

Six Thinking Hats Edward de Bono

Early in the 1980s Dr. de Bono invented the Six Thinking Hats method as a thinking tool for group discussion and to assist individual thinking. Some people naturally gravitate to one style; all styles are useful in a team. Ideally, in a meeting all of the participants will 'put on' the same hat at the same time to work through the development of ideas (parallel thinking) this encourages cross pollination of ideas and helps remove ego. The Six Hats are:



White Hat – Facts & Information

Objective, neutral and non-emotional. The cold observer of what is (ignoring opinions and views).

Focuses on the available data to identify gaps and see what can be learned.

Uses historical data to extrapolate trends.

White hat thinking - considering purely what information is available, what are the facts?



Red Hat – Feelings & Emotions

Presents views based on intuition and gut feel/hunches - there's no need for explanation.

Take time to listen to your emotions, your intuition.

The red hat allows feelings, as such, to come into the discussion without pretending to be anything else. It is always valuable to get feelings out into the open.

Red hat thinking - instinctive gut reaction or statements of emotional feelings plus trying to think how others will react emotionally?



Black hat – Critical Judgment and caution

Used to identify barriers, hazards, risks and other negative connotations looking for problems and mismatches.

Used to make plans and ideas 'tougher' and more resilient. Can help spot fatal flaws in a scheme early. This is an important test of any new idea to ensure problems are identified in advance (the alternative is to be over optimistic and under-prepared for difficulties).

Black hat thinking - logic applied to identifying flaws or barriers, seeking mismatch.



Yellow hat – Positive Judgment

Sunny and optimistic - the opposite of 'black hat' - focuses on the benefits and the value in a course of action.

Yellow hat thinking is a deliberate, but logical search for the positive. Take time to be hopeful and optimistic.

Yellow hat thinking - positive judgments; logic applied to identifying benefits, seeking harmony.



Green hat – Alternatives and learning

The creation of new ideas, perceptions and concepts.

Focuses on change and escaping old ideas to find better new ideas.

Green hat thinking - creativity; statements of provocation and investigation, seeing where a thought goes.



Blue hat – The Big Picture

Taking a look from a higher and wider perspective to see if the right issues are being addressed. Worn by the chair or facilitator of a meeting most of the time, but by everyone at appropriate times when you need to take an overview.

Coordination and facilitation leading to decisions.

Blue hat thinking - processes and control, plus metacognition (thinking about thinking).

Using the 'hats'. A meeting may start with everyone assuming the Blue hat to discuss how the meeting will be conducted and to develop the goals and objectives. The discussion may then move to Red hat thinking in order to collect opinions and reactions to the problem. This phase may also be used to develop constraints for the actual solution such as who will be affected by the problem and/or solutions. Next the discussion may move to the Yellow then Green hat in order to generate ideas and possible solutions. Next the discussion may move between White hat thinking as part of developing information and Black hat thinking to develop criticisms of the solution set. Because everyone is focused on a particular approach at any one time, the group tends to be more collaborative than if one person is reacting emotionally (Red hat) while another person is trying to be objective (White hat) and still another person is being critical of the points which emerge from the discussion (Black hat).



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