



The Six Thinking Hats

Have you ever wished you and your team could be more effective and creative in analyzing a problem, business opportunity, or new product or service?

Would it be helpful if you could change team dynamics to enable better decisions and enhance implementation?

For most people, the answer is yes, and a great solution is to utilize Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats. This method uses parallel thinking, where all team members consider the same aspect (such, as what is good about this) of a solution at the same time before moving to another aspect to consider (such as what is bad about this). This moves the group from a confrontational, argumentative style, where often the loudest, shrewdest, or person with the biggest title wins, to a collaborative process where the best decision is reached and implemented.

Keeping various foci separate helps ensure each consideration is thorough and that all team members work together in a respectful, creative manner. This method also leads to team members finding benefits and drawbacks they never would have found using the traditional method.

The method generally involves a team first identifying all facts they know or need to know about a situation and/or proposed solutions, if any (White Hat). The team would next move to how each member feels about the situation and proposed solutions, if any (Red Hat). The team could then move into a creative phase, where the entire team focuses on generating ideas that could lead to better solutions (Green Hat). The team could next focus on what is good about a particular solution, with all members regardless of what they think, identifying something good (Yellow Hat). The team could then focus on what is deficient about a proposed solution (Black Hat). This process would continue (under the guidance of the Blue Hat) until a problem is sufficiently identified and quantified, and a solution or course of action is selected.

Here are the Six Thinking Hats in greater detail.

1. **White Hat: Facts and Information.** This hat is about objective information. When wearing the White Hat, the focus is solely on identifying available data, known facts, and information gaps. It is important team members remain neutral. During this phase, the group would ask questions like: What do we know? What information do we currently have? What is the relevant background and historical data? What are the historical trends? How do we know these "facts"? What do we need to find out? What information are we missing?
2. **Red Hat: Feelings and Intuition.** The Red Hat provides a space for emotional expression. Under this hat, participants can share their gut feelings, intuitions, and emotions about the issue without needing to provide logical justifications. This acknowledges that feelings are a valid part of the human experience and decision-making process. Some of the questions could be: What is our gut reaction to this idea? How does this situation make us feel? How do we think our customers or stake holders might feel about this?
3. **Yellow Hat: Optimism and Benefits.** The Yellow Hat focuses on optimism, positive outcomes, and the potential value of an idea or course of action. This hat pushes the team to find constructive benefits and explore the potential rewards of a proposed course of action. Some of the questions could be: What are the potential benefits of this idea? What is the value we can get from this? How will we/our employees/our customers benefit from this? How can we make this work?

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4. **Black Hat: Caution and Critical Thinking.**

This is the “devil’s advocate” hat, focusing on critical thinking, risks, weaknesses, and potential problems. It’s a crucial part of the process, as it helps identify potential pitfalls and exposes a plan’s vulnerabilities.

Questions to consider include: What are the weaknesses or flaws in this idea? What are the risks? What could go wrong? Do we have the necessary resources to do this, including money, people, and time? What barriers or obstacles might prevent us from completing this?

5. **Green Hat: Creativity and Alternatives.**

This is the creative hat, dedicated to generating new ideas, possibilities, and alternatives. It encourages “out-of-the-box” thinking and innovation by asking: What are other ways we could approach this? What are some completely new ideas we haven’t explored yet? What if we got rid of the product

altogether and started from scratch? What would we do if we had no budget or unlimited resources? What would a competitor do in this situation?

6. **Blue Hat: Process Control.** The Blue Hat is the facilitator’s or chairperson’s hat. It is used to manage the thinking process itself, which includes setting the agenda, choosing which hat to utilize and in what order (which could include moving back and forth between hats, and keeping the team focused on one hat at a time). Preparation is key. Before each session, the facilitator must define the meeting’s objective, whether it’s problem-solving, brain storming, or decision-making, and create an agenda. The facilitator guides, and may participate in, the discussions without pushing their own conclusions. The facilitator also summarizes outcomes and keeps the project on track with follow-up action items and setting the next meeting.

Give this a try at your next meeting and watch how the team moves together through analyzing an issue or solution and the great results they get.

