

SIX THINKING HATS MODEL

How to Use the Six Thinking Hats Model

Use Six Thinking Hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings, it has the benefit of preventing any confrontation that may happen when people with different thinking styles discuss a problem, because every perspective is valid.

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

- **White Hat:** with this thinking hat, you focus on the available data. Look at the information that you have, analyze past trends, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and try to either fill them or take account of them.
- **Red Hat:** "wearing" the Red Hat, you look at problems using your intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also, think how others could react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.
- **Black Hat:** using Black Hat thinking, look at a decision's potentially negative outcomes. 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. It's one of the real benefits of this model, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that they often cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.

- **Yellow Hat:** this 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 represents creativity. This is where you develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.
- **Blue Hat:** this hat represents process control. It's the hat worn by people chairing meetings, for example. When facing 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.

A variant of this technique is to look at problems from the point of view of different professionals (for example, doctors, architects or sales directors) or different customers.

An Example of Six Hat Thinking

The directors of a property company are considering whether they should build a new office block. The economy is doing well, and the vacant office spaces in their city are being snapped up. As part of their decision-making process, they adopt the Six Thinking Hats technique.

Wearing the White Hat, they analyze the data that they have. They can see that the amount of available office space in their city is dwindling, and they calculate that, by the time a new office block would be completed, existing space will be in extremely short supply. They also note that the economic outlook is good, and steady growth is predicted to continue.

Thinking with a Red Hat, some of the directors say that the proposed building looks ugly and gloomy. They worry that people would find it an oppressive or uninspiring place to work.

When they think with the Black Hat, they wonder whether the economic forecast could be wrong. The economy may be about to experience a downturn, in which case the building could sit empty or only partially occupied for a long time. If the building is unattractive, then companies will choose to work in other, more attractive premises.

Wearing the positive Yellow Hat, however, the directors know that, if the economy holds up and their projections are correct, the company stands to make a healthy profit. If they are lucky, maybe they could sell the building before the next downturn, or rent to tenants on long-term leases that will last through any recession.

With Green Hat thinking, they consider whether they should redesign the building to make it more appealing. Perhaps they could build prestige offices that people would want to rent in any economic climate. Alternatively, maybe they should invest the money in the short term, then buy up property at a lower cost when the next downturn happens.

The chairman of the meeting wears the Blue Hat to keep the discussion moving and ideas flowing, encouraging the other directors to switch their thinking between the different perspectives.

Having examined their options from numerous viewpoints, the directors have a much more detailed picture of possible outcomes, and can make their decision accordingly.