Structural-Constructivist Dynamics of the Core Emotion Framework: A Multi-Scale Synthesis of Affective Operators, Enneagram Integration, and Somatic Grounding

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Preregistration:

- https://osf.io/ac4x2/overview

Pilot study:

- https://osf.io/fydsq/wiki?wiki=j7q8g

Abstract

The evolution of affective science has necessitated a transition from viewing emotions as static biological categories toward a functional understanding of emotions as dynamic transformations within a structured system. The Core Emotion Framework (CEF), a structural-constructivist model of the human psyche, provides a granular architecture for this understanding, organizing human experience into ten distinct functional operators distributed across three primary hubs: the Head (Cognitive), the Heart (Affective), and the Gut (Conative). Central to this framework is the protocol of Emotional Cycling, a structured method designed to activate, differentiate, and balance

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**) We welcome feedback on the preregistration and study design, and invite researchers who are interested in pre-reviewing the system to contact us.*

these operators to foster psychological resilience and emotional agility. By applying these cycling protocols to somatic grounding—specifically targeting the pelvic floor and postural alignment—it is possible to strengthen the midline axis of the psyche, composed of the Deciding, Achieving, Boosting, and Accepting operators, thereby mitigating the rigid interference of the Constricting operator and harmonizing lateralized outgoing and reflecting functions.

The Structural-Constructivist Architecture of the CEF

The Core Emotion Framework reframes the human internal landscape not as a series of random moods, but as a "Human Operating System" (Human OS) governed by precise functional operators. In this model, emotions are treated as internal transformations that process information, regulate relational aperture, structure action, and recalibrate baseline states.[2] This architecture is organized into a $3x3 + 1$ system, where nine operators are housed within three functional centers, and a tenth operator, Accepting, serves as the universal manifestor and baseline for the entire system.

The Head center acts as the system's processor, responsible for navigation and logic. It does not "feel" the environment in a conventional sense; rather, it "maps" it through Sensing (data intake), Calculating (analysis), and Deciding (conclusive resolution). The Heart center serves as the engine, providing the magnitude and direction of the individual's drive through Expanding (openness), Constricting (focus/protection), and Achieving (the action vector). Finally, the Gut center serves as the foundation or motoric engine, anchoring the system through Arranging (organization), Appreciating (resonance/value), and Boosting (momentum/stability).

The principle of operator independence is vital for psychological health; emotional cycling is the tool used to restore this independence and prevent "emotional fusion," a state where different functional modes become entangled, leading to rigidity and maladaptive behavior. Cycling involves the use of directional movements—either physical or imagined—to stimulate specific emotional functions: Clockwise (CW) for outgoing activation, Counter-Clockwise (CCW) for reflecting activation, and Swinging for balancing activation.

Functional Mapping of the Decalogue of Operators

Center	Primary Function	Outgoing (CW)	Reflecting (CCW)	Balancing (Swing)	Baseline (Spiral)
Head	Processor / Navigation	Sensing	Calculating	Deciding	—
Heart	Engine / Drive	Expanding	Constricting	Achieving	—
Gut	Foundation / Motoric	Arranging	Appreciating	Boosting	Accepting

[1]

Mapping the Enneagram's Tripartite Model to CEF Operators

The Enneagram’s traditional centers—Head, Heart, and Gut—describe *fixation patterns*, not functional capacities. The CEF, by contrast, maps each type to the **operator that reflects its healthy functional mode**, not its defensive structure. This distinction is essential for maintaining operator independence and emotional agility.

The CEF therefore reorganizes the Enneagram types according to the **functional architecture of the ten operators**, not the Enneagram’s historical emotional groupings. This produces a structurally coherent mapping that aligns with the CEF’s Head (cognitive), Heart (affective), and Gut (conative) hubs.

A key principle is that Deciding is not assigned to any Enneagram type. Deciding is the balancing operator of the Head center—a universal human capacity for clarity, orientation, and commitment. It is not emotional, not motivational, and not derived from any fixation pattern.

The Head Center in the CEF: Types 4 and 5

The Head center corresponds to the cognitive operators—Sensing and Calculating—which regulate perception and analysis.

Type 4 → Sensing (Head)

Type 4’s healthy expression is **meaning-search**, perceptual sensitivity, and attunement

to subtle internal and external cues. This aligns with **Sensing**, the operator responsible for *searching for something not yet found*:

- searching for meaning
- searching for emotional texture
- searching for authenticity
- searching for "what's missing"

Sensing is **perceptual hunger**, not satisfaction. Type 4 represents **inward Sensing**—tracking internal shifts and subtle emotional signals with precision.

Type 5 → Calculating (Head)

Type 5's healthy expression is analytical depth, pattern recognition, and conceptual clarity. This aligns with **Calculating**, the operator that evaluates information through logical sequencing and structured analysis.

Deciding as the Head Balancer

Deciding integrates Sensing and Calculating into a stable point of clarity. It is the operator of *common sense*—a universal human capacity that does not belong to any Enneagram type.

The Heart Center in the CEF: Types 1, 2, and 3

The Heart center corresponds to the affective operators—Expanding, Constricting, and Achieving.

Type 1 → Constricting (Heart)

Type 1's healthy expression is refinement, precision, and principled boundary-setting. This aligns with **Constricting**, the operator of inward focus, protection, and energy consolidation.

Type 2 → Expanding (Heart)

Type 2's healthy expression is relational openness, empathy, and outward warmth. This aligns with **Expanding**, the operator that widens relational aperture and fosters connection.

Type 3 → Achieving (Heart)

Type 3's healthy expression is efficient execution, mastery, and goal-directed action. This aligns with Achieving, the Heart's action vector responsible for translating intention into coordinated movement.

The Gut Center in the CEF: Types 6, 7, 8, and 9

The Gut center corresponds to the conative operators—Arranging, Appreciating, Boosting, and Accepting.

Type 6 → Arranging (Gut)

Type 6's healthy expression is practical structuring, preparation, and environmental organization. This aligns with Arranging, the operator responsible for ordering tasks, stabilizing the environment, and creating workable structure.

Type 7 → Appreciating (Gut)

Value-recognition, noticing what is supportive, uplifting, or enjoyable. Matches Appreciating, the operator of resonance, enjoyment, and perceptual satisfaction.

Type 8 → Boosting (Gut)

Type 8's healthy expression is conative force: momentum generation, charge building, and energetic propulsion. This aligns with Boosting, the operator that builds charge, strength, and forward drive.

Type 9 → Accepting (Gut)

Type 9's healthy expression is settling, softening, and returning to baseline. This aligns with Accepting, the universal baseline operator that releases tension and restores grounded presence.

ENNEAGRAM TYPE	CORE ISSUE (FIXATION)	CEF CENTER	HEALTHY CEF OPERATOR
1	Internalized Anger / Idealism	Heart	**Constricting**
2	Externalized Shame	Heart	**Expanding**

3	Conflicted Shame	Heart	**Achieving**
4	Internalized Shame	Head	**Sensing**
5	Internalized Fear	Head	**Calculating**
6	Conflicted Fear	Gut	**Arranging**
7	Externalized Fear	Gut	**Appreciating**
8	Externalized Anger	Gut	**Boosting**
9	Repressed Anger	Gut	**Accepting**

The 'Expanding' Operator and Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory

The functional definition of the CEF's **Expanding** operator—the drive for openness, inclusivity, and growth—is anchored in the tenets of Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory.[1] This theory suggests that positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, and love serve an evolutionary purpose distinct from the narrowing survival responses of negative emotions.[20]

Broadening Thought-Action Repertoires

Fredrickson argues that while negative emotions (fear, anger) narrow an individual's thought-action repertoire to a specific set of behaviors (attack, flee), positive emotions broaden these repertoires.[20] This broadening process enables individuals to draw on a wider array of possible cognitions and behaviors.[20]

Fredrickson's findings illustrate the mechanism that the Expanding operator implements: a widening of cognitive and behavioral possibilities. While her studies describe this broadening through positive-emotion exemplars (joy, interest, contentment), the CEF treats Expanding as the underlying functional movement of

relational aperture widening, independent of emotional valence.

The Expanding operator operationalizes this broadening within the Heart hub.[1] It is the "engine" that enables the individual to move from a narrow focus on self-protection toward a wide, inclusive relational aperture.[1] This is evident in organizational settings where "transformative cooperation" emerges from a positive emotional climate that encourages employees to connect on a human level.[25]

The Building of Personal Resources

The "Build" component of Fredrickson's theory posits that these broadened mindsets lead to the discovery of novel actions and ideas, which in turn build enduring personal resources.[21] These resources function as reserves that can be drawn on later to improve coping and survival:

- **Physical Resources:** Developed through play and physical activity.[20]
- **Intellectual Resources:** Enhanced problem-solving and knowledge acquisition.[20]
- **Social Resources:** Strengthening social bonds and creating chains of social support.[23]
- **Psychological Resources:** Increasing resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy.[20]

This mechanism creates an "upward spiral" where the activation of the Expanding operator increases well-being, which subsequently facilitates further broadening of awareness.[24] This spiral is the antithesis of the rigid, "fused" states identified in CEF psychopathology, such as the GoodPerson Anxiety Pattern (GPAP), where Expanding is inhibited by over-active Constricting functions.[1]

The Undoing Hypothesis

A critical piece of overlapping evidence for the Expanding operator is Fredrickson's "Undoing Hypothesis".[24] Research demonstrates that positive emotions can reverse the lingering aftereffects of negative emotions, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure following a stressful task.[24] Participants who viewed positive-emotion films (inducing joy or contentment) showed significantly faster cardiovascular recovery compared to those in neutral or negative conditions.[24] This identifies the Expanding operator as a biological regulator capable of neutralizing the "metabolically costly" defense reactions managed by the sympathetic nervous system and the Constricting operator.[24]

The 'Constricting' Operator and Polyvagal Theory

The CEF's **Constricting** operator is defined as the state of focus, protection, and consolidation of energy necessary for maintaining personal limits.[1] Its physiological foundation is articulated by Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, which describes the unmyelinated dorsal vagal complex as a system for metabolic conservation and defensive immobilization.[28]

Defensive Immobilization and Shutdown

Polyvagal Theory identifies three primary autonomic states arranged in a phylogenetic hierarchy:

1. **Ventral Vagal State:** Safety and social engagement (Newest).[29]
2. **Sympathetic State:** Mobilization (Fight or flight).[29]
3. **Dorsal Vagal State:** Immobilization, shutdown, and energy conservation (Oldest).[29]

When a threat is perceived as inescapable, the body enters a "metabolic retreat," characterized by the dorsal vagal shutdown.[32] This state involves reduced heart rate, restricted breathing, and a kind of "tonic grip" on the body.[31] This mirrors the somatic manifestation of Constricting-fusion: a defensive tightening pattern in the chest and throat that restricts expression when Constricting loses its precision function and becomes chronically over-activated.[1] This "bracing" pattern is a protective response that helps the organism survive overwhelm by "hitting the pause button".[32]

Jacksonian Dissolution and Structural Rigidity

Jacksonian dissolution describes how the nervous system, when under stress, reverts to these older, more primitive circuits.[28] In the CEF, this dissolution corresponds to the loss of midline agility and the dominance of the Constricting operator.[1] Constricting becomes pathological when it becomes "fused" with other functions, leading to emotional rigidity and a "needing to be right" that inhibits connection and action.[1]

The "vagal brake" normally regulates cardiac output to maintain calm; when this brake is withdrawn, the system defaults to sympathetic mobilization or dorsal shutdown.[30] The CEF uses emotional cycling to re-engage this "vagal brake" by strengthening the midline operators, thereby allowing the system to move out of the Constricting state and back

into social engagement (Expanding) and masterly action (Achieving).[1]

Somatic Evidence for Pelvic Floor Grounding

The conative (Gut) center grounding in the CEF is achieved through the dual activation of Boosting and Accepting, with the pelvic floor serving as the anatomical anchor.[1] This is supported by extensive research in Bioenergetic Analysis and somatic psychotherapy.[36]

The Mechanics of Grounding: Charge and Discharge

In Bioenergetics, grounding is the feeling contact between the feet and the ground, denoting a flow of excitation through the legs.[38] Alexander Lowen posits that a person's dignity and identity are tied to their "biological ground".[40]

- **Accepting (Relaxation/Discharge):** The CEF's "Accepting" operator utilizes the inward spiraling motion to release tension and surrender to gravity.[1] Lowen's "Basic Orienting Position" (BOP) requires the practitioner to "relax your pelvis—let it fall slightly" and "drop your pelvic floor".[1] This allows energy to flow from the body to the ground, lowering the center of gravity into the lower abdomen and establishing a sense of safety.[42]
- **Boosting (Engagement/Charge):** The "Boosting" operator corresponds to the dynamic engagement of the pelvic core.[1] A vigorous swinging motion builds energetic reserves, mirroring traditional practices like cultivating "Qi".[1] This builds the "charge" necessary to tolerate strong emotions and assert one's needs.[38]

Grounding Stage (Bioenergetics)	Stage Definition	CEF Operator Analogy
Holding	Maintaining physical/energetic structure	Boosting/Arranging
Supporting	Connection to gravity/foundation	Boosting/Accepting

Containing	Managing internal pressure/charge	Boosting/Constricting
Limiting	Setting functional boundaries	Constricting
Sustaining	Ongoing presence and vitality	Boosting/Appreciating
Protecting	Defensive stabilization	Boosting/Arranging
Discharging	Releasing energy into the earth	Boosting/Accepting

[1]

The Pelvic Stress Reflex

Physiologically, the "pelvic stress reflex" is a subconscious shortening of the pelvic floor muscles when a person is stressed.[43] Chronic stress leads to muscle tension and "armouring," which can result in pelvic pain, dysfunction, and emotional numbness.[36] Grounding practices that release pelvic floor tension restore the Gut center's functional range. The CEF's cycling protocols use coordinated relaxation (Accepting) and engagement (Boosting) to reverse chronic shortening patterns and re-establish stable conative grounding.

Postural Alignment and the Alexander Technique

Postural alignment acts as the physical manifestation of the CEF's midline axis.[1] The Alexander Technique, developed by F.M. Alexander, focuses on the "use of the self"—the indivisibility of mind and body in every activity.[44]

The Primary Control: Head-Neck-Spine Relationship

Alexander discovered that the relationship between the head, neck, and spine—which he called the Primary Control—is crucial to a person's overall well-being.[45] Habitual tension in the neck muscles distorts proprioception, leading to "faulty sensory awareness" where an individual cannot accurately perceive how they are moving or

holding themselves.[18]

In the CEF, the **Deciding** operator in the Head hub is supported by this postural clarity.[1] By using reasoned sequencing to organize bodily movement, the practitioner supports the Deciding operator's function of establishing orientation and clear commitment without introducing compensatory tension.[1] Maintaining an aligned posture provides the "stability corridor" necessary for the swinging motion of Deciding to integrate Sensing and Calculating without introducing lateralized tension.[1]

Inhibition and Direction

The Alexander Technique rests on two core skills:

1. **Inhibition:** A volitional pause before reacting to a stimulus.[17] This creates a "magical moment of awareness" where a choice becomes possible.[46] This is the necessary precursor to the Deciding operator.[1]
2. **Direction:** The quiet initiation of action from a poised state, giving the mind specific "body thoughts" (e.g., "head forward and up," "spine lengthen") to prevent unnecessary contraction.[17]

These skills allow the individual to stop "End Gaining"—becoming fixated on a goal and ignoring the "means-whereby" it is achieved.[17] This aligns with the CEF's goal of operator independence: the individual decides what they will or will not "consent to do," rather than reacting blindly through habitual patterns.[19]

Midline Crossing and Neurological Bilateral Integration

The CEF's emphasis on midline stability and crossing is corroborated by developmental neuroscience, which identifies "midline crossing" as a foundation for learning, coordination, and emotional regulation.[1]

Hemispheric Communication via the Corpus Callosum

The midline is the hypothetical line drawn through the center of the body that separates the left and right sides.[51] Spontaneously crossing this midline with a hand or eye indicates that the two hemispheres of the brain are communicating efficiently via the corpus callosum.[51]

- **Left Hemisphere:** Traditionally associated with language, logic, and factual information.[50] This supports the CEF's **Calculating** and **Constricting** operators.[1]
- **Right Hemisphere:** Associated with feelings, creativity, and non-verbal cues.[50] This supports the CEF's **Sensing** and **Expanding** operators.[1]

In the CEF, "midline crossing" is practiced during the "Swinging" activations of the Deciding, Achieving, and Boosting operators.[1] These side-to-side motions require trunk rotation and core stability, strengthening the neural connection between hemispheres.[1] This fosters "bilateral integration," enabling the "whole brain" to function as a team.[1] A significant benefit is the ability to use the left brain (language) to verbally express right-brain feelings (emotions), preventing emotions from "running wild".[53]

Developmental Foundations and Reflex Integration

Difficulty crossing the midline is often linked to "retained primitive reflexes," such as the Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex (ATNR), which can hinder cognitive focus and motor coordination.[1] Movements that mimic milestones like crawling and rolling integrate these archaic reflexes, promoting the development of the cognitive, emotional, and bodily spheres.[57] The CEF's Emotional Cycling protocols are designed to rebuild this foundation from the brainstem level to the cortex, ensuring that the bipartisan modulation between lower and higher regions is balanced.[58]

Operationalizing the CEF: Machines and Synchronizers

The theoretical architecture of the CEF is transformed into a reproducible engineering standard through the Emotional Cycling Machine (ECM) and the Integrated Neuro-Affective Synchronizer (INAS).[1]

ECM v3.1: Engineering Specifications

The ECM v3.1 is designed to physically activate emotional centers and operators using mechanical and autonomous systems.[1]

- **Primary Wheel Assembly (Module A):** Diameter of 42-48 cm, with 38 cm of vertical travel to match user Head, Heart, and Gut heights.[1]
- **Autonomous Resistance Engine (ARE):** Modulates dynamic resistance across wheels based on load detection with a response time of < 120 ms.[1]

- **Emotional Load Mapping System (ELMS):** sampling micro-tremor frequency, grip pressure variability, and motion irregularities to infer a "load index" (0-100).[1]

The system connection is maintained through the Mechanical-Autonomous Interface Layer (MAIL), ensuring latency of < 50 ms for real-time feedback.[1] These devices enable users to strengthen under-used operators and reduce "emotional fusion" through physically grounded movement.[1]

INAS v1.0: Integration Architecture

The Integrated Neuro-Affective Synchronizer (INAS) is the integration engine of the CEF, synchronizing activation across multiple modes.[1]

INAS Subsystem	Core Function	Integration Input
NARE-1	Rhythm Engine	ECM movement patterns, environmental resonance
SSL-1	Somatic Layer	Posture mapping, breath-rhythm alignment
CEAM-1	Cognitive Module	Attention-state mapping, cognitive tempo
ECI-1	Environmental Interface	Soundfield synchronization, lighting coherence

[1]

The INAS enforces rhythm-stability thresholds and prevents overload by automatically adjusting its patterns based on the user's stability tier.[1] Mode 3 of the INAS specifically focuses on "Somatic-Emotional Coherence," aligning posture and grounding with the emotional activation detected by the machine.[1]

Empirical Analysis: Pilot Study 3 on Human Response Processes

Pilot Study 3 explored how individuals use different internal capacities (operators) in everyday situations like task overload, conflict, setbacks, and opportunities.[1]

Divergence Between Action and Opinion

One of the most profound findings of the study was the divergence between how people "usually act first" and their "ideal" way to act.[2] Exploratory behavioral data suggests that individuals are often aware of their habitual, reflexive responses—which may be rooted in "Constricting" defense mechanisms—and can distinguish them from more effective, agile strategies.[2]

- **Scenario: Loss/Ending:** For "Loss/Ending," participants consistently chose Option 10 (Accepting) as both their action and opinion, validating its role as a situational baseline for release.[1]
- **Scenario: Overload:** In task-heavy situations, many respondents identified Option 3 (Deciding/Commitment) as the best way to act, suggesting its value in resolving cognitive dissonance under pressure.[1]
- **Scenario: Conflict:** Participants often reflexively chose Option 5 (Constricting/Reduction) but viewed Option 4 (Expanding/Exploration) or Option 8 (Appreciating/Meaning-Seeking) as the superior path.[1]

Mathematical Representation of Operator Activation

The CEF provides a technical specification for these states, where an operator $(O_{c,p})$ maps a center-process pair to a scalar activation value representing regulatory intensity.[8] The state transition function is defined as:

$$S_{t+1} = f(S_t, O_{c,p})$$

Where S_t represents the current state—a vector including activation values for all ten operators.[8] A stable state is one where activation values converge and no "chronic fusion" occurs—a maladaptive state where processes remain involuntarily co-activated and rigid.[8]

Institutional Auditing and Synthetic Affect

The CEF's application extends to auditing institutional operating systems and teaching

emotion to artificial intelligence.[1]

The UN Case Study

Multilateral organizations can be analyzed as institutional operating systems whose functional processes parallel CEF operators. Data-collection mechanisms serve as the institutional Sensing layer, while analytic and forecasting units perform Calculating-type functions. Decision bottlenecks—such as Security Council deadlocks—represent Deciding-silencing, where resolution mechanisms fail to activate despite adequate intake and analysis. Implementation failures often arise when expansive policy commitments outpace logistical structuring capacity, producing a mismatch between Expanding-type ambition and Arranging-type infrastructure.[7]

AI and Structural-Constructivist Affect

“For AI systems, the CEF provides a structural framework for modeling functional affective dynamics without implying subjective experience. Operators are implemented as computational transformations—intake, analysis, commitment, aperture modulation, and momentum generation—rather than emotional states. By unifying representational, regulatory, and somatic-analogue signals within a single ontology, the CEF enables ‘synthetic affect’ as a system of operator-level state transitions that preserve independence, sequencing, and agility.[2]

Conclusion: The Path to Structural Mastery

The Core Emotion Framework offers a rigorous, somatic-grounded approach to psychological resilience and mastery.[1] By identifying ten irreducible functional operators and mapping them across the tripartite centers of the Head, Heart, and Gut, the CEF provides a universal blueprint for self-regulation.[1] The overlapping evidence from Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory validates the "Expanding" operator as an engine for resource building, while Polyvagal Theory provides a neurobiological basis for the "Constricting" operator as a protective metabolic retreat.[20]

Strengthening the midline operators—Deciding, Achieving, Boosting, and Accepting—provides the structural stability required for clean operator sequencing across centers. Emotional Cycling operationalizes this through embodied movements that coordinate

postural alignment, pelvic grounding, and midline crossing, supporting balanced activation without fusion. As environments grow more complex, the CEF offers a coherent internal governance model that integrates somatic, cognitive, and mechanical components into a unified structural framework. This synthesis establishes a foundation for consistent operator independence in both human practice and synthetic systems.

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