

Handout 6

Six Thinking Hats Example

How to Use The Six Thinking Hats Tool

June 20th, 2012 | Posted by [John Kapeleris](#) in [Creativity](#) | [Thinking](#)



In a previous blog I introduced Edward de Bono's [Six Thinking Hats](#) technique. The simple approach that encourages parallel thinking within a group or team environment has been useful in solving complex problems but can also increase productivity in meetings where decisions need to be made. Unfortunately, the tool is not used widely because many people don't feel comfortable in using the technique (could be due to a number of reasons) or they don't value the tool's ability to deliver enhanced outcomes.

Having used the tool for over two decades I have seen the power of parallel thinking in a meeting environment. Unfortunately, I have also seen the tool challenged by a number of senior managers who don't support the use of the tool because they don't believe in it. The key to experiencing the power of the tool is to start using it and developing a deeper understanding of the power of the Six Thinking Hats. The best approach for applying the tool is to firstly understand the sequence of the coloured hats to use.

When I used the Six Thinking Hats in a workshop to work on the global problem of "Declining supply of petroleum fossil fuels" I used the following sequence of coloured hats and associated questions:

						
What is the current information on the issue or problem?	How does everyone feel about the current situation, issue or problem?	What are the positive aspects of the current situation, issue or problem?	What are the negative aspects of the current situation, issue or problem?	What are new creative ideas or alternatives in solving the issue or problem?	How does everyone feel now that we have worked on the issue or problem?	What conclusions or summaries can we make in moving forward on the issue or problem?

When considering a specific problem or topic it is best to start with the WHITE hat as this allows all the background information to be presented and documented. Once the problem or topic is fully defined then the RED hat is used to ask participants how they feel about the problem or situation. Participants' feelings are documented. The general tendency for a proportion of people in a meeting, at this stage, is to present the negative aspects of the problem or situation, however in this process I like to encourage the use of the YELLOW hat to capture the positive aspects of the problem or situation from all participants. Sometimes we can identify the positive elements of a problem or issue. This step is then followed with the BLACK hat when everyone considers the negative aspects of the problem or situation. The BLACK hat is then followed by the GREEN hat where everyone is encouraged to use creative thinking to overcome the negative issues but also develop new alternatives to solving the problems or resolving the situation. I then encourage the use of the RED hat again to gauge the feelings of participants after considering the problem or issue. Generally, most participants who were previously concerned about the problem or situation now feel more positive after having gone through the process of using the different hats. Finally, it is always appropriate to use the BLUE hat as this allows participants to develop conclusions or to evaluate and summarise the solutions to move forward on the issue or problem. The BLUE hat also provides process control to ensure the right technique or approach was used by participants. If a solution or resolution was not identified then another approach or process would be suggested as more appropriate in solving the problem.

An example using the six thinking hats to solve the problem “Declining supply of petroleum fossil fuels” can be found below (summary extract of the workshop).

Declining supply of petroleum fossil fuels

						
<p>Petroleum is required for combustion engines and production of plastics and other products Total available oil is 2 trillion barrels Half of the 2 trillion barrels has been consumed Major decline in oil production predicted to occur in 2020</p>	<p>Disturbing Scary Frightened Helpless Concerned Alarmed Distressed Terrified Vulnerable Dependent Worried</p>	<p>Understand that resources are finite Conserve what we have Use sparingly Will reduce CO₂ emissions Need to research and investigate alternative fuels Future dependency on renewable energy</p>	<p>Increased costs of petrol Won't be able to drive a car Have to give up my V8 car How are we going to fly? How are we going to produce petroleum products such as plastics? Increased transport costs</p>	<p>Identify alternative fuels Electric vehicles Biofuels from algae Biodiesel Use coal to produce plastics and industrial products Consider renewable energy options Replace petrol with LNG Nuclear energy Synthetic oils Ethanol additive to petroleum</p>	<p>Optimistic Positive Excited Hopeful Excitedly cautious Cheerful Positive future outlook Confident Encouraging</p>	<p>Further focus and investment into alternative energy Conserve as much petroleum as possible Use ethanol as an additive to petrol Use gas in liquid form to replace petroleum</p> <p>Six thinking hats process worked well for this problem</p>

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