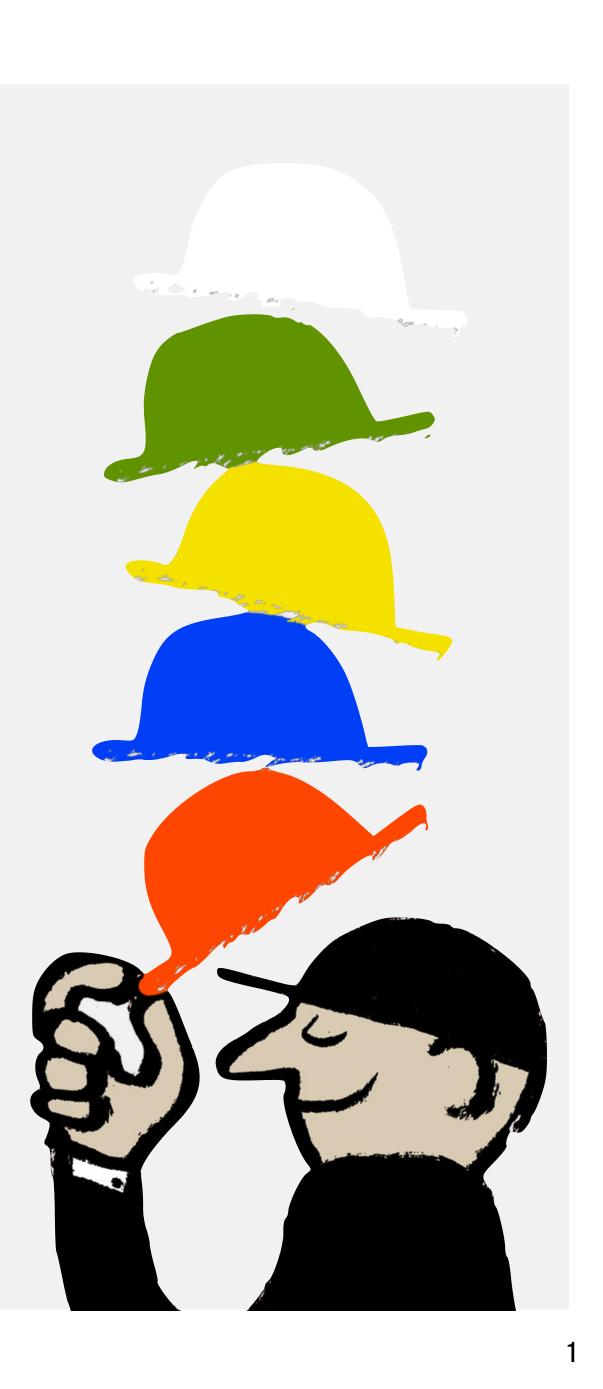# The Six Thinking Hats

Edward de Bono, who passed away in early 2021, was a psychologist, inventor and author who helped some of the biggest organisations in the world to think smarter. His legendary Six Thinking Hats tool enables us to get out of our default world views, invite diverse perspectives and keep our biases and blindspots in check.

The tool help us intentionally explore different modes of thinking, and allows something to be seen from every possible angle. Curious, inclusive teams around the world have reported leaps in innovation, better decisions and richer collaboration through its simple, and regular use.

Next we'll walk through the simple idea at the heart of the tool, before putting it to play in relation to some challenges and opportunities live among this group. Let's move to the next page.

"Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way."

Edward de Bono'

Meeting the hats

We'll briefly work through the different 'personas' that the hats embody, before experimenting with them together. We'll take it in turns to read the description that accompanies each — and as we go through, let's individually make a mental note of which of the hats we feel best represents our own default world view. First up, the White Hat.

White Hat
Data, facts, information known or needed

Think of a sheet of paper, neutrality or a spreadsheet.

The White Hat is only concerned with data and facts — not emotion or gut.

It wants to know things like, what information do we have? What information do we still need? And how are we going to get it? When we're wearing the White Hat, we're in fact seeking detective mode, not one of idea generation.

White Hat thinking is very helpful in ensuring no stone is left unturned, and that plenty of information is 'on the table' in the pursuit of good decisions and sound outcomes.

Red Hat
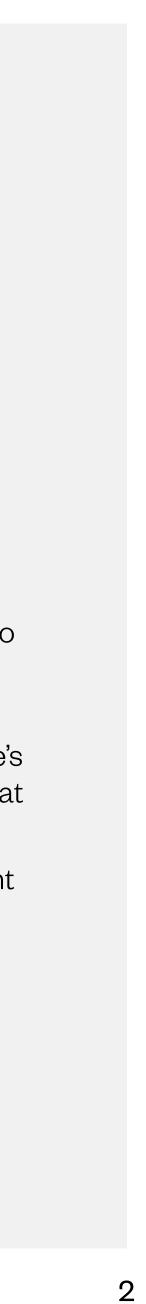Feelings, hunches, instinct and intuition

Think of a roaring fire, passion or 'seeing red.'

In contrast to the White Hat, the Red Hat can express gut reaction and emotion without having to validate or back it up.

The red hat wants to know "what is my gut telling me?" and to express things like "I just don't feel she's the right person for the project", or "my hunch is that we can definitely make that deadline."

The Red Hat can capture the feeling that is present among a group towards something right now.

Next up we'll outline the Black Hat and the Yellow Hat.

We'll read the two descriptions opposite, keeping in mind our individual tendencies to demonstrate this kind of thinking — before moving on and discovering the final pair.

Black Hat
Difficulties, potential problems, why something may not work

Think of a judge's gown.

The Black Hat allows us to ask critical questions, and to 'see the worst first'. It explores the risks and negatives of any particular opportunity, and the fears of the wearer. Its problem oriented in a purposeful way, highlighting pitfalls that may have gone unnoticed.

The Black Hat asks things like, what are the risks? And the wearer is likely to be able to back up their fears with examples and instances of where problems have arisen in the past, and may well recur. It's a persona that's sometimes too easy to adopt in the day-to-day, as we've been doing it for millions of years to stay alive.

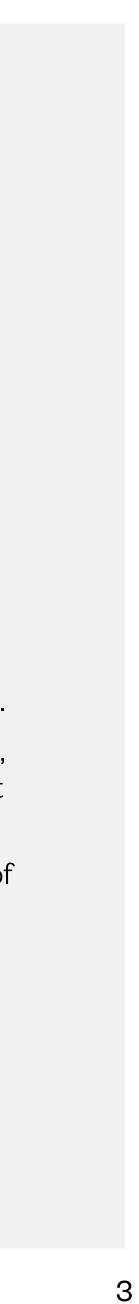**Yellow Hat**
Focuses on positive outcomes benefits of solutions

Think of brightness and optimism.

The Yellow Hat is the 'ying,' to Black Hat's 'yang', standing for positivity and optimism. It's about consciously look for benefits in different situations.

The Yellow Hat is interested in where the value lies, what's the best that can happen and how we might make this thing work.

Instead of seeing mainly negative consequences of new ideas, we can make an effort to look for new ones. We can use the Yellow Hat to advance and improve ideas that help us solve our problems.

Blue Hat
Manage process,
next steps,
action plans

Green Hat
Creativity,
solutions,
alternatives,
new ideas

Our final two hats are coloured Blue and Green. Someone new can read out the intros to them — and again let's reflect on who feels a kindred connection to these styles of thinking.

Once that's done — we'll move to the next page and try some of these hats on for size.

Think of the sky above, or being cool and in control

The Blue Hat is the overview hat, and when running the Six Thinking Hats exercise, it's often used as a bit of a facilitator's hat to help bring structure and clarity. An important use of the Blue Hat is to focus the discussion on a particular topic or problem. It's a useful hat to reach for when a group strays away from its initially agreed focus. And equally, when you want to commit to next steps together, the Blue Hat is a good one to reach for.

The Blue Hat helps us to draw conclusions, and might lead us to say things like, "Let's pause and summarise what we've got so far." Or, "Let's focus on what each of us wants from this session."

Think of plants, growth and abundance

Wearing the green hat, we are allowed to have crazy ideas. It's all about creating many novel ways to look at things. Say, "remember I'm wearing the Green Hat, so I'm allowed to suggest things like that."

By wearing the Green Hat, we make a deliberate effort to actually look for new ways of doing things. We signal to others and our brains that now is the time to be creative. And while we might come up with ideas that feel wildly unrealistic, we may well prompt a powerful new way of looking at things.

The Green Hat can motivate us to come up with ideas that break a current pattern of thought

Before we collectively try on the Six Thinking Hats — we're going to spend a minute or so individually reflecting on some challenges and opportunities live within the group at the minute, so that we can put them at the centre of the exercise.

First, everyone spend a minute individually and silently noting some down — work decisions, team challenges, new project opportunities — anything that will benefit from some diverse and deliberate scrutiny.

It's time to try on the hats together

We'll now practice the Six Thinking Hats tool, in relation to some live challenges and opportunities. A snapshot of each hat is on this page as a reminder — and we'll follow the simple steps below.

1 — Identify and frame a first challenge or opportunity. For example "We should allow everyone totally flexibility on the days they work from the office." or "I'm thinking of leaving my job and setting up my own business." The beauty of the tool is how widely it can be applied, but it helps to get tight with the framing of what you're going to focus on. Spend a minute or so defining that.

2 — Select a first coloured hat, that you will all each metaphorically put on. Now spend some time exploring what you've chosen to focus on — assuming only the persona of that hat. Ask the questions you think that hat would ask, make suggestions that reflect its essence. So in the example of the team flexibility, the White Hat might ask "What surveys have we run to see what the team wants" or "What are similar companies to us offering?, whereas the Green Hat might say "Yes! And why don't we test out a 3 day week, or encourage some of the team to co-locate with our clients for one month every year."

3 — Spend some time with at least four of the hats, channeling each persona and making some notes of the ideas and insights you feel are most valuable as you go. Choose your own combinations and order, but ensure you're all wearing the same hat at the same time.

Enjoy the experiment!

White Hat
Data, facts, information known or needed

Black Hat
Difficulties, potential problems, why something may not work

Blue Hat
Manage process, next steps, action plans

Red Hat
Feelings, hunches, instinct and intuition

Yellow Hat
Focuses on positive outcomes benefits of solutions

Green Hat
Creativity, solutions, alternatives, new ideas

It's time to put the hats back on, but with a different spin this time...

Back in our groups, we'll work with the hats again.

We'll put a different challenge into the middle for exploration and discussion. But this time, we'll wear different hats to each other — channeling that hat's persona ourselves.

So you can choose which hat you're wearing, and are periodically welcome to change it too.

White Hat
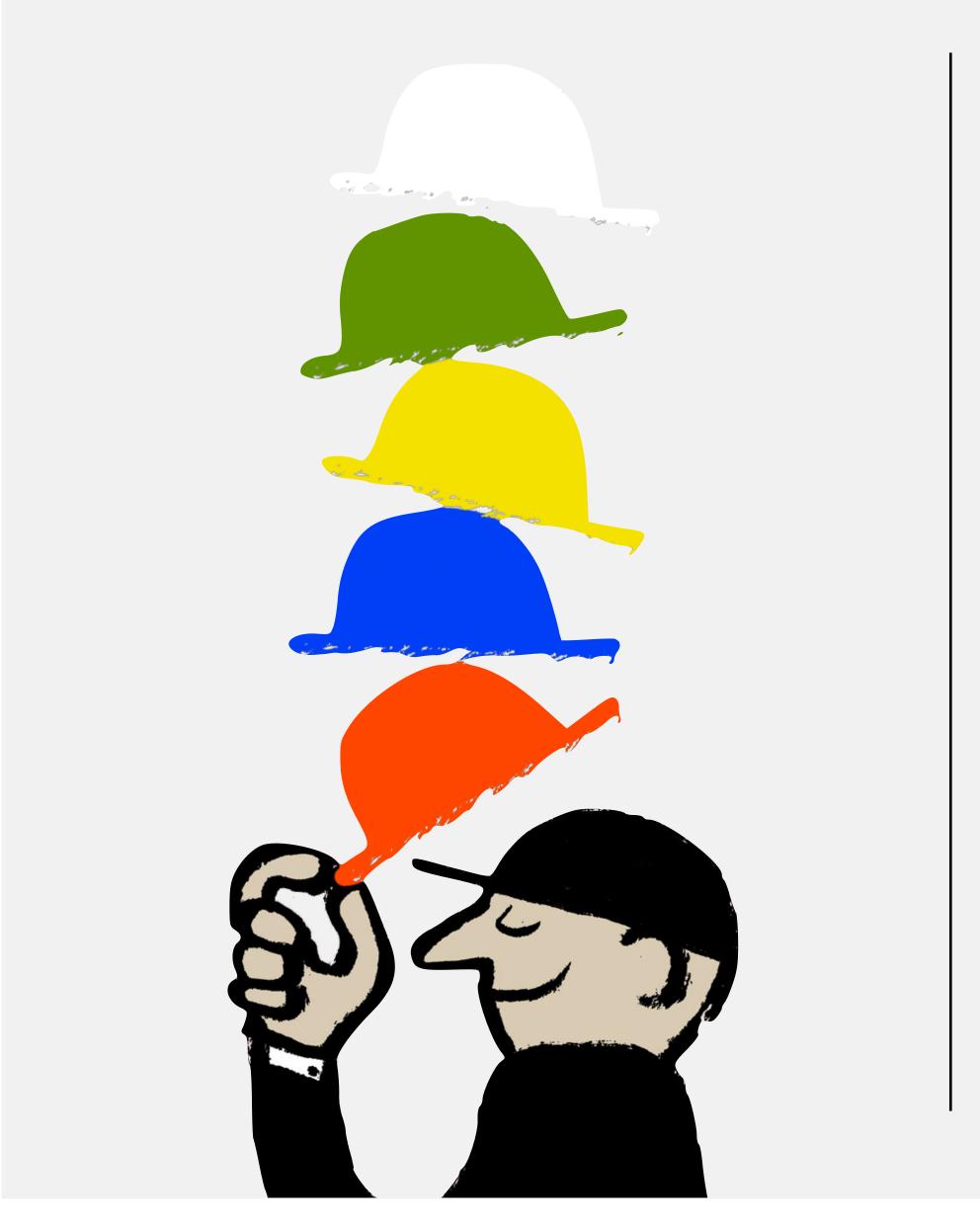Data, facts, information known or needed

Black Hat
Difficulties, potential problems, why something may not work

Blue Hat
Manage process, next steps, action plans

Red Hat
Feelings, hunches, instinct and intuition

Yellow Hat
Focuses on positive outcomes benefits of solutions

Green Hat
Creativity, solutions, alternatives, new ideas

Reflecting and thinking forwards

Having experimented with De Bono's Six Thinking Hats, now spend reflecting on the prompts below

1 Where do we feel we moved a challenge or opportunity forward? What next steps might that lead us to?

2 What feels like the best kind of order to using the hats in. De Bono suggested beginning and ending with the Red Hat to test any change in our gut instinct. What do you think of this?

3 What coming decisions or opportunities within your team could you use the Six Thinking Hats on?