

Six Thinking Hats

There are several tools that can be used by both individuals and groups to support Creation and Synthesis. One of these tools is Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats. The purpose of the Six Thinking Hats is to unscramble thinking so a thinker can use one thinking mode at a time – instead of trying to do everything at once. The more the hats are used, the more they will become part of the thinking culture. Instead of wasting time in argument or drifting discussion, a brisk and disciplined approach will occur if you adopt these different modes of thinking hats (de Bono, 1985).

The great value of the hats is that they provide thinking roles. A thinker can take on the role of thinking with a particular thinking hat on. Without the formality of the hats, some thinkers would remain permanently stuck in one mode (usually the black hat mode). Practise and skill is needed in using the Six Thinking Hats. de Bono (1985) describes how to use the six hats.

Below are descriptions of the type of thinking associated with each of the Thinking Hats.

Black Hat

Logical negatives, Devil's Advocate, why it won't work

The black hat thinker points out risks and dangers. Black hat thinking may point out the errors in the thinking procedure and method itself. Black hat thinking may project an idea into the future to see what might fail or go wrong. Black hat thinking can ask 'negative questions'. Black hat thinking should not be used to cover negative indulgence or negative feelings which should make use of the red hat.

Yellow Hat

Logical positives, optimistic, constructive

Yellow hat thinking probes and explores for value and benefit. Yellow hat thinking then strives to find logical support for this value and benefit. Yellow hat thinking is constructive and generative. From yellow hat thinking comes concrete proposals and suggestions. Yellow hat thinking is concerned with 'making things happen'.

White Hat

Pure facts, data, figures and information

When wearing the white thinking hat, the thinker should imitate the computer. White hat thinking is a discipline and a direction. The thinker strives to be more neutral and more objective in the presentation of information.

Red Hat

Emotions and feelings, hunches and intuition

The red hat allows the thinker to say "This is how I feel about the matter". The red hat provides a convenient method for a thinker to switch in and out of the 'feeling' mode in a way that is not possible without such a device. The red hat allows a thinker to explore the feelings of others by asking for a 'red hat review'. When a thinker is using the red hat there should never be any attempt to justify the feelings or to provide a logical basis for them.

Green Hat

Creative, provocative, going beyond the obvious

The person who puts on the green hat is going to use creative thinking. The search for alternatives is a fundamental aspect of green hat thinking. There is a need to go beyond the known, the obvious and the satisfactory. Provocation is an important part of green hat thinking. A provocation is used to take us out of our usual patterns of thinking. There are many ways of setting up provocations including the random word method.

Blue Hat

Summaries, overviews, thinking about the thinking generated by the other hats

The blue hat thinker organises the thinking itself. Blue hat thinking is “thinking about the thinking needed to explore the subject”. The blue hat thinker calls for the use of other hats. The blue hat thinker defines the subjects towards which the thinking is to be directed. A blue hat thinker sets the focus, defines the problems and shapes the questions. Blue hat thinking is responsible for summaries, overviews and conclusions. Even when the specific blue hat thinking role is assigned to one person, it is still open to anyone to offer blue hat comments and suggestions.

The sequence in which the hats are used is important. The sequence that is most supportive of Creation and Synthesis is:

1. Black Hat
2. Yellow Hat
3. White Hat
4. Red Hat
5. Green Hat
6. Blue Hat

Reference:

de Bono, E. (1985) Six thinking hats. Key Porter Books Ltd, London, England.