

## Edward de Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats'

Use of Edward de Bono's concept of the 'Six Thinking Hats' has been invaluable to us at mdp management consultancy ltd in our work with clients in developing leaders and teams. With our emphasis on EQ (emotional intelligence) and its development for effective leadership and teamwork, the most memorable quote of all for us is:

"In the end, all decisions are really 'red hat'. We lay out the factors but the final decision is emotional"

Benefits of the Six Hats Method – p175

For a clear understanding of the 'Six Hats' concept and its application you need to read the book. Published by Penguin, England (1985, revised 1999) ISBN 0-14-029666-2. Details:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0140296662/reviews/026-5052680-2306820>

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### Overview of 'Six Thinking Hats'

Thinking complexity often leads to confusion. The '6 Hats' method of thinking simplifies the process by dealing with emotion, logic, hope, information and creativity separately and within a coherent framework.

Edward de Bono's (p150) suggests:

"Thinking often proceeds as drift and waffle and reaction to what turns up from moment to moment. There is a background sense of purpose, but this is never spelled out either as an overall objective or sub objectives. Suggestions, criticism, information and plain emotion are all mixed together in a sort of thinking stew. It seems to be a matter of messing around until a thinker stumbles on some tried approach that seems to achieve what is desired. It is a haphazard exploration of experience strongly guided by negative criticism. The underlying assumption is that reasonably intelligent people provided with enough background information will, in the course of the discussion, list the action options and choose the most suitable"

Brief definitions of the 6 hats are as follows:

- ◆ The white hat – is objective / deals with facts (not opinion)
- ◆ The red hat – is about emotions, feelings
- ◆ The yellow hat – provides a positive focus
- ◆ The blue hat – defines focus/control of thinking
- ◆ The green hat – generates new ideas/concepts
- ◆ The black hat – points out negatives/ points of caution

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More detailed definitions:

- ◆ The white hat - indicates neutrality - imitates the computer. Neutral and objective – does not offer interpretations and opinions. Uses focusing questions to obtain information. Two tier system of information – 1<sup>st</sup>) checked and proven facts, 2<sup>nd</sup>) believed to be true, but have not yet been fully checked. Refers to spectrum of likelihood ranging from 'always true' to 'never true'. Strives to be more neutral and more objective in the presence of information.
- ◆ The red hat - allows the thinker to say "This is how I feel about the matter". Legitimises emotions and feelings as an important part of thinking. Makes feelings visible so that they become part of the thinking 'map', and part of the value system that chooses the route on the map. Allows the thinker to explore the feelings of others by asking for a red hat view. Never attempts to justify feelings or provide a logical basis for them. Covers 2 broad types of feelings 1) ordinary emotions such as: like, dislike – to more subtle, such as suspicion, 2) more complex judgements such as hunch, intuition, taste, aesthetic feeling - and other not justified types of feeling.
- ◆ The yellow hat – is positive and constructive. Symbolises sunshine, brightness and optimism. Concerned with positive assessment and covers a positive spectrum from logical and practical at one end, to dreams, visions and hopes at the other. Probes and explores for value and benefit – seeks to put forward soundly based optimism. Constructive and generative – generates concrete proposals and suggestions. Not concerned with mere positive euphoria (red hat), nor directly with creating new ideas (green hat)
- ◆ The blue hat - organises the thinking itself. Thinking about the thinking needed to explore the subject. Like the 'conductor of the orchestra' – calls for the use of the other hats. Defines the subjects towards which the thinking is to be directed. Sets the focus, defines the problems and shapes the questions. Determines the thinking tasks that are to be carried through. Responsible for summaries, overviews and conclusions. Stops argument and insists on the map type of thinking – enforces discipline.
- ◆ The green hat – is for creative thinking. Symbolises fertility, growth and the value of seeds. Fundamental aspects:- the search for alternatives – going beyond the known, the obvious and the satisfactory. Used to consider at any point, whether there might be alternative ideas. The idiom of movement replaces that of judgement. Provocation an important part – used to take out of usual patterns of thinking. Generates new concepts and perceptions.
- ◆ The black hat – is concerned with caution. Considers risks, dangers, obstacles, potential problems and the downside of a suggestion. Black hat questions could include "Does this suggestion fit our policy and strategy?" "Does it fit our ethics and values?" "Does it fit the known facts and experiences of others?" Can be abused and overused if it is the only mode of thinking.

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Memorable quotes from the book include:

- ◆ "Computers are not yet emotional (though we shall probably have to make them emotional if they are to think intelligently)  
The White Hat - p 27
- ◆ "Unfortunately, Western thinking, with its argument habits, prefers to give a conclusion first and then bring in the facts to support that conclusion. In contrast, in the map-making type of thinking I am advocating, we have to make the map first and then choose the route"  
The White Hat - p27
- ◆ "In a normal business discussion you are not supposed to allow your emotions to enter in. They enter in anyway – you merely disguise them as logic"  
The Red Hat – p47
- ◆ Any good decision must be emotional in the end.....when we have used thinking to make the map, our choice of route is determined by values and emotions".  
Red Hat Thinking –p53
- ◆ "Intuition .....is the result of a complex judgement based on experience"  
Red Hat Thinking – p57
- ◆ "The positive spectrum ranges from the over-optimistic at one extreme to the logical-practical at the other"  
Yellow Hat Thinking p97

Source:

'Six Thinking Hats' by Edward de Bono, published by Penguin, England (1985, revised 1999) ISBN 0-14-029666-2.

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