

Facilitating DSRP Workshops in a Diverse Adult Group

A Case Study

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ABSTRACT: This case study reports on a six-session DSRP (Distinctions, Systems, Relationships, Perspectives) workshop series conducted in Fall 2025 with a culturally and professionally diverse group of adult learners at Interkultur Lund in Sweden. The series introduced participants to the DSRP Patterns and Moves through a combination of tangible and intangible anchor examples, group practice, and between-session reinforcement. Over the six sessions, several predictable cognitive challenges emerged—including difficulty transferring structure from tangible to intangible domains, consistent struggles with non-agent perspectives, and a narrowed focus on causal relationships. A central finding was the significant pedagogical effect of facilitator metacognitive modeling, which reliably increased engagement and comprehension. Reflecting on the intervention, the case highlights an important structural insight: live sessions were burdened by the need to teach foundational DSRP concepts rather than focus on coached practice, a misalignment that flipped DSRP instructional models directly resolve.[18,19] Implications for future workshop design and systems thinking pedagogy are discussed.

KEYWORDS: DSRP | systems thinking | workshop facilitation | adult education | perspective-taking | relational thinking | flipped training | Pareto bias

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1. Introduction

DSRP Theory posits four universal patterns—Distinctions (D), Systems (S), Relationships (R), and Perspectives (P)—that form the organizational structure of human thinking and of reality itself.^{2-4,10-14} These patterns transform information (I) into mental models ($\mathbb{M} = I \cdot O$), consistent with the Cognitive Law that performance and understanding depend multiplicatively on both information and its

organization.^{1,2} Formal work on DSRP-483 and the Unified Calculus shows that these four patterns are necessary and sufficient for representing any organized system and that they arise from a shared underlying structural calculus.^{3-6,11-16} Empirical studies further confirm that D, S, R, and P exist in both mind and nature, functioning as a universal grammar of organization.¹⁰⁻¹⁴ In addition, further empirical studies systems thinking skills can be defined and reliably measured,^{1,16,17} and other studies show that training in DSRP²³⁻²⁸ is effective in developing systems thinking skills.^{11-15,19}

Deliberate practice of the Moves derived from D, S, R, and P strengthens structural cognition and improves model–world alignment by making this organization explicit and trainable.^{7,11,15,18,19,22}

This case study examines a six-workshop series I facilitated in Autumn 2025 with adult learners at Interkultur Lund, most of whom were immigrants to Sweden. The aim was to introduce participants to the DSRP Moves and help them apply structural thinking to meaningful social issues. Across the series, It waw observed not only participants' progress and challenges but also my own learning as a facilitator—particularly around (1) the balance between instructional design, concept teaching, and coached practice, and (2) the realization that many challenges were not anagogical errors but predictable expressions of structural cognitive biases. In other words, the difficulties were not caused by faulty teaching; they reflected the natural Pareto distribution of thought that every facilitator must work with rather than against. Table 1 summarizes some of the learning from this case study.

Table X. Problems Identified and Suggested Improvements for Future DSRP Workshops

Problem Identified	Description (from Case Findings)	Suggested Improvement / Practice
1. Difficulty transferring structure from tangible → intangible concepts	Participants could easily analyze bicycles and trees but struggled with homelessness and loneliness; attention collapsed back to sensory concreteness.	Begin with intangible anchors to foreground structural thinking; use tangible examples only after structural fluency develops.
2. Over-reliance on agent perspectives	Participants defaulted almost exclusively to human viewpoints (e.g., social worker, politician); struggled to generate spatial, temporal, conceptual, or systemic perspectives.	Provide explicit scaffolds for non-agent perspectives; require groups to generate multiple perspective types (spatial, systemic, conceptual, temporal) during P-Circle practice.
3. Narrow relational repertoire (cause–effect bias)	Participants easily identified tangible/static relationships but had difficulty generalizing to comparative, proportional, or dynamic forms; action–reaction label caused semantic confusion.	Teach multiple relationship types explicitly; use side-by-side examples of static, dynamic, comparative, proportional, and structural relations; integrate RDS Barbell earlier.

4. Difficulty identifying structure in abstract issues	Participants struggled to generate distinctions, parts, and relationships for intangible social issues; cognitive load was high.	Use structured prompts and guided starters (e.g., “list the non-identities,” “zoom in on parts hidden from view”); incorporate modelled examples before independent work.
5. Lack of conceptual readiness consuming live session time	Large portions of live sessions were spent teaching basic DSRP concepts (what a relationship is, how perspectives work, how systems are constructed).	Adopt a flipped model: deliver foundational DSRP instruction asynchronously via expert-designed modules before live sessions.
6. Structural cognitive biases (Pareto pattern bias)	Observable overuse of Di and S and difficulties with R and P; these mirrored the Cognitive Pareto Law.	Incorporate targeted practice using the Six Pareto Moves; design sessions intentionally to activate underused patterns and elements.
7. Participants hesitant to propose examples/topics	Cultural and linguistic diversity made example-sharing uneven; participants deferred to facilitator-provided topics.	Provide a curated yet flexible list of socially relevant, culturally neutral issues; use small warm-up exercises to build comfort contributing content.
8. Limited metacognitive awareness before modeling	Participants struggled until the facilitator made her own Moves explicit; comprehension improved dramatically during modeled examples.	Make metacognitive modeling a central, intentional instructional strategy; narrate D, S, R, and P thinking routinely.
9. Inconsistent practice between sessions (without prompts)	Learners needed reminders and cues to continue DSRP practice outside of class.	Continue and expand WhatsApp follow-ups; provide daily O-rep prompts, random-word exercises, and optional micro-tasks.
10. Dual-role burden on facilitator (teaching + coaching)	Facilitator had to both teach core DSRP ideas and coach practice, creating cognitive overload and limiting practice time.	Flipped training model: let pre-training handle conceptual knowledge; live sessions focus exclusively on coaching, feedback, application, and deepening structural understanding.
11. Difficulty generalizing moves across domains	When the domain changed, participants reverted to concrete thinking; struggled to “carry over” the Moves.	Use randomized nouns and Moves earlier in the sequence; incorporate cross-domain transfer drills using abstract, unfamiliar terms.

12. Challenges not pedagogical errors but structural	Participants' difficulties stemmed from universal cognitive biases, not from failures of instruction.	Design workshops that anticipate the Pareto structure of thought; normalize mistakes; treat structural biases as expected and correctable through targeted practice.
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2. Intervention / Method

Participants and setting

The series consisted of six weekly, two-hour workshops held from 29 September to 10 November 2025. Approximately fifteen adults attended the early sessions, stabilizing to about ten consistent participants. The group was highly diverse, spanning early adulthood to retirement age and representing national backgrounds including Mexican, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, Swedish, Iranian, and Dutch. Nearly all participants were immigrants adjusting to life in Sweden.

Workshop progression and design

The workshops introduced DSRP gradually, with each week focusing on one Pattern and its associated Moves:

1. **Workshop 1:** Distinctions — Is/Is Not List Anchor: dog Film: The Little Film About a Big Idea
2. **Workshop 2:** Systems — Zoom In / Zoom Out Anchor: tree
3. **Workshop 3:** Relationships — Part-Party Anchors: bicycle, homelessness. Participants also chose group topics from eight social issues; most selected loneliness, and one selected fast fashion.
4. **Workshop 4:** Relationships — RDS Barbell Anchors: bicycle, homelessness. Group social issue work continued.
5. **Workshop 5:** Perspectives — P-Circle Anchors: bicycle, homelessness. Groups applied the Moves to their chosen issue.
6. **Workshop 6:** Integration Participants used randomization of nouns and Moves to build flexibility and transfer across domains, consistent with research emphasizing DSRP as a minimal but complete grammar of organization that can be applied to any content domain.^{2-4,10}

Tangible examples (dog, tree, bicycle) were paired with intangible ones (homelessness, loneliness, fast fashion) to support transition from concrete to abstract structure. Beginning in Workshop 3, participants applied the Moves to their chosen social issue during group work in Weeks 3–5.

Between-session reinforcement

After each workshop, participants received a WhatsApp summary containing:

- a recap of the session
- prompted “O-reps” (DSRP repetitions)
- random-word practice suggestions
- a link to otis.chat for additional exercises

This repetition cycle encouraged learners to revisit and reinforce DSRP structure between meetings, aligning with evidence that explicit instruction and deliberate practice in DSRP patterns and the Six Pareto Moves produce large, replicable gains in systems-thinking performance, metacognition, and problem solving.^{7,15,18,19}

3. Findings

3.1 Transfer from tangible to intangible concepts

Participants were notably more confident and fluent when working with tangible anchors such as *bicycles*. They easily identified parts, distinguished features, and mapped visible relationships. However, when asked to apply the same Moves to *homelessness* or *loneliness*, they struggled to identify parts, boundaries, or relevant distinctions.

Even though *bicycles* and *homelessness* were intentionally paired as parallel anchors, participants repeatedly drifted toward the concrete example. This revealed a structural bias toward identities and sensory features and suggested that beginning a workshop series with intangible anchors may better scaffold transfer and help learners focus on underlying structure rather than experiential concreteness—precisely the kind of structural generalization DSRP Theory predicts when the patterns are treated as content-agnostic organization.^{2–4,10,11,22}

3.2 Perspective-taking difficulties

Perspective-taking was consistently challenging. In P-Circle exercises, participants overwhelmingly chose human agent perspectives—“politician,” “citizen,” “social worker,” “homeless person.” They rarely generated non-agent perspectives such as:

- spatial perspectives (“the room from the ceiling corner”),
- systemic perspectives (“the city from the point infrastructure”),
- conceptual perspectives (“loneliness as a perspective on society”),
- temporal perspectives (“an issue viewed from 30 years in the future”).

One participant’s confident claim that “There is no homelessness in Sweden” became a live example of over-confidence, confirmation bias, and the agent trap. This highlighted the need for stronger scaffolding around non-agent and structural perspectives, in line with empirical findings that P is the least-used of the four patterns and that explicit training is required to activate underused elements like point and view.^{14,15,18,22}

3.3 Relational thinking constraints

Participants equated relationships almost exclusively with *cause–effect*. For example, when analyzing loneliness, they immediately searched for “what causes loneliness,” rather than exploring other relational structures such as associations, comparisons, proportional relationships, static connections (“X is connected to Y”), or dynamic interactions that are not causal (mutual influence, co-variation, reciprocal change).

This revealed a deeper structural issue: cause–effect is only one narrow type of relationship, and relying on it introduces a cognitive bias. In DSRP, the elemental structure of all relationships is action–reaction (*a:r*)—a universal, bidirectional relational pair that underlies every type of connection, including causality, correlation, feedback, proportionality, interaction, mutual influence, and even basic existential relations (“A relates to B”). Whereas cause–effect is linear, asymmetric, and often oversimplified (“A causes B”), action–reaction is symmetric, universal, and less biased, framing relationships as co-implicated actions and reactions that can take many forms. This reduces the tendency to force every relationship into a causal explanation.

Examples of relational forms that are *subsets* of the broader *a:r* structure include:

- causal relations ($A \rightarrow B$),
- feedback ($A \leftrightarrow B$),
- correlation ($A \sim B$),
- association or grouping ($A — B$),
- proportionality ($A \propto B$),
- comparison ($A < B$, $A = B$, $A > B$),
- interaction or influence (A influences B; B modifies A)
- existential relations (“A relates to B”), and
- existential identity relations (“A relates to B by C”).

Teaching participants that cause–effect is just one subset of *a:r* helps to broaden their relational repertoire, but many still gravitated toward causal interpretations, thus it requires practice to change the default pattern of thinking. This reflected a predictable under-use of the Relationship Pattern and its action–reaction elements, consistent with empirical work showing that R is commonly neglected relative to D and S unless explicitly scaffolded.^{13,15,18,22}

3.4 Effects of metacognitive modeling

The most productive and clarifying moments occurred when I made my own thinking explicit—narrating:

- how I constructed an Is/Is Not List,
- why I chose certain system boundaries,
- how I generated perspectives,
- how I saw relationships in an abstract issue.

Participants repeatedly asked for more examples of “how I would do it,” and engagement increased immediately during and after modeling. This finding underscores the centrality of facilitator metacognitive transparency for effective DSRP learning, aligning with experimental evidence from the Fish Tank Studies and related work showing that explicit awareness and practice of DSRP patterns significantly increase structural complexity and metacognition.^{11,12,15–17}

3.5 Group diversity and topic selection

The group was highly diverse, spanning early adulthood to retirement age and representing national backgrounds including Mexican, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, Swedish, Iranian, and Dutch. 40% of the group was male. Two thirds of the group had a job, the rest were either retired or studying Swedish. About 60% of the group had at least a bachelor degree. Nearly all participants were immigrants adjusting to life in Sweden. The group’s diversity enriched conversation but made it more difficult to find common examples. When asked to choose topics, participants hesitated, perhaps due to unfamiliarity, cultural differences, or linguistic insecurity. Providing eight neutral yet socially relevant issues allowed every group to select something accessible, with loneliness emerging as the most common choice.

3.6 Practice structure and reinforcement

Across sessions, participants were encouraged to practice between workshops, and I provided multiple concrete strategies—reinforced verbally and through follow-up messages in a shared WhatsApp group. My guidance emphasized daily *O-reps* (organization repetitions), inviting participants to sketch each of the Six Moves several times a day to build fluency. I also encouraged them to use **otis.chat** to organize any idea or problem they were currently working on, noting that repeated organization of the same information often produces different outcomes. To help diversify practice and reduce content dependence, I suggested using a random-word generator to generate objects or ideas to structure, and I advised participants to pay attention to everyday language that signals distinctions, parts, relationships, or perspectives—treating natural conversation as a live source of DSRP cues.^{18,19}

4. Discussion

4.1 What the facilitator learned through the intervention

Across the series, a central pattern became clear: live workshop time was burdened by the need to teach foundational DSRP concepts rather than devote the majority of time to coaching practice in the 6 foundational Pareto mental moves, which limited how far participants could progress each session. Participants often needed repeated instruction on:

- what counts as a distinction vs. a part,
- the difference between a perspective and a view,
- the wide range of relationships,
- how to structure an intangible concept,

- how to transfer the same structure into new domains.

These are difficult concepts to teach on the fly—especially while also facilitating group practice, monitoring understanding, and guiding discussion. The challenge was not my ability to facilitate but the structural constraint of needing to play two roles simultaneously:

1. concept instructor, and
2. practice coach.

This dual load slowed structural development. It also surfaced, in real time, the underlying Pareto structure of thought: participants had less trouble with Distinctions and Systems, than they did with Relationships, and Perspectives—patterns that mirror the Cognitive Pareto Law and its associated hierarchy of structural biases discovered in large-scale analyses of DSRP use.^{18,22}

4.2 Alignment with Pareto-bias research

All observed difficulties aligned with the Pareto hierarchy: although participants practiced all six moves—assigned through the “move of the day” structure and, in the final session, randomized combinations—certain structural operations consistently proved more challenging. In particular, relational operations (R, a.r, and the broader family of non-causal relationship types) and perspectival operations (P, v, p) required more facilitator guidance, modeling, and scaffolding. This pattern is consistent with the structural asymmetries documented in work on the Cognitive Pareto Law, where roughly 20% of structural operations account for most observable organization, and with the rationale behind the Six Pareto Moves as a minimal, high-yield curriculum for surfacing and correcting those asymmetries.^{18,22}

4.3 How the flipped training model resolves these challenges

CRL and Training Camp research provides a structural solution to the challenges I experienced: a flipped DSRP training model. In this model:

- The concept teaching (e.g., the Cognitive Law $\mathbb{M} = \text{I-O}$, DSRP as universal O, the basic Patterns and Elements, and the Six Pareto Moves) is handled asynchronously by world-leading experts through high-quality training modules grounded in O-Theory and DSRP-483.^{1-6,18,22-28}
- Learners arrive at live sessions already familiar with DSRP basics and vocabulary, having had time to process and practice foundational ideas, as in recent work on systems-thinking interventions in policy education and other applied settings.¹⁹
- Live time is reserved for practice, coaching, modeling, correction, and application—the areas where facilitators create the greatest learning impact and where research shows the largest performance gains from DSRP-based interventions.^{7,15,18,19}

Had participants entered the workshop series with foundational DSRP literacy, far more time could have been spent on:

- applying Moves to their chosen social issues,
- strengthening relational and perspectival repertoires,

- exploring multiple levels of structure (parts, wholes, interactions, viewpoints),
- and building fluency across abstract domains.

The flipped model directly addresses the central bottleneck revealed by this intervention: it aligns facilitator effort with the empirically most effective role—coaching structural practice rather than delivering base concepts.^{7,15,18,19}

5. Conclusion

This six-session DSRP workshop series demonstrated both the accessibility of DSRP for adult learners and the predictable structural challenges they face. Participants expressed enthusiasm, engaged deeply with the examples, and practiced the Moves eagerly. Yet they also struggled in ways that reflect universal cognitive tendencies: difficulty with intangible systems, limited relational repertoires, agent-only perspectives, and reliance on sensory concreteness—patterns that mirror documented underuse of certain DSRP Patterns and Elements and the need for targeted practice to correct them.^{11–15,18,22}

The series revealed several key pedagogical insights:

1. Begin with intangible anchors to prioritize structure over sensory features and to foreground DSRP as a universal grammar rather than a tool for concrete things only.^{2–4,10}
2. Provide stronger scaffolding for non-agent perspectives across spatial, temporal, conceptual, and systemic forms, helping learners activate the least-used P structures.^{14,15,18,22}
3. Explicitly broaden relational repertoires beyond causality, emphasizing that relationships include static, dynamic, comparative, and proportional forms, not just cause–effect.^{13,22}
4. Use metacognitive modeling as a core instructional method, making the facilitator’s own DSRP thinking visible and thus accelerating learner awareness and practice.^{11,15–17}
5. Adopt flipped instructional models so conceptual instruction comes from expert-designed modules rooted in O-Theory and DSRP-483, and live sessions focus on coached practice and performance, which have been shown to produce large, durable gains in structural thinking, collaboration, and problem solving.^{1–4,7,15,18,19}

Taken together, these insights highlight a structural truth: DSRP teaching is most effective when instructors coach practice, not deliver concepts. Flipped models allow facilitators to operate in their highest-leverage role—guiding learners toward performance-level competence in structural thinking—while standing on the accumulated empirical foundation that links the Cognitive Law, DSRP’s universal patterns, their dynamics, and the demonstrated impact of deliberate practice.^{1–7,10–19,22–28}

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