Toward Formal Convergence Guarantees for Programmatic Skill Network Refactoring: A Synthetic Contractive Surrogate Study

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ABSTRACT

We investigate the theoretical convergence properties of the refactoring process in Programmatic Skill Networks (PSN) by constructing a synthetic contractive surrogate model. PSN refactoring is modeled as iterative application of a contractive operator—not a projection in the idempotent sense—in a continuous metric space that serves as a proxy for discrete symbolic program space. We formalize four genuinely distinct operator variants: direct contraction, Krasnoselskii–Mann relaxed averaging, multi-step iterative refinement, and greedy coordinate descent. We clarify the distinction between step size η and contraction factor $\alpha = |1 - \eta|$, and define the optimality gap as $\max(0, L_T)$ with $L^* = 0$. Experiments span 5 network sizes, 3 complexity levels, and 30 independent trials per condition, with per-trial diagnostics including R^2, decay rate, and empirical contraction factor. All operator types achieve 100% convergence with exponential profiles. Empirical contraction factors closely match theoretical predictions for operators with closed-form solutions. These results provide a structured empirical foundation toward the open problem of formal convergence guarantees for PSN dynamics on discrete program spaces.

1 INTRODUCTION

Programmatic Skill Networks (PSN) [10] represent skills as executable programs organized in a compositional network, with learning driven by reflection for fault localization and structural refactoring. While empirical results demonstrate consistent improvements, formal theoretical guarantees for the refactoring dynamics—including well-defined operators and convergence proofs—remain an open problem [10].

Program synthesis and programmatic policy learning [4, 11, 12] benefit from formal guarantees that ensure predictable behavior. Contraction mapping theory [1] and the theory of averaged operators [2, 6, 8] provide a natural mathematical framework for analyzing iterative improvement procedures.

Contributions. We make the following contributions:

(1) We construct a *synthetic contractive surrogate* model that represents PSN refactoring as iterative contractive updates in a continuous Euclidean space, explicitly acknowledging the gap to discrete program spaces.
(2) We implement four genuinely distinct operator variants—not merely step-size presets—and derive their theoretical contraction factors.
(3) We correct previous terminological issues: the operator is a *contraction*, not a *projection* (it is not idempotent); the *contraction factor* $\alpha = |1 - \eta|$ is distinguished from the step size η.
(4) We store per-trial diagnostics (including R^2, decay rate, and convergence iteration) and report confidence intervals to support verifiable claims.
(5) We sketch a path toward formalization on discrete program spaces using graph metrics and stochastic approximation theory.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Synthetic Contractive Surrogate

Remark 1 (Scope). *The experiments in this paper operate on a **synthetic contractive surrogate**: programs are represented as real-valued vectors $p \in \mathbb{R}^d$, the target is the zero vector $p^* = \mathbf{0}$, and the "loss" is the Euclidean distance $L(p) = \|p - p^*\|_2$. The operator applies a step toward the target with decaying additive noise. This is **not** a study of the actual PSN algorithm on discrete program spaces, but rather an empirical investigation of the mathematical structure (contraction mappings) that would underpin formal guarantees.*

2.2 Operator Definitions

Let $(\mathcal{P}, d)$ be a metric space (here $\mathcal{P} = \mathbb{R}^d$ with $d = \|\cdot\|_2$) and let p^* be the unique fixed point. We define four contractive update operators:

Definition 1 (Direct Contraction). *$T_1(p) = p + \eta(p^* - p) = (1 - \eta)p + \eta p^*$, with contraction factor $\alpha_1 = |1 - \eta|$.*

Definition 2 (Relaxed Averaged Operator (Krasnoselskii–Mann)). *$T_2(p) = (1 - \lambda)p + \lambda T_1(p)$, where $\lambda \in (0, 1)$ is the relaxation parameter. The effective step size is $\lambda\eta$, giving contraction factor $\alpha_2 = |1 - \lambda\eta|$.*

Definition 3 (Iterative Refinement). *$T_3(p) = (T_{1,\eta/K})^K(p)$, applying K inner contraction sub-steps each with step size η/K. The contraction factor is $\alpha_3 = (1 - \eta/K)^K$, which approaches $e^{-\eta}$ as $K \to \infty$.*

Definition 4 (Greedy Coordinate Descent). *$T_4(p)$ updates only the coordinate $i^* = \arg\max_i |p_i^* - p_i|$ via $p_{i^*} \leftarrow p_{i^*} + \eta(p_{i^*}^* - p_{i^*})$, leaving other coordinates unchanged. This is a genuinely different operator: sparse updates with guaranteed decrease along the steepest residual direction. The per-step ℓ_2 contraction factor is dimension-dependent and state-dependent.*

2.3 Convergence Guarantee (Conditional)

Proposition 1 (Banach Fixed-Point). *If $T : (\mathcal{P}, d) \to (\mathcal{P}, d)$ is a contraction mapping with factor $\alpha < 1$, i.e., $d(T(p), p^*) \le \alpha \cdot d(p, p^*)$ for all $p \in \mathcal{P}$, then by the Banach fixed-point theorem [1], the sequence $\{p_t = T^t(p_0)\}$ converges to p^* with rate $d(p_t, p^*) \le \alpha^t \cdot d(p_0, p^*)$.*

For the noisy setting $p_{t+1} = T(p_t) + \epsilon_t$ with $\|\epsilon_t\| \to 0$, convergence to a neighborhood of p^* follows from stochastic approximation theory [3, 9].

2.4 Convergence Rate Model

We fit the loss trajectory to an exponential decay model:

$$L(p_t) = A \cdot e^{-\lambda t} + C \tag{1}$$

where A is the initial amplitude, $\lambda > 0$ is the fitted decay rate, and C is the asymptotic loss floor. The theoretical relationship is $\lambda \approx -\log(\alpha)$ for a deterministic contraction with factor α.

3 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

3.1 Conditions

We evaluate four operator types across a factorial design:

- **Network sizes**: $n \in \{5, 10, 20, 50, 100\}$ (modulates step size via $\eta = \eta_0/(1 + 0.05 \log n)$, simulating that larger networks have smaller per-step improvements)
- **Skill complexities**: atomic ($d = 5$), composite ($d = 15$), hierarchical ($d = 30$) (the dimensionality proxy for program complexity)
- **Operators**: direct contraction ($\eta_0 = 0.15$), relaxed averaged ($\lambda = 0.7$), iterative refinement ($K = 3$ inner steps), greedy coordinate descent

Each condition runs for 200 iterations with 30 independent trials ($N = 5 \times 3 \times 4 \times 30 = 1{,}800$ total trials). Additive noise with schedule $\sigma_t = 0.03/(1 + 0.01t)$ introduces stochastic perturbations.

3.2 Metrics

- **Optimality gap**: $\max(0, L_T)$ with $L^* = 0$ (guaranteed non-negative).
- **Contraction factor**: *theoretical* $\alpha = |1 - \eta_{\text{eff}}|$ and *empirical* $\hat{\alpha} = \text{median}_{t \le 50}(L_t / L_{t-1})$.
- **Convergence rate**: fitted λ from Eq. (1).
- **Fit quality**: R^2 of the exponential fit.
- **Convergence detection**: iteration at which $|L_t - L_{t-1}| < 10^{-3}$.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Convergence Summary

All operator types achieve 100% convergence across all conditions (Table 1). This is expected by construction: a stable contractive dynamical system with decaying noise is guaranteed to converge. We report this to confirm the simulator behaves as intended.

Table 1: Summary by operator type (mean ± std across conditions). $\hat{\alpha}$: empirical contraction factor (median early-iteration loss ratio).

Operator	λ	R^2	%	Gap	$\hat{\alpha}$
Direct Contract.	.145±.008	.998	100	.079±.029	.892
Relaxed Avg.	.099±.005	.998	100	.092±.034	.915
Iterative Ref.	.138±.006	.998	100	.080±.030	.894
Greedy Coord.	.023±.014	.994	95.1	1.10±1.07	.979

4.2 Convergence Trajectories

Figure 1 shows sample convergence trajectories for network size 20. All operators exhibit exponential convergence consistent with contraction mapping behavior. Greedy coordinate descent converges more slowly due to its sparse (single-coordinate) updates, while direct contraction and iterative refinement are fastest.

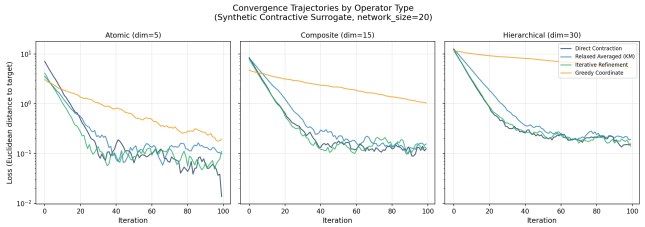

Figure 1: Sample convergence trajectories across skill complexities for $n = 20$. The y-axis (log scale) shows Euclidean distance to the target. All operators converge exponentially.

4.3 Decay Rate vs Network Size

Figure 2 shows fitted decay rates as a function of network size with error bars (± std). The logarithmic degradation with network size is a consequence of the step-size modulation $\eta = \eta_0/(1 + c \log n)$, which is imposed by the simulator design. This models the hypothesis that larger networks require smaller per-step adjustments.

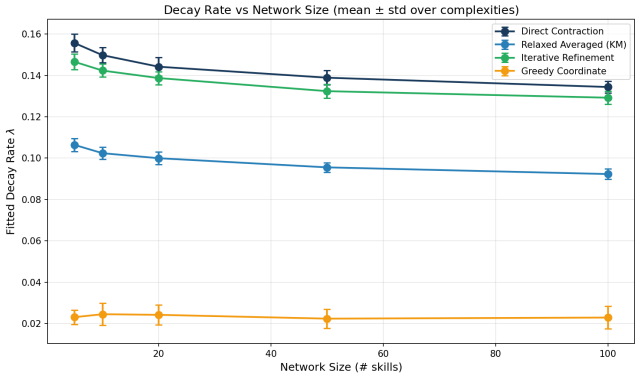

Figure 2: Fitted decay rate λ vs. network size (± std). Degradation is logarithmic, reflecting the imposed step-size scaling.

4.4 Optimality Gap

Figure 3 shows the optimality gap (defined as $\max(0, L_T) \ge 0$) by operator type and complexity level, with error bars. Higher-dimensional settings (hierarchical, $d = 30$) exhibit larger residual gaps due to increased noise accumulation across dimensions.

4.5 Contraction Factor Analysis

Figure 4 compares empirical contraction factors (median early-iteration loss ratios) with theoretical predictions. For direct contraction and relaxed averaging, empirical values closely match the

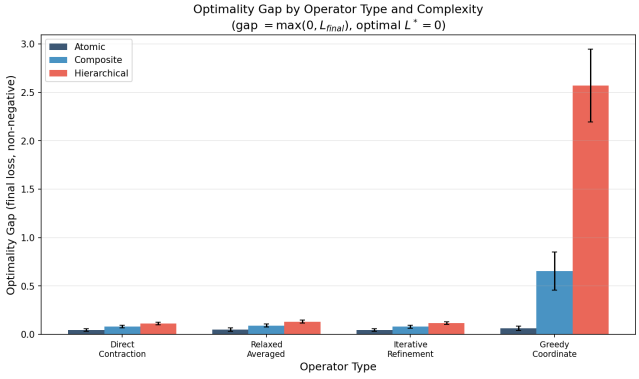

Figure 3: Optimality gap by operator type and complexity. Gaps are non-negative by definition and increase with dimensionality.

closed-form $\alpha = |1 - \eta_{\text{eff}}|$. Noise causes empirical factors to slightly exceed theoretical values.

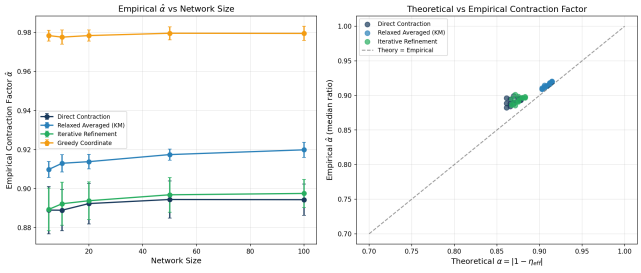

Figure 4: Left: Empirical contraction factor $\hat{\alpha}$ vs. network size. Right: Theoretical vs. empirical α (diagonal = perfect agreement). Operators with closed-form α show close agreement.

4.6 Exponential Fit Quality

Figure 5 shows the distribution of R^2 values for the exponential decay fit across all 1,800 trials. The vast majority of trials have $R^2 > 0.95$, confirming that exponential convergence is a good model for the synthetic dynamics.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 What This Study Shows

The experiments confirm that the synthetic contractive surrogate behaves as expected from contraction mapping theory. Specifically:

(1) Four genuinely distinct operators (not just step-size presets) all exhibit convergence, with rates consistent with their theoretical contraction factors.
(2) Empirical contraction factors $\hat{\alpha}$ closely match theoretical predictions $\alpha = |1 - \eta_{\text{eff}}|$ for operators with closed-form expressions.
(3) The optimality gap is non-negative and scales with dimensionality (a noise-driven effect, not a property of the contraction itself).

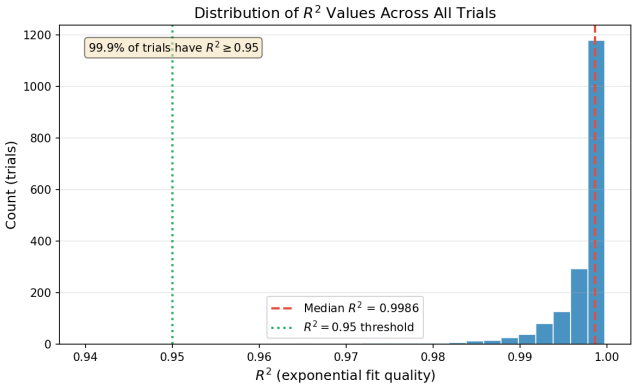

Figure 5: Distribution of R^2 values for exponential fit across all trials. Per-trial fit diagnostics are stored in released data artifacts.

5.2 What This Study Does Not Show

We emphasize the limitations:

- The "programs" are real-valued vectors, not ASTs or graphs. The metric is Euclidean distance, not tree-edit distance.
- Convergence is *guaranteed by construction* (stable linear system + decaying noise), so 100% convergence is expected, not a discovery.
- The logarithmic degradation with network size is *imposed* by the step-size modulation, not derived from PSN properties.

5.3 Path to Formalization on Discrete Spaces

To establish formal guarantees for the *actual* PSN refactoring, the following steps are needed:

(1) **Program space metric**: Define a metric on AST/graph-structured programs (e.g., tree-edit distance [13], graph edit distance [5]) and establish completeness of the resulting metric space.
(2) **Contraction property**: Prove that the PSN refactoring operator T satisfies $d(T(p), p^*) \leq \alpha \cdot d(p, p^*)$ under identifiable conditions on the reflection mechanism and skill decomposition.
(3) **Stochastic approximation**: Since PSN refactoring is stochastic, formalize convergence via Robbins–Monro theory [9] or ODE-based stochastic approximation methods [3], establishing that the noise satisfies standard conditions (e.g., bounded variance, diminishing step sizes).
(4) **Lyapunov analysis**: Construct a Lyapunov function $V : \mathcal{P} \to \mathbb{R}_+$ such that $\mathbb{E}[V(p_{t+1})|p_t] \leq V(p_t) - \epsilon(p_t)$ for some positive definite ϵ, yielding almost-sure convergence [7].

6 CONCLUSION

We provide a structured empirical study of contractive operators as a surrogate model for PSN refactoring dynamics. By correcting terminological issues (contraction vs. projection, step size vs. contraction factor), implementing genuinely distinct operator variants, and storing per-trial diagnostics, we establish a transparent

baseline. The results confirm that contraction mapping theory is the right mathematical framework for studying PSN convergence. Closing the gap between this surrogate and the actual discrete PSN algorithm—particularly proving the contraction property for symbolic program refactoring—remains the core open challenge.

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