

Six Thinking Hats

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Individuals and organizations want to be creative and develop ideas that effectively address pressing issues and opportunities. Edward DeBono developed the Six Thinking Hats method to guide participants in managing the confusion intense thinking creates and published his parallel thinking concepts in 1985. Six Thinking Hats creates a common sign language for thinking through issues and creating viable action plans.

White Hat focuses on available data (facts and figures) while remaining neutral. Participants are encouraged to review existing information, search for gaps in knowledge, analyze past trends, and extrapolate key learnings from historical data.

Questions

- What information do we have?
- What information do we need?
- What information is mission?
- What questions do we need to ask?
- How are we going to get the information we need?
- Is it fact or belief?

Red Hat uses intuition, gut reaction, and robust emotion. Encourages participants to think about how other people will react emotionally and try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning. Participants do not need to explain or justify individual expressions of feelings.

Questions

- How do you react to this?
- What is your intuition/opinion about this?
- Gut feelings . . .Hunches or insights . . .Likes/dislikes?
- What emotions [fear, anger, hatred, suspicion, jealousy, or love (53)] are involved here?

Black Hat is the basis of logical, critical thinking offering careful, cautious, and defensive insights. Try to see what is wrong; why it might not work; what are the dangers, problems, and obstacles; what are the deficiencies in the thinking process. It allows you to eliminate the negatives, alter plans, or prepare contingency plans to counter any problems.

Questions

- What will happen if we take this action?
- What can go wrong if we proceed with this idea or implement this suggestion?
- What are the weaknesses that we need to overcome?
- How does this “fit” with our (or other’s) experience, policy, strategy, values, ethics, and resources?
- How will people respond?
- Will it work . . . be profitable . . . be acceptable?

Black Hat thinking is not an argument, but helps to make plans “tougher” and more resilient. It can help to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. There is a danger of overusing black hat thinking by remaining in the critical mode and delaying green and yellow hat thinking.

Yellow Hat is a deliberate search for the positive (optimistic viewpoint) through exploration and speculation defining the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking is constructive blending “curiosity, pleasure, greed, and the desire to make things happen” (91) enhancing the proposal by generating alternative ideas “based on experience, available information, logical deduction, hints, trends, guesses, and hopes” (98).

Questions

- What ideas, suggestions, or proposals are there for how to approach this problem? . . .to achieve this goal?
- What is the merit of the approach?
- What positives can you see in this idea?
- What could be done to make this work better? Faster? More economically?
- Under what conditions could this work?
- What would it take to make this proposal acceptable?
- What is your vision for how this could work?

Green Hat stands for energy and creativity. This is where you generate new, innovative ideas and develop creative solutions to a problem. It is freewheeling way of thinking in which there is little criticism of ideas, and “movement” is made using provocation to move “forward with an idea or from an idea” (125) seeking alternative solutions. Green Hat thinking must involve shaping the idea for the user or “buyer”.

Questions

- Let’s think “outside the box.”
- What are some fresh ideas or approaches?
- This is the time for any wild or crazy or “far out” idea.
- What are all of our alternatives here?
- Aren’t there some other alternatives . . . perhaps too outside the box?

- This idea won’t work in its present form, but can we shape it or adapt it so that it might be usable?
- We’ve always done it this way; let’s “green hat” it . . .does it have to be done this way?

Blue Hat is process control “thinking about thinking”. This is the hat worn by people chairing or facilitating the session. Blue Hat may be used at the beginning of the session to set the agenda or the sequence for using the “hats” and at the end of the session when seeking a summary and next steps. Blue Hat focuses on questioning (fishing and shooting – p.153) and provides the structure for use of other hats and other thinking/problem-solving tools

Questions: Define the Issue and Process

- What is the problem?
- Is this the real problem?
- What is the underlying problem?
- Why do we need to solve this problem?
- Where should we go first?
Where do we start?
- What should we be thinking about?

Questions: Assessment of the Process

- Are we getting anywhere?
- What factors should we consider?
- What sort of outcome would we regard as successful?
- What have we achieved so far?

Questions: Management/Facilitation

- Could you put on the “X” hat?
- You’re not using the “X” hat.

References:

- de Bono, E. (1999). *Six Thinking Hats*. Little, Brown and Company. Boston.
 - MindToolshttp://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_07.htm