



## Six Thinking Hats

### A summary by Sylvie La belle

Early in the 1980s Dr. de Bono invented the Six Thinking Hats method. The method is a framework for thinking and can incorporate lateral thinking. Valuable judgmental thinking has its place in the system but is not allowed to dominate as in normal thinking. Dr. de Bono organized a network of authorized trainers to introduce the Six Thinking Hats. Advanced Practical Thinking (APTT), of Des Moines, Iowa USA, licenses the training in all parts of the world except Canada (and now, Europe). APTT organizes the trainers and supplies the only training materials written and authorized by Dr. de Bono.

Organizations such as Prudential Insurance, IBM, Federal Express, British Airways, Polaroid, Pepsico, DuPont, and Nippon Telephone and Telegraph, possibly the world's largest company, use Six Thinking Hats.

The six hats represent six modes of thinking and are directions to think rather than labels for thinking. That is, the hats are used proactively rather than reactively.

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 as they are just using the yellow hat or whatever hat. The six hats system encourages performance rather than ego defense. People can contribute under any hat even though they initially support the opposite view.

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:

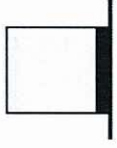
- encourage Parallel Thinking
- encourage full-spectrum thinking
- separate ego from performance

The published book [Six Thinking Hats](#) (de Bono, 1985) is readily available and explains the system, although there have been some additions and changes to the execution of the method.

The following is an excerpt from John Culvenor and Dennis Else Engineering Creative Design, 1995)

### White Hat on the Hats

There are six metaphorical hats and the thinker can put on or take off one of these hats to indicate the type of thinking being used. This putting on and taking off is essential. The hats must never be used to categorize individuals, even though their behavior may seem to invite this. When done in group, everybody wear the same hat at the same time.



### 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 proposals, and look at the data base."



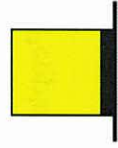
### Red Hat thinking

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. Usually the feeling is genuine but the logic is spurious. 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 judgment and caution. It is a most valuable hat. It is not in any sense an inferior or negative hat. The rior 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 policy 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 feel we should do some more green hat thinking at this point." In technical terms, the blue hat is concerned with meta-cognition.

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This was an excerpt from Edward de Bono's "Why Do Quality Efforts Lose Their Fizz?" Quality is No Longer Enough, The Journal for Quality and Participation, September 1991