



Six Thinking Hats Group Decision Making Technique

Look at an issue with the 'Six Thinking Hats' technique, and your decisions and plans will mix ambition, skill in execution, sensitivity, creativity and good contingency planning.

How to Use the Tool:

You can use the Six Thinking Hats technique in meetings, with teams, or on your own. In meetings it has the benefit of blocking the confrontations that happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem.

Each 'Thinking Hat' is a different style of thinking. These are explained below:

- **White Hat:**
With this thinking hat you focus on the **data available**. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them.

This is where you **analyze past trends**, and try to extrapolate from historical data.
- **Red Hat:**
'Wearing' the red hat, you look at problems using **intuition, gut reaction, and emotion**. Also try to think **how other people will react emotionally**. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.
- **Black Hat:**
Using black hat thinking, look at all the **bad points of the decision**. Look at it cautiously and defensively. Try to see why it might not work. This is important because it **highlights the weak points in a plan**. It allows you to **eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans** to counter them.

Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively

that often they cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.

- **Yellow Hat:**
The yellow hat helps you to **think positively**. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to **see all the benefits of the decision** and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.
- **Green Hat:**
The Green Hat stands for **creativity**. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is **little criticism of ideas**.
- **Blue Hat:**
The Blue Hat stands for **process control**. This adds structure and organization. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, etc.

Example:

The directors of a property company are looking at whether they should construct a new office building. The economy is doing well, and the amount of vacant office space is reducing sharply. As part of their decision they decide to use the 6 Thinking Hats technique during a planning meeting.

Looking at the problem with the White Hat, they analyze the data they have. They examine the trend in vacant office space, which shows a sharp reduction. They anticipate that by the time the office block would be completed, that there will be a severe shortage of office space. Current government projections show steady economic growth for at least the construction period.

With Green Hat thinking they consider whether they should change the design to make the building more pleasant. Perhaps they could build prestigious offices that people would want to rent in any economic climate. Alternatively, maybe they should invest the money in the short term to buy up property at a low cost when a recession comes.

The Blue Hat has been used by the meeting's Chair to move between the different thinking styles. He or she may have needed to keep other members of the team from switching styles, or from criticizing other peoples' points.

Key points:

- Six Thinking Hats is a good technique for looking at the effects of a decision from a number of different points of view.
- It allows necessary emotion and skepticism to be brought into what would otherwise be purely rational decisions and vice versa. It opens up the opportunity for creativity within Decision Making. The technique also helps, for example, persistently pessimistic people to be positive and creative.
- Plans developed using the "6 Thinking Hats" technique will be sounder and more resilient than would otherwise be the case. It may help spot good reasons not to follow a course of action before you have committed to it.

Source: Ed Debono, author of The Six Thinking Hats