

HOW TO GUIDE: Six Thinking Hats

OVERVIEW: Guide to use a technique to look at decision making from different points of view, to move away from habitual thinking styles for a more rounded view of the situation

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide a guide for problem solving
- Encourage different types of thinking
- Minimize the conflict when people with different thinking styles discuss a problem
- Lead to more creative thinking and better communication

ACTIVITY:

The Six Thinking Hats is a technique that can be used to look at problems or decisions from different points of view. It forces you to think in a way outside of your comfort zone and helps members of a group to recognize the different thinking styles of others.

Each hat represents a different style of thinking:



White	Red	Black	Yellow	Green	Blue
Facts	Emotion	Caution	Optimism	Creativity	Process
Objective, neutral thinking in terms of facts, numbers and information	Emotional, with judgements, suspicion and intuitions.	Negative, seeks risks and things about why something won't work.	Positive, optimistic, clear, effective and constructive.	Creative, seeks alternatives. Develop creative solutions to a problem.	The Meta hat. Thinking about thinking.
Focus on the data available.	Look at problems using intuition, gut reaction and emotion.	Look cautiously and defensively at all the bad points of the decision. Try to see why it won't work.	Helps the group think positively and to see all the benefits of the decision and value in it.	A freewheeling way of thinking with little criticism of ideas.	Role is to keep an overview of what thinking is necessary.



When to use this technique:

- To explore options (brainstorm) and make a decision
- To minimize confrontation
- To illustrate distinct perspectives, and become more aware of different opinions
- To examine hypothetical scenarios

You can use the Six Thinking Hats on your own or as a group. The hats can be real or imagined.

In a group, the role of the facilitator is to:

- Define the focus of thinking or decision to be made
- Plan the timelines
- Ask for and direct changes in thinking as needed
- Capture a final summary of the thinking

This technique allows emotion and scepticism to be brought into problem solving in an overt way.

When this activity is done in a group, start by having everybody wear the same hat at the same time. This activity can also be done on your own, working through each of the hats.

Questions you might ask while wearing each hat:

White:

- What information do we have here?
- What information is missing?
- What information would we like to have? How are we going to get this information?
- What is relevant? What is most important?

Red:

- My gut-feeling is that...
- How do I feel about this right now?
- What is my reaction to this?
- My intuition is telling me...

Black:

- Is this true?
- Will this work?
- What are the weaknesses?
- What is wrong with this idea?



Yellow:

- What are the benefits of this option?
- Why is this proposal preferable?
- What are the positive assets of this option?
- How can we make this work?
- Why will this idea work? Why is it worth doing?

Green:

- Are there any other ideas here?
- Are there any additional alternatives?
- Could we do this in a different way?
- Could there be another explanation?

Blue:

- What has been considered so far?
- What do we do next?
- What decision has been reached?
- Which hat is most suitable to be used at this stage of the decision?

In a group setting, you may also try having each individual wear a different coloured hat during the discussion.

Following the activity, debrief by asking questions such as:

- How did using this technique affect the discussion and decision made?
- Were you more drawn to one particular thinking style? Which thinking style made you least comfortable?
- How could you see this technique being useful in your work?
- What are the downfalls of using this technique?

Adapted based on: Six thinking hats

http://www.fao.org/elearning/course/FK/en/pdf/trainerresources/PG_SixThinkingHats.pdf