

THE SIX THINKING HATS

Have you ever tried: balancing a big book on the top of your head, juggling with two balls with your left hand and unwrapping a chocolate bar with your right hand? It would probably be rather difficult. Doing a lot of different things at the same time is always difficult and confusing.

In our thinking we often try to do too much at the same time. We look at the facts of the matter; we try to build up a logical argument; our emotions come in somewhere; we may try to put in a new idea; we try to see whether our idea will work. We do all this more or less at the same time. It is no wonder that we sometimes get confused. At other times we may do only one of these many things well - for example our emotions may dominate our thinking or we may just be very negative.

The six thinking hats is a method for doing one sort of thinking at a time. Instead of trying to do everything at once we 'wear' only one hat at a time. There are six coloured hats and each colour represents a type of thinking.

White hat: Facts, figures and information. What information do we have? What information do we need to get?

Red hat: Emotions, feelings, hunches and intuition. What do I feel about this matter right now?

Black hat: Caution. Truth, judgement, fitting the facts. Does this fit the facts? Will it work? Is it safe? Can it be done?

Yellow hat: Advantages, benefits, savings. Why it can be done. Why there are benefits. Why it is a good thing to do.

Green hat: Exploration, proposals, suggestions, new ideas. Alternatives for action. What can we do here? Are there some different ideas?

Blue hat: Thinking about thinking. Control of the thinking process. Summary of where we are now. Setting the next thinking step. Setting the program for thinking.

Each of the hats will be covered in much more detail in the next pages.

If you look at a large-screen projection television you will see that each of the three tubes gives out a different colour. On the screen all colours come together to give full-colour pictures. The same is true of ordinary television sets except that we cannot see the separate colours. The same is true of colour photography, where the different basic colours are treated separately but then come together to give full colour. Full-colour printing on paper is the same. Each of the basic colours is printed separately (colour separation) but the different colours come together to give full colour. It is exactly the same with six-hat thinking. The colours are treated separately so that we can make a good job of each colour. Then the colours come together to give us full-colour thinking.

There is some evidence that the chemicals in the brain might be slightly different when we are being creative or positive or negative. If this is so then we have to separate the different types of thinking, because we cannot at any one moment have the best setting for different types of thinking.

WHY HATS?

We often say: 'Put on your thinking cap.' There is a traditional association between caps/hats and thinking.

Hats often define a role we are playing at the moment: a baseball cap, a soldier's helmet, a nurse's cap etc.

Most important of all, hats can easily be put on and taken off. A hat is not permanently attached to you. A hat is the easiest item of clothing to put on or take off. This point is important because every person must be able to put on or take off each of the hats.

The hats are not categories. It is quite wrong to say: 'She is a green-hat thinker,' or 'He is a black-hat thinker.' The purpose of the hats is exactly the opposite of this. Instead of labelling people and putting them into boxes the hats are there to encourage people to use all types of thinking.

ROLE-PLAYING

... 'Let's have four minutes green-hat thinking on this.' ... 'What are the facts? Some white-hat thinking, please.' ... 'Be realistic. Put on your black hat.'

... 'Switch from the black hat to the yellow hat for the moment.'

When a person puts on a hat he or she plays the role that belongs to the hat. This becomes a sort of game.

If you do not think the idea will work but someone asks you for some 'yellow-hat thinking', you make an effort to find positive points about the idea.

If at a meeting someone asks for three minutes of 'green-hat thinking', all those present make an effort to come up with alternatives and new ideas.

You can choose to put on your red hat and say. 'Wearing my red hat this is what I feel about this situation - it stinks.'

This role-playing serves to detach the ego from the thinking.

The thinker is now carrying out a performance (a green-hat performance, a black-hat performance, a yellow-hat performance). The thinker shows his or her skill and gets a sense of achievement from carrying out that performance well.

This role-playing frees thinkers. Even if you like an idea, you are free to come up with black-hat ideas of why it may not work. Putting on the green hat frees you to suggest new ideas. Putting on the red hat frees you to express your hunches and feelings - without any need to justify them.

At the same time as the six-hats system frees thinkers it is also a way of forcing thinkers to think more broadly. Asking someone to put on the green hat is a specific request for that person to try to be creative. Asking a group for black-hat thinking is a request for them to assess the idea very carefully.

USE OF THE HATS

1. Yourself: You can choose to put on a hat in order to tell others the sort of thinking you are going to do.

... 'Putting on my black hat I am going to point out what is wrong with the idea

... 'I am going to put on my red hat because I have a hunch this is all a trick. I do not know why but that is my hunch.'

... 'Putting on my green hat I want to put forward a new idea. Why don't we let people buy their motorcycles from us?'

... 'I want to do some yellow-hat thinking here. There are the following good points about the idea ...'

... 'We do not seem to be getting anywhere. Putting on my blue hat I suggest we make clear what we are trying to do.'

You can also give yourself instructions to put on one or other hat when you are working out something on your own. You may even put down a sequence of hats and then work through them.

2. Someone else: When talking to someone else you can ask that person to put on a particular hat, to take off a particular hat or to switch hats. This allows you to request a change in thinking - without offending the other person.

... 'Please give me your black-hat thinking on this matter. We do not want to make any mistake.'

... 'Never mind what we can do. I just want some white-hat thinking. What are the facts?'

... 'That is what you feel about it. Now take off your red hat.'

... 'I am going to ask you to switch from black-hat thinking to some yellow-hat thinking.'

... 'What about some new ideas? Can we have some green-hat thinking on this matter?'

3. Group: When working with a group the leader of the group, or anyone else, can ask individuals in the group - or the whole group - to put on, take off, or switch hats. This use is similar to use with one other person - except that more people are involved.

... 'Let's all try three minutes of green-hat thinking.'

... 'I want to know what you all really feel about this project - so some red-hat thinking from each one of you.'

... 'I think we need some white-hat thinking here. Do you all agree?'

... 'Some blue-hat thinking, please. Suggestions on the direction our thinking should take.'

THE SIX THINKING HATS IN USE

In December 1986 I gave a short talk on the six-hats method at a hotel in Tokyo to a meeting of senior Japanese executives. The occasion was the publication of the Japanese edition of my book on the subject. At that meeting there was present the chief executive of NTT (Mr Hisashi Shinto). NTT (Nippon Telephone and Telegraph) employed 350,000 people at that time. At the time of writing this book NTT is by far the most highly valued corporation in the world (stock market valuation). In fact if all four top US corporations are put together their value would be less than that of NTT. Mr Shinto was delighted with the method and bought hundreds of copies of the book, which he asked his executives to read. Later he told me that the method had had a powerful effect on the thinking of his people, so much so that he invited me back to talk to the board and all senior management. Many other corporations around the world are now introducing the method as part of the corporate culture.

ATTENTION DIRECTING

The six-hats method is really an attention-directing tool, because it directs our attention towards certain aspects and towards a certain type of thinking. For example the red hat allows us to pay attention to our feelings.

EXERCISES ON THE SIX THINKING HATS (GENERAL)

Discuss the method in general terms and in particular the role-playing aspect.

In what sort of situations do you think the six-hats method would be most useful? Give examples of thinking situations where you, yourself, might like to use one or other of the hats.

Do you think the six-hats method would be easy to use in practice? What would the difficulties be? Why might some people object to the use of the hats?

The number of hats is kept down to six for the sake of convenience. But if you had to suggest further hats what type of thinking might these further hats cover? (Suitable for older or more able children.)

For each of the following remarks, indicate what hat you think the speaker was wearing at the time: 'This car can accelerate at 60 mph in just 6 seconds. The fuel consumption is 25 miles per gallon in traffic'

'Why don't we sell the factory and then lease it back?'

'At this point we should list the options we have.'

'I don't like him and I don't want to work with him.'

'I don't think that putting up the price of gasoline will make people drive more carefully.'

'If I don't get asked to his birthday party then I don't have to spend money buying a present.'

'It is not possible to climb over that wall.'

WHITE-HAT THINKING AND RED-HAT THINKING

WHITE HAT

Think of blank paper. Think of a computer print-out. The white hat means neutral information. It is not a matter of argument or making suggestions. White-hat thinking focuses directly on the available information.

Information is very important for thinking, so it is useful to have a way of being able to focus directly on information.

Under the white hat there are three key questions:

What information do we have?

What information is missing?

How do we get the information we need?

The Information We Have:

We lay out all the information we have.

The information may be facts, figures, lists, statistics etc.

The information may be our own personal knowledge or experience. In this case it must be labelled as such: 'In my experience ...'; 'As far as I know...'

In addition to the obvious information we also read between the lines to see what other information is actually available. Every good detective in fiction picks up clues which other people have not noticed. There are different levels of the truth, probability or solidity of the information. There are also guesses and deductions and possibilities. The important thing in white-hat thinking is to state clearly what type of information it is:

... 'This is a fact as shown in these tables.'

... 'My guess is that...'

... 'From the way the keys have been left in the car I deduce the driver must have intended to return.'

... 'The generally accepted view is that the greenhouse effect will get serious in fifty years' time.'

Missing Information:

We examine the information we have in order to see what is missing. We try to find the gaps in our information. Do we have enough information for our thinking or for our decision? If we do not have enough information what else do we need?

Try to define the information needs as clearly as possible. It is always nice to have as much information as possible, but what do we really need?

We may need information in order to choose between two possible explanations. We may need information in order to select the best course of action. We may need information about a material to know if it will serve our needs.

Getting the Information We Need:

Listening is part of white-hat thinking. We listen carefully and pick up information - not only what is intended.

We get information by reading or by knowing how to consult computers and databanks.

The most useful way of getting information is by asking questions. Knowing the right questions to ask is a very important part of thinking. What do you want the question to do for you? Do you want to

check something? This is a shooting question, since we know what we are aiming at — and the answer is a 'yes' or 'no'. Or are we fishing for information - not knowing what we will catch (fishing question)?

Under the white hat we may also be asked to say how we intend to get the missing information. It might be through information search, it might be through direct research, it might be through conducting an opinion poll etc.

Information and Feeling:

There are times when the white hat and the red hat can get quite close. When we are looking forward into the future we can never be certain, so we are guessing or extrapolating. You might say: 'I have a feeling this toy will sell.' Obviously you cannot be certain. If, however, you can provide good reasons (sales of similar toys, test markets etc.) it is white-hat thinking. If you can provide no reasons, it is red-hat thinking. As far as possible white-hat thinking should stick to information that can be checked or has some reasonable basis.

If you say: 'Mr Herring does not like this idea,' that is white-hat thinking because you are reporting a fact. If, however, you say: 'I don't like this idea,' that is your feeling and so is red-hat thinking. Even if there are good reasons for your feeling it is still red-hat thinking.

Challenge:

If someone puts forward information as being correct and someone else challenges it as being incorrect, what happens? Quite simply both views are put down, alongside each other.

... 'Mr Jones has said that the number of road deaths per year in the USA is 50,000. Mr Klein disagrees and states that the number is 70,000. We had better have those figures checked.'

RED HAT

Think of fire and warm. The red hat is for emotions, feelings, hunches and intuition.

In a way the red hat is the opposite of the white hat. The white hat seeks to put down the objective facts and is not interested in what anyone feels about them - facts are facts. The red hat is not interested in the facts but only in people's feelings.

Feelings are a very important part of thinking. Feelings come into thinking all the time. We seek to be objective but (outside of mathematics) are rarely objective. In the end all choices or decisions are based on feelings. I shall be dealing with feelings again later in this book and in more detail.

The purpose of the red hat is to allow us a way of putting forward our feelings so that they can take part in the thinking. Feelings are valuable so long as we label them as feelings. The problem arises if we pretend feelings are something else. The red hat provides a clear label.

Intuition is often based on experience about a matter. We have an 'intuition' that something is the right thing to do. But we cannot exactly explain how we reached that conclusion. Often intuitions are very valuable. Occasionally, intuitions are disastrous (in matters of probability).

Justification:

Normally, when we put forward a hunch or an intuition we seek to construct a reasonable basis for the hunch or intuition. Often this basis is false (and can be shown to be false), while the intuition or hunch has a validity.

The red hat allows the thinker to put forward a hunch or intuition without any need to support or justify it.

... 'Putting on my red hat I have this hunch that he is going to turn out to be a great tennis player - don't ask me why.'

In fact there should never be any attempt to support or justify red-hat thinking. Such support destroys the whole purpose of the red hat. The red hat is permission to put forward feelings, hunches and intuitions simply because they are there - not because they are justified.

At This Moment:

The red hat covers feelings 'at this moment'. At the beginning of a meeting a person's red-hat feelings may be quite different from what they will be at the end of the meeting.

A feeling is only valid if it is genuine and sincere. That means the feelings of the moment. A thinker may choose to refer to feelings at other times but must make this clear.

... 'My usual feelings on this purchase of a motor-bike is that it is very dangerous - but right now I feel that it might be a good idea.'

Mixed Feelings:

It is perfectly possible to have mixed feelings - and they should be reported as such.

... 'There are some aspects I feel good about - and others I feel bad about.'

You then spell out the different aspects and the feelings for each. Nevertheless, if a conclusion is required (for example in making a decision), the thinker may need to have an overall feeling.

... 'I like this and I don't like that - but on balance I like the idea.'

SUMMARY

White-hat thinking is to do with information. Red-hat thinking is to do with feelings.

EXERCISES ON WHITE-HAT AND RED-HAT THINKING

What is the difference between white-hat and red-hat thinking?

Can computers do red-hat thinking?

A boy has kicked a ball into a neighbour's yard and has broken a window. They are yelling at each other. Give three examples of red-hat remarks for each side.

Do some white-hat thinking on the road or street in which you live.

Someone suggests to you that you should take up one of three hobbies: gardening, carpentry, stamp collecting. Do some white-hat thinking on each. Then follow this with red-hat thinking on each.

Which of the following are white-hat thinking and which are red-hat thinking?

'Pollution is a growing problem.'

'I feel pollution is now the world's number one problem.'

'We are not doing enough to control pollution.' 'Pollution is everyone's business.' 'Household garbage contributes to pollution.' 'Polls show that people do care about pollution.' 'I do not know what I can do about pollution.'

For a young person about to choose a career what aspects would be covered by white-hat thinking and what aspects would be covered by red-hat thinking?

In choosing a colour with which to paint the walls of your room, what aspects are white-hat thinking and what aspects are red-hat thinking?

Put on your red hat and list three things you really like and three things you do not like.

is that he works not just in the narrow field of education but in the wide world of applied thinking. His ideas and methods have stood the test of time and paying customers.

Dr de Bono's emphasis on simplicity and practicality is essential in a subject area that is too often subjected to complexity, confusion and over-philosophizing.

Dr de Bono is concerned with the thinking involved in getting things done and in having new ideas. This goes beyond traditional reactive thinking, which is concerned only with analysis, criticism and argument.

BLACK-HAT THINKING AND YELLOW-HAT THINKING

Both the black hat and the yellow hat are forms of judgement. With the black hat we are concerned with truth and fit. With the yellow hat we are concerned with benefits. Both hats have to be entirely logical. With both hats there have to be strong reasons for what you say. If there are no reasons, you should be using the red hat, because a statement without reasons is a feeling or intuition.

BLACK HAT

Think of a stern judge. Think of someone who gives you a black mark if you get something wrong. The black hat is certainly the most used of all the hats. In some ways it is also the most valuable of the hats. The black hat prevents us from making mistakes and doing silly things.

The black hat is concerned with truth and reality. The black hat is the hat of critical thinking: 'Is this right?'

Under the black hat come a number of questions:

Is it true?

Does it fit?

Will it work?

What are the dangers and problems?

Is It True?

The black hat judges the truth of a statement or claim. Is it true or false? Does it fit the facts?

The black hat also judges the validity of a line of reasoning. Does your conclusion follow from your evidence? Have you made a mistake? Is your claim justified?

The black hat searches for what is true and correct by pointing out errors.

Does It Fit?

Does this suggestion fit in with our experience?

Does this suggestion fit in with the system in which we are working? The system includes the procedures of the organization, the law, the rules, the social customs etc.

Does this suggestion fit in with our objectives, our plans or our policy?

Does this suggestion fit in with our values, our ethics and what we consider to be fair and just?

Because the black hat is always a logical hat, you must always give the reasons why something does not seem to fit.

Will It Work?

Will the idea work?

Will the invention or machine work?

Will the plan work?

If, wearing the black hat, you say that something will not work, you must give the reasons why you say this. If you just have a 'feeling' that it will not work then that is the red hat.

What are the weaknesses in the idea?

What are the Dangers and Problems?

If we were to go ahead with this suggestion what are the dangers?

If we were to go ahead with this suggestion what problems might arise?

If we were to go ahead with this suggestion what are the likely harmful effects?

These are the questions the black-hat thinker asks himself or herself when looking at a suggestion.

Over-Use:

It is quite true that the black hat can be over-used. There are some people who want to be cautious and negative all the time. They are always ready to point out why something will not work or cannot be done.

This does not mean that the black hat is a 'bad hat'. Some salt on food is good, too much salt is bad. Food itself is good and essential for life - but too much eating makes us fat and unhealthy. Over-use of salt and food does not make salt and food bad. Over-use of the black hat does not make it a bad hat. The black hat is a very important and very powerful hat. It would be difficult to do anything without the help of the black hat.

YELLOW HAT

Think of sunshine and optimism. The yellow hat is full of hope -but as it is a logical hat the reasons behind the hope must be given.

In general the yellow hat is looking forward into the future: 'If we do this, then these benefits will arise ...'

The yellow hat can also be used for looking backwards into the past: 'This thing happened. There were a lot of harmful effects. But there were also some good effects - let's put on our yellow hat to find the good effects.'

The yellow-hat thinker asks himself or herself the following questions:

What are the benefits?

Why should it work?

What are the Benefits?

The yellow-hat thinker seeks to find and show the benefits. What are the benefits? For whom are the benefits? How do the benefits arise?

What are the advantages? Why is this worth doing? What is the nature of the improvement?

There may be cost savings. There may be improvements in function. There may be new opportunities opened up.

What are the values here? Who is affected by these values?

It must always be remembered that the yellow-hat thinker is looking only for the benefits or positive effects. The reason for this is that we need to provide some part of our thinking where we make this deliberate positive effort. The yellow-hat thinking is not assessing all the values but only the beneficial values.

It should be noted that if the yellow-hat thinking cannot turn up enough benefits the thing is not worth doing anyway. If such benefits can be shown, the matter still has to be assessed using the black hat.

Why Should It Work?

The yellow-hat thinker must show clearly why an idea will work. The reasons must be given. It is not up to other people to show why the idea will not work. First of all the yellow-hat thinking must examine the basis for claiming the idea will work.

Yellow-hat thinking seeks to show the feasibility of the idea and why it can be done.

Over-use:

There are people who get carried away by an idea and plunge ahead with yellow-hat thinking without facing the realities or practicalities. This is not so much over-use of the yellow hat as failure to use the black hat.

The black hat not only provides an assessment of an idea but can also point out the weaknesses of the idea so that these might be overcome.

SUMMARY

The black hat is used for judgement and assessment. The black hat is used for criticism. The black hat prevents mistakes and errors and can also lead to the improvement of ideas.

The yellow hat focuses on benefits. Can this thing be done? Is it worth doing?

Both hats are fully logical and reasons must be given.

EXERCISES ON BLACK-HAT AND YELLOW-HAT THINKING

Someone suggests that there should be cars specially designed for women. Do some black-hat thinking to point out the weaknesses in this idea.

There is a lot of stealing going on at school. Rewards are offered to anyone who can catch a thief. Is this a good idea? Do some yellow-hat thinking first and then some black-hat thinking on the idea.

There is a surplus of food in some countries but in other countries people are starving. Should some of the surplus food be given free to the people who are starving? Write out an imaginary conversation between one person wearing a yellow hat and another person wearing a black hat. Two points per person.

Which of the following are proper black-hat remarks:

'Fining people for dropping litter in the street is a police-state idea.' 'The fact that many fat people seem happy does not mean that they are fat because they are happy.'

'A publicity campaign in the newspapers won't work because many people cannot read.'

'People who tell lies are usually found out.'

'In my experience paying people higher wages does not make them happier.'

'If you do not work hard you will not get good results in the test.'

Use yellow-hat thinking to show the benefits in the suggestion that everyone should keep a pet of some sort.

If you never read newspapers and never listened to television news, what would happen? Do some yellow-hat and some black-hat thinking on this.

Do some yellow-hat thinking on the use of the black hat.

GREEN-HAT THINKING AND BLUE-HAT THINKING

The green hat and the blue hat are opposites in the sense that the green hat is full of energy and the freedom of thinking in any direction whereas the blue hat is concerned with the control and direction of the thinking process.

GREEN HAT

Think of grass, trees, vegetation and growth. Think of the energy of growth and fertility. Think of shoots and branches.

The green hat is the 'active' hat.

The green hat is the hat for creative thinking. In fact the green hat covers both uses of the word 'creative'.

Creative thinking may mean bringing something about or making something happen. This is similar to constructive thinking. The green hat is concerned with proposals and suggestions.

Creative thinking may mean new ideas, new alternatives, new solutions, new inventions. Here the emphasis is on 'newness'.

The white hat lays out the information. The red hat allows feelings to be put forward. The black and yellow hats deal with logical assessment. So it falls to the green hat to be the action hat under which ideas are put forward.

When you are asked to put on the green hat you are being asked to come up with suggestions and ideas. This is active thinking, not reactive thinking.

The five main uses of the green hat are as follows:

Exploration

Proposals and suggestions

Alternatives

New ideas

Provocations

Unlike the yellow-hat and black-hat thinkers, the green-hat thinker does not have to come up with logical reasons to support the suggestion or idea. It is enough to put forward the idea for further examination.

Exploration:

The white hat is used to explore the situation in terms of available information. But the green hat is used to explore the situation in terms of ideas, concepts, suggestions and possibilities.

Proposals and Suggestions;

The green hat is used to put forward proposals or suggestions of any sort. These do not need to be new ideas. Suggestions for action. Proposals to solve a problem. Possible decisions. These are all part of the active thinking that takes place under the green hat. If no one has any ideas about what can be done then it is time for some green-hat thinking.

Alternatives:

An explanation has been given. Or, a course of action is being discussed. There is a green-hat request for further options or alternatives. What else can be done? What other possible explanations might there be? The green hat seeks to broaden the range of options before pursuing any one of them in detail. It is the role of the yellow and black hats to assess the alternatives.

New Ideas:

Sometimes there is a need for really new ideas. The old ideas do not work or there may be no ideas available to tackle the problem. Real creative or lateral thinking is now needed. Such thinking is a prime role of the green hat. If you ask someone to go away to do some green-hat thinking on a subject, you are asking for some new ideas -beyond the existing ones. You can never demand that someone has new ideas but you can request that the person makes an effort. The lateral-thinking techniques that are described later in the book can be used deliberately in order to try to generate some new ideas.

Provocations:

Under the green hat we can put forward tentative ideas. We have no idea if such ideas will work. Under the green hat we can also put forward deliberate provocations. A provocation is never meant to be a usable idea. A provocation is meant to jerk our mind out of its usual tracks so that we can see things differently. The technique of provocation is described later in the book.

Action and Energy:

Green-hat thinking is characterized by action and energy. If an artist is standing before a blank canvas the important thing is to get going. This may mean making preliminary sketches or putting something down on the canvas itself. Blank situations need ideas. Blank situations need green-hat thinking. Old situations or stagnant situations also need green-hat thinking.

BLUE HAT

Think of the blue sky. The sky is above everything. If you were up in the sky you would be looking down at everything below. With blue-hat thinking you are above the thinking: you are looking down at the thinking. With blue-hat thinking you are thinking about thinking.

The blue hat is the overview. The blue hat is the process control. The blue hat is like the conductor of the orchestra. With all the other hats we think about the subject matter, but with the blue hat we think about our thinking.

The blue hat covers the following points:

Where are we now?

What is the next step?

Program for thinking

Summary

Observation and comment

A person who puts on the blue hat steps back from the thinking that is going on in order to watch that thinking.

Where are We Now? Where are we in our thinking? What is the focus? What are we trying to do right now?

This is an attempt to see - at this moment - what our thinking is about. Are we just drifting or trying to do something?

What is the Next Step? What should we do next (in our thinking)?

The blue-hat thinker may suggest the use of another hat, or a summary, or a definition of the focus etc. It may be that no one knows what to do next, so a suggestion is necessary. It may be that everyone wants to do something different next, so a decision is required. If there is a clear view of the next step then that step can be taken.

Program for Thinking:

Instead of just choosing the next step, the blue hat can be used for setting out a whole program of thinking on the subject. This is an agenda or sequence in which various thinking steps will be taken.

This would usually be done at the beginning of the meeting but could be done at any time. The program could cover the whole meeting or apply just to one subject or part of a subject. In some cases the program may consist of a sequence of the thinking hats.

The blue hat treats thinking in a formal manner. Just as a computer programmer sets up a program for a computer so the blue hat can set up the program for thinking.

Summary:

At any point in the thinking anyone present can put on the blue hat and ask for a summary.

... 'Where are we? How far have we got? Can we have a summary?'

Such a summary may give a sense of achievement but may also show how little has been achieved during the thinking. The summary may also serve to clarify the different points of view.

Observation and Comment:

The blue-hat thinker is above the thinking and looking down at what is happening. So the blue-hat thinker observes and comments.

... 'It seems to me that all we have been doing is argue about the objective of this meeting.'

... 'We set out to consider some alternatives and we have only considered one so far.'

... 'There is a lot of red-hat thinking this morning.'

This blue-hat function makes thinkers conscious of their thinking behaviour. Just how effective is it?

Over-use:

In practice many people use the blue hat without saying they are doing so. It is better to declare it openly. Over-use is not a real problem but must be avoided. It is very irritating if every few seconds someone halts the meeting to make a blue-hat comment. Occasional use is more effective.

SUMMARY

The green hat is for action and creativity: for ideas, suggestions and proposals. These do not have to be worked out in detail.

The blue hat is for the control of the thinking process itself. What has happened? What is happening? What should happen next?

EXERCISES ON GREEN-HAT AND BLUE-HAT THINKING

You are selling newspapers but you cannot get anyone to deliver them. Put on your green hat and make some suggestions.

Your dog and your neighbour's dog fight the whole time. What green-hat suggestions do you have?

You are running a fast-food business (pizza). A competitor opens another outlet (also pizza) near by.

You start to lose business. Put on your blue hat and decide the first three steps in your thinking. How should your thinking go?

You do not have enough space to store your books and papers in your room. You put on your green hat and come up with the following alternatives:

... throw some of them away

... ask a friend with more space to keep them for you What other alternatives can you think of?

A film-maker sets a competition to find the best idea for a monster type of film. There is a need for a new type of monster. Put on your blue hat first to see how you would set about thinking up a new monster. Then try some green-hat thinking to make suggestions for that monster.

There is a straight piece of road and people drive too fast along it. Pedestrians are always getting injured and even killed. Some green-hat thinking on this problem?

There is a search for a new shape for cereal boxes. Someone puts on a green hat and makes the provocation that cereal boxes should be round like a ball. Can you get anything useful from that provocation?

There is an argument between a father and daughter as to what time she should get home in the evening. Using your blue hat how would you set a program for that argument?

SIX THINKING HATS IN SEQUENCE

There are two types of use for the six thinking hats: Occasional use and Systematic (sequence) use
Occasional use: This is the most common use. The hats are used one at a time (or two if you ask for a switch of hats). At a meeting or in a conversation someone suggests the use of one of the hats. Then the meeting or conversation continues. The hat that has been introduced is used for only two or three minutes. This occasional use of the hats allows someone to ask for a particular type of thinking or to suggest a switch in thinking. The hats provide a means for switching thinking.

Systematic use: Here a sequence of hats is set up in advance and the thinker goes through one hat after the other. This is sometimes done when there is a need to cover some subject quickly and effectively. In a sense the blue hat is used to set up the sequence of hats, which then becomes a program for thinking about the subject. This method is also useful if there is a quarrel or argument about a matter and no useful thinking is being done.

SEQUENCE USE

What is the correct sequence in which the six hats could be used?

There is no single correct sequence because the sequence will vary with the circumstances. You are free to make up your own sequence but some rules or guidelines are given here.

Each hat may be used any number of times in the sequence.

In general it is best to use the yellow hat before the black hat since it is difficult to be positive after you have been critical.

The black hat is used in two ways. The first way is to point out the weaknesses in an idea. This should then be followed by the green hat, which tries to overcome the weakness. The second use of the black hat is for assessment.

The black hat is always used for final assessment of the idea. This final assessment should always be followed by the red hat. This is so that we can see how we feel about the idea after we have assessed it.

If you believe that there are strong feelings about a subject, you would always start the thinking with the red hat in order to get those feelings out into the open.

If there are no strong feelings you would start with the white hat in order to collect information. After the white hat you would use the green hat to generate some alternatives. Then you would assess each alternative with the yellow hat followed by the black hat. You would then choose an alternative and finally assess your choice with the black hat followed by the red hat.

The major difference in sequence is between the two situations: seeking an idea; reacting to an idea.

Seeking an Idea:

The sequence of hat colours might be:

White: To gather available information.

Green: For further exploration and to generate alternatives.

Yellow: To assess the benefits and feasibility of each alternative.

Black: To assess the weaknesses and dangers of each alternative.

Green: To develop further the most promising alternatives and to make a choice.

Blue: To summarize and assess what has been achieved so far. Black: To make the final judgement on the chosen alternative. Red: To find out the feelings on the outcome.

Reacting to a Presented Idea:

Here the sequence is different because the idea is known and, usually, the background information is also known.

Red: To find out the existing feelings about the idea.

Yellow: To make an effort to find the benefits in the idea.

Black: To point out weaknesses, problems and dangers in the idea.

Green: To see if the idea can be modified to strengthen the yellow-hat benefits and to overcome the black-hat problems.

White: To see if available information can help in modifying the idea to make it more acceptable (if the red-hat feelings are against the idea).

Green: Development of the final suggestion. Black: Judgement of the final suggestion. Red: To find out the feelings on the outcome.

Short Sequences:

Quite often short sequences of the hats are used for various purposes.

Yellow/Black/Red: For quick assessment of an idea. White/Green: To generate ideas. Black/Green: To improve an existing idea. Blue/Green: To summarize and spell out the alternatives. Blue/Yellow: To see if the thinking has had any benefits.

SUMMARY

The six hats are usually used one at a time in the course of thinking. This is the occasional use.

In the systematic use a sequence of hats may be set up as a program to guide the thinking. There are guidelines about the most useful sequences.

EXERCISES ON THE SEQUENCE USE OF THE SIX HATS

If you could only use a sequence of three hats to find a present for your best friend's birthday, what would the sequence be?

There is a meeting to discuss the problem of young criminals. Which hat do you think should be used first?

Your family is planning to move to another part of the country. You are asked what you think about the move. What sequence of hats would you use (give the first four)?

A group of young people are always holding parties and the loud music is upsetting their neighbours.

The neighbours have a meeting to discuss the problem. Their choice of hats is: Red/Black/Green/Black/Red. Do you agree with this sequence of hats? What sequence would you suggest?

You need to earn some money quickly in order to buy something you want very much. What sequence of hats would you set up to guide your thinking?

Some people do not seem to enjoy life enough. What sort of thinking should such people do? Give a short sequence of four hats.

For each of the following situations which hat would you use first of all:

... You are accused of being a liar.

... You break your right arm in an accident.

... Your mother is very ill and has to go to hospital.

... You find an envelope with a lot of money in it.

... You discover your friend is a thief.

... You get offered a very good summer job.

A man buys a car from a friend, after testing it. But after a week the car breaks down and needs expensive repairs. They meet to discuss who should pay for the repairs. Set out a sequence of hats for the discussion.