

Six hats

In a few words: *A technique for changing the way you are thinking about any particular problem.*

In the early eighties Edward de Bono created the Six Thinking Hats method. The method is essentially a framework for thinking and can incorporate lateral and other forms of thinking. Valuable judgmental thinking has its place in the system but is not allowed to dominate as in conventional thinking.

The six hats represent six modes of thinking and are directions to think rather than labels for thinking. In other words, the hats are used proactively rather than reactively.


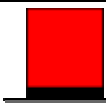

The method promotes fuller input from more people. In de Bono's words it "separates ego from performance". Everyone is able to contribute to the exploration without denting egos as they are just using the yellow hat, for example. The six hats system encourages performance rather than ego defence. People can contribute under any hat even though they initially support the opposite view.

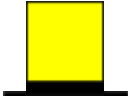


The key point is that a hat is a direction to think rather than a label for thinking. The key theoretical reasons to use the Six Thinking Hats are to:

- Encourage Parallel Thinking
- Encourage full-spectrum thinking
- Separate ego from performance

There are six metaphorical hats and the thinker can put on or take off to indicate the type of thinking being used. This putting on and taking off is essential. The hats must never be used to categorize individuals, even though their behaviour may seem to invite this.

When done as a group exercise, traditionally everybody wears the same hat at the same time. It can also sometimes also be effective to have each person wearing a different hat, so long as they are periodically rotated around the group, providing for an effective form of role-play.

 White Hat	This covers facts, figures, information needs and gaps. "I think we need some white hat thinking at this point..." means Let's drop the arguments and proposals, and look at the data base."
 Red Hat	This covers intuition, feelings and emotions. The red hat allows the thinker to put forward an intuition without any need to justify it. "Putting on my red hat, I think this is a terrible proposal." Usually feelings and intuition can only be introduced into a discussion if they are supported by logic. Usually the feeling is genuine but the logic is spurious. The red hat gives full permission to a thinker to put forward his or her feelings on the subject at the moment.
 Black Hat	This is the hat of judgment and caution. It is a most valuable hat. It is not in any sense an inferior or negative hat. The black hat is used to point out why a suggestion does not fit the facts, the available experience, the system in use, or the policy that is being followed.

	The black hat must always be logical.
 Yellow Hat	This is the logical positive. Why something will work and why it will offer benefits. It can be used in looking forward to the results of some proposed action, but can also be used to find something of value in what has already happened.
 Green Hat	This is the hat of creativity, alternatives, proposals, what is interesting, provocations and changes.
 Blue Hat	This is the overview or process control hat. It looks not at the subject itself but at the 'thinking' about the subject. "Putting on my blue hat, I feel we should do some more green hat thinking at this point." In technical terms, the blue hat is concerned with meta-cognition

References

De Bono, Edward, *Six thinking hats*, Little, Brown and Company, 1985