

Six Thinking Hats of Dr Edward de Bono

One of the most popular leadership models is Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats.

Edward de Bono considered human cognition and thought to be of several types, approaches, or orientations. He theorized that of these approaches, most people used only one or two of the approaches and that people developed thinking habits which in turn limited people to those approaches.

de Bono believed that if the various approaches could be identified and a system of their use developed which could be taught, that people could be more productive in meetings and in collaborating within groups and teams by deliberately using the approaches.

As a result of his investigations, de Bono was able to describe a process of deliberately adopting a particular approach to a problem as an implementation of Parallel Thinking™ as well as an aid to lateral thinking. Six different approaches are described, and each is symbolised by the act of putting on a coloured hat, either actually or imaginatively. This he suggests can be done either by individuals working alone or in groups.

- The Red Hat represents Emotional thinking.
- The Yellow Hat represents Positive thinking.
- The Black Hat represents Critical thinking.
- The White Hat is purely the facts.
- The Green Hat is Creative thinking.
- The Blue Hat represents the Big Picture, sort of looking at it from all the viewpoints.

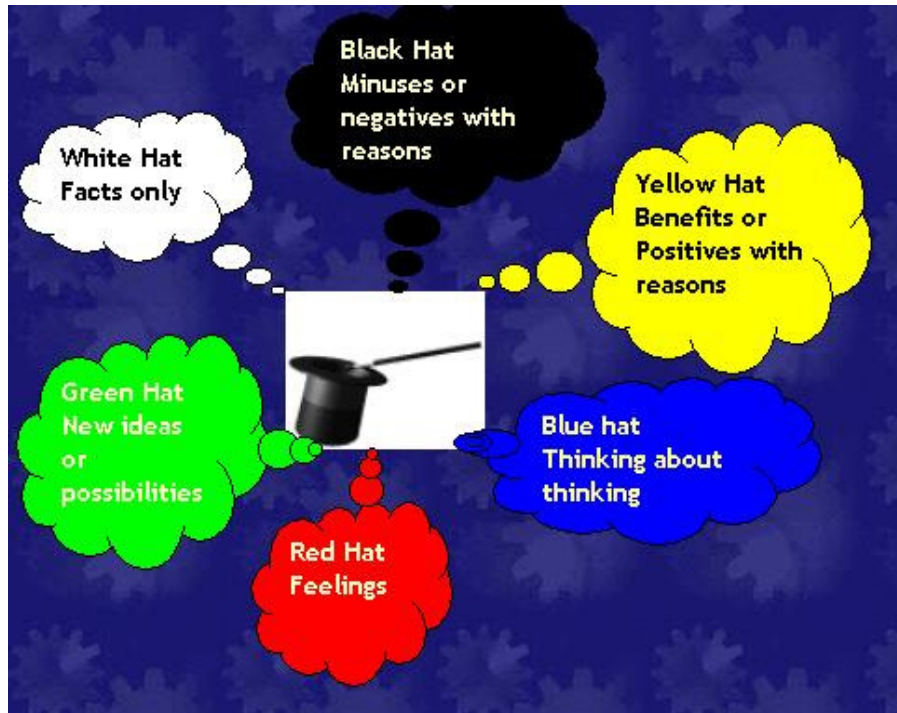
These Thinking Hats have recently been incorporated in numerous school business programs.

de Bono's Six Hats

- White hat (Blank sheet): Information & reports, facts and figures (*objective*)
- Red hat (Fire): Intuition, opinion & emotion, feelings (*subjective*)
- Yellow hat (Sun): Praise, positive aspects, why it will work (*objective*)
- Black hat (Judge's robe): Criticism, judgment, negative aspects, (*objective*)
- Green hat (Plant): Alternatives, new approaches & 'everything goes', idea generation & provocations (*speculative/creative*)
- Blue hat (Sky): "Big Picture," "Conductor hat," "Meta hat," "thinking about thinking", overall process (*overview*)

Main purposes

- Focus and improve the thinking process
- Encourage creative, parallel and lateral thinking
- Improve communication
- Speed up decision making
- Avoid debate



de Bono's thinking hats diagram

Edward de Bono's thinking hats were developed in order to illustrate the various methods of thinking utilized by individuals within problem solving processes.

Each of the hats represents a method of thinking commonly used by individuals within problem solving. It is hoped that through such representations more individuals will be able to recognise the various methods of thinking that they utilise and therefore better understand their own thinking processes.

It is also hoped that individuals will be able to better understand the thinking processes of others and therefore even incorporate some of these processes within their own thinking. Included below is a description of each of the hats and the thinking processes that they represent. Their use will be illustrated through the analysis of a simple classroom issue. By doing so the problem can be more easily deconstructed and therefore an answer more easily sought.

For example take the following problem into consideration.

Issue – Students are talking while their teacher is talking

White hat – factual (state the facts)

- Students are talking while the teacher is talking
- There is noise and therefore other students are distracted and can't hear the teacher
- Students don't know what to do once instructions are given
- Many students become distracted and off task resulting in the failure to complete work

Red Hat – emotional (state the emotions)

- The teacher feels offended
- Students become frustrated because they can't hear directions
- Those talking enjoy joking around and being heard.

Black Hat – critical (negative aspects)

- Time is wasted
- Learning is compromised
- Those speaking feel that listeners do not respect them and do not wish to hear what they are saying

Yellow hat – positive (positive aspects)

- Everyone is able to say what is on their minds
- It can be fun
- Not only the 'smart kids' get to speak
- One doesn't have to wait to share their ideas and therefore risk forgetting information

Green hat – creative (creative ideas that originate as a result of seeing information in a new light)

- Teacher will be more aware about the amount of time they spend talking
- Teacher will try to incorporate interaction from a variety of different students rather than just the 'smart kids'
- Students will resist the urge to say whatever is on their mind. They will think about what they have to say and whether it is relevant to the topic
- Students will take into account whether their comment will interfere with other people's learning

Blue hat – process control (ensure each hat gets used effectively/the big picture)

- Teacher learns that they need to monitor the amount of time that they spend talking within the classroom
- Teacher needs to involve all students within discussions
- Teacher needs to recognize that some students need thinking time before responding. Allowing these students time to compute solutions promotes wider participation and increased learning
- Students realize that their talking makes the speaker feel unappreciated and disrespected
- Students realize that their comments are jeopardizing the learning of other individuals
- Students realize that talking out of time demonstrates a lack of self-discipline and that not all comments require sharing

Summary

Utilizing a variety of approaches within thinking and problem solving allows the issue to be addressed from a variety of angles, thus servicing the needs of all individuals concerned. The thinking hats are useful for learners as they illustrate the need for individuals to address problems from a variety of different angles. They also aid learners as they allow the individual to recognize any deficiencies in the way that they approach problem solving, thus allowing them to rectify such issues.

de Bono believed that the key to a successful use of the Six Think Hats methodology was the deliberate focusing of the discussion on a particular approach as needed during the meeting or collaboration session.

For instance, a meeting may be called to review a particular problem and to develop a solution for the problem. The Six Thinking Hats method could then be used in a sequence to first of all explore the problem, and then develop a set of solutions, and to finally choose a solution through critical examination of the solution set.

So the meeting may start with everyone assuming the **Blue** hat to discuss how the meeting will be conducted and to develop the goals and objectives. The discussion may then move to **Red** hat thinking in order to collect opinions and reactions to the problem. This phase may also be used to develop constraints for the actual solution such as who will be affected by the problem and/or solutions. Next the discussion may move to the (**Yellow** then) **Green** hat in order to generate ideas and possible solutions. Next the discussion may move between **White** hat thinking as part of developing information and **Black** hat thinking to develop criticisms of the solution set.

Because everyone is focused on a particular approach at any one time, the group tends to be more collaborative than if one person is reacting emotionally (Red hat) while another person is trying to be objective (White hat) and still another person is being critical of the points which emerge from the discussion (Black hat).

Exercises for Further Exploration and Consideration

- Use the six hat thinking method in a business meeting to address an issue. Document the outcomes of each hat's perspective. Be sure everyone understands the model that's being used and sticks with the process. This may require a facilitator well versed in the method.
- Use the six hat thinking method on a personal issue, either on your own, going through each hat's perspective, or in discussion of the issue with someone else. Again, be sure to write down the outcomes of each hat. In this case, be sure both parties are informed about how the process works. This could be something you choose to have your coach facilitate with you.

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