

How to Make Decisions: Six Hats Thinking

The Six Hats Thinking technique enables you to break out of your habitual thinking style and make better quality decisions. Six Hats Thinking was created by Edward De Bono with the aim of looking at the effect of a decision from a number of important, different perspectives, and modifying your decision accordingly. This decision making approach can be successfully used individually or in a group.

In short, you consider the effect of a decision by wearing six "hats", and in turn, articulating the aspirations and concerns of each group.

This is the data hat, where you consider facts, figures and information, identify any gaps in your knowledge and either fill or acknowledge them. For example, you use historical data or case studies to predict future behaviour, or do a cost benefit analysis.

Red Hat

This is the emotional hat, where intuition, instinct and irrational responses are considered.

Black Hat

Is the negative, pessimistic, "the world is going to end" hat. This viewpoint is useful as flaws and assumptions can be flushed out and addressed, and contingency plans prepared.

Yellow Hat

Is the polar opposite of the black hat, where optimism prevails. This is where benefits and added value are considered.

Green Hat

The Green Hat is used to put some creativity into the process. What other options exist? Is there a trickier, smarter solution?

Blue Hat

Is the hat worn by the person facilitating the decision making process, ensuring each hat is worn in turn and gets a fair amount of air-time.

Here's an example of how Six Hats Thinking can be used.

A small training company are deciding on whether to deliver online training. This is new territory for them as they have historically only done face to face training. However, they need to grow the business and think this is what customers want.

White Hat Thinking

The team look at their finances and see face to face training numbers are generally stagnant, and declining for some courses. Feedback from customers suggest a growing proportion would prefer a training solution that could be delivered "on demand", wherever and whenever the trainee requires. There are already a considerable number of successful training companies with an online presence.

Red Hat Thinking

The team are nervous about their lack of experience in managing online training. They are concerned their roles will change into being technical support and no longer doing what they enjoy or are good at.

Black Hat Thinking

Black hat thinking flushes out concerns about the cost and complexity of building a website and creating an online training platform, particularly if not all courses are suited to an online environment. Also, how does this project fit with existing workload?

Yellow Hat Thinking

Yellow hat thinking frees the team up to believe that in a year's time they will be wondering what they were worried about. They break the project up into manageable chunks, with agreed deadlines and deliverables. They realise that if all goes to plan, there may be a new market in turning other companies training from off-line into on-line training.

Green Hat Thinking

Spending some time wearing the green hat makes the team consider other ways to deliver training, both off and on-line. They create two different training solutions which they had not previously considered.

Blue Hat Thinking

Throughout the discussion, one person wears the blue hat, ensuring no thinking style dominates or colours the others.

Six Hats Thinking forces you to consider many different perspectives when making a decision, and break out of your habitual thinking style. This technique is particularly useful for both newly formed, or established

teams, as there is a transparent decision making process to be followed.