

Six Thinking Hats

Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats technique is an extremely useful way to debate an issue, solve a problem or to arrive at an important decision. The technique encourages a group to approach the issue at hand from all possible angles.

About the technique

During a meeting it is often the case that people use different thinking processes, which can make it difficult for a meaningful discussion to take place. For example, if someone wants to put forward a new idea when someone else is still thinking about the practicalities of the last idea, they will not listen properly to each other.

To resolve this situation, de Bono suggests that everyone thinks about the same issues at the same time, by putting on six different metaphorical hats. Each hat has a different colour, and represents a particular type of thought process, as shown below.

1. White Hat



Thought process: Information gathering

The white hat helps a group to think about how information can help them tackle a particular issue.

Questions to ask when using the white hat, can include:

- What information do we have about the issue, e.g. reports, feedback etc?
- What does it tell us?
- What information do we lack?
- What information would we like to have?
- How are we going to get it?

2. Red Hat



Thought process: Feelings, intuition and emotions

The red hat allows everyone in the group to express their feelings, without having to offer a rational explanation, e.g:

- 'I just don't think that idea will work.'
- 'I have a good feeling about doing it this way.'
- 'I've got a hunch that demand for this product is about to fall.'

Red hat thinking can also be used to encourage the group to think how others, e.g. customers, might feel about a particular course of action.

3. Black Hat



Thought process: Caution, criticism and assessing risks

The black hat is the hat of logic and critical judgment (although it should never be seen as the negative hat).

Black hat thinking encourages a group to consider any weak points in an idea or solution, and to work out how to avoid or counter them.

While the black hat can be the most useful of the six hats, de Bono warns against its overuse, as this can kill creative ideas and positive thinking.

4. Yellow Hat



Thought process: Benefits and feasibility

The yellow hat is the optimistic but logical hat. It allows the group to consider the benefits of a new idea or a particular decision, and how feasible this would be.

Yellow hat thinking is useful in helping a group to see the bright side when they are feeling negative or despondent about an issue, and to view any creative ideas in a rational light.

5. Green Hat



Thought process: Creativity, new ideas and possibilities

The green hat is the hat of creativity, and is designed to encourage a group to seek new approaches and innovative solutions. Every idea, however 'way out' should be heard and not criticised at this stage.

Questions to ask can include:

- Is there a new way we could do this?
- What about approaching the issue from the opposite viewpoint?
- Are there any alternatives we haven't yet considered?

6. Blue Hat



Thought process: Process control

The blue hat represents the whole thinking process. It is normally used by the chairperson or person who has arranged

the meeting or discussion. By using the blue hat, the chairperson can organise and control the thinking process in order to make the discussion as productive as possible.

The chairperson can use the blue hat to direct the group towards another type of thinking. For example, if the group is running out of ideas, they may suggest the group returns to some creative green hat thinking. They may also respond to participants' suggestions to change hats.

Putting the technique into practice

1. When you have an issue or problem to discuss, print out the coloured hats (these can be found in [Supplementary Resources](#)) and attach each to a separate sheet of flipchart paper, then pin them up around the room prior to your meeting or discussion. Alternatively, you may ask the group to suggest what issue they would like to explore when you meet.
2. Start the session by explaining that the Six Hats technique is designed to encourage everyone to approach a problem or issue from a variety of different perspectives.
3. Starting with the red hat, discuss the issue at hand, by asking the group to move round the room, 'wearing' each hat in order. When the group runs out of ideas and the discussion tails off, move on to the next hat. You may allow the group to move back and forward between hats if necessary, but it is important to make sure that each hat is used.
4. You or someone else in the group should adopt the blue hat, in order to facilitate the meeting, and ensure that everyone is 'wearing' the same hat at the same time. This person should also capture all the group's ideas and thinking on the appropriate flipchart sheet when 'wearing' each different hat.
5. At the end of your session, agree actions with the group and assign activities as appropriate.

Benefits of the Six Thinking Hats technique

Because the technique allows an issue or problem to be examined from each angle in turn, no single view (or person) is allowed to dominate a meeting or group discussion. Ideas, decisions and solutions that are reached using the Six Thinking Hats method should, therefore, be more robust and effective than they might otherwise have been. The technique also encourages participants to approach any future issues or problems they encounter more holistically.

Although most commonly used by a group, the Six Thinking Hats technique can also be used effectively by any individual who wishes to take a rounded approach to issues and problems.

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