

Six Thinking Hats

From De Bono E. (1999) *Six Thinking Hats*, US Little Brown & Co (Pap).

This is a well known method of enhancing team communication created by Edward De Bono. It fosters collaboration, creativity and innovation. There are six metaphorical hats. You 'put on' or 'take off' one of these hats to indicate the type of thinking being used. 'Putting them on' and 'taking them off' is essential: you must all be wearing the same hat at the same time. The hats must never be used to categorise people, even though their behaviour may seem to invite this.

White Hat thinking

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 suggestions and look at the data.'

Red Hat thinking

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. Often the feeling is genuine but the logic is questionable. The red hat gives full permission to a thinker to put forward his or her feelings on the subject at the moment.

Black Hat thinking

This is the hat of judgement 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 path that is being followed. The black hat must always be logical.

Yellow Hat thinking

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 thinking

This is the hat of creativity, alternatives, proposals, what is interesting, provocations and changes.

Blue Hat thinking

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 think we should do some more green hat thinking.'

Thinking about the thinking ...

The six hats represent six modes of thinking and are aids to thinking rather than labels for thinking. 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: they are just using one hat or rather. The six hats system encourages performance rather than ego defence. People can contribute under any hat even though they initially support the opposite view. You don't get stuck defending something you said previously.

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 (ie being able to hold different views while a decision is in the process of being made).
- encourage full-spectrum thinking (ie the full range of possibilities)
- separate ego from performance. (You are communicating about an assignment: it's not personal. This technique keeps the personal out.)