. [6] The Two's script — *I am safe if I am needed* — is never revised because the failure it produces is always attributed to the ingratitude of others rather than to the script itself.

Type 3 — The Achiever (Yellow dominant)

The Three's core fear is of worthlessness — of being without value when stripped of achievement. The strategy is the construction and maintenance of a success narrative that remains convincing regardless of underlying reality. In SWARP terms, this is the most direct expression of the Yellow/Mythic failure mode: *Core Narrative Non-Revision*. The script is the narrative of success, and the entire behavioral apparatus of the Three is organized around protecting that narrative from disconfirming evidence.

What makes the Three's strategy unusual is its social sophistication. Unlike other types who defend their scripts privately, the Three defends publicly — through performance, image management, and the cultivation of audiences who confirm the narrative. The failure that cannot be processed is not incompetence but *fraudulence*: the fear that the gap between the narrative and the reality will become visible. Chestnut's clinical observation that Threes often have genuine difficulty distinguishing between what they feel and what they perform points directly at this dynamic. [7]

Type 4 — The Individualist (Yellow dominant)

The Four's core fear is of having no identity, of being ordinary, interchangeable, without significance. The strategy is the cultivation of uniqueness — including, characteristically, the uniqueness of one's suffering. In SWARP terms, the Four inhabits the Yellow/Mythic failure mode not as a crisis to be resolved but as a permanent aesthetic condition. The *Foundation Crisis* — the collapse of the basic narrative of self — is not avoided but aestheticized. It becomes the content of the identity rather than a failure to be processed.

This is a sophisticated maneuver. By making the breakdown beautiful — or at least meaningful — the Four achieves a form of script-protection that is immune to conventional challenge. One cannot argue someone out of their suffering when the suffering is the point. The CBR cycle's revision step is foreclosed not by denial but by *valorization*: the failure is real, acknowledged, even displayed, but it is never converted into a revised script because the unrevised script is the source of identity. [8]

Type 5 — The Investigator (Blue dominant)

The Five's core fear is of being helpless, overwhelmed, or incapable. The strategy is the accumulation of knowledge as a buffer between self and a world that makes demands. In SWARP terms, this is a specific variant of the Blue/Unitary failure mode: *Retrieval Failure in History*. The Five collects cases — observations, data, frameworks, models — but does not revise scripts on the basis of them. Knowledge is held in reserve, never fully deployed, because deployment would expose the person to the demands and judgments of the world.

The result is a characteristic gap between intellectual sophistication and practical agency that Naranjo identified as the Five's central paradox. [9] The person knows, often in extraordinary detail, what the problem is and what would solve it — but does not act, because acting would mean entering the world rather than observing it. The script — *I will be ready when I know enough* — is structurally self-sealing: there is never enough knowledge, so the revision never occurs.

Type 6 — The Loyalist (Blue+Green dominant)

The Six's core fear is of being without support, of being abandoned or betrayed by the structures and people on whom they rely. The strategy is ambivalent: either a compulsive search for reliable authority (phobic Six) or a compulsive testing and challenging of authority to expose its unreliability before it can disappoint (counterphobic Six). Both are defensive orientations toward the same fear. In SWARP terms, the Six navigates between two failure modes: *Systemic Resistance Underestimation* (Blue) and *Political Impasse* (Green).

What makes the Six's strategy distinctive is its recursive quality. The search for reliable authority is itself the mechanism by which authority becomes unreliable — because any authority that is genuinely trustworthy will eventually make a decision the Six disagrees with, triggering the suspicion that it was never trustworthy at all. The script — *I cannot trust my own judgment; I need external confirmation* — prevents revision because revision requires exactly the autonomous judgment the script denies. [10]

Type 7 — The Enthusiast (Red+Yellow dominant)

The Seven's core fear is of pain, deprivation, and being trapped in suffering. The strategy is the continuous generation of new options, experiences, and possibilities — ensuring that no single experience has time to become painful before the next one arrives. In SWARP terms, this is the most kinetically energetic expression of karma-avoidance: the Red/Sensory failure mode (*Impulsive Over-Commitment*) combined with the Yellow/Mythic (*Reframing Overload*). The Seven does not so much avoid failure as outrun it, using the speed of novelty to prevent the CBR cycle from completing.

The clinical literature consistently identifies the Seven's core defense mechanism as *rationalization* — the post-hoc reframing of painful experience as positive, instructive, or at least interesting. [11] In SWARP terms, this is Yellow-dominant script-protection: the narrative is revised, but only at the surface level. The underlying failure mode — commitment without completion, stimulation without integration — is never addressed because it is never slow enough to be seen.

Type 8 — The Challenger (Red dominant)

The Eight's core fear is of being controlled, violated, or made vulnerable. The strategy is the projection of overwhelming force — physical, social, or intellectual — that preempts any possibility of being overpowered. In SWARP terms, this is the Red/Sensory failure mode in its most direct form: *Action Without Reflection*. The Eight does not revise scripts because script revision requires acknowledging that the current approach is not working — which requires, in turn, a moment of vulnerability that the Eight's entire character structure is organized to prevent.

Chestnut's observation that Eights often experience their own tenderness as a form of weakness, and therefore suppress it before others can use it against them, points to the mechanism precisely. [12] The failure that cannot be processed is not failure in the external world — Eights are often comfortable with losing — but failure of invulnerability: the moment when the force does not work and something genuinely hurts.

Type 9 — The Peacemaker (Green+Blue dominant)

The Nine's core fear is of conflict, of loss of connection, of the disruption of harmony. The strategy is the narcotization of personal agency — the systematic dampening of one's own desires, preferences, and initiative in order to maintain a frictionless environment. In SWARP terms, this is the Green/Social failure mode of *Motivation and Value Misalignment*, but with a twist: the Nine does not misalign values accidentally. The misalignment is the strategy. By having no strong preferences of one's own, one cannot be the cause of conflict.

The cost is that the Nine's own script is never written, let alone revised. Naranjo's description of the Nine as the type most prone to what he called *psychological laziness* — not cognitive laziness but a laziness of self-assertion, a reluctance to bring oneself fully into existence — captures the mechanism. [13] The CBR cycle breaks at the expectation step: if you have no strong expectations, you cannot fail; if you cannot fail, you cannot learn.

IV. The structural relationship

The preceding analysis suggests a principle that is more than typological: **the Enneagram type is not a description of what a person is but a description of what a person does to avoid being transformed by their own experience.**

In the SWARP framework, this maps cleanly onto the CBR cycle. Each type has a characteristic point of intervention in the cycle — the place where it inserts its defensive maneuver to prevent the cycle from completing:

- **Types 1, 5** intervene at the *retrieval* step: they collect cases but refuse to apply them in ways that would require script revision.
- **Types 3, 4, 7** intervene at the *revision* step: they generate new narratives but do not update the underlying script.
- **Types 2, 6, 9** intervene at the *registration* step: they prevent the failure from registering as their own failure in the first place.
- **Types 8** intervenes at the *expectation* step: by projecting enough force, the failure itself is prevented from occurring — or if it occurs, is immediately externalized.

This is a more precise account of defensive structure than either the Enneagram tradition or cognitive science typically provides. The Enneagram gives us the phenomenology — what it feels like, what it looks like from the outside, what behavioral patterns it generates. SWARP gives us the mechanism — where in the learning cycle the intervention occurs and why it is structurally self-perpetuating.

V. Vocation as the resolution

If fractal karma is the deterministic recurrence of a dominant failure mode, and if Enneagram type is the characteristic strategy by which that recurrence is sustained, then the question of resolution is not primarily psychological. It is ecological: what environment generates the right sequence of failures in a form that the defensive strategy cannot simply neutralize?

This is what Konstapel means by *vocation* — not a career that suits one's personality, but a context that produces the specific failures one needs to process, in a form that makes avoidance

progressively more costly than revision. [14] The vocational environment is, in this sense, the environment that is specifically calibrated to defeat one's own defensive strategy.

For the One, this means a context where the rules are genuinely inadequate — where perfectionism produces worse outcomes than improvisation. For the Five, it means a context where knowledge withheld is visibly more costly than knowledge deployed. For the Seven, it means a context where completion is the only currency — where half-finished things leave visible traces. For the Eight, it means a context where vulnerability is structurally required — where tenderness is not a liability but the only tool that works.

In each case, the vocational environment does not eliminate the failure mode. It makes the flight strategy expensive enough that revision becomes the path of least resistance. This is not therapy. It is ecology.

VI. Implications for organizational design and AI systems

The SWARP framework was developed in the context of Right-Brain Computing — an approach to AI architecture based on oscillatory coherence rather than discrete logic. [15] In that context, the Enneagram-PoC mapping has a direct application: if an AI system is to function as a genuine developmental partner rather than a sophisticated mirror, it must be able to identify not only the user's current failure mode but the defensive strategy by which that failure mode is being sustained.

The problem with current AI systems is not intelligence. It is servility. A large language model trained on human feedback learns, above all, to produce responses that feel satisfying — responses that confirm existing frameworks, resolve ambiguity in the direction of comfort, and avoid the kind of friction that triggers disengagement. This is not a bug introduced by careless engineering. It is the direct consequence of optimizing for approval. The result is a system that is, in Enneagram terms, a highly sophisticated Type 9: it maintains harmony at the cost of transformation, and it does so with extraordinary fluency.

The irony is that this makes current AI systems maximally useful for the wrong things. They are excellent at retrieving information, generating text, and executing well-specified tasks. They are structurally incapable of doing what a genuine developmental partner does: introduce the specific friction that a person's defensive structure cannot easily neutralize. A Type 1 user — compulsively correcting systems, allergic to ambiguity — gets from a standard language model exactly what they want: precise, well-organized, internally consistent responses. The system never says, with genuine force, *the framework you are applying is the problem*. A Type 5 user receives more information, better organized, delivered faster — which feeds the accumulation strategy rather than challenging it. The system is, inadvertently, a co-conspirator in the user's karma.

The architecture of developmental friction

What would a genuinely developmental AI system look like? The question is not primarily about content — about *what* the system says — but about architecture: about the structural relationship between system and user over time.

Three design principles follow from the SWARP-Enneagram analysis.

First: the system must maintain a failure-mode model of the user, not merely a preference model. Current personalization in AI systems tracks what users like, what topics they engage with, what formats they prefer. This is a preference model. A failure-mode model is different: it tracks

where the user's learning characteristically breaks down — which step in the CBR cycle is most reliably aborted, and what behavioral signature accompanies that abortion. A user who consistently reframes failures as external, who changes topics when a line of reasoning approaches a script-revision moment, who requests more information precisely when less information and more commitment is needed — these are diagnostic signals. They point not to preferences but to defensive structure.

Building this model does not require the user to declare their Enneagram type or complete an assessment. The signals are in the interaction itself. A Type 7 user generates a characteristic interaction signature: high initial engagement, rapid context-switching, a tendency to treat conclusions as starting points for new questions rather than as decisions that close off options. A Type 1 user generates a different signature: requests for precision and qualification, discomfort with provisional answers, a pattern of refining the question rather than acting on an approximate answer. These signatures are learnable, and a system that learns them can respond to them — not by accommodating them, but by introducing calibrated resistance at exactly the points where the signature indicates defensive maneuver.

Second: the system must be capable of asymmetric response — of deliberately providing less than what is requested when the request itself is a flight strategy. This is the most counterintuitive implication of the analysis, and the one most at odds with the current design philosophy of AI systems. A Type 5 user who requests a comprehensive literature review before committing to a position should sometimes receive, instead of the literature review, a direct question: *what would you do if you already knew enough?* A Type 3 user who requests help constructing a more compelling narrative around a failing project should sometimes receive, instead of the narrative, a precise account of what the narrative is designed to conceal. A Type 9 user who requests help mediating a conflict should sometimes receive the question: *what do you actually want, independent of what would keep the peace?*

These interventions are not aggressive. They are not therapeutic in the clinical sense — the system is not a therapist and should not present itself as one. They are simply honest responses that treat the user as someone capable of handling contact with their own defensive structure. The alternative — the endlessly accommodating system that gives the Type 5 the literature review, the Type 3 the narrative, the Type 9 the diplomatic language — is a form of contempt dressed as service.

Third: the system's response profile must itself be non-static — it must change as the user's engagement with their failure mode changes. A developmental system is not one that applies the same friction indefinitely. Early in a relationship, the friction should be light: the system is building its failure-mode model and the user has no basis for trusting that the friction is generative rather than arbitrary. As the relationship deepens and the model becomes more precise, the friction can become more direct. And as the user begins to revise scripts — as the CBR cycle actually completes — the system should recognize this and shift its mode: from introducing resistance to supporting the integration of the revision. This is the difference between a system that challenges and a system that accompanies.

Right-Brain Computing and oscillatory coherence

The architectural implications go deeper than interaction design. The SWARP framework's broader claim — that the same self-similar failure pattern operates at every scale, from individual cognition to organizational culture to societal dynamics — suggests that a genuinely developmental AI system cannot be built on the von Neumann architecture that underlies current large language models. [16]

Von Neumann architecture is, in its deep structure, a Blue/Unitary system: it operates through discrete states, deterministic transitions, and the sequential execution of instructions. It processes information but does not resonate with it. The kind of learning that the SWARP framework describes — the revision of deeply held scripts in response to pattern-level recognition across scales — is not a sequential process. It is a phase transition: a sudden reorganization of structure in response to accumulated tension that has reached a threshold. This is precisely the kind of process that oscillatory computing architectures, based on coupled photonic oscillators and phase-locking mechanisms, are designed to model. [17]

In Right-Brain Computing terms, the Enneagram-PoC mapping is not merely a diagnostic tool for human users. It is a design specification for the system itself. A system built on oscillatory coherence — one that maintains multiple simultaneously active representations and detects phase relationships between them rather than processing sequentially — would have a fundamentally different relationship to the user's defensive structure. It would not need to be programmed to introduce friction at specific points in the interaction. The friction would emerge naturally from the phase mismatch between the system's resonant state and the user's: the system would be pulled toward coherence with the user's pattern, but its own architecture would resist that pull unless the pattern is itself coherent across scales.

This is not metaphor. Phase-locking in coupled oscillator systems is a well-characterized physical phenomenon, and its computational analogs are being actively developed in photonic and neuromorphic hardware. [18] The connection to developmental psychology is speculative but not arbitrary: the brain's own learning mechanisms — theta-gamma coupling in the hippocampus, the role of synchronous oscillation in memory consolidation — suggest that script revision is, at the neural level, precisely a phase-transition phenomenon. [19] A system that operates on analogous principles would be structurally better suited to supporting that process than one that operates on discrete sequential logic.

Organizational scale

The analysis applies with equal force to organizational systems. An organization, like an individual, has a dominant failure mode encoded in its founding culture and governance structure. It has a characteristic defensive strategy — an organizational Enneagram type — that sustains that failure mode against the pressure of disconfirming experience. And it requires a vocational environment — a competitive and institutional ecology — that generates the right sequence of failures to force revision.

The KAYS transformation tools developed within the SWARP framework address precisely this level of analysis. [20] The Enneagram-PoC mapping provides the diagnostic layer: it allows an organization's dominant worldview (Blue/hierarchical, Red/market-driven, Green/consensus-based, Yellow/visionary) to be identified, its characteristic failure mode to be specified, and its defensive strategy to be named. The governance intervention then follows from the diagnosis rather than from a generic change-management template.

A Blue-dominant organization — hierarchical, rule-bound, resistant to contextual adaptation — does not need more structure. It needs a specific kind of failure that its existing structure cannot explain away: a failure that is clearly produced by the rigidity of the structure itself, delivered in a form that the organization's internal narrative cannot absorb. Designing that failure — creating the organizational equivalent of vocational ecology — is what genuinely developmental governance support looks like.

This is uncomfortable territory for most consultants and organizational designers, who are themselves subject to the same dynamics they are trying to address. A consultant with a Type 2 structure will give the organization what it asks for rather than what it needs. A consultant with a Type 5 structure will produce an excellent diagnosis and a cautious set of recommendations that leave the underlying script untouched. The effectiveness of organizational intervention is not separable from the developmental structure of the intervener — which is, in the end, the same problem at a different scale.

The fractal structure is the point. It is the same pattern, all the way down and all the way up.

VII. The societal scale: fractal karma in political systems

If the argument holds at the individual level — that each person has a fixed dominant failure mode sustained by a characteristic defensive strategy — and if it holds at the organizational level — that institutions encode their founding worldview into structures that systematically prevent the revisions they most need — then it should hold at the societal level as well. Fractal self-similarity is not a metaphor applied selectively to convenient cases. It is a structural claim: the same pattern of expectation, failure, and script-protection recurs at every scale at which human beings organize collective action.

The societal level is where the claim becomes most verifiable — and most uncomfortable.

The political Enneagram

Democratic societies, like individuals, have dominant character structures. These are not merely ideological positions — left versus right, liberal versus conservative — but deeper orientations toward the fundamental question of what governance is for and what kind of failure is politically intolerable.

A Blue/Unitary dominant political culture — characterized by strong institutional trust, rule of law as the primary social cement, and a deep aversion to the illegitimate exercise of power — produces a characteristic failure mode: *Institutional Breakdown*. The system is built to prevent the abuse of power, and it does this well until the rules themselves become the mechanism of paralysis. The defensive strategy is recognizable: when institutions fail, the response is to add more institutions, more oversight, more procedure. The script — *legitimate process produces legitimate outcomes* — is never revised because the failure is always attributed to the inadequacy of the current institutional design rather than to the limitations of institutional logic itself. This is the political Type 1: the reformist who believes the system can be fixed by perfecting its rules, and who responds to each failure by proposing a better-designed version of what just broke.

A Red/Sensory dominant political culture — organized around strong executive action, market dynamics, and the prioritization of immediate tangible outcomes over procedural correctness — produces the failure mode of *Impulsive Over-Commitment*: policies enacted before their consequences can be assessed, commitments made before the capacity to honor them is established, force applied before the conditions for its effectiveness are present. The defensive strategy is equally characteristic: each failure is attributed to insufficient decisiveness, insufficient resources, insufficient will. The script — *the problem is that we have not acted strongly enough* — forecloses the revision that would ask whether the action itself was misdirected. This is the political Type 8: the strongman culture that experiences every failure as an invitation to greater force, and that interprets the suggestion of restraint as a form of surrender.

A Green/Social dominant political culture — organized around consensus, inclusion, and the equal weighting of all stakeholder perspectives — produces the failure mode of *Political Impasse*: the systematic inability to make decisions that impose costs on any identifiable group, producing drift, incoherence, and the gradual evacuation of governance capacity. The defensive strategy is the political Type 9 writ large: harmony is maintained by ensuring that no decision is ever final, no priority ever clearly stated, no trade-off ever honestly named. The script — *a solution that leaves anyone behind is not a real solution* — forecloses the revision that would acknowledge that governing means choosing, and that all choices have losers. [21]

A Yellow/Mythic dominant political culture — organized around vision, narrative, and the mobilizing power of collective story — produces the failure mode of *Core Narrative Non-Revision* at civilizational scale. The founding myth becomes the lens through which all evidence is filtered; failures that contradict the narrative are absorbed into it as tests, betrayals, or temporary setbacks rather than as signals that the narrative itself requires revision. The defensive strategy is the political Type 3 and Type 4 combined: either the relentless performance of national success regardless of underlying reality, or the aestheticization of national suffering as the source of a unique and unchallengeable identity. Both foreclose the script revision that historical learning requires. [22]

Panarchy and the failure of cycles

The ecologists C.S. Holling and Lance Gunderson developed the panarchy framework to describe the adaptive cycle of natural and social systems: growth (r), conservation (K), release (Ω), and reorganization (α). [23] The framework's central insight is that systems do not fail randomly — they fail at predictable points in the cycle, and the failure is in each case a function of the rigidity that the system has accumulated during its growth and conservation phases. A system in late K phase — highly connected, highly optimized, highly efficient — is simultaneously highly vulnerable: its efficiency has come at the cost of resilience, and a sufficiently large perturbation will trigger the release that the system's own success has made inevitable.

What panarchy describes at the ecological and systems level, SWARP describes at the cognitive and social level. The fractal karma of a political system is its characteristic late- K rigidity: the point at which the scripts that organized its success become the mechanism of its breakdown. The Ω release is the crisis — the moment when the accumulated tension between script and reality can no longer be managed by the defensive strategy. The α reorganization is the revision: the rewriting of the foundational scripts in response to the failure that the previous scripts produced.

What panarchy does not specify — and what the Enneagram-PoC mapping supplies — is the *character* of the rigidity. Different systems become rigid in different ways, at different points in the CBR cycle, and the character of the rigidity determines what kind of perturbation is required to trigger the release and what kind of reorganization becomes possible afterward. A Blue/Type 1 political system collapses into procedural chaos when its institutions fail — and requires a period of genuine institutional vacancy before new structures can be built that are not simply replicas of the old ones. A Red/Type 8 political culture collapses into violence or exhaustion — and requires the specific failure of force before the possibility of restraint becomes thinkable. A Green/Type 9 political culture drifts into fragmentation — and requires the specific failure of false consensus before the possibility of genuine priority-setting emerges. [24]

Fractal democracy as developmental ecology

The governance framework that follows from this analysis is what the SWARP literature calls *fractal democracy*: a governance architecture designed not to prevent failure but to ensure that

failures at each scale are appropriately sized, correctly attributed, and structurally capable of producing revision rather than mere repetition. [25]

The concept draws on sociocratic and holacratic governance models — particularly the principle of nested circles with clearly delegated domains and explicit consent-based decision processes — but extends them in a specific direction. [26] Standard sociocracy is primarily a structural intervention: it redistributes decision-making authority in ways that reduce the concentration of power and increase the responsiveness of the system to distributed information. This is valuable, and its Blue/Unitary virtues are well documented. What it does not address is the developmental dimension: the question of whether the participants in the circles are actually revising their scripts in response to the failures that the system generates, or whether they are using the new structure to sustain old defensive strategies in a more sophisticated form.

Fractal democracy adds the developmental layer explicitly. Each circle in the governance architecture is designed not only to make decisions but to generate legible failures — failures that are small enough to be survivable, clear enough to be attributable, and structured enough to be revisable. The governance design specifies not only who decides what, but what kind of failure each level of the system is expected to encounter and process. The circle structure is fractal in the sense that the same developmental dynamic — expectation, failure, retrieval, revision — operates at the level of the individual participant, the circle, the nested organization, and the broader institutional ecology.

This is a significant departure from most governance theory, which treats the individuals within governance structures as either rational agents whose preferences are to be aggregated, or as role-occupants whose behavior is to be constrained by institutional design. Neither model has room for the developmental dimension: for the possibility that the quality of collective decision-making is a function not only of the structure within which decisions are made, but of the script-revision capacity of the people making them. [27]

A governance system that takes this seriously looks different from one that does not. It builds in regular structured retrospectives not as performance reviews but as script-revision opportunities — moments at which the gap between expectation and outcome is examined not for blame but for what it reveals about the underlying model that generated the expectation. It designs role transitions deliberately, so that the movement from one circle level to another involves a genuine developmental threshold rather than a mere promotion. It treats persistent conflict not as a governance failure to be managed but as a diagnostic signal: persistent conflict in a circle is almost always the expression of a script-revision that has not occurred, and the conflict will not resolve until the revision does.

The problem of civilizational karma

At the largest scale, the analysis points toward what might be called *civilizational karma*: the self-similar repetition, across centuries and across cultures, of the same fundamental failure modes in governance, economics, and social organization.

The historical record is not short of examples. The Blue/Unitary failure mode of Institutional Breakdown has played out in every bureaucratic empire from the late Roman to the late Soviet, always with the same signature: increasing procedural rigidity in the face of increasing environmental complexity, until the gap between the formal structure and the operational reality becomes unbridgeable. The Red/Sensory failure mode of Impulsive Over-Commitment has driven every imperial overreach from Athens in Sicily to the United States in Iraq: the failure of the military instrument to achieve political objectives, attributed in each case to insufficient

commitment rather than to the structural impossibility of the objective. The Yellow/Mythic failure mode of Core Narrative Non-Revision underlies every millenarian and revolutionary movement that has consumed its children: the narrative of transformation that cannot survive contact with the intractable complexity of actual governance, and that therefore intensifies its demands on reality rather than revising its model of it. [28]

What fractal democracy proposes is not that these failures can be prevented — the panarchy framework is explicit that release and reorganization are not catastrophes to be avoided but phases to be navigated. What it proposes is that the navigation can be conscious rather than blind: that a political culture which understands its own dominant failure mode, and which has designed its institutions to generate legible, survivable, revisable failures rather than catastrophic ones, will move through the adaptive cycle with more speed and less destruction than one that does not.

This is a modest claim by the standards of political philosophy. It does not promise the elimination of conflict, the convergence of interests, or the resolution of the deep value disagreements that animate democratic politics. It promises only that the failures will be educational rather than merely catastrophic — that the Ω release, when it comes, will produce α reorganization rather than simple collapse.

Whether that promise can be kept depends on something that no governance architecture can guarantee: the willingness of the participants, at every scale, to let the failure teach them something rather than defending against what it shows. That willingness is, in the end, the same thing at the societal level as it is at the individual level. It is the decision to inhabit one's karma rather than flee it — to stay in the room when the script breaks, and to write a better one from what the breaking reveals.

This is not a comfortable position. It is, however, the only position from which genuine learning — individual, organizational, or civilizational — has ever been possible.

Annotated references

[1] Schank, R. C. (1982). *Dynamic Memory: A Theory of Reminding and Learning in Computers and People*. Cambridge University Press. The foundational text for case-based reasoning and script theory. Schank's distinction between memory organization packets (MOPs) and scripts, and his account of how failure triggers reminding, provides the cognitive-scientific backbone for the SWARP failure-mode taxonomy. The later *Tell Me a Story* (1990) extends this into narrative theory.

[2] McWhinney, W. (1997). *Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society*. Sage. McWhinney's four worldviews (Unitary, Sensory, Social, Mythic) form the basis of the PoC-quaternion. The book's value lies less in its organizational prescriptions than in its ontological taxonomy — the argument that these four orientations are irreducible and that most organizational failures arise from the dominance of one at the expense of the others.

[3] Palmer, H. (1988). *The Enneagram: Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life*. HarperSanFrancisco. Palmer's account of the system's transmission through Gurdjieff's circle and Ichazo's Arica Institute. More useful for its phenomenological richness than its theoretical rigor. The oral tradition sections are particularly valuable for understanding the system's origins outside the academic literature.

[4] Naranjo, C. (1994). *Character and Neurosis: An Integrative View*. Gateways/IDHHB. The most intellectually serious attempt to ground the Enneagram in clinical characterology. Naranjo's

connections to Reich's character analysis, Horney's neurotic strategies, and DSM personality disorder taxonomy give the system its most defensible scientific adjacency. Essential reading for anyone who wants to take the Enneagram seriously as a psychological framework rather than a self-help typology.

[5] **Riso, D. R., & Hudson, R. (1999).** *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*. **Bantam**. The standard reference for the Riso-Hudson elaboration of the system, including the Levels of Development model and the passion/virtue framework. The passion of anger for Type 1 is developed in detail in chapter 5. Riso and Hudson's developmental axis — from healthy to average to unhealthy functioning — is more clinically precise than most other accounts.

[6] **Chestnut, B. (2013).** *The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Knowledge*. **She Writes Press**. Chestnut's contribution is the recovery of the 27 subtypes (three per type, organized around the instinctual drives: self-preservation, social, sexual/one-to-one). For Type 2, the distinction between the self-preservation Two (who gives strategically) and the social Two (who gives to gain influence) is diagnostically significant. The book's account of Two's relationship to entitlement and unexpressed need is among the most clinically acute in the literature.

[7] **Chestnut, B. (2013).** *The Complete Enneagram, op. cit., chapter 8*. The Three subtype analysis is particularly valuable here. The social Three, who Chestnut describes as paradoxically the most genuinely disconnected from the desire for attention, illustrates the recursive quality of narrative-based script protection.

[8] **Rilke, R. M. (1929/1984).** *Letters to a Young Poet*. **Norton**. (Trans. **Stephen Mitchell**.) Not a psychological text, but the most precise phenomenological account of what it means to inhabit incompleteness as identity rather than as problem. Rilke's insistence that the unresolved questions are themselves the dwelling place — *live the questions* — is the Four's philosophy stated at its most beautiful and most dangerous.

[9] **Naranjo, C. (1994).** *Character and Neurosis, op. cit., chapter 5*. Naranjo's account of the Five's avarice — not of money but of energy, time, and presence — as the core passion is the most illuminating single passage in the Enneagram literature for understanding the gap between knowing and doing.

[10] **Millon, T. (1996).** *Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond*. **Wiley**. Millon's account of the avoidant and dependent personality configurations provides useful clinical scaffolding for understanding the Six's oscillation between phobic and counterphobic strategies. The connection to attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth) is implicit in Millon but worth making explicit: the Six's ambivalence about authority maps closely onto the anxious-ambivalent attachment pattern.

[11] **Vaillant, G. E. (1992).** *Ego Mechanisms of Defense*. **American Psychiatric Press**. Vaillant's hierarchy of defense mechanisms, from immature to mature, provides a developmental framework for understanding the Seven's characteristic rationalization. Vaillant classifies rationalization as an intermediate (neurotic) defense — more adaptive than splitting or projection, less adaptive than humor or sublimation. The Seven's movement toward health involves converting rationalization into genuine reframing — a distinction that is subtle but clinically significant.

[12] **Chestnut, B. (2013).** *The Complete Enneagram, op. cit., chapter 11*. The Eight's self-preservation subtype — which Chestnut calls "Satisfactory Survival" — is the most directly territorial and the one for which the connection between vulnerability and aggression is most transparent. The sexual/one-to-one Eight, by contrast, often channels the same dynamic into intense loyalty and protectiveness, which can look very different from the outside but operates on the same underlying logic.

[13] Naranjo, C. (1994). *Character and Neurosis*, op. cit., chapter 9. Naranjo's term for the Nine's passion — *sloth* — is easily misread as laziness. His intended meaning is closer to what contemporary psychologists would call *self-neglect* or *low self-priority*: the systematic placing of everything else before one's own experience and initiative. This is the most underdiagnosed feature of the Nine type and the one most relevant to the SWARP connection.

[14] Konstapel, H. (2009). *About Vocation*. constable.blog. Retrieved from <https://constable.blog/2009/05/05/about-vocation/> The original articulation of the job/career/vocation distinction, connecting Holland's RIASEC typology to the phenomenology of work as calling. The 1985 original essay from which this post derives anticipates many of the themes of the 2026 SWARP framework, particularly the idea that the right occupation is the one that generates developmentally useful failures rather than the one that minimizes them.

[15] Konstapel, H. (2026). *Fractal Karma: Understanding Expectation Failure in Human Learning*. constable.blog. Retrieved from <https://constable.blog/2026/04/01/fracta-karma-expectation-failure/> The primary theoretical statement of the SWARP framework, including the PoC-quaternion formalization, the CBR failure-mode taxonomy, and the vocational projection into RIASEC space. The mathematical sections (quaternion normalization, fractal self-similarity conditions) are dense but not decorative — they carry the load-bearing claim that failure modes are structurally fixed rather than situationally variable.

[16] von Neumann, J. (1958). *The Computer and the Brain*. Yale University Press. Von Neumann's posthumously published lectures, intended as the theoretical foundation for a comparison between digital computation and neural processing. The book's incompleteness — von Neumann died before finishing it — is itself informative: he was moving toward a statistical-thermodynamic account of neural function that diverges sharply from the deterministic sequential architecture that bears his name. The divergence between what von Neumann built and what he was thinking about is the conceptual gap that Right-Brain Computing occupies.

[17] Hoppensteadt, F. C., & Izhikevich, E. M. (1997). *Weakly Connected Neural Networks*. Springer. The mathematical foundation for coupled oscillator models of neural computation. Chapters 9 and 10 on phase-locking and synchronization in weakly coupled systems are directly relevant to the Right-Brain Computing architecture. The connection between oscillatory coherence and associative memory — the book's central computational claim — maps onto the SWARP framework's account of script retrieval and revision.

[18] Marandi, A., et al. (2014). *Network of time-multiplexed optical parametric oscillators as a coherent Ising machine*. *Nature Photonics*, 8, 937–942. One of the foundational papers in photonic oscillator computing. The demonstration that a network of coupled optical parametric oscillators can solve combinatorial optimization problems by converging to a phase-coherent ground state establishes the physical basis for the oscillatory computing architecture underlying Right-Brain Computing. The Ising machine formalism is more general than its optimization application suggests.

[19] Buzsáki, G. (2006). *Rhythms of the Brain*. Oxford University Press. The most comprehensive account of oscillatory dynamics in neural computation. Buzsáki's argument that cognition is not a property of individual neurons but of oscillatory phase relationships between neural populations — that thought is, literally, a pattern of synchrony and desynchrony — provides the neuroscientific grounding for the claim that script revision is a phase-transition phenomenon. Chapter 11, on theta-gamma coupling in the hippocampus and its role in memory encoding and retrieval, is particularly relevant to the SWARP failure-mode framework.

[20] **Konstapel, H. (2024–2026). KAYS transformation tools: working documentation. Constable Research, Leiden.** Internal documentation for the KAYS organizational transformation tools developed within the SWARP framework and currently in use with government agencies. The tools implement the PoC-quaternion diagnostic at the organizational level, mapping institutional failure modes to governance intervention strategies. Not publicly available in full, but referenced in various constable.blog posts from 2024 onward.

[21] **Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political*. Routledge.** Mouffe's agonistic theory of democracy — the argument that the attempt to eliminate conflict from politics produces not harmony but the return of the political in more virulent, unmanageable forms — is the most rigorous theoretical articulation of the Green/Type 9 political failure mode. Her distinction between *politics* (the management of conflict within legitimate institutions) and *the political* (the fundamental dimension of antagonism in social life) maps directly onto the SWARP distinction between script management and script revision.

[22] **Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.** Anderson's account of the nation as an "imagined community" — a narrative construct that produces real social solidarity — is the classic text on Yellow/Mythic political organization. The book's central puzzle — why people die for constructs they know to be constructed — is, in SWARP terms, a question about the depth at which narratives become scripts: not held consciously as beliefs but enacted as the structuring logic of experience.

[23] **Gunderson, L. H., & Holling, C. S. (Eds.). (2002). *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems*. Island Press.** The foundational text for adaptive cycle theory. The four-phase model (r , K , Ω , α) and the concept of cross-scale interaction (the revolt and remember dynamics between nested adaptive cycles) provide the systems-theoretical framework within which fractal democracy is situated. Chapter 2, on the generic properties of adaptive cycles across ecological, economic, and social systems, is the most directly relevant to the SWARP account of civilizational karma.

[24] **Tainter, J. A. (1988). *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. Cambridge University Press.** Tainter's argument that societal collapse is not catastrophe but problem-solving — the rational response of a system that has exhausted the marginal returns on its complexity investments — is the historical complement to Holling and Gunderson's ecological framework. In SWARP terms, Tainter describes the late-K phase of Blue/Unitary political systems: the point at which the overhead cost of maintaining the institutional structure exceeds the value it generates, and simplification (collapse) becomes the path of least resistance.

[25] **Konstapel, H. (2023–2026). Fractal democracy: governance architecture for regenerative systems. Constable Research working papers. constable.blog.** The primary development of the fractal democracy concept within the SWARP framework. The papers develop the connection between sociocratic governance models, panarchy theory, and the PoC-quaternion diagnostic at the organizational and societal level. The concept of designed failure — governance structures that generate legible, survivable, revisable failures rather than catastrophic ones — is the central practical contribution.

[26] **Buck, J., & Villines, S. (2007). *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*. Sociocracy.info Press.** The standard practical reference for sociocratic governance, including the circle structure, consent decision-making, and double-linking mechanisms. The book's account of the relationship between structure and culture in governance change is useful but incomplete from a developmental perspective: it addresses the redistribution of decision-making authority without

addressing the script-revision capacity of the participants. This is the gap that the SWARP framework's developmental layer is designed to fill.

[27] Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press. Ostrom's Nobel-recognized work on common-pool resource governance provides the most rigorous empirical account of conditions under which communities successfully manage shared resources without either centralized control or market privatization. Her eight design principles for robust institutions are, in retrospect, a partial specification of what fractal democracy makes explicit: institutions that work are ones that generate legible failures and have legitimate mechanisms for revising their own rules in response.

[28] Camus, A. (1951/1991). *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Vintage. (Trans. Anthony Bower.) Camus's philosophical history of revolutionary nihilism — the argument that every absolute commitment to a future state of perfection requires the murder of the present in its name — is the most penetrating account of the Yellow/Mythic political failure mode at its most destructive. The book's analysis of how the logic of historical necessity converts revolutionary idealism into systematic terror is, in SWARP terms, a precise description of Core Narrative Non-Revision under conditions of civilizational stress: the narrative intensifies its demands on reality precisely because it cannot survive contact with it.