

Six Hats for Parallel Thinking

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

What are the Six Thinking Hats?

Developed by Edward de Bono, Six Hats is a method that provides direction for group thinking and decision-making by building off the common notion of "putting on your thinking cap." de Bono has developed six different "hats" that each focus on thinking in one particular direction (feelings, judgment, creativity, process, optimism, and facts).

Activity Objective

To improve group discussion and decision-making by getting your group thinking in parallel with one another and sharing the same framing lens, as an alternative to a discussion based on quick feedback and opposition.

Participants

Can be done with any size group.

Duration

Approximately 45 minutes.

Worksheet

Please find the attached Activity Worksheet for descriptions of the Six Thinking Hats.

Facilitator

A facilitator is recommended to lead the exercise and keep time.

Activity

Step 1: With the group, the facilitator identifies a topic for discussion.

Step 2: The facilitator passes out a worksheet with descriptions of the Six Hats to each group member.

Step 3: With the group, the facilitator determines an order to use the hats. de Bono recommends that you pair complementary hats, such as White/Red, Yellow/Black, Green/Blue, and that you determine the full order of the hats you'll "try on" before you start your discussion. It's often useful to begin and end with Blue. Hats can be repeated.

Step 4: With the group, the facilitator determines a time limit for each hat. Times can vary from 2 minutes to 10 minutes or longer per hat. The Red Hat (feelings) is typically shorter because it's about gut response. The Green Hat (creativity) might be longer because it about possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas.

Step 5: The facilitator then leads the group through each hat, reminding the group of each hat's focus and keeping time. The facilitator may need to remind participants to contain their responses to the parameters of the hat.

Reflection

How was the discussion you had using the Six Hats different for your typical discussions?

How might it help you discuss difficult topics or make decisions?

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ROLE SUMMARIES



The White Hat calls for information known or needed. "The facts, just the facts."



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



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 over-used.



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.



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



The Blue Hat is used to manage the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensure the Six Thinking Hats guidelines are observed.