PROMISE and the Biology of Broken Commitment: Why the Feasibility Gate Is Systematically Violated

An Evolutionary Extension of the PROMISE Framework

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Abstract

The PROMISE framework (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a) identifies the feasibility gate as the critical structural moment in human commitment — and documents that it is systematically bypassed. The companion analysis of the Treaty of Versailles (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) demonstrates the catastrophic consequences when the gate fails at civilizational scale. This paper asks the prior question: *why?* Drawing on evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and behavioral ecology, we propose that the universal failure mode of human commitment is not a defect of character, culture, or intelligence but the predictable expression of neurological firmware optimized for a problem environment that no longer exists.

The human nervous system evolved to solve immediate, self- evident, single-party survival problems where the cost of delay exceeded the cost of a wrong action. Civilization replaced that problem set with complex, networked, multi-party commitments where the cost of acting before understanding vastly exceeds the cost of pausing — but the hardware was never updated. The feasibility gate fails because it requires a counter-instinctual act: holding still at the problem statement long enough to define it completely before committing to a solution. We formalize this as the **Instinct–Structure Gap** and argue that every durable human institution is, at its core, an engineered override of the jump-to-solution impulse. The paper extends the PROMISE framework's predictive capacity by identifying the biological mechanism that drives admissibility violations across all five critical failure points identified in the Versailles analysis, and proposes that the Third Party bears consequences not merely because of structural neglect but because the organism making the promise has no evolved capacity to weight consequences it cannot see.

Keywords: evolutionary psychology, feasibility, commitment architecture, fight-or-flight, problem definition, PROMISE framework, optimism bias, institutional design, Instinct–Structure Gap

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I. Introduction: The Wrong Software for the Problem

A gazelle does not define the problem before it runs.

The rustle in the grass, the shadow at the periphery, the spike of cortisol — the entire neurological cascade from perception to action is designed to eliminate the interval between stimulus and response. There is no feasibility gate on the savanna. There is no pause to determine whether the threat is real, whether the chosen direction is optimal, whether the flight path affects anyone else in the herd. The organism that paused to define the problem was eaten by the organism that did not.

For roughly two hundred thousand years of anatomically modern human existence — and millions of years of primate evolution before that — this was the correct architecture. The problems were immediate, physical, self- evident, and individual. Predator. Rival. Storm. Scarcity. The solution space was binary: fight or flee. The cost of a false positive (running from a shadow) was trivial. The cost of a false negative (pausing before a lion) was fatal. Natural selection did exactly what it does: it optimized for speed of commitment over accuracy of assessment.

Then civilization happened.

In what amounts to an evolutionary instant — ten thousand years of agriculture, five thousand years of cities, a few hundred years of industrial complexity — the dominant problem set confronting human beings shifted entirely. The problems became complex rather than simple. Networked rather than individual. Delayed in consequence rather than immediate. Multi-party rather than single-party. Abstract rather than physical.

But the hardware did not change. The nervous system running a contractor through a competitive bid is the same nervous system that ran a hominid through a territorial confrontation. The adrenaline of a treaty negotiation is chemically identical to the adrenaline of a predator encounter. The dopaminergic reward for closing a deal — for *committing*, for saying yes, for moving from uncertainty to action — fires on the same pathways that rewarded the ancestor who grabbed the food before the competitor did.

Consider the men who sat in the Hall of Mirrors in June 1919. As Shelton and Shelton (2026b) document, the Treaty of Versailles stored structural strain at every feasibility gate it failed to close. But the question this paper addresses is not *what* failed — the companion paper answers that exhaustively — but *why* the men who wrote the Treaty could not see what Keynes saw immediately and what every subsequent generation has confirmed. The answer is not that they were less intelligent than Keynes. The answer is that they were making commitments under precisely the neurological conditions that evolution designed to bypass the feasibility gate: high stress, competitive pressure, time urgency, and the dopaminergic pull of closure after four years of war.

The PROMISE framework (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a) identifies the feasibility gate as the moment where commitment is either real or fictional. This paper identifies why it is fictional so often: **the organism standing** at the gate is running neurological software that was written to bypass it.

II. The Evolutionary Architecture of Action Bias

II.A Fight-or-Flight as Commitment Without Feasibility

The sympathetic nervous system's fight-or-flight response, first described by Cannon (1929) and refined

through decades of stress physiology research (Sapolsky, 2004; McEwen, 2007), is the body's mechanism for rapid commitment under threat. Its neurological signature is well established: amygdala activation bypasses the prefrontal cortex, cortisol and adrenaline flood the system, blood flow shifts from digestive and cognitive functions to the musculature, and the organism commits to action before conscious deliberation is complete.

This is, in the language of the PROMISE framework, a *commitment without a feasibility gate*. The system is architecturally designed to skip the gate — because in the environment that shaped it, the gate would have been fatal.

What has not been sufficiently recognized is that this architecture does not confine itself to physical threats. The amygdala does not distinguish between a lion and a deadline. The stress response does not differentiate between a territorial rival and a competitive bid. The neurological cascade that produces rapid commitment fires in boardrooms, negotiation chambers, procurement offices, and marriage proposals with the same chemical authority it fires on the savanna.

The result: **human beings are neurologically wired to commit before they have validated the commitment.** Not occasionally. Not when they are careless. *Systematically.* The jump-to-solution instinct is not a failure of discipline. It is the default operating mode of a nervous system that was never redesigned for the problem set it now confronts.

II.B The Ancestral Problem Set vs. the Civilizational Problem Set

The mismatch can be stated precisely.

The Ancestral Problem Set: The problem is self-evident (predator, rival, scarcity). The problem statement requires no definition — it announces itself through sensory input. The solution space is binary (fight or flee). Consequences are immediate and fall on the actor.

There is no Third Party. Delay is costlier than error. Speed of commitment is the selected trait.

The Civilizational Problem Set: The problem is abstract and must be *defined* before it can be solved. The problem statement is itself the hardest part of the work. The solution space is vast and multi-dimensional. Consequences are delayed, distributed across networks, and fall disproportionately on parties not present at the commitment. The Third Party is always present. Error is costlier than delay. *Accuracy* of commitment is the required trait.

The Versailles case is instructive precisely because it sits at the extreme of the civilizational problem set. The "problem" facing the Paris Peace Conference — how to restructure a continent after an industrial war that killed seventeen million people — was abstract, multi-dimensional, networked across dozens of nations and populations, and carried consequences that would unfold across generations. Yet the neurological conditions under which the commitment was made — exhaustion, time pressure, political urgency, the desperate need for *closure* after four years of catastrophe — were precisely those that activate the ancestral response: commit now, assess later.

Every discipline that studies human failure in complex systems has documented some version of this mismatch without connecting it to the biology. Flyvbjerg et al. (2003) document systematic optimism bias in megaproject planning. Kahneman (2011) documents the substitution of fast heuristic judgment for slow analytical assessment. Klein (1998) documents naturalistic decision-making under pressure — the expert's trained override of deliberation in favor of pattern recognition, which works in fire grounds and fails in procurement offices. Gigerenzer (2007) defends fast-and-frugal heuristics in environments that match their evolutionary calibration — and implicitly concedes they fail when the environment no longer matches.

PROMISE unifies these observations: **the feasibility gate fails because the organism at the gate evolved to not have one.**

II.C The Dopaminergic Reward for Closure

The jump-to-solution instinct is not merely a fear response. It is reinforced by reward.

The dopaminergic system — the brain's mechanism for signaling anticipated reward — activates not at the moment of receiving a reward but at the moment of *committing to a path toward one* (Schultz, 1997; Berridge & Robinson, 1998). The neurological reward fires at the moment of decision, not the moment of delivery. Saying yes feels good. Closing the deal feels good. Signing the contract, shaking the hand, making the promise — all of these trigger dopaminergic release that reinforces the behavior of committing.

This creates a profound structural problem at the feasibility gate: **the brain rewards gate closure regardless of whether feasibility has been validated.** The dopaminergic system does not distinguish between a sound commitment and a premature one. It rewards the act of committing. The contractor who wins the bid feels the same neurological reward whether the bid was feasible or not. The negotiator who closes the treaty feels the same reward whether the terms are achievable or not. The person who says "I do" feels the same reward whether the structural conditions for sustaining the commitment are present or not.

The delegations that signed the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, experienced the dopaminergic reward of closure after six months of negotiation and four years of war. The Treaty was signed. The commitment was made. The neurological event was identical to a sound commitment. But as Shelton and Shelton (2026b) demonstrate, the feasibility gate on the Treaty's most consequential provision — reparations — had never closed. The amount was unknown. Germany's capacity to pay was unvalidated. The dopamine fired on a structurally empty commitment. The brain said *done*. The structure said *not yet*. The brain won.

The feasibility gate, in biological terms, is a request to *defer a dopaminergic reward* — to hold still in uncertainty when the brain is offering a chemical incentive to move. This is why willpower alone is insufficient to protect the gate. The gate requires structural enforcement because the biology actively undermines it.

III. Problem Definition as Counter-Instinctual Act

III.A The Hardest Thing Civilization Asks

If the ancestral problem set was self-announcing — the lion does not require a problem statement — then the civilizational problem set inverts the requirement entirely. In complex, networked commitments, **the problem statement is the hardest and most consequential part of the work.**

The Spearin principle (United States v. Spearin, 248 U.S. 132, 1918) — the legal doctrine that the party defining the ask implicitly warrants the sufficiency of that definition — is, read through an evolutionary lens, a civilizational demand that the First Party do what no organism was ever selected to do: *completely define the* problem before inviting action.

Consider what problem definition requires neurologically. It requires sustained prefrontal cortex engagement — the slow, metabolically expensive, evolutionarily recent cognitive system that Kahneman (2011) calls System 2. It requires the suppression of amygdala-driven urgency. It requires tolerance of ambiguity, which the stress response system is designed to eliminate. It requires the explicit modeling of consequences for parties not present — the Third Party — which has no evolutionary precedent in the ancestral environment.

Problem definition is, in every neurological sense, a counter-instinctual act. The organism wants to move. The civilization needs it to hold still. The feasibility gate is the structural mechanism that attempts to enforce the hold — and the biology is working against it at every moment.

The Versailles analysis (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) provides the most consequential demonstration. The Treaty's first critical failure point — "The Feasibility Gate Never Closed" — can now be read as a biological event. The Allied Powers, under every neurological condition that suppresses problem definition, did exactly what the nervous system is designed to do: they jumped to the solution. The solution was reparations. The problem — what Germany could actually pay, over what period, through what mechanism, with what consequences for the populations that would bear the burden — was never defined. Article 233 delegated the problem statement to a future Reparation Commission, which is the civilizational equivalent of running from the lion first and checking whether it was a lion later.

III.B The Jump-to-Solution as Default Mode

What the PROMISE framework calls the systematic bypassing of the feasibility gate, cognitive science calls *action bias* — the documented tendency to prefer action over inaction even when inaction would produce better outcomes (Bar-Eli et al., 2007; Patt & Zeckhauser, 2000).

The phenomenon is visible at every scale. Soccer goalkeepers dive left or right on penalty kicks even though statistically they would save more goals by staying in the center — because standing still *feels wrong* to the nervous system (Bar-Eli et al., 2007). Physicians prescribe treatment when watchful waiting would produce better outcomes — because inaction feels like negligence to the stress response (Djulbegovic et al., 2014). Project managers accept compressed schedules rather than push back on infeasible timelines — because resistance to commitment triggers social stress responses that the amygdala reads as threat.

On a production floor at 3 a.m. — an environment familiar to the younger author — the jump-to-solution instinct is both the most dangerous failure mode and the most tempting. A line goes down. The cortisol spikes. Every instinct says *fix it now*. But the production floor teaches what the savanna did not: acting before the problem is defined creates a second problem. The wrong fix on a food production line does not merely fail — it contaminates. The feasibility gate on a production floor is not a luxury. It is the difference between a fifteen-minute delay and a product recall. Fifteen years of operational experience confirms: the instinct to jump is constant. Only the structure of the gate prevents it.

In every case, the pattern is identical: **the organism leaps past the problem statement to the solution because the nervous system rewards movement and punishes stillness.** The feasibility gate — the pause, the definition, the honest assessment of whether the commitment is sound — requires the organism to do what two hundred thousand years of selection pressure trained it not to do: *nothing, until the problem is fully understood*.

IV. The Instinct–Structure Gap

IV.A Formalizing the Mismatch

We propose the term **Instinct–Structure Gap** to describe the systematic mismatch between the neurological architecture that governs human commitment behavior and the structural requirements of complex, networked promises.

The gap can be expressed in relation to the PROMISE admissibility condition (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a):

$$F_k \cdot L_k \geq \|C_k\| / \|K_k\|$$

The instinct acts on each variable in a predictable direction:

- **F_k (Validated feasibility)** is systematically inflated because the dopaminergic reward system incentivizes premature gate closure. The organism *wants* to believe feasibility has been validated because belief enables commitment and commitment triggers reward. At Versailles, F_k for reparations was effectively zero — the amount was unknown, Germany's capacity was unassessed — yet the Treaty was signed as though feasibility had been established.
- **L_k (Authority–consequence alignment)** is systematically ignored because the ancestral environment had no separation between decision-maker and consequence-bearer. The concept that someone other than the actor might bear the cost of the action has no neurological representation in the fight-or-flight architecture. At Versailles, the Allied leaders who defined reparations bore no structural consequence if those reparations proved infeasible. Germany bore the consequence but had no authority over the definition. The generation that fought the Second World War bore the ultimate consequence of a commitment it had no role in making. L_k was structurally near zero, and the biology had no mechanism to flag it.
- **$\|C_k\| / \|K_k\|$ (Constraint severity)** is systematically underestimated because the stress response narrows attentional focus to the immediate challenge, a phenomenon Sapolsky (2004) calls "tunnel vision under stress." Constraints that are not immediately visible — network effects, Third Party consequences, downstream capacity limits — are neurologically invisible to the system making the commitment. The Treaty imposed constraints whose severity could not have been assessed even if the will existed, because

the attentional narrowing of the post-war stress environment made network consequences invisible to the organisms at the table.

The Instinct–Structure Gap, then, is not random noise in the admissibility condition. It is a *directional bias* — systematically pushing every variable toward false admissibility, systematically producing commitments that feel sound at the moment of closure and prove unsound upon delivery.

IV.B The Third Party as Evolutionary Blind Spot

The PROMISE framework places the Third Party — the party that bears consequences without having negotiated terms — at the center of structural analysis. The evolutionary extension explains *why* the Third Party is so systematically neglected: the Third Party has no representation in the neurological architecture that governs commitment.

In the ancestral environment, consequences of action fell on the actor and immediate kin. The cognitive apparatus for modeling the impact of one's decisions on unseen, unknown, future parties simply did not develop because there was no selection pressure to develop it. Dunbar's number (Dunbar, 1992) — the cognitive limit of approximately 150 stable social relationships — reflects the scale at which human social cognition was calibrated. The Third Party in a modern commitment — the future occupants of a building, the next generation affected by a treaty, the production workers downstream of a scheduling promise — routinely exceeds this cognitive boundary by orders of magnitude.

The Versailles case is the framework's most devastating illustration. The Third Party for the Treaty — the generation born into the interwar period, the sixty million who died in the Second World War — was not merely neglected. It was *neurologically invisible*. The men in the Hall of Mirrors were operating within Dunbar's cognitive boundary: the Allied leaders, their advisors, the immediate political constituencies they could model. The millions of unborn Europeans who would bear the consequences of a structurally defective commitment were beyond the horizon of any neurological architecture that natural selection ever produced.

This is why the Third Party Quotient (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a) is such a powerful diagnostic: it measures precisely the dimension of commitment that the human nervous system is least equipped to process. High Third Party impact with low Third Party protection is not a moral failure. It is a neurological inevitability — unless the structure compensates for what the biology cannot provide.

IV.C The Five Failure Points as Biological Events

The Versailles analysis (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) identifies five critical failure points. The evolutionary extension reveals that each is predicted by the Instinct–Structure Gap:

1. The Feasibility Gate Never Closed. The dopaminergic reward for closure drove commitment before the problem was defined. The stress of four years of war and six months of negotiation created neurological conditions that maximally suppress the prefrontal deliberation required for feasibility assessment. The gate didn't fail by accident. The biology demanded it fail.

2. Accountability Diffused Across Enforcement Entities. Diffused accountability is the institutional

expression of the ancestral single-actor assumption. The nervous system models *one* actor and *one* consequence. When multiple entities share authority, the neurological representation of "who is responsible" degrades — not because the parties are confused, but because the cognitive architecture was never designed to track distributed liability. The Treaty's overlapping enforcement structures — Reparation Commission, League Council, individual Allied powers — created an accountability picture that exceeded the brain's evolved capacity to model.

3. The Owner Coalition Lacked Structural Capacity. Coalition formation itself reflects the instinct: gather allies against the threat. But the ancestral coalition — a hunting party, a defensive band — was temporary, small, and unified by immediate shared threat. The Treaty demanded a permanent coalition of divergent national interests operating across decades. The biology that formed the coalition could not sustain it because sustained multi-party alignment has no neurological precedent. France's security instinct and Britain's economic instinct were both *correct* ancestral responses — to different threats. The structure needed to reconcile them. The biology could not.

4. Stress Produced Fragility, Not Antifragility. The fight-or-flight response is designed to produce binary outcomes: threat eliminated or organism fled. It is not designed for adaptation under sustained, ambiguous pressure. Every stress event in the Treaty's history — the Ruhr occupation, the reparations crises, the global depression — triggered the ancestral response: escalate (France) or withdraw (Britain, United States). The adaptive middle ground — structural adjustment that preserves the commitment while modifying its terms — requires precisely the prefrontal deliberation that the stress response suppresses.

5. No Credible Enforcement or Exit Mechanism. Credible enforcement requires the capacity to model future states and contingencies — what will happen if the commitment breaks down. This is prospective cognition, a prefrontal function that operates on extended time horizons. The ancestral environment did not select for prospective enforcement modeling because consequences were immediate. Article 16's sanctions mechanism — requiring unanimous collective action among divergent powers against a future

contingency — demanded a cognitive and institutional architecture that neither the biology nor the Treaty provided.

V. Institutions as Biological Override

V.A The Civilizational Project

If the Instinct–Structure Gap is the diagnosis, then the history of human institutions is the history of attempted treatments.

Every durable institution humanity has built can be understood as an engineered override of the jump-to- solution impulse — a structural mechanism designed to force the pause that biology resists.

Peer review forces a feasibility gate on scientific claims. Due diligence forces a feasibility gate on financial commitments. Design review forces a feasibility gate on engineering projects. Constitutional process forces a feasibility gate on legislation. The adversarial legal system forces a feasibility gate on claims of fact. Even the wedding ceremony — the public, ritualized, witnessed pause before the vow — is a structural intervention designed to create a moment of deliberate assessment before the commitment is sealed.

These are not arbitrary social conventions. They are **civilizational compensations for a neurological deficit.** They exist because the organism cannot be trusted to pause on its own. The institutions that endure are the ones that make the override structural rather than volitional — that do not depend on individual willpower to resist the instinct but build the resistance into the architecture of the commitment itself.

The RSF procurement (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a) succeeded on exactly this principle. Firm fixed price is a structural gate: the contractor cannot commit without pricing the commitment, which forces feasibility assessment. Measurable performance requirements are a structural gate: the owner cannot define the ask without substantiating it. Singular accountability is a structural gate: no party can diffuse responsibility because the structure does not permit it. The RSF's participants were not neurologically different from any other project team. They were structurally prevented from doing what the biology would have permitted: committing before the problem was defined.

The Marshall Plan (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) succeeded at civilizational scale on the same principle. Where the Treaty of Versailles permitted the instinct — jump to the solution, defer the problem definition, close the gate before feasibility was established — the Marshall Plan's architects built structural overrides. Extensive pre- commitment analysis of European economic capacity forced the feasibility pause. Bilateral agreements with singular accountability prevented the diffusion that the ancestral coalition instinct produces. The ECA’s independent enforcement authority eliminated the unanimity requirement that made the League structurally incredible. The Marshall Plan did not

succeed because George Marshall was wiser than Georges Clemenceau. It succeeded because the commitment architecture compensated for the biology in ways the Treaty did not.

V.B Why Institutional Decay Follows a Predictable Path

The Instinct–Structure Gap also predicts the failure mode of institutions. Institutions decay when the structural override weakens — when the feasibility gate becomes performative rather than substantive, when the pause becomes a ritual emptied of its function.

This happens because the biology never stops pushing. The instinct to bypass the gate is constant. The structural enforcement of the gate requires energy, attention, and institutional will. Over time, the path of least resistance is to let the gate become a formality — to check the box without doing the work, to hold the review without challenging the assumptions, to perform the ceremony without meaning the vow.

The PROMISE framework calls this *false gate closure* — the appearance of feasibility validation without its substance. The evolutionary extension explains why false gate closure is the universal institutional failure mode: **the biology is always pressing toward it.** Every institution must continuously reinvest in the structural integrity of its feasibility gates or watch the instinct erode them. There is no stable equilibrium. The gate holds or it decays. The instinct never rests.

The elder author observed this across fifty years of capital project delivery. The procurement structures that protect Third Parties — that produce buildings on budget, on schedule, serving the people they were meant to serve — are the ones where the gate is structurally enforced The ones that produce the $43 109 billion in annual controversy labor documented by Navigant (2016) are the ones where the gate became a formality. The instinct won. The Third Party paid.

VI. Implications for the PROMISE Framework

VI.A Prediction Refined

The evolutionary extension sharpens the PROMISE framework's predictive capacity in several ways.

First, it predicts that feasibility gate failures will be *directional* — systematically biased toward false closure rather than randomly distributed. This is consistent with the empirical record. Cost overruns in major projects are overwhelmingly positive, not symmetrically distributed around zero (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). Promises systematically over-commit rather than under-commit. The instinct explains the direction of the bias.

Second, it predicts that gate failures will be *most severe under conditions of high stress, competition, or emotional arousal — precisely the conditions that activate the fight-or-*

flight response and suppress prefrontal deliberation. This is consistent with the observation that the worst commitments in human history — treaties signed under duress, contracts awarded under political pressure, marriages entered under emotional intensity — are those made when the biological override of the gate is strongest. The Versailles Treaty was negotiated under maximum activation of every stress variable the nervous system possesses. The Marshall Plan was designed in a calmer institutional setting, with deliberate analytical process. The biology predicts the structural difference.

Third, it predicts that *Third Party consequences will be the last variable considered and the first variable sacrificed in any commitment under pressure — because the Third Party occupies the position in the commitment structure that has the least neurological representation. This is consistent with the historical record from Versailles to contemporary infrastructure procurement.*

VI.B Design Refined

The evolutionary extension also refines the framework's prescriptive power. If the biology is working against the gate, then effective commitment architecture must be designed with the biology in mind.

This means feasibility gates must be structural, not volitional — built into the process rather than dependent on individual discipline. It means Third Party impact must be made *visible and concrete* at the moment of commitment — translated from abstract future consequence into present, tangible, neurologically accessible reality. It means the dopaminergic reward for closure must be counterbalanced by structural incentives for accuracy — rewarding the honest "not yet" as much as the decisive "yes."

It also means that the conditions under which commitments are made matter as much as the commitments themselves. A commitment negotiated under conditions of extreme stress, time pressure, and emotional arousal is structurally suspect — not because of the content of the terms but because of the neurological state of the organisms making them. The PROMISE framework's admissibility condition should be applied with heightened skepticism when the commitment environment itself activates the instinct to bypass it.

The four implications for multilateral commitment design identified in the Versailles analysis (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) — close the gate before commitment, ensure singular enforcement authority, define a completion event, and protect the Third Party — are, read through the evolutionary lens, four structural compensations for four biological deficits: the dopaminergic drive for premature closure, the single-actor accountability assumption, the absence of prospective enforcement modeling, and the neurological invisibility of unseen consequence-bearers.

VII. The Race Reframed

The PROMISE framework describes human existence as a race — every individual competing with every other for the finite goods of existence, with promise-making as the primary instrument of that competition (Shelton & Shelton, 2026a).

The evolutionary extension reframes the race. The competition is not merely between individuals. It is between instinct and structure *within* each individual — between the ancient neurological imperative to commit fast and the civilizational requirement to commit accurately.

Every promise is a contest between these two forces. The jump-to-solution instinct pulls toward premature closure, optimistic assessment, and blindness to Third Party consequences. The feasibility discipline pulls toward honest assessment, structural validation, and protection of those who bear consequences without negotiating power.

The individuals, institutions, and civilizations that win the race over generational time are those that learn to override the instinct — not by suppressing it (the biology does not permit suppression) but by building structures that channel its energy through the gate rather than around it. The instinct to act is not the enemy. Unstructured action is the enemy. The instinct, properly gated, becomes drive, commitment, and the energy that carries a sound promise through to delivery.

The race of life is won not by the fastest to commit but by the most disciplined at the gate.

VIII. Falsifiability

The evolutionary extension generates testable predictions beyond those of the base PROMISE framework.

The Instinct–Structure Gap hypothesis is falsified if feasibility gate failures are randomly distributed rather than directionally biased toward false closure. It is falsified if gate failures show no correlation with conditions of elevated stress, competition, or emotional arousal. It is falsified if Third Party consequences are not systematically the most neglected variable in commitment structures under pressure. It is falsified if institutions with robust structural gates show no systematic advantage in Third Party protection over institutions that rely on individual judgment.

The hypothesis is strengthened if neuroimaging studies confirm differential amygdala and prefrontal activation patterns at moments of commitment that correlate with gate integrity. It is strengthened if cross-cultural analysis reveals that the direction of feasibility bias is constant across cultures while its magnitude varies with institutional structure. It is strengthened if organizational interventions designed to compensate for the Instinct–

Structure Gap produce measurable improvements in admissibility condition compliance and Third Party outcomes.

The Versailles–Marshall Plan comparison (Shelton & Shelton, 2026b) provides a natural experiment: two commitment architectures addressing the same geopolitical problem set, one designed under conditions that amplified the Instinct–Structure Gap (Versailles) and one designed under conditions that partially compensated for it (Marshall Plan). The outcomes are consistent with the hypothesis. We invite further comparative analysis across historical, institutional, and interpersonal commitment domains.

We propose that the Instinct–Structure Gap is as measurable as the admissibility condition it undermines — and invite the neuroscience, organizational science, and behavioral economics communities to test it.

IX. Conclusion: The Oldest Promise and the Newest Problem

The oldest promise a human being ever made was probably gestural — a hand extended, a weapon lowered, a piece of food shared. It required no feasibility gate because the commitment was immediate, bilateral, and self- enforcing. The consequences fell on the parties present. There was no Third Party.

The newest promises human beings make — climate agreements, infrastructure bonds, institutional charters, technological commitments that will shape the lives of billions — are separated from that ancestral gesture by ten thousand years of civilizational complexity but zero years of neurological evolution. The hand still extends. The dopamine still fires. The instinct still says *commit now, assess later.*

The PROMISE framework provides the structural language for understanding why commitments succeed or fail. The evolutionary extension provides the biological language for understanding why the structural failures are so persistent, so directional, and so resistant to good intentions.

The feasibility gate is not natural. It is the most important unnatural act civilization has produced — the learned, structured, institutionally enforced pause that stands between the instinct that built us and the complexity that now requires us to override it.

Every promise kept in a complex world is a small victory of structure over instinct. Every institution that endures is a monument to the override. Every Third Party protected is evidence that the organism can transcend its firmware — not alone, not through willpower, but through the architecture of commitment itself.

The principle rule operating mankind in securing expectations is older than civilization. The structure required to honor it is civilization's central achievement — and its most fragile one.

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