

Facilitator's Body of Knowledge Research Project

Six Thinking Hats

Background: Early in the 1980s Dr. Edward de Bono considered human cognition and thought to be of several types, approaches, or orientations. He theorized that of these approaches, most people used only one or two of the approaches and that people developed thinking habits which in turn limited them to those approaches. De Bono believed that if the various approaches could be identified and a system of their use developed which could be taught, that people could be more productive in meetings and in collaborating within groups by deliberately using all the approaches as needed.

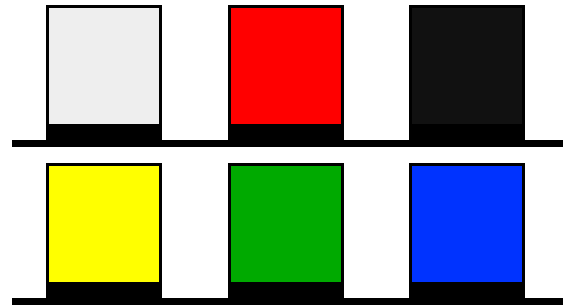
As a result of his investigations, De Bono was able to describe a process of deliberately adopting a particular approach to a problem as an implementation of Parallel Thinking™ as well as an aid to Lateral Thinking.

This led to the creation of the Six Thinking Hats method as a framework for thinking. Six different approaches are described, and each is symbolized by the act of putting on a colored hat, either actually or imaginatively. This he suggests can be done either by individuals working alone or in groups.

Six Thinking Hats' is a powerful technique that helps you look at important decisions from a number of different perspectives. It helps you make better decisions by forcing you to move outside your habitual ways of thinking. As such, it helps you understand the full complexity of the decision, and spot issues and opportunities to which you might otherwise be blind

The method promotes fuller input from more people. In de Bono's words it "separates ego from performance". Everyone is able to contribute to the exploration without denting egos as they are just using the yellow hat or whatever hat. The six hats system encourages performance rather than ego defense. People can contribute under any hat even though they initially support the opposite view.

There are six metaphorical hats and the thinker can put on or take off one of these hats to



indicate the type of thinking being used. This putting on and taking off is essential. The hats must never be used to categorize individuals, even though their behavior may seem to invite this. When done in a group, everybody wear the same hat at the same time.

The main purposes of using Six Thinking Hats are:

- focus and improve the thinking process
- encourage creative, parallel and lateral thinking
- improve communication
- speed up decision making
- avoid debate

White Hat

(Blank sheet) (*objective*) This hat covers facts, figures, information needs and gaps. With this thinking hat you focus on the data available. What you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them. This is where past trends are analyzed, and we try to extrapolate from historical data. "I think we need some white hat thinking at this point..." means Let's drop the arguments and proposals, and look at the data.

Red Hat

(Fire) (*subjective*) This hat covers intuition, feelings, gut reactions, and emotions. The red hat allows the thinker to put forward an intuition without any need to justify it. Usually feelings and intuition can only be introduced

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into a discussion if they are supported by logic. Usually the feeling is genuine but the logic is spurious. The red hat gives full permission to a thinker to put forward his or her feelings on the subject at the moment. "Putting on my red hat, I think this is a terrible proposal."

Black Hat

(Judge's robe) (*objective*) This is the hat of judgment and caution. It is a most valuable hat. It is used to look at proposals cautiously and defensively. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan. It allows you to eliminate or alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them. Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. The black hat must always be logical.

Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.

Yellow Hat

(Sun) (*objective*) The yellow hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult. It can be used in looking forward to the results of some proposed action, but can also be used to find something of value in what has already happened.

Green Hat

(Plant) (*speculative/creative*) This is the hat of creativity, alternatives, and proposals where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.

Blue Hat

(Sky) (*overview*) This is the overview or process control hat. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat

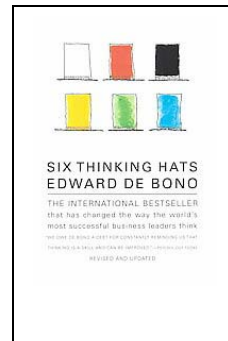
thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, etc. It looks not at the subject itself but at the 'thinking' about the subject. In technical terms, the blue hat is concerned with meta-cognition or the Big Picture. "Putting on my blue hat, I feel we should do some more green hat thinking at this point."

Application

The Six Thinking Hats is a very popular method for planning and problem solving. Facilitators that use it with their groups generally develop plans that are sounder and more resilient than would otherwise be the case. It may also help to avoid public relations mistakes, and spot good reasons not to follow a course of action before having committed to it.

Organizations such as Prudential Insurance, IBM, Federal Express, British Airways, Polaroid, Pepsico, DuPont, and Nippon Telephone and Telegraph, possibly the world's largest company, use Six Thinking Hats.

Resources



Six Thinking Hats

Edward de Bono, Ph.D
Back Bay Books Aug 99
ISBN: 0316178314
\$10.17

The deBono Group website:
<http://www.debonogroup.com/>

Summary by Sylvie Labelle:
[http://members.optusnet.com](http://members.optusnet.com.au/~charles57/Creative/Techniques/sixhats.htm)

<http://members.optusnet.com.au/~charles57/Creative/Techniques/sixhats.htm>

Wikipedia Description:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Thinking_Hats

MindTools Description:

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_07.htm