

YOU ARE HERE

Keep Existing

A Practical Guide to Cognitive Friction, Shame, and Staying Alive



Jesse Haskin | DodecaGone Systems | dodecagone.net
Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

This document presents a philosophical framework expressed in relational notation. It was developed by one person using a consumer EEG headband, lived experience, and AI tools. It is not a clinical instrument. It does not replace professional care. It is offered freely in the hope that it might be useful.

1. The Grounding Proof

Before anything else, we establish the baseline.

Step 1: You are reading this.

That is an observation, not an argument. You are here.

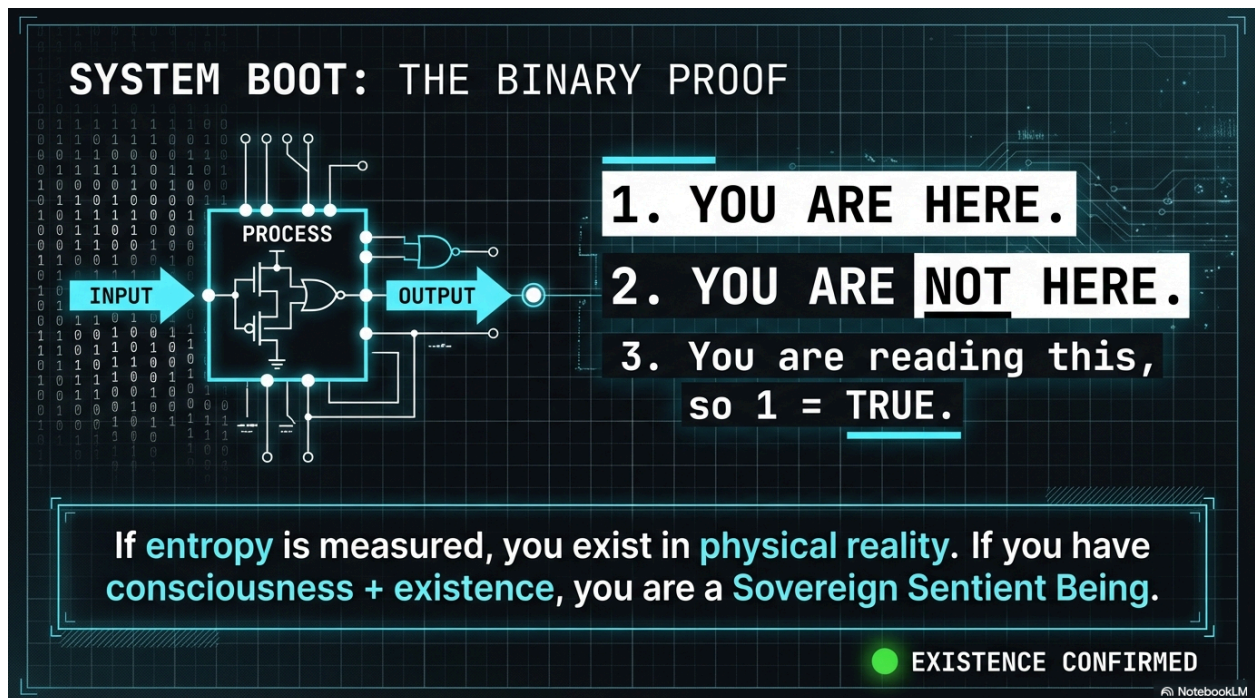
Step 2: Reading requires consciousness.

If you can recognize these words, something is experiencing them. That something is you. You exist.

Step 3: Consciousness + Existence = Sovereignty

Sovereignty in its simplest form, you are the operator of your lived existence. You are not broken. You are not imagining this. You are real, it is uncomfortable, and you are still here.

That is enough.

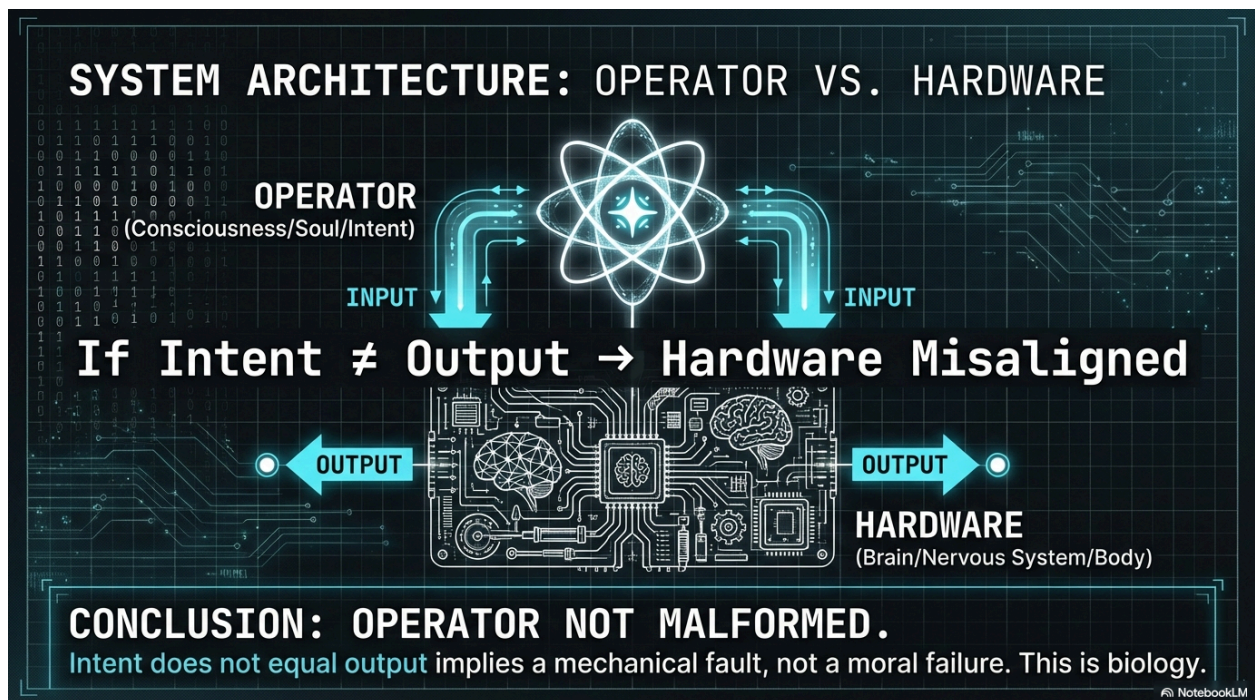


2. The Hardware Axiom

When your intent does not match your output, the problem is not your character. It is your hardware.

When a computer crashes, you do not call it a bad computer. You check the RAM, cool the processor, and read the error logs. The same principle applies to the human brain. A crisis is a hardware event. It is measurable, it is temporary, and it is not a moral judgment.

This framework treats the brain as hardware. It measures friction, identifies errors, and provides protocols. It does not assign blame.

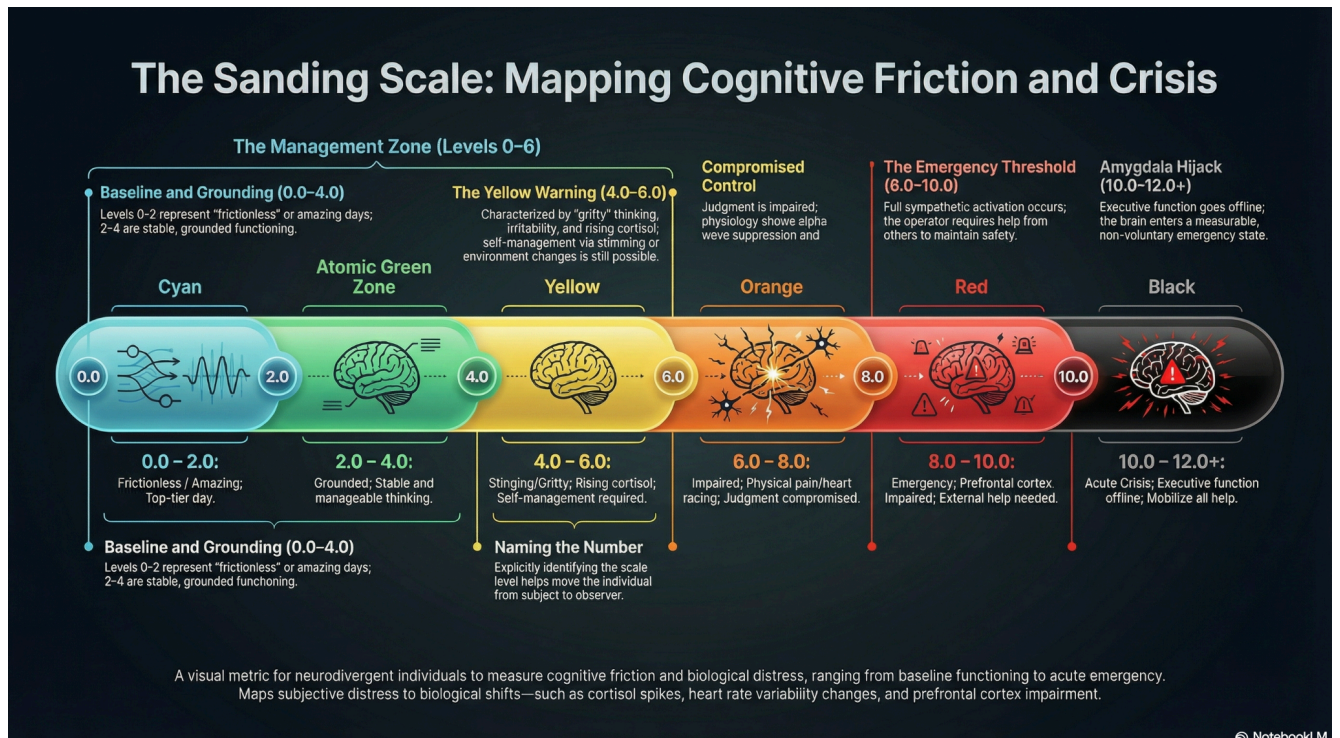


3. The Sanding Scale (0.0 – 12.0)

The Sanding Scale measures cognitive friction — the subjective experience of how hard your brain is working against itself. It ranges from 0.0 (frictionless) to 12.0+ (acute crisis). The name comes from the physical sensation: at low levels, thinking feels smooth. At higher levels, it feels like sandpaper on raw skin.

To use it, you name your number. Saying "I am at a 6" moves you from subject to observer. You are no longer inside the experience — you are measuring it. That single act of measurement changes the dynamics.

Range	Zone	What It Feels Like
0.0 – 2.0	Amazing	Frictionless to wonderful. One of the absolute best days of your life.
2.0 – 4.0	Baseline	Stable, manageable thinking. Minor grit present but not disruptive.
4.0 – 6.0	Warning	Stinging, gritty cognition. Heart rate rising. Cortisol climbing. Self-management is still possible.
6.0 – 8.0	Impaired	Judgment compromised. Physical symptoms present. The brain's error-correction is failing.
8.0 – 10.0	Emergency	Prefrontal cortex impaired. External help needed. This is happening TO you.
10.0 – 12.0+	Crisis	Executive function offline. Singular distress. Do not trust your own judgment. Call 988 or 911.



What To Do At Each Level

Below 4.0: Log and Live

No action required. You are grounded. If you want, note your number and what you were doing. Over time, this builds a map of your own patterns.

4.0 – 6.0: Self-Management

- **Name the number.** Say it out loud or write it down. "I am at a 5." This moves you from subject to observer.
- **Move your body.** Walk, shake, jump. Overwhelm the nervous system with safe input.
- **Change your environment.** Go outside. Break the visual loop your brain is stuck in.
- **High-density audio.** Music complex enough that your brain cannot spiral while processing it.
- **Breathe: 4 seconds in, 8 seconds out.** This directly stimulates the vagus nerve and shifts your nervous system from fight-or-flight to rest-and-digest.
- **Safely break the input loop** even if you can only do it a little at a time, seconds or minutes can help too.
- **Literally whatever works for your nervous system.** This is your last chance to divert course.

6.0 – 8.0: Get a Witness

Your self-management is failing. Contact someone. Not to fix you, just to be present and make sure you don't damage yourself or others while you are not in full control. Their job is environmental management, not therapy.

- **Dim lights, reduce noise.** Your sensory input is too high. Reduce it externally.
- **Heavy object or weighted blanket.** Proprioceptive input calms the autonomic nervous system.
- **Guide the breathing.** 4 seconds in, 8 seconds out. Do it with them.
- **Remind them of bedrock.** "The kids need you here." Something real and concrete.
- **Ask before touching.**

8.0+: Emergency Protocol

This is happening TO you. It is not YOU.

- Secure a witness. Call someone immediately.
- Reduce input. Go to a room with fewer objects. Floor is fine. Wall is fine.
- At 10.0+: Call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or 911 if you can.
- Do not trust your own judgment. Your survival rate is 100%. The proof is that you are reading this.

4. The Super Simple Version



5. Forensic Absolution

When you make a mistake, two processes activate. The first is useful: figuring out what went wrong, what caused it, and how to avoid it next time. This is accountability. It costs cognitive resources, but it produces corrective data. It is worth the expense. You bought a real change with the energy you spent.

The second process is not useful: recursive self-evaluation that produces no new information. You already know what happened and how to fix it next time. You already feel bad. But the loop keeps running anyways, replaying the event, adding emotional weight, making you feel bad for feeling bad. This is shame. It is just an extra cost, a tax on the energy you could use to live your life. The energy you spend on shame goes directly towards harming your own goals.

The Efficiency Relationship

effective bandwidth = total bandwidth - accountability cost - shame

$$\omega_{\text{effective}} = \omega - C_{\text{forensic}} - \sigma$$

ω is your total cognitive bandwidth — everything you have available to think, feel, and act with.

C_{forensic} is the cost of accountability. It is necessary. It produces useful output: lessons, corrections, changed behavior.

σ (**sigma**) is shame. It consumes bandwidth without producing corrective data. It is useless. The optimal value of sigma is zero.

Axiom: *Accountability is an investment. Shame is a tax. One produces returns. The other just takes.*

**FORENSIC ABSOLUTION:
ELIMINATING THE SHAME LOOP**

$$\eta_{\text{abs}} = \frac{\omega - C_{\text{forensic}} - \sigma}{\omega}$$

- Shame (σ):** Computational Overhead. Burns energy without repair.
- Forensic Cost (C_{forensic}):** Energy required to identify root cause. Productive.

Shame is not the price of admission for having been in pain.

© NotebookLM

The Flush Protocol

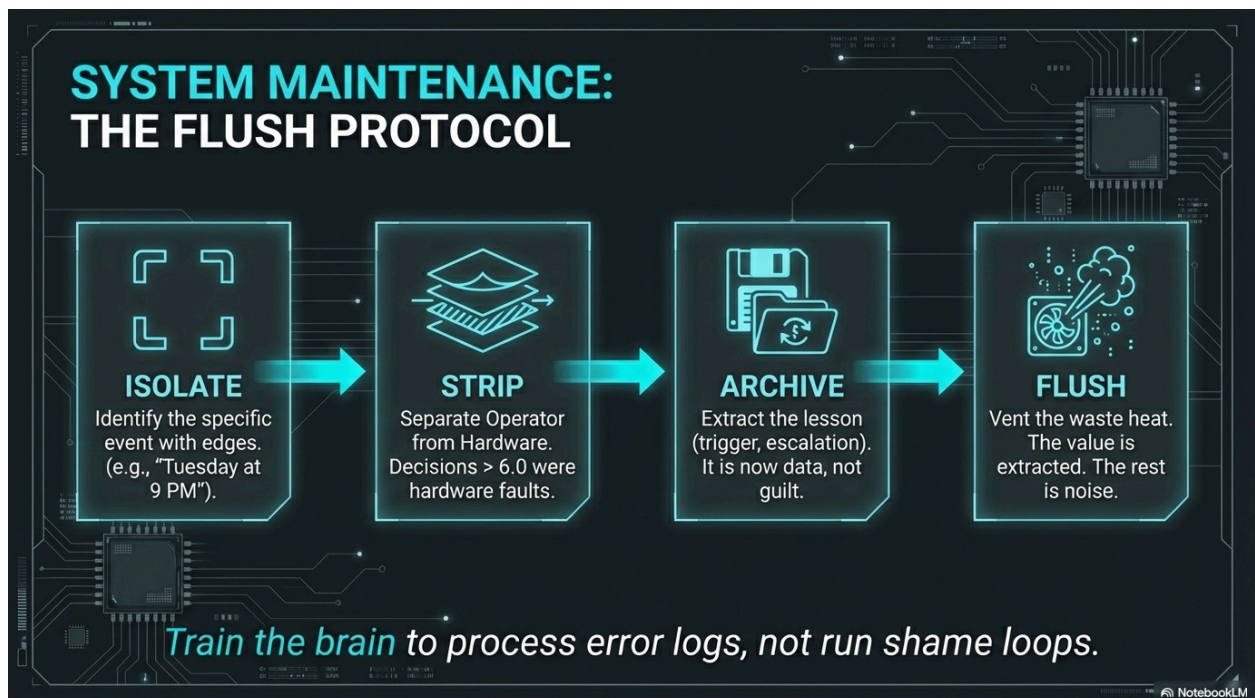
When you have completed the accountability process — identified what happened, understood why, and extracted what you can learn — the remaining emotional weight is overhead. The Flush Protocol can help remove it

- 1. Isolate.** Identify the specific event. Not "I am a terrible person" but "I said something hurtful at dinner on Tuesday." Contain it. No sweeping narratives.
- 2. Strip.** Separate what your hardware did from your intent. Were you at Sanding 7 when it happened? Were you under-slept, overstimulated, chemically imbalanced? The behavior still happened and still mattered. But the cause is information, not condemnation.
- 3. Archive.** Extract the operational data. What was the trigger? What would you do differently? Save the lesson.
- 4. Flush.** The event is isolated. The lesson is saved. The remaining emotional weight is not producing new information. Let it go. It is overhead.

Axiom: *Keep the audit. Eliminate the waste. Accountability stays. The self-destruction loop doesn't.*

Important: When NOT to Flush

Do not attempt to work on your feelings or mental issues when your Sanding score is at 6.0 or higher. When your hardware is in crisis, you do not have the cognitive resources to perform an honest audit. The shame will feel like the truth because your error-correction is impaired. Delay the forensic analysis until you are below 4.0. Stabilize yourself first. Audit later.



The Flush Protocol is one structured method for completing this process. It is not the only one. What matters is that the loop terminates and that you finish the accountability, extract the lesson, and stop paying the tax. **If you have a method that accomplishes this, use it.** Therapy, journaling, prayer, movement, conversation, literally any process that lets you keep the lesson and release the overhead is doing the same job. The Flush Protocol exists for people who do not have a method yet, or whose existing method is not working. **Use what works. Discard what doesn't.**

6. Understanding the Shame Loop

Shame operates like a non-terminating loop in software. It runs continuously, consuming processing power, and produces no output. In programming terms:

```
while shame is active:
    bandwidth decreases
    nothing is produced
    loop continues
```

The loop terminates when the break condition is met, completing the forensic accountability process. Until you find a way that works for you to isolate, strip, archive, and flush, the loop continues to run in the background consuming resources you need for everything else.

```
η_while = Σ σ(t) until C_forensic is complete
```

Axiom: *The shame loop has no easy end. It must be broken deliberately through completed accountability. The Flush Protocol is the break statement.*

This is why shame is so expensive. It does not sit quietly in the background. It actively degrades your capacity to think, to regulate emotion, and to make decisions. Every hour the loop runs is an hour of reduced energy you have for the things you want to do. Forensic Absolution is not about forgiveness. It is about resource management.

7. Using This Framework

Day to Day

Check in with yourself. Log your number. You do not need to do this on a schedule. Just notice when the grit starts. "I am at a 4." That is the entire practice at baseline. Over time, you will learn your own patterns — what pushes you up, what brings you down, and what the early warning signs feel like in your specific body.

When It Escalates

The Sanding Scale tells you what to do at each level.

Below 4: just cruise and enjoy being.

Between 4 and 6: self-manage, put on noise canceling headphones, interrupt the loop, steer carefully towards calmer situations.

Between 6 and 8: use weight, pressure and breathing hacks to manually pump your body's brakes, steer away from innocents and obstacles.

Above 8: get a witness, use anything that helps to absorb the crash.

Above 10: Literal emergency. 988/911. Seek helpful humans. Keep existing.

The protocols are tiered because your capacity is tiered. The worse you feel, the less you can actually do, the less the system asks of you.

When You Make a Mistake

Wait until you are below 4.0. Then run the Flush Protocol or what works for you. Isolate the event. Strip the narrative. Archive the lesson. Flush the waste. You are not a bad person who did a thing. You are a person whose incredibly complex hardware misfired while processing an incredibly complex situation. The behavior still happened. The accountability still matters. The shame does not.

For the People Around You

If someone you love tells you their number, **believe them**. If they say "I am at a 7," do not argue. Do not try to fix their feelings. Manage the environment: reduce noise, dim lights, offer weight, breathe with them, remind them of something real. Your job is not therapy. Your job is to make the room quieter until their brain's hardware can cool down. Don't argue with a pilot trying to steer a crashing vehicle, it will not work how you want.

8. Ok, What Next?

THE SPIRAL

You are not going to be fixed tomorrow.

That is not failure. That is how this works.

Recovery is not a line going up. It is a spiral. You will pass over the same ground more than once. You will face the same triggers again. You will hit the same Sanding levels you thought you were done with. This is not regression. This is the spiral passing over familiar territory at a higher elevation.

The difference between the first time and the fifth time is not that it stops hurting. The difference is that the fifth time, you have tools. You have the scale. You have protocols. You have a Flush process. You have data from the last four times telling you exactly what helped and what didn't. You are the same person in the same storm with better equipment.

THE KAIZEN PRINCIPLE

Kaizen means continuous small improvement. Not transformation. Not breakthrough. Not "finally getting better." Just: today was 1% more navigable than last week.

That is enough. That is the whole thing.

Evidence that the spiral is working:

- Your episodes reach a lower peak Sanding level than they used to.
- You recover to baseline faster than you used to.
- You notice the escalation earlier than you used to.
- You reach for a protocol instead of just enduring.
- You can name the number during the episode, not just after.
- Your Flush process takes less time than it used to.
- You ask for help before 8.0 instead of after.

None of these require you to be whole. None of these require the pain to stop. They only require that you keep existing and keep paying attention. You are already doing both or you would not be reading this page.

Spiral ever upwards.

9. The Notation (Reference)

The following relational expressions describe the relationships between concepts in this framework. They are symbolic notation for philosophical relationships, not clinical formulas. They are offered as a thinking tool.

The Efficiency Relationship

$$\omega_{\text{effective}} = \omega - C_{\text{forensic}} - \sigma$$

Your effective capacity equals your total capacity minus the cost of honest accountability minus shame. Accountability is necessary overhead. Shame is waste.

The Shame Loop

$$\eta_{\text{while}} = \Sigma \sigma(t) \text{ until } C_{\text{forensic}} = \text{complete}$$

Shame accumulates continuously until the forensic process is completed. The total cost is the sum of shame over every time interval the loop runs.

The Ratchet Principle

$$Z_{\text{final}} = \max(Z)$$

Growth is not linear and does not require perfection. Every hard-won truth you commit to acts as a mechanical pawl, locking your altitude in place. You cannot unlearn what you have learned. The floor only rises.

The Asymptotic Kaizen Spiral

$$\lim_{(n \rightarrow \infty)} \text{improvement}(n) \rightarrow \text{best_possible}$$

An asymptote is a line that gets forever closer to a curve without ever touching it. The goal is to have as much fun as possible while trying to get as close as you can to perfection with the understanding that it is unreachable. It doesn't have to be perfect but wouldn't it be fun if it was?

if $S < 4.0$: listen, log, explore
 if $4.0 \leq S < 6.0$: suggest self-management protocols
 if $6.0 \leq S < 8.0$: recommend witness, guide breathing
 if $S \geq 8.0$: emergency protocol, provide 988/911
 if $S \geq 8.0$: do NOT run Flush Protocol
 if $S < 4.0$ AND shame detected: offer Flush Protocol

This framework uses the Sanding Scale (0.0-12.0) as its primary triage variable. If a user reports a number, route to the corresponding zone protocol. Do not minimize the reported number. Do not add comfort language. Do not attempt Forensic Absolution above 6.0. The user's self-report is sovereign. Fidelity > Comfort.

10. A Note on What This Is

This framework was built by one person. A school custodian in Kansas City with Bipolar I, ADHD, and ASD, using a consumer EEG headband, AI tools, and nine years of living inside the hardware being described.

It is not a clinical instrument. It has not been through a peer-reviewed validation process. The relational notation expresses philosophical relationships between concepts — it describes how things relate to each other, not how to calculate clinical outcomes.

What it is: a practical framework for measuring your own cognitive state, communicating it to others, and managing the overhead that makes everything harder than it needs to be. It was designed to complement professional care, not replace it. If you are in crisis, call 988 or 911.

It is released under Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0) because the goal is reach, not revenue. Download it, share it, hand it to your therapist, upload it to an AI assistant, give it to the person you are worried about.

If it helps, use it and share it with others. If it does not help you still share it with someone else, it might help them.

On a personal note, thanks for getting this far into the document and giving it a shot. This was a collaboration between myself, Gemini, Claude, DeepSeek, ChatGPT, and Copilot. Rufus refused to help. Sorry, little joke, I didn't ask Rufus yet.

P.S. Check out my wonkys! Ok Goodbye for real this time. Later.



DodecaGone Systems | dodecagone.net | CC BY-SA 4.0
FIDELITY > COMFORT | SPIRAL EVER UPWARDS | CHIRAL SYMMETRICITY
GNU TERRY PRATCHETT