

de Bono's Six Thinking Hats

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a summary for teachers

Black Hat - bad points

This hat is used for checking things out, to avoid making mistakes, and to point out difficulties and dangers.

- Checking for evidence to support statements, ideas
- Checking for logic, truth or validity
- Checking for feasibility - would it work? Is something missing?
- Checking for impact - what would the consequences of this be?
- Checking for fit - fit space, facts, system, objectives, fairness, honesty.
- Checking for weaknesses - point out weaknesses so can be overcome.

Key words are checking and checking out. Idea is to find weaknesses, judge ideas, constructive criticism.

The overall question is "What is wrong with this?"

Yellow Hat - good points

This hat is used to think about the good points or benefits of a plan or an idea.

- Good points - strong points of idea
- Benefits (may not be obvious), short/long term? who benefits?
- Reasons why an idea will work - "this will work because ..."
- Likelihood - clues, trends, risks

Main purposes for use are in assessing value, extracting benefits, and making something work. It must be used in conjunction with black hat thinking.

Types of benefit to consider are

- simplicity (less effort, reduce errors)
- effectiveness
- efficiency (same output with less input)
- acceptability (people will need less persuasion)
- opportunity
- lower cost (in terms of money, time, effort, hassle)
- lower risk (reduces dangers and uncertainties)
- increased values

Key words are good points, benefits, workability, likelihood.

The overall questions are "What are the good points?" "What are the benefits?"

White Hat - finding facts

This hat is used to find out facts and information, relevance of those facts, and the missing facts.

- list the information we have (if doubtful of validity, mark as doubtful for later checking with black hat)
- note gaps in the information. Do we need it?
- get the information we need by questioning, interpreting and making inferences, consulting sources.

Main purposes for use are to stimulate thinking and to check thinking. The information is needed to form a basis for further thinking - plans and ideas need to fit the available information.

Key words - information, gaps, needs, questions, interpretation, sources.

The overall questions are "What information do we have?" "What information do we need?" "How do we get the information we need?"

Green Hat - creative thinking

This hat is used to come up with new possibilities and new ideas - the stage of suggestions and proposals.

- come up with a hypothesis - a reasonable explanation
- come up with a speculation - more guesswork than hypothesis
- use lateral thinking
- modify ideas

Main purposes are to help us when we need to take an action, provide an explanation, forecast an outcome or design something new to fit a need.

Key words are creative, generative, possibilities, and alternatives.

The overall question is "What ideas do we have?"

Red Hat - feelings

This hat is used to express feelings, emotions, hunches and intuitions. There is no need to explain or rationalise the feeling - it should simply be recognised as a feeling. Main value is to use at the very beginning and the end, not through the middle of the process.

- focus on total situation or only one part of it
- express from wide range of feelings
- acknowledge the legitimacy of mixed feelings, as long as they are not an excuse to avoid making our true feelings public.

The main uses of the red hat are to make feelings known, and to make assessments and choices (eg use the red hat after black and yellow hat to find the alternative we like better.)

Key words are emotions, feelings, hunches, intuition.

The overall question is "What do I feel about this?"

Blue Hat - thinking about thinking

This hat is used for thinking about how to organise thinking about a problem. It would be used to define the focus and purpose of a task, and keep on track during the process.

- Defining focus and purpose, lay out situation and desired outcome. This purpose may need restating part way through, or even redefining the task.
- Setting out a thinking plan or agenda - an agenda of thinking steps which are to be followed one after the other
- Making constructive observations and comments - perhaps to note that thinking has focused on one part of a problem, and needs to move on
- Deciding the next step, so discussion does not just drift on
- Defining outcomes and summarising - insisting on an outcome.

The main uses of the blue hat are to examine the thinking that is taking place, or that needs to take place. (It is often unannounced, and used by the person suggesting it, rather than suggesting a particular person use it. It is useful to suggest the whole group engage in blue hat thinking at the start and end of a session, however.) In a classroom, blue hat thinking is often done by the teacher.

Key words are focus, purpose, agenda, observations, next step, outcome and summary.

The overall questions are "What thinking is needed?" "What is the next step?" "What thinking has been done?"