

Six Thinking Hats... at a glance

What?



Six Thinking Hats is a simple yet powerful tool created by Edward De Bono based on a principle of parallel thinking: everyone thinking in the same direction, from the same perspective, at the same time.

Each thinking hat represents one lens / perspective / style of thinking. By "wearing" the different hats you can explore ideas or problems from a range of different perspectives

How?



Six Thinking Hats has been specifically designed so that everyone thinks in parallel using only one hat at a time. The process works best with a time limit (4–5 minutes maximum) for each hat. This encourages the group to 'try on other hats' and specifically helps people who may have very entrenched views to consider the idea from different perspectives.

See Figure 1 overleaf - Six Thinking Hats

Ask leading questions to activate different hats:

- What data do we have or need? (white hat)
- What could go wrong? What are the possible negatives? (black hat)
- List all the benefits (yellow hat)
- Is there a different way of looking at this? How could the idea be further developed? (green)
- What do you feel about this? What is your gut feeling? (red)
- Could you summarise the findings so far? What needs to happen next? (blue)

Why?



Six Thinking Hats is helpful to extend your understanding of an idea or problem. It takes you and your team beyond any instinctive positions, allowing you explore a range of perspectives. That way, you can carefully consider each one, without having to argue your case or make snap decisions about what's "right" or "wrong."

By the time you've tried out all six hats, you should have a rich collection of insights that will help you to decide your next steps.

Want to learn more?

Six Thinking Hats v1.0



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la19ZNyvfLA>
(6 minute video)



Figure 1 – Six Thinking Hats



White
Information/
data needs



Black
Negatives/risk



Green
Ideas



Blue
Managing the
thinking process



Yellow
Benefits/positives



Red
Emotion/gut
feeling

The hats have natural pairings: yellow is positive while black is negative; red is emotion driven while white is data driven. In general, if you use one hat, you should also use its partner for balance.

To use the Six Thinking Hats, someone in the group 'puts on' the blue hat as the leader of the session. The leader explains the overall plan for flow to the group and then takes responsibility for managing the time, keeping the group focused as well as actively contributing to the thinking associated with just one hat at a time.

A useful sequence of hats for initial harvesting of ideas could be: green, yellow, black, white, leading to a final red hat assessment (getting people's gut feeling) of whether the idea should go forward with the blue hat focusing on managing the process and the big picture – so what are we going to do?

Tips for using 6 thinking hats:

- You do not have to use the hat metaphor if you think it may get in the way.
- Don't be afraid to re-visit certain hats if you feel further exploration is necessary.
- Discourage people from characterising themselves as being a particular hat. While people will have natural preferences, you should encourage them to practise different modes of thinking.
- The six hats can be used in different orders and combinations depending on the individual situation. The key point is that everyone 'wears the same hat', thinks in the same direction, at the same time.
- The technique can also be used by individuals to help generate ideas or make decisions.