CRITICAL THINKING

SIX THINKING HATS

SESSION 6

SESSION 6 Six Thinking Hats

'Six Thinking Hats' is an important and powerful technique. It is used to look at decisions from a number of important perspectives. This forces you to move outside your habitual thinking style, and helps you to get a more rounded view of a situation.

This tool was created by Edward de Bono in his book '**6 Thinking Hats**'.

Many successful people think from a very rational, positive viewpoint. This is part of the reason that they are successful. Often, though, they may fail to look at a problem from an emotional, intuitive, creative or negative viewpoint. This can mean that they underestimate resistance to plans, fail to make creative leaps and do not make essential contingency plans.

Similarly, pessimists may be excessively defensive, and more emotional people may fail to look at decisions calmly and rationally.

If you look at a problem with the 'Six Thinking Hats' technique, then you will solve it using all approaches. Your decisions and plans will mix ambition, skill in execution, public sensitivity, creativity and good contingency planning.

How to Use the Tool

You can use Six Thinking Hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings it has the benefit of blocking the confrontations that happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem.

Each 'Thinking Hat' is a different style of thinking. These are explained below:

- **White Hat:**
  With this thinking hat you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see 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 you analyze past trends, and try to extrapolate from historical data.

- **Red Hat:**
  'Wearing' the red hat, you look at problems using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.

- **Black Hat:**
  Using black hat thinking, look at all the bad points of the decision. Look at it cautiously and defensively. Try to see why it might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan. It allows you to eliminate them, 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. 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:**
  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.

- **Green Hat:**
  The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas. A whole range of **creativity tools** can help you here.

- **Blue Hat:**
  The Blue Hat stands for process control. 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.

A variant of this technique is to look at problems from the point of view of different professionals (e.g. doctors, architects, sales directors, etc.) or different customers.

Example

The directors of a property company are looking at whether they should construct a new office building. The economy is doing well, and the amount of vacant office space is reducing sharply. As part of their decision they decide to use the 6 Thinking Hats technique during a planning meeting.

Looking at the problem with the White Hat, they analyze the data they have. They examine the trend in vacant office space, which shows a sharp reduction.

They anticipate that by the time the office block would be completed, that there will be a severe shortage of office space. Current government projections show steady economic growth for at least the construction period.

With Red Hat thinking, some of the directors think the proposed building looks quite ugly. While it would be highly cost-effective, they worry that people would not like to work in it.

When they think with the Black Hat, they worry that government projections may be wrong. The economy may be about to enter a 'cyclical downturn', in which case the office building may be empty for a long time. If the building is not attractive, then companies will choose to work in another better-looking building at the same rent.

With the Yellow Hat, however, if the economy holds up and their projections are correct, the company stands to make a great deal of money. If they are lucky, maybe they could sell the building before the next downturn, or rent to tenants on long-term leases that will last through any recession.

With Green Hat thinking they consider whether they should change the design to make the building more pleasant. Perhaps they could build prestige offices that people would want to rent in any economic climate. Alternatively, maybe they should invest the money in the short term to buy up property at a low cost when a recession comes.

The Blue Hat has been used by the meeting's Chair to move among the different thinking styles. He or she may have needed to keep other members of the team from switching styles, or from criticizing other peoples' points.

It is well worth reading Edward de Bono's book **6 Thinking Hats** for more information on this technique.

Key Points

Six Thinking Hats is a good technique for looking at the effects of a decision from a number of different points of view.

It allows necessary emotion and skepticism to be brought into what would otherwise be purely rational decisions. It opens up the opportunity for creativity within Decision Making. The technique also helps, for example, persistently pessimistic people to be positive and creative.

Plans developed using the '6 Thinking Hats' technique will be sounder and more resilient than would otherwise be the case. It may also help you to avoid public relations mistakes, and spot good reasons not to follow a course of action before you have committed to it

Six Thinking Hats®
A Creativity Process for Results Driven Groups
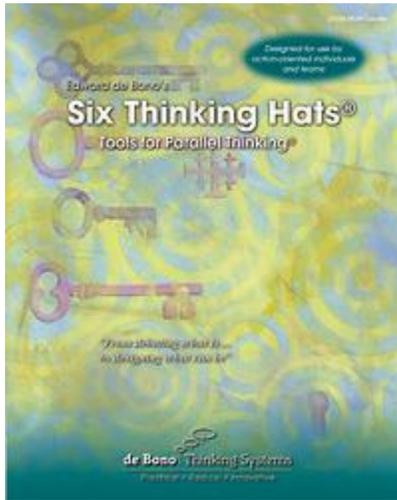
A Statoil drilling manager presents his problem as a case study. The group solves his problem using the Six Thinking Hats method. The drilling goes on, and millions are saved. With hindsight, a genial solution-- not planned and not foreseeable in advance.

"The winner is the chef who takes the same ingredients as everyone else and produces the best results."--Edward de Bono

Six Thinking Hats is a time-tested tool that boosts creative and innovative performance. It provides a framework to focus and broaden thinking by separating out six different ingredients in thinking: white hat--information, yellow hat--benefits, black hat--risk, green hat--creativity, red hat--gut instinct, and blue hat--process.

Each person uses the same tool, at the same time, on the same challenge-- focused parallel thinking. This cleans up the conversation, puts an end to endless debate and discussions that are going nowhere, and saves everyone time.

"Six Hats is a simple, yet powerful tool that can be learned rapidly and used immediately to achieve long-lasting results. Six Hats has helped our product development group to generate ideas quickly, evaluate them efficiently, and implement action plans effectively." - Laura Donahue,

Increase creative and innovative performance by learning how to:

1. Break the idea killer habit that shuts down the creative process.
2. Generate powerful new ideas that are outside of the mainstream.
3. Follow a productive process for idea evaluation.
4. Work with benefits to determine if an idea is worthwhile exploring further.
5. Identify and assess problems at the appropriate places in the creative process.

6. Consider a broader range of possible solutions, and select the ones that best meet the business need.
7. Include "gut instinct" reactions.
8. Break the tendency to get stuck in the data and facts--information overload which constrains creative effort.
9. Set up clear focus statements to put each person on the same page and avoid confusion.
10. Select opportunities to pursue based on balancing value against risk.
11. Develop action plans to minimize risk.
12. Sell well thought through ideas to management and clients with more confidence.
13. Move from intellectual understanding to skill development.

"The Six Thinking Hats methodology was openly embraced by the advisors and we truly got much more robust output from the meeting than conventional advisory boards." - Betsey King, Professional Relations & Education Manager, AstraZeneca

The Six Thinking Hats® Tool Kit

	Process control. Managing the thinking. • Focus tool. • Thinking agenda development. • Time management plan. • Keep egos and argument in check. • Action planning for next steps, roles, responsibilities, time.
	Data, information, facts — known and needed. • White hat O.P.V. tool — other people's views. • Spectrum of relevance tool. • Range of accuracy tool. • Plan to get necessary white hat data.

	Creativity. Ideas. Alternatives. Solutions. Possibilities. - Top of the head tool idea generating tool. - Random entry tool idea generating tool. - Concept fan idea generating tool. - Time and space for creative thinking.
	Benefits with rationale. The optimistic view. Plus points. - Frames of value tool. - Levels of feasibility tool. - Competitive advantage screen. - Sense of potential.
	Risk assessment. Potential problems. Danger. Difficulties. - Find errors in logic. - Speculate about the future. - Note ways something does not fit. - Set out to remove difficulties with green hat solutions.
	Hunches. Gut instinct. Intuition. Feelings. - Range of feelings tool. - Decision making tool. - Idea sorting tools. - Idea power tools. - Level of commitment tool.
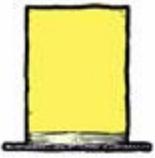
White Hat Thinking: Information That We Have

We can often find more information by taking a close look at what is known than we might expect. It's like detective work: each known fact can be examined for its significance.

Example:

"The dates of employment for each position on this applicant's resume shows that she has never held a job for more than 18 months." (Note: we don't jump to conclusions, we just note the fact.)

White Hat Thinking: Information That We Would Like to Have

Here we include everything that comes to mind, without deciding whether there is a way to get the information or how urgently it is needed. Sometimes there are ways of getting information that at first seems unattainable.

Example:

"It would be nice to know how this applicant would cope if George retires early and she is left to sort out his recruiting system on her own."

White Hat Thinking: Information That We Need

If we focus on information that we need after we've listed everything that we'd like to have, then it's a matter of prioritizing. If we've gone straight to thinking about what is most needed, then it's a matter of discriminating. What's the minimum information we must have before we can move forward?

Example:

"We have to find out if this applicant has experience in integrating social media into a marketing plan before we put her in the final running."

White Hat Thinking: Information That is Missing

Here we are pinpointing exactly what information is missing.

Example:

"We do not know why this candidate has never held a job for more than 18 months."

White Hat Thinking: Sources for Getting any Missing Information

Listing sources of information and planning how to get information are part of white hat thinking. It's never enough to complain that the information is missing. We have to go out and get it.

Example:

"We could ask people who have worked with her in the past."

White Hat Thinking is very important because the quality of any decision made depends on the quality of the information on which it is based.

Red Hat Thinking: Signaling feelings

Red Hat Thinking is very valuable because it makes clear that intuition, feelings, and emotions are going to be expressed as such. There is no need to pretend that they are something else. If feelings are indeed present, it is helpful to know what these feelings are. We can then see what we are dealing with.

Example

"My Red Hat feeling is that I resent the email that was sent out." (Notice that no reasons are given. It is difficult but important not to explain the reasons.)

Red Hat Thinking: Considering Feelings in Decision Making

Feelings and intuition cannot be checked out, so it is unwise to use the Red Hat alone for decision making. However, Intuition, hunches, feelings, and emotions have a high value as "ingredients" in the thinking that leads up to a decision.

Example

"The facts do not support going ahead with the plan, but my Red Hat feeling is that we should explore it further."

Red Hat Thinking: Recognizing a Range of Feelings

Red Hat Thinking includes a wide variety of possible feelings. On the positive/negative scale, people may report everything from detesting an idea to being wildly enthusiastic. More subtle feelings are also included: feeling curious or mildly interested, being uncertain or ambivalent, finding a proposal boring, etc.

When taking the general temperature of a group (rather than feelings about a specific issue), various members may report feeling upset, fearful, excited, angry, determined, exasperated, optimistic, tired, or a host of other internal states. It can be helpful to know what state people are in before you even start the agenda. Remember not to ask for explanations.

Examples

"I'm excited that we're meeting today and can't wait to get started."

"My Red Hat is annoyance."

Yellow Hat Thinking: Values and Benefits

Values are more abstract than benefits. We may sense a value in an idea and then need to look around to see how the value can be enjoyed. Benefits are more specific. Who will reap the benefits? How are the benefits going to be enjoyed?

Examples

"Could we implement this idea in such a way that it improves customer satisfaction?"

"Awarding a bonus for employees at their five-year anniversary may reduce our turn-over."

Yellow Hat Thinking: Reasons for Optimism

In Yellow Hat Thinking, there must be reasons to support the benefits that are claimed. In **Green Hat Thinking**, we note possibilities even if they are vague and unlikely. With the Yellow Hat, we must have reasons why something has value or might work.

Example

"If we include home décor along with our outdoor sporting equipment, we could attract people who don't actually get out much, but who like to feel that they lead a healthy, active lifestyle."

Yellow Hat Thinking: Feasibility

Can this idea be made to work? Will this idea work in practice? We can estimate feasibility given the existing system, and we can also consider modifying either the idea or the system to increase the feasibility.

Example

"How could we feasibly expand the public school system downward to cover children aged three and up?"

Yellow Hat Thinking: Concepts

Sometimes the idea itself is unattractive, but the concept behind the idea has great value. Any idea is only one way of carrying out a concept. There may be better ways. So we keep the concept alive and later use Green Hat Thinking to develop more feasible ways to carry it out.

Example

"This idea is not very attractive but the underlying concept of creating an online store as well as setting up distributors has a lot of potential."

Black Hat Thinking: Exploring Lack of Fit

Whenever something is suggested, we need to make sure the idea fits the circumstances. Black Hat Thinking points out things that do not fit the facts, regulations, strategy, our experience, or our values.

Examples

"Following this suggestion won't fit recent changes in the tax laws. It's no longer to our advantage to do it this way."

"This proposal to change the specs for building that addition would be less costly. But it doesn't fit the building codes."

Black Hat Thinking: Looking at faults

The Black Hat helps us improve on an idea by drawing attention to the faults in the idea. Once we see the faults, we may be able to think of ways to overcome them. Note: We think of ways to overcome them later, when we're using **Green Hat Thinking**.

Example

"If we order these items in larger quantities to take advantage of the volume discount, we will have the expense of renting more storage space to warehouse the inventory."

Black Hat Thinking: Scanning for Potential Problems

Black Hat Thinking can discover potential problems that might arise. Then we can either design ways to avoid the problems or be prepared to address the problems if they do come up.

Example

"If we describe our product in detail on the website, it may be an open invitation for others to copy our design."

Black Hat Thinking: Assessing Yellow Hat Output

Black Hat Thinking is a powerful assessment tool to use after **Yellow Hat Thinking**. Before an idea is put into action, we need to see if it is safe, legal, feasible, profitable, etc.

Example

"We found a lot of benefits to this idea; now let's black hat it."

Green Hat Thinking: The Green Hat as a Formal Signal

People often say that they cannot be creative because they don't have time or their work culture doesn't encourage it. Green Hat Thinking creates a micro culture for innovation at any given moment.

Example

"We need to think of other ways to do this. Put on your Green Hats."

Green Hat Thinking: Expecting Creative Effort

You cannot demand that people have wonderful new ideas, but you can expect them to develop a habit of making a creative effort. Use Green Hat Thinking to call for this effort. Creativity is a matter of investing time in generating ideas. You won't get a wonderful idea every time you use Green Hat Thinking, but if you do not put forth any effort, you may not get any new ideas at all.

Example

"This is a difficult situation. Let's spend three minutes using the Green Hat. Jot down your ideas individually. Then we'll see what we've come up with."

Green Hat Thinking: Adopting a Creative Attitude

What if you're in a Green Hat session and can't think of any ideas? The simplest form of creative effort is to look for alternatives. Even if these are well-known, it's

a creative effort to recall and list them. The minimum creative effort during Green Hat Thinking is to think of alternatives.

Example

"Here's one alternative: We could bundle some of the slower selling items in with more popular ones and sell the combination as a package. What are other options?"

Green Hat Thinking: Green Hat Thinking in Problem Solving

When **Black Hat Thinking** reveals faults, the Green Hat is used to remove these faults. When Black Hat Thinking points out difficulties, Green Hat Thinking tries to overcome these difficulties.

Example

"Let's use the Green Hat right now to see if we can fix the Black Hat problems

Within Edward de Bono's **Six Thinking Hats** process, **Blue Hat Thinking** focuses on managing the thinking process, keeping participants on track, and stating what has been accomplished.

Every Six Thinking Hats sequence begins and ends with Blue Hat Thinking. At the beginning of Six Hat Thinking, the Blue Hat is used to define the focus (what we're going to think about). Under the Blue Hat, we also lay out which hats will be used, in what order, and for what amount of time. During the meeting, the Blue Hat takes requests and maintains discipline.

At the end of a Six Thinking Hats session or meeting, Blue Hat Thinking is used to note conclusions and determine next steps.

Blue Hat Thinking: Defining the Focus

In defining the focus, Blue Hat questions include these kinds of things:

- What is the subject?
- What are we thinking about?
- What is our goal?

Example

"We agreed to hold this meeting to target the customers most likely to keep buying our products during an economic downturn."

Blue Hat Thinking: Setting Out the Agenda

Here we're referring to making a plan for using the hats as well as for how and when we're going to handle any other activity during the meeting.

Example

"Okay, Blue Hat, everyone. We have the conference room for one hour. What hat sequence would make the most of our time?"

Blue Hat Thinking: Maintaining Discipline

When discussions become heated or get off track, there is a need for someone to put on the Blue Hat and control the situation. Otherwise, the thinking can quickly revert to the traditional argument.

Examples

"That is a good **Yellow Hat** point. Right now, however, we are using **Green Hat Thinking** and listing all of the alternatives we can think of."

"The focus of this meeting is how to eliminate unnecessary steps in the ordering process. We can change the focus if we all agree, but we don't want to drift away from it by accident. Let's stick to the original focus for now."

Blue Hat Thinking: Noting Conclusions

It is part of Blue Hat Thinking to state conclusions that a group seems to have reached and get agreement to or revision of the stated conclusions. Even if no decision has been made, the conclusion should note new ideas and approaches that have been considered. A summary is concerned with what has taken place. A conclusion is concerned with what has been achieved.

Example

"The conclusion is that each sales area should decide on its own promotion and price-cutting policy."