

Structured Thinking Structures Sales Opportunities that Win

When Sales People Structure Their Thinking, it Allows Them to Structure Complex Opportunities to Increase Wins

George Brontén^{a@} | Derek Cabrera^{b,c,@}

a: Membrain.com

b: Cornell University

c: Cabrera Research Lab

@: george@membrain.com

@: dac66@cornell.edu

ABSTRACT: The ability to structure complex sales opportunities is directly tied to a sales professional's ability to structure their thinking and connect the dots in the sales process. Common logic assumes that increasing the number of stakeholders complicates decision-making and decreases win rates. However, empirical data challenges this assumption, revealing that win rates peak at 4-5 stakeholders before declining beyond six, with deal values shifting unpredictably. Sales professionals can leverage DSRP-483—a universal theory of cognition with extensive empirical validation—to structure their thought processes in a way that clarifies stakeholder complexity and helps co-create a shared mental model. We suggest that sales professionals apply the DSRP Mapping Protocol, which includes five cognitive moves (Is/Is Not List, Zoom In/Out, Part Party!, RDS Barbell, and P-circle) to systematically map, analyze, and structure complex opportunities to optimize sales interactions. The findings suggest that this protocol would assist with effective stakeholder engagement and enable sales teams to focus on high-leverage actions that maximize success. By dynamically structuring their thinking, sales professionals can improve opportunity outcomes, increase win rates, and navigate stakeholder complexity without unnecessary friction¹.

KEYWORDS: sales | DSRP-483 | sales complexity | cognitive complexity | structured thinking | sales process management | sales management | sales systems

Introduction

Structuring Thinking to Structure Sales

The modern B2B sales environment demands that sales professionals navigate multiple decision-makers with differing priorities, perspectives, and levels of influence. While conventional wisdom assumes that

¹ Cite this Paper: Cabrera et al. (2025) Structured Thinking Structures Sales Opportunities that Win: When Sales People Structure Their Thinking it Allows Them to Structure Complex Opportunities to Increase Wins. (5) 4.

an increase in stakeholders results in decision fatigue and lower win rates, empirical data paints a more intricate picture:

- Win rates improve from 1-3 stakeholders to 4-5 stakeholders, suggesting that a structured approach to stakeholder engagement enhances deal success.
- When the stakeholder count exceeds six, opportunities do not necessarily fail, but they become more complex, and win rates drop, requiring a refined engagement strategy.

This reveals that success in complex opportunities is not merely about managing an increasing number of stakeholders but about structuring thought processes to clarify engagement, decision-making, and relationship dynamics. Applying cognitive structure allows sales professionals to anticipate obstacles better, align stakeholder perspectives, and optimize deal flow. Understanding this requires a dynamic cognitive approach that connects how salespeople think with how opportunities are structured and won.

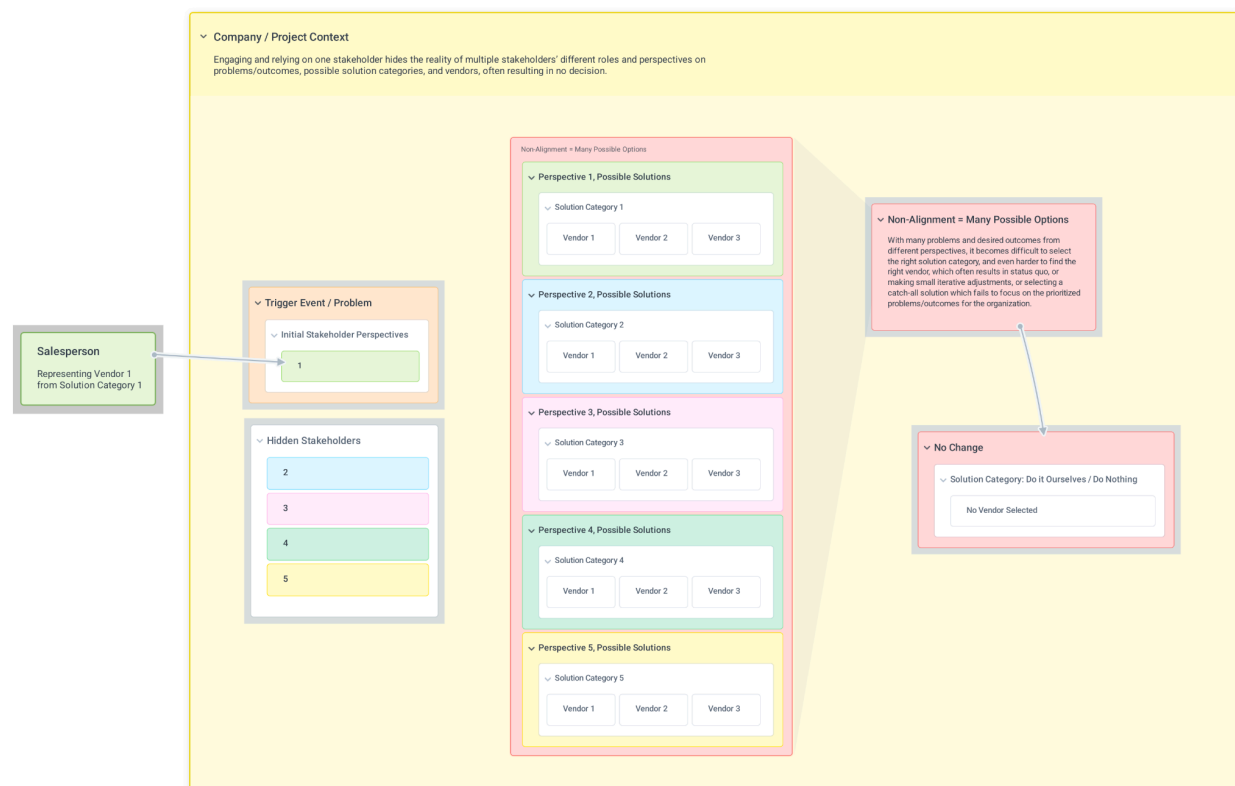


Figure 1: Engaging and relying on one stakeholder hides the reality of multiple stakeholders' different roles and perspectives on problems/outcomes, possible solution categories, and vendors, often resulting in no decision.

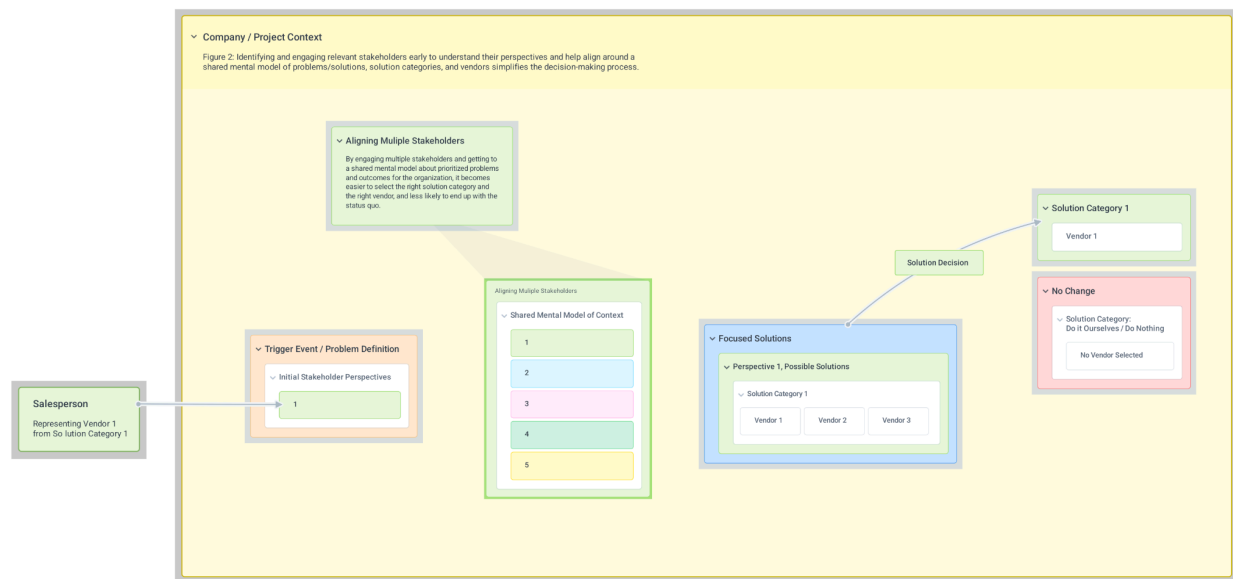


Figure 2: Identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders early to understand their perspectives and help align around a shared mental model of problems/solutions, solution categories, and vendors simplifies the decision-making process.

In the initial stage, the salesperson and the customer's first stakeholder engage in a relationship, where both perceive the interaction as a traditional sales exchange—the salesperson sees the customer as a potential buyer, and the stakeholder views the salesperson as someone trying to sell them something. To advance the relationship, both parties must shift their mental model from a sales-driven dynamic to a problem-solving and/or outcome-driven collaboration. In this evolved model, the salesperson and the first stakeholder identify and engage relevant stakeholders to collaborate to address a shared challenge, aligning their perspectives toward a solution. Achieving this shift requires a deep understanding of the organization's internal dynamics, key stakeholders, and contextual factors that influence decision-making.

Research Question

- How do structuring thought processes impact stakeholder engagement, alignment, and overall sales performance?
- How can salespeople apply DSRP-483 Mapping Protocol to increase clarity, alignment, and efficiency in structuring multi-stakeholder opportunities?

Literature Review

Structuring Thought to Navigate Stakeholder Complexity

Prior research highlights the critical role of cognitive structuring in managing stakeholder complexity in sales:

- Decision-making complexity increases exponentially, not linearly, as more stakeholders are involved [1]. As the number of decision-makers grows, conflicting priorities and misalignment become more prevalent, leading to delays and reduced sales effectiveness [2].
- Stakeholder misalignment is a leading cause of opportunity failure, as competing perspectives often create decision paralysis. Without structured cognitive engagement and alignment, stakeholders struggle to reach a consensus [3].
- Sales teams that structure stakeholder conversations systematically close more complex and high-value opportunities. Effectively mapping decision criteria and influence dynamics leads to greater clarity, alignment, and sales success [4].

These findings underscore that structured thinking enables structured sales execution and results in structured decision-making. By applying DSRP-483 and the five cognitive moves, sales professionals can proactively align stakeholder priorities, avoid decision gridlock, and optimize opportunity flow.

Methodology

Data Collection

Sales performance data was collected for a sales team from Membrain CRM, a platform specializing in multi-stakeholder B2B sales processes. The dataset includes:

- Opportunities segmented by stakeholder count (1, 2-3, 4-5, and 6+ stakeholders).
- Win rates, deal values, and archived projects analyzed across stakeholder groups.
- Qualitative insights from sales professionals, identifying the challenges and patterns in managing stakeholder engagement.

Results

Stakeholder Count and Deal Performance

The data in Table 1 provides a consolidated view of how stakeholder count affects deal outcomes, including win rates, deal values, and archived opportunities. The average deal size across all number of stakeholders was \$21,171

Opportunities with 4-5 stakeholders perform best, achieving the highest win rate (40.5%) and the greatest value won (\$32,037 on average). This suggests that sales professionals engaging this number of stakeholders benefit from a balanced mix of decision-making efficiency and organizational buy-in, leading to higher-value opportunities and increased win rates.

Involving 1 stakeholder or 2-3 stakeholders also see moderate success, with win rates of 21.0% and 29.8%, respectively, and deal values of \$13,976 and \$20,922. While these projects may be easier to close, the lower overall opportunity value suggests a limitation in revenue potential when fewer stakeholders are involved.

In contrast, opportunities involving 6+ stakeholders experience a drop in both win rates (27.3%) and average value won (\$17,749). This decline indicates that beyond a certain threshold, increased complexity leads to negotiation slowdowns, competing priorities, and diluted decision-making authority, ultimately reducing both success rates and financial impact.

The value archived metric further reinforces this trend, with significant financial loss in larger-stakeholder opportunities. Single-stakeholder opportunities see \$6,362,791 archived (90.3%), while 2-3 stakeholder opportunities archived \$4,688,372 (79.2%), the 4-5 stakeholder category archived \$1,267,870 (72.5%), and 6+ stakeholder opportunities drop dramatically to \$609,488 archived (92%), highlighting that too low, as well as excessive, decision-maker involvement often results in failed or stalled negotiations.

These findings suggest that sales professionals must adopt structured cognitive approaches to manage multi-stakeholder complexity effectively. By strategically engaging decision-makers and structuring conversations, they can maximize deal values while mitigating the risks associated with stakeholder overload or lack of stakeholder involvement and alignment. The data in Table 1 consolidates key metrics, revealing the impact of stakeholder count on both win rates and deal values. The analysis highlights a peak performance range in the 4-5 stakeholder category, where opportunities exhibit both the highest win rate (40.5%) and the greatest average value won (\$32,037). This suggests that opportunities within this stakeholder range effectively balance decision-making complexity while maximizing financial return.

Smaller transactions involving 1 stakeholder or 2-3 stakeholders also show relatively strong performance, with win rates of 21.0% and 29.8%, respectively. These lower-stakeholder opportunities yield \$13,976 and \$20,922 on average, reinforcing that projects with fewer involved stakeholders may close efficiently but often lack the high-value impact.

On the other hand, opportunities involving 6+ stakeholders experience a decline in both win rate (27.3%) and average value won (\$17,749). This drop suggests that beyond a certain threshold, the increasing number of decision-makers introduces cognitive overload, lengthened sales cycles, and potential misalignment that reduces the likelihood of winning high-value opportunities.

These findings suggest that sales professionals who structure their thinking and, as a result, that of involved stakeholders can effectively optimize stakeholder engagement, mitigating complexity beyond five decision-makers while leveraging structured engagement strategies for maximum deal yield.

Table 1 presents the relationship between stakeholder count and deal value. The data shows that opportunities involving 4-5 stakeholders generate the highest financial return, averaging \$32,037 in won value, with a win rate of 40.5%. This suggests that projects in this range balance the complexity of multiple decision-makers while maintaining efficiency in deal execution.

Smaller opportunities involving 1-3 stakeholders yield lower returns, with 1-stakeholder opportunities averaging \$13,976 and 2-3 stakeholder opportunities reaching \$20,922. These findings indicate that while simpler opportunities may close at a reasonable rate, they do not reach the high-value potential seen in moderately complex opportunities.

Conversely, opportunities with 6+ stakeholders experience a sharp drop in won value to \$17,749, reinforcing the trend that increased stakeholder involvement complicates decision-making and extends sales cycles. This pattern suggests that beyond five stakeholders, cognitive overload and misalignment may contribute to lower deal values and success rates. These results emphasize the need for structured thinking and cognitive tools to navigate stakeholder complexity and optimize opportunity outcomes.

Stakeholder Count	Projects Won	Projects Archived	Value Won (USD)	Value Archived (USD)	Win Rate # Of Projects (%)	Win Rate Value (%)
1	49	184	\$684,837	\$6,362,791	21.0%	9.7%
2-3	59	139	\$1,234,381	\$4,688,372	29.8%	20.8%
4-5	15	22	\$480,558	\$1,267,870	40.5%	27.5%
6+	3	8	\$53,247	\$609,488	27.3%	8.0%

Table 1: Win Rate Trends

Discussion

Structuring Thought to Structure Opportunities

It is somewhat a priori common sense that larger organizations have an increased probability of larger deal sizes and stakeholder groups and, therefore, increased deal complexity. Increased deal complexity necessitates a greater level of cognitive complexity for structuring one's thinking, as well as that of the stakeholders involved in decision-making to manage more complex opportunities. The findings suggest that sales professionals who can effectively structure their thinking are better equipped to engage with and handle more stakeholders, which leads to a higher rate of success and profitability. Furthermore, the

decline in win rates for 6+ stakeholder opportunities may indicate a threshold where a lack of cognitive structuring inhibits deal success.

These insights align with research on decision complexity and structured engagement, supporting the premise that cognitive structuring enhances sales success.

Introducing the DSRP-483 Mapping Protocol for Sales

Given these findings, we propose that sales professionals (1) learn the first set of mental moves (a Pareto Law of Cognition that shows 5 mental moves—or low, 20% effort—account for the majority of requisite complexity (they work 80% of the time) and use these moves to (2) apply the DSRP-483 Mapping Protocol to structure their thinking and, in turn, their stakeholder engagement strategies. The protocol provides a cognitive framework that:

- Helps potential customers create shared distinctions
- Clarifies roles and relationships among stakeholders
- Identifies hidden system dependencies and decision-making bottlenecks
- Structures conversations to align perspectives before conflicts arise

Not helping potential customers create shared distinctions is the primary reason for low win rates and explains why deals involving only one engaged stakeholder often default to the status quo. This is important as it often is the case that the status quo, not other competitors, is the main source of competition.

When a shared mental model is only established between the seller and a single motivated stakeholder, it fails to permeate the broader decision-making group. As a result, alignment never fully forms across the organization, leading to stalled or lost deals.

Successful sales professionals facilitate the creation of shared distinctions by ensuring all stakeholders align around a common problem, desired outcome, and relevant solutions. In contrast, many salespeople fall into the trap of relying on a single champion within the target organization, assuming that person will drive internal alignment on their behalf—a strategy that rarely succeeds. Instead, winning sales teams take an active role in structuring stakeholder conversations, ensuring consensus is built collaboratively rather than left to chance. Oftentimes, there are internal systems, routines, and cross-functional processes in place that salespeople are unaware of, and that even stakeholders might not immediately recognize. These hidden dynamics can create friction and roadblocks that derail deals unless they are surfaced, discussed, and resolved early in the sales process. Skilled sales professionals proactively uncover and address these systemic factors, ensuring they don't become last-minute barriers to success.

DSRP-483 as a Model to Structure Thinking in Order to Structure Complex Sales Opportunities

DSRP-483 is a universal theory of cognition, validated through extensive empirical evidence[5–16]. In sales, thought structures determine deal structures, and effective stakeholder engagement depends on using the right cognitive moves at the right time. Research in DSRP-483 has revealed that a Pareto law exists within the complexity of thought, allowing us to use just five mental moves for most applications. Teaching sales professionals these moves significantly increases their ability to see and understand complex deal structures, optimizing their decision-making and stakeholder engagement.

Cognitive Move	Explanation	Application to Sales
Is/Is Not List	A technique that clarifies what something is and what it is not by explicitly identifying its boundaries. This helps in distinguishing key elements from distractions.	Helps salespeople guide potential customers in defining distinction(s) and prioritization of what they like to solve and accomplish.
Zoom In/Out	The ability to shift between different levels of abstraction, moving from a broad overview to a granular understanding and vice versa.	Helps sales teams understand both high-level strategy and the detailed mechanics of what the potential customer is trying to accomplish, align with that, and become a part of the chosen path forward.
Part Party!	Examines the whole-part relationship by breaking complex systems into their constituent parts and analyzing how they interact.	Uncovers hidden relationships that can influence success or failure, ensuring all components of a decision are considered.
RDS Barbell	Focuses on identifying relationships, distinguishing elements within those relationships, and zooming in on the causal dynamics at play.	Helps sales teams anticipate dependencies and potential barriers in the decision-making process.
P-circle	A method for structuring and aligning different perspectives within a system, ensuring multiple viewpoints are integrated effectively.	Ensures all stakeholder perspectives are considered, reducing misalignment and improving opportunity win rates.

Table 2: The 5 Most Valuable Mental Moves and Sales Applications

These five moves do not exist independently but function as a Pareto-optimal system where small cognitive shifts lead to disproportionate sales impact. In this sense, the moves themselves instantiate the Pareto principle, structuring high-leverage engagement with minimal effort.

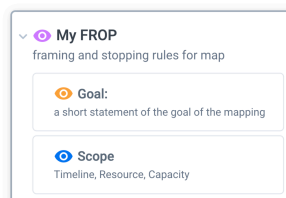
DSRP Mapping Protocol

DSRP is simple but it represents some of the most complex mathematics used today. But nature satisfies, it rarely optimizes so this simple stepwise DSRP Mapping Protocol will work 80% of the time to get you to be more systemic about whatever issue life is throwing at you.

Step

Map

Step 0. Perform a FROP (framing and stopping rules). Include Goal and Scope. Then use this mini-map as a perspective on the rest of your mapping.

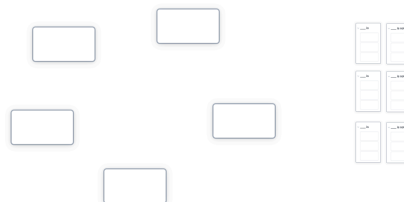


The Mapping I Do

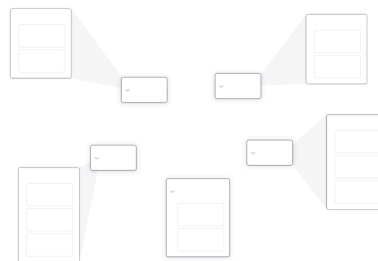
Step 1. Start with a small mapping of your goal sentence. For example, if your goal is "to Increase X" build a map that looks like: [increase]→[X]. If the goal is, "shared clarity of Y" build a map that is: [shared clarity]→[Y]



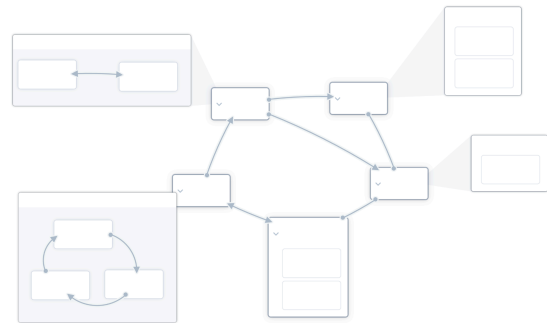
Ongoing step. Throughout the process consider any Di that is vague and perform an Is/Is Not List. Move to the side to create Dio's.



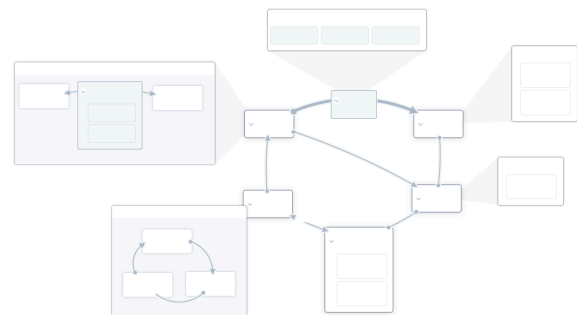
Step 2. Zoom into the Di's. Break them down into parts (2-5 parts per Di).



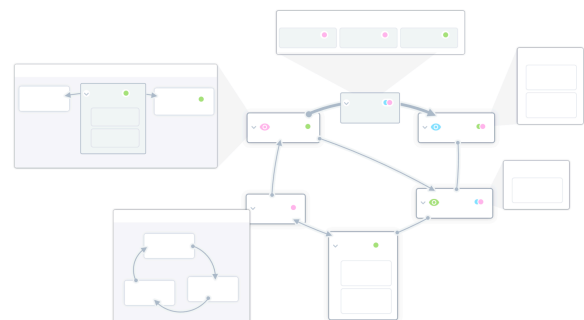
Step 3. Part Party! the Di's at the top and second levels. Consider how they might be related or not related. Draw lines to represent Relationships. We will refer to these as Rs. Use arrow heads to consider action reaction relationships. If you can distinguish the relationships by naming them, do so.



Step 4. Pick some of the most important relationships (Rs) and Zoom into them using the RDS Barbell move. Name the relationship with a Di. Then zoom into the relationship Di to determine its parts.



Step 5. Do a P-circle move. You can do this in two ways: (1) use existing Di's in the system as points and see how they view the rest of the system or (2) consider "external" additive points of view. Once you've established the points (Pp) consider what each point sees or does not see (Pv).



Step 6. Consider how the objects in your map group into (2-3) wholes with relationships between them. This is an important step for building "compression" in your map. Compression is measured by the # of top nodes divided by the total # of nodes. The more compression the better. Often, your compression will collapse back to your goal map.



Step 7. Zoom out of the entire system.
Think about it at one level higher.

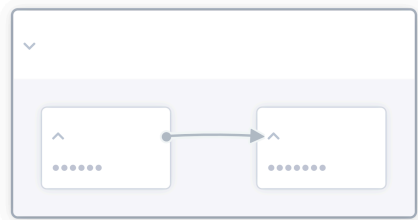


Table 4: DSRP Mapping Protocol Step by Step.

Conclusion

Key Takeaways

- Win rates and deal values peak at 4-5 stakeholders, demonstrating that structured stakeholder engagement drives success.
- Win rates and opportunity values decline at 6+ stakeholders, which may indicate that increasing real-world complexity is outmatching cognitive complexity ability. Increasing this ability may increase larger opportunity wins.
- Sales professionals who apply cognitive structuring techniques can better manage multi-stakeholder complexity.
- The DSRP-483 Mapping Protocol provides a scalable method for structuring sales thinking, enabling more predictable outcomes.

This was an exploratory study into the cognition of sales. Further research is needed. Future research should look at the empirical effects of the protocol as a treatment. However, these findings reinforce the connection between structured thinking and structured sales success, providing a pathway for sales professionals to navigate complexity with greater confidence and efficiency. Structured thinking enables structured sales execution. By applying DSRP-483 and the five cognitive moves, sales professionals can proactively identify stakeholders and help define clear problem and outcome distinctions to align with to avoid decision gridlock and optimize deal flow.

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