

I am, therefore I think

By symbolically putting on a different coloured hat and expressing it as such — i.e. put on the blue hat — we can systematically direct our own and our group's attention to six different aspects of thinking. The colours are much easier to visualize than remembering to cover the facts, the positive and negative aspects, the feelings, etc. Best of all, we can think and express thoughts, under the guise of a hat, that we might not otherwise think or say.

It also allows us to ask someone to *stop* being negative, or to *be* creative, without ruffling sensitive egos or dampening a meeting — by simply asking others to switch hats! Another benefit of this method is that it establishes the “rules of the game,” one of the most powerful ways of learning.

From red to green: what do they mean?

Each hat colour is related to a different thinking process:

- The **white hat** is neutral and objective, concerned with facts and figures. (Imagine a blank white paper to record the facts.)
- The **red hat** is for the emotional viewpoint — feelings, intuition, hunches that just exist with no explanation required. (Red suggests the heart, symbol of feelings.)
- The **black hat** covers the negative and critical aspects — why something will not work. (Black is dark and gloomy.)
- The **yellow hat** directs attention to the realistic positive and optimistic aspects of an issue — what are the benefits? (Think of the bright yellow sun.)
- The **green hat** calls for creativity, bringing up fresh, new ideas. It provokes a change in perceptions and patterns of thinking. (Green recalls lush vegetation and fertile growth.)
- The **blue hat** is concerned with orchestrating and organizing the thinking process itself, for example introducing the issue and objectives and summarizing the viewpoints. (Blue is cool and, like the blue sky, overlooks everything else.)

Give it a try!

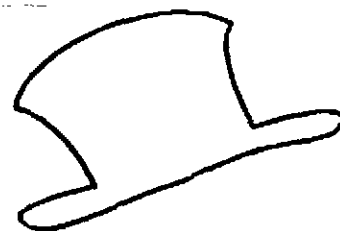
If you read the description of the colours, then you can follow a bit of the process.



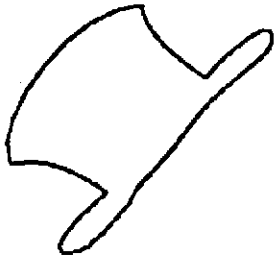
Put on a blue hat (thinking process). Take a look at what you would like to gain from this article. Perhaps you are curious about the Six Thinking Hats concept and about how it can help you conduct more effective meetings, or tackle a personal problem.



Switch to the red hat (feelings). This sounds confusing and silly. Why am I wasting my time?



Put on the white hat for a moment (facts/figures). Where does this concept come from? Dr. Edward de Bono is a world-renowned authority in the teaching of thinking as a skill, both to corporations and schools. He has written 45 books on the subject and on formal techniques for creative thinking (which he calls lateral thinking, having invented the term in 1967) and has lectured around the world.



Now try the yellow hat (positive aspects). Since today's changing world calls for clear and creative thinking, this process helps you improve that thinking. To eliminate some of the confusion in resolving a problem or making a decision, it is helpful to focus your thinking on one aspect at a time, separating emotion from logic, existing knowledge from new ideas, etc.



Change to the black hat (negative aspects). The idea may be interesting, but how do you apply it when you are dealing with people who don't know what you are talking about? Not everyone has the time or desire to take a course on the subject.



Put on your green hat (creativity). What if you don't have to invest a lot of time to grasp the Six Hats concept? Maybe it could be presented in less than a day, or as part of another planned gathering. Some people might prefer to borrow the easy-to-read book, **Six Thinking Hats**, by

One department's experience

Mark Weatherley, chief internal auditor, was looking for another way to solve problems and fire-up creative thinking when he and his staff are dealing with our different companies and cultures. After consulting Jim Bergeron of human resources training, Mark, the department's auditors and one administrative assistant followed a two-day course last year on the Six Thinking Hats process, with the second day devoted to creative thinking.

"When we are working at our various business units, part of our job calls for suggesting ways to improve their financial processes. By applying the Six Hats concepts, we can look at all elements of a problem and help others do so too, so that they can make a more informed decision. The process helps defuse people's natural tendency to at first react negatively to change," says Mark.

Here is what some others who followed the course say:

- **Mario Cavaliere** (auditor): The process makes you stand back and analyse a situation better. Without realizing it, you become more aware of the different positions you can take on an issue and you can guide others to look at the different sides.
- **Carole Adam** (administrative assistant): I found the course very interesting. It gives you a whole new way of looking at things. I could see myself using the process on major decisions.
- **Nancy Pereira** (former auditor, now financial and accounting manager for DIFCO): It is difficult to say that I am consciously using the process, but I certainly have to think clearly and creatively in my new job. I always try to look at things from different perspectives. I also like to make sure that staff meetings are well-organized and running on time. Perhaps, I am using my "blue hat" then.

If you are interested in learning more about the Six Thinking Hats, you are welcome to contact Mark Weatherley or any of the internal auditors for information.

Edward de Bono, from Business Information Services at the corporate office, or from their local library. You could even invite someone who is familiar with the process to act as a facilitator at a key meeting, to help it run more smoothly.

Obviously this is a very abbreviated run-down of the approach.

Think about it. It could improve your thinking.

Interested head office staff and human resources personnel from our business units can contact Mike Timmons, director, human resources planning and development, about participating in or organizing a course on the subject. ■