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## Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

### For Those on the Run

Looking for a way to improve your or your team's thinking skills? This month's newsletter explores how the Six Thinking Hats - a quick, simple and powerful technique - can help you and/or your team actualize your full thinking potential.

### Six Thinking Hats Technique

There are many things that get in the way of us actualizing our full thinking potential. First, many cultures follow a tradition of ARGUMENT when discussing a subject - one person takes a position on a subject and another person attacks that position. Not that this approach is not useful, i.e. this is the modus operandi for law courts, parliament, and many business negotiations; it is not the only way to explore a subject, particularly when exploring a complex problem or decision. We know for a fact that seeing things in different ways is often a good idea in strategy formation or complex decision-making processes.

We all use different types of thinking, usually without realizing it. For example, many of us tend to think from a very rational, positive viewpoint, often failing to look at a problem from an emotional, intuitive, creative or negative viewpoint. If we are feeling pessimistic about the situation that is the only type of thinking we apply! Alternatively, when we are thinking about something, we tend to try and do everything at once, i.e. we might be looking out for dangers and difficulties or trying to find new ideas to the problem or identifying how we feel about it. These kinds of thinking approaches limit our ability to see all the issues and can lead to underestimating resistance to plans, failing to make creative leaps and not making essential contingency plans.

Just like a golfer who has many different clubs in his or her bag where one club is more suitable for some situations and other clubs for others, we need to apply different thinking approaches when exploring a subject. Edward de Bono's **Six Thinking Hats** is a useful method for exploring different perspectives towards a challenging situation or problem. The technique is based on a consideration of how the brain chemicals differ when we are being cautious and when we are being positive. This chemical pre-sensitization is a key part of brain function. You cannot sensitize in all directions at once - so there is an absolute need to separate out the modes of thinking.

The Six Thinking 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. De Bono created the thinking "hat" metaphor because of familiar expressions such as "put on your thinking cap (hat)." He saw the hat as a tangible object that one can literally wear or that one can visualize putting on or taking off. "Putting on" a hat is a deliberate process that switches the thinker's attention exclusively to that mode, thus simplifying the thinking process; "switching" hats redirects thinking to another mode.

### The Six Thinking Hats include:



The **White Hat** calls for information known or needed. "The FACTS, just the facts." What is needed; how can it be obtained.



The **Yellow Hat** symbolizes brightness and optimism. Under this hat you explore the positives and probe for value and benefit. LOGICAL, POSITIVE.



The **Black Hat** is judgment - the devil's advocate or why something may not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers; where things might go wrong. Probably the most powerful and useful of the Hats but a problem if overused. LOGICAL, NEGATIVE view.



The **Red Hat** signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. When using this hat you can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates. EMOTIONS, FEELINGS.



The **Green Hat** focuses on creativity; the possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. It's an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions. CREATIVE.



The **Blue Hat** is used to manage the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensures the Six Thinking Hats® guidelines are observed. CONTROL OF PROCESSES, STEPS, OTHER HATS.

The technique encourages you to recognize what type of thinking you are using, and to apply different types of thinking to the subject. One of the other benefits of The Six Thinking Hats technique is that it 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.

### Application of Six Thinking Hats:

De Bono believed that the key to a successful use of the Six Think Hats methodology was the deliberate focusing of the discussion on a particular approach as needed during the meeting or collaboration session. For instance, a meeting may be called to review a particular problem and to develop a solution for the problem. The Six Thinking Hats technique could then be used in a sequence to first of all explore the problem, develop a set of solutions, and to finally choose a solution through critical examination of the solution set. Here are the typical steps you might use in a meeting with your team:

**Step 1:** Present the facts of the situation or challenge (White Hat)

**Step 2:** Generate ideas on how the situation or challenge could be handled (Green Hat)

**Step 3:** Evaluate the merits of the ideas - List the benefits (Yellow Hat); List the drawbacks (Black Hat)

**Step 4:** Get team member's gut feeling about the alternatives (Red Hat)

**Step 5:** Summarize and adjourn the meeting (Blue Hat)

## What's the Bottom line

One thinking style (hat) is not inherently "better" than another. A full, balanced person and/or team recognize the need for all hats so that they consider all aspects of whatever issues they are facing.

For more information on the Six Thinking Hats, pick up de Bono's book *Six Thinking Hats*, Back Bay Books, 1999 or contact us at Foursight to come into your organization and conduct a workshop.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at [jlaws@foursightconsulting.com](mailto:jlaws@foursightconsulting.com).

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