



WISDOM IN A NUTSHELL

Six Thinking Hats

**An essential approach
to business management**



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The Big Idea

Confusion is the biggest enemy of good thinking. Simplicity is the key. “When thinking is clear and simple, it becomes more enjoyable and more effective.”

The Six Thinking Hats method is very easy to understand and therefore, simple to use. This tool can be used no matter how big or small your organization is, to create a more creative atmosphere, improve communication and train people to use a clearer way of thinking.

A hat is something you can easily put on and take off. The hats are visual cues for us to allow an easy switch in our modes of thinking. The wonderful thing about this method is that it can be taught to children as well as top executives!

Introduction

We have to train our minds into doing one thing at a time. We cannot be emotional, logical, factual, creative, and organized all at the same time. The Six Thinking Hats method lets us focus our thought process and filter out ideas and outputs. Consider this new paradigm.

The Western model of thinking, which is based on argument, is not sufficient to tackle all the different problems we face in most organizations. To design a way forward, a more constructive model of thinking, The Six Hats method or “parallel thinking” is required.

Parallel thinking is looking at something from all of its different angles. Each individual has a unique view of one idea or object. Put people on four different sides of a house and you will see each has his or her own perspective.

Parallel thinking subscribes to the idea that everyone must try looking at the house from the same direction. The object is not to argue your point until you win, but to explore all possibilities or angles of a situation.

When using the Six Hats method, all the parties involved role-play at the appointed time. No one person is assigned to be the Black Hat thinker the entire time. Everyone wears a different hat, and switches to another at the same time.

This method allows people who only focus on arguments and criticism to put on their Green Hats and offer creative solutions, or with their Yellow hats, some optimistic views, for example.

- The Six Hats Method is a time saving approach that cuts down long discussions. E.g. *Optus* (in Australia) set aside 4 hours for an important discussion. The Six Hats method enabled the team to conclude within 45 minutes.

- The Six Hats method removes the biggest obstacle to quick and effective thinking – the ego. Instead of attacking another person's idea to show off how clever you are, with the aid of the Six Hats approach, adversarial and confrontational thinking is eliminated because your performance as a thinker can be shown off in how well you utilize each hat. Instead of ego-driven meetings, meetings become more constructive, productive, and move much faster.

Six Hats, Six Colors

- **The White Hat** is neutral and objective. It is concerned with facts and figures.
- **The Red Hat** is the realm of the emotional view and feelings.
- **The Black Hat** is the hat of caution. It points out weaknesses in an idea.
- **The Yellow Hat** is positive, sunny, and optimistic.
- **The Green Hat** belongs to creativity and new ideas.
- **The Blue Hat** is cool and like the sky, is above all. It is concerned with control, organization of the thinking process, and the use of the other hats.

In practice, we refer to hats by color and never by their function:

"Take off your black hat for a moment".

"Let's put on our green hats here."

"That's enough of the yellow hat thinking. Let's put on the white hat."

Using the Hats

Single use

The hat may be used to request a type of thinking to direct a discussion.

Sequence use

- The hats may be used one after another in a sequence.
- Any hat may be used as often as you like.
- The sequence may be made up of two, three, four or more hats.
- A preset sequence is set up at the beginning of the meeting under an initial blue hat. The sequence is laid out in advance and followed. Minor variations are permitted depending on the output. Evolving sequences are recommended only for those who are more experienced in the Six Hats method. Members may choose hats as they go, or the facilitator can. The facilitator may be viewed as manipulating the outcome, so it is better to stick to preset sequences.

Time's Up!

Allow one minute per person for each hat. It is best to set a short time limit and only extend if there are many ideas. If nobody has anything else to add, move on to the next hat.

Blue hats should be used to begin and end a meeting.

- The first blue hat indicates why we are meeting, defines the problem, what the objectives are, the results we want to achieve, and the sequence plan of the hats to be used.
- The final blue hat should indicate what was achieved, the outcomes, conclusions, designs, solutions, and next steps.

You can sometimes put a red hat on and ask at the end of the meeting how people feel about the outcome, their thinking, and if they feel they've done a good job.

The White Hat

White hat thinking is a way of asking for facts and figures to be put forth in a neutral manner. It encourages the thinker to separate what is fact and what is interpretation.

- The two tiers of facts are the believed facts or unchecked facts, and the checked facts.
- The facts we cannot possibly check, the second-class, believed facts, may be put forward during white hat thinking sessions, but it must be made absolutely clear these are not checked.
- The key rule for white hat thinking is that something should not be put forward at a higher level than is actually the case.
- Your own opinion is never permissible under white hat thinking, but you may report the opinion of someone else.
- White hat thinking encourages the right attitude of neutrality. No one can push a particular point of view, but simply lays it out on the table.
- The purpose of white hat thinking is to be practical.
- Anecdotes or instances fall under white hat thinking if the thinker puts them forward as such.
- White hat thinking excludes opinion, intuition, judgment based on experience, feelings, and impressions.
- The spectrum of likelihood under white hat thinking ranges from "Always true" to "never true". In between are statements such as "sometimes, by and large, occasionally, been known to happen, etc"

- White hat thinking is a discipline and direction. The thinker must strive to be more neutral and objective in the presentation of information.

The Red Hat

The red hat gives everyone an opportunity to express how they feel about a situation. Feelings, emotions, and intuition are in the realm of the red hat. It is always done on an individual basis, and always applied to a specific idea or situation. The thinker may not change the idea and cannot say, "I'll pass" when asked for red hat feelings. The thinker may use terms like *neutral*, *undecided*, *confused*, *doubtful*, or *mixed*.

The purpose of the red hat is to express feelings, as they exist. It is not designed to force a judgment.

- Intuition may be based on knowledge of the market, or past experience
- A hunch is a hypothesis based on intuition.
- Decisions are not made solely on intuition, but red hat feelings do play an important part in many major business decisions.
- The red hat legitimizes feelings as an important part of thinking.
- The red hat makes feelings visible so they become part of the thinking map and also part of the value system that chooses the route on the map.
- It provides a convenient method for a thinker to switch in and out of the feeling mode in a way that is not normally possible without such a device.
- Under the red hat, its essence of being artificial, or formalizing the expressing of an emotion, makes it less personal.
- Emotions are often used to establish bargaining positions.
- There should never be an attempt to justify feelings or provide a logical basis for them.

The Black Hat

The black hat is the hat of caution. It is the most used hat of all the six thinking hats. It is the hat of survival. Overuse of the black hat may lead to an unhealthy cynicism where people only seem to find fault with everything.

- The black hat points out errors in thinking
- It is always logical
- The black hat is only used when the time for critical thinking is appropriate
- You cannot interrupt a non-black hat session with a black hat insight
- The black hat is used to cite obstacles, difficulties, problems, and dangers
- The facilitator must maintain hat discipline so people do not interrupt each other
- Some people enjoy being critical, but cannot contribute a constructive option

- Refrain from overuse of the black hat. It is easy to criticize the design of a chair, but it is more difficult to come up with a better design of your own. Criticism should be accompanied by an alternative option

The Yellow Hat

The yellow hat is harder to wear than the black hat, because our brains are naturally wired to think with a black hat. The black hat is the hat that has allowed human beings to evolve and survive, through the use of caution and risk management. The yellow hat is essential because it provides “value sensitivity”. It is a waste of time to set out trying to be creative, if you are not going to recognize a good idea. There are people who love to pounce on an idea and tear it to pieces. The yellow hat seeks value, so even unattractive ideas are given their due recognition.

Being positive is a choice.

The one thing that all successful people share in common is their desire to make things happen. Now there is such a thing as over-optimism, such as people who base their entire lives on the possibility of winning the lottery. That is sheer stupidity. The yellow hat calls for a Reasonable amount of optimism.

- Yellow hat thinking is about exploring possible benefits and seeking to justify them.
- Under the yellow hat, everyone is supposed to come up with his or her own proposal or idea. This is the constructive aspect of yellow hat thinking mode.
- The yellow hat requires a genuine desire to put forward proposals even if they seem ordinary.
- Yellow hat thinking is concerned with positive assessment.
- It ranges from the logical and practical, to the dreams, visions, and hopes at the other end of the spectrum

The Green Hat

The green hat is the hat of energy, growth, and new ideas. A specific time is set for everyone to make a creative effort. Everyone has to submit one idea, it is no longer just the responsibility of one “ideas person” while everyone sits around waiting to critique it.

- When the green hat is put on, everyone must contribute an idea, or else keep quiet.
- The green hat explores possibilities.
- The green hat embraces change.
- The green hat is about exploring problem solving from another angle.

- Green hat thinking is about coming up with a totally fresh approach.
- Lateral thinking, or pattern switching, works when the thinker cuts across patterns instead of just following them, thus producing a Eureka effect.
- “PO” is a green hat device that allows one to think and use provocative operation. E.g. Po cars would have square wheels, Po planes would be able to land upside down. Po executives should be able to promote themselves.
- A concept manager has the role and responsibility of collecting, stimulating, and directing ideas put forth
- The ideas generated under the green hat session are then gathered and assessed under the yellow hat for constructive development, and then the black hat may be used. At any point the white hat can be used for neutral facts or information to support or evaluate whether or not an idea will work. Red hat thinking is the last stage. Ask questions like: do we like the idea enough to proceed? Are we excited?

The Blue Hat

The blue hat is the hat of control. It is the hat we use for thinking about thinking. It is our “over view”. The blue hat is the agenda hat, and lays out what is to be achieved. The blue hat sets out the strategy and keeps discipline so people stick to the relevant hat. The facilitator or chairperson wears the blue hat. At the end of a session, the blue hat thinker calls for a conclusion, summary or decision and action points or next steps.

- The blue hat thinker must observe the thinking that takes place, and notes the map or route that the other thinkers in the group are driving along.
- The final summary or report is the realm of the blue hat.
- The blue hat thinker acts as a photographer who records/documents the thinking session taking place, or in this case, the thoughts that have been set forth.

Benefits of the Six Hats Method

- Decision-making time is cut into less than half with the proper use of the six hats
- In the end, all final decisions are really Red Hat or emotional decisions.
- The first purpose of the 6 Hats Method is to simplify thinking so we can deal with one thing at a time. The second main purpose of the method is to allow an easy switching device. This does not threaten egos and can be played like a game.