

GROUP PROCEDURE FOR SIX THINKING HATS*

Six Thinking Hats helps a group to sort out feelings, intuitions, solutions, causes, hopes, criticisms, and factual observations so they don't get confused when discussing a problem in a group! Six Thinking Hats systematically employs different types of "intelligence" ("hats") to more carefully map the problem space. The idea is to use the Six Thinking Hats **sequentially** to create more clarity and better organize our different modes of thinking at a particular point in time.

Overall Process

- 1) State the problem or challenge to be addressed.
- 2) Adopt each of the hats **one at a time**, together, as a group. The hats must never be used to label individuals. The goal is to become more aware of the "hat" you are using on the problem.
- 3) The usual sequence is RED -> WHITE -> YELLOW -> BLACK -> GREEN; (The facilitator adopts the BLUE hat, guiding the process and recording comments on a board or flipchart.)
- 4) After GREEN is used to generate solutions, the group can alternate YELLOW and BLACK hats for each solution. May also alternate YELLOW and BLACK for different major parts of a problem.

HAT DESCRIPTION	KEY POINTS	TYPICAL QUESTIONS**
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RED HAT thinking (Personal feelings, emotions, preferences, intuitions, and insights) Example: "Putting on my RED hat, I think this is a terrible proposal." The RED hat permits a thinker to put forward feelings on the subject without reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be used early to get feelings, emotions, and intuitions out in the open, otherwise, they might go underground and resurface masquerading as BLACK, YELLOW, or WHITE hat. • No justifying feelings! (Logic belongs in YELLOW or BLACK hat.) Emotional negatives belong here, <i>not</i> in BLACK hat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What gut feelings do we have about this situation? • Do we have any strong feelings or preferences? What are they? • What does our intuition tells us about this situation? How will others feel about this situation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHITE HAT thinking (Data, objectivity, factual accuracy) Covers facts, figures, information needs and gaps. Example: "I think we need some white hat thinking at this point..." means "Let's drop the arguments and opinions, and look at the data base." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No advocacy! Just observations. . • Distinguish verified versus unverified facts. Disputed facts can be listed and labeled as such. (For example: Wikipedia does this.) No opinions – but others' opinions can be reported. • For indirectly observed facts, note certainty of facts using " % likelihood." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information do we have versus what information is missing? • How reliable is the information we have? • What information is missing? • Is this statement proven? What is the probability (" likelihood) that this statement is true?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YELLOW HAT thinking (Logical positive, constructive optimism) Why something will work and how it can offer benefits.) Example: "This approach has been known to improve the kind of problem we are discussing." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventors and entrepreneurs often use YELLOW hat thinking, but it may not be well developed in most other people. • Every creative idea deserves some YELLOW hat thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the most promising areas? How so? What benefits might we expect here? • What factors could most readily work in our favor? How so? • What's the best thing that could happen to us in this situation? How could that happen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLACK HAT thinking (Logical negative; doubt and pessimism) The devil's advocate, BLACK hat points out why an idea doesn't fit with facts or experience. Example: "I am concerned about...Can you help me with this concern?" Usually follows YELLOW hat thinking for balance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always logical, may challenge facts or assumptions. • Is often the easiest hat, due to cultural bias toward skepticism. • No arguments or taking sides (this quickly becomes RED hat thinking)! • For indirectly observed facts, note certainty of facts using " % likelihood." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What limits could work against success? • What are the dangers here? • Is there anything so far that seems unrealistic? Why? • What's the worst that could happen? How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GREEN HAT thinking (Creative magic) The hat of creative solutions, alternatives, & proposals, what's possible. Includes wild ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any and all wild ideas are invited and permitted. • If necessary, group can evaluate solutions by alternating between YELLOW and BLACK hats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the possibilities? • Could this be done in a different way? How so? • Is this situation analogous to anything else in our experience?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLUE HAT thinking (Long term, group process perspective) The hat of group process leader. This hat is with the quality of thinking. Example: "Putting on my blue hat, Let's do some more green hat thinking on this." BLUE hat leads the exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects "wisdom" in the sense of valuing each effective patterns of thinking. • Works to include each thinking hat in a systematic way. • Concern for thorough mapping of problem space to arrive at best outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we spending too much time blaming? • Can we summarize your viewpoint on this? • Shall we try some GREEN hat thinking to get some ideas on this?

*See: De Bono, E. *Six Thinking Hats*, Boston: Little Brown, 1985; and Peterson, T. & Lunsford, D., Parallel Thinking: A technique for group interaction and problem solving, *Journal of Management Education*, Aug. 1998; 22, 4; p. 537-554. **Questions adapted from De Bono, E. *Serious Creativity*, Harper Business, New York, 1992.