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This systematic method of thinking developed by Edward de Bono provides individuals with skills and tools they can apply immediately. It is a simple, effective technique that helps anyone who applies it become more productive at their respective level of application. It separates thinking into six distinct categories. Each category is identified with its own coloured metaphorical “thinking hat”. By mentally wearing and switching “hats”, one can easily focus or redirect thoughts, the conversation, or the meeting.

Argument and Critical Thinking To this day, Western culture depends on this type of thinking. In family arguments, in business discussions, in the law courts, and in governing assemblies, we use the thinking system of the Greeks, based on argument and critical thinking.

I sometimes refer to prominent philosophers of this day as the “gang of three.” Who were the famous Greek gang of three, and how did they form the thinking habits of Western culture?

The Gang of Three

Socrates (469–399 B.C.)

Socrates was trained as a "sophist." Sophists were people who played with words and showed how careful choice of words could lead you to almost any conclusion you wanted.

Socrates was interested in challenging people's thinking and, indeed, getting them to think at all instead of just taking things for granted. He wanted people to examine what they meant when they said something. He was not concerned with building things up or making things happen.

From Socrates we get the great emphasis on argument and critical thinking. Socrates chose to make argument the main thinking tool. Within argument, there was to be critical thinking: Why do you say that? What do you mean by that?

Plato (c. 427–348 B.C.)

Plato is generally held to be the father of Western philosophy. He is best-known for his famous analogy of the cave. Suppose someone is bound up so that the person cannot turn around but can only look at the back wall of the cave. There is a fire at the mouth of the cave. If someone comes into the cave, then the bound person cannot see the newcomer directly but can only see the shadow cast by the fire on the back wall of the cave. So as we go through life, we cannot see truth and reality but only "shadows" of these. If we try hard enough and listen to philosophers, then perhaps we can get a glimpse of the truth. From Plato we get the notion that there is the "truth" somewhere but that we have to search for it to find it. The way to search for the truth is to use critical thinking to attack what is untrue.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

Aristotle was the pupil of Plato and the tutor of Alexander the Great. Aristotle was a very practical person.

He developed the notion of "categories," which are really definitions. So you might have a definition of a "chair" or a "table." When you come across a piece of furniture, you have to judge whether that piece of furniture fits the definition of a chair. If it does fit, you say it is a chair.

The object cannot both be a chair and not be a chair at the same time. That would be a "contradiction."

On the basis of his categories and the avoidance of contradiction, Aristotle developed the sort of logic we still use today (based largely on "is" and "is

not"). From Aristotle we get a type of logic based on identity and non-identity, on inclusion and exclusion.

The Outcome of the Gang of Three

So this was the gang of three. The outcome was a thinking system based on the search for the "truth." This search was going to be carried out by the method of argument. Within argument there was to be the critical thinking that sought to attack "untruth." This attack was going to use the methodology of Aristotle's logic.

The Pervasiveness of Argument

To this day, argument is the basis of our normal thinking. The purest form of this type of thinking is in the law courts where the prosecution takes one side of the argument and the defense the other side. Each strives to prove the other side wrong. The "truth" is to be reached by argument.

The Inadequacy of Argument

There is a place for argument, and argument is a useful tool of thinking. But argument is inadequate as the main tool of thinking.

Argument lacks constructive energies, design energies, and creative energies. Pointing out faults may lead to some improvement but does not construct something new.

Synthesizing both points of view does not produce a stream of new alternatives.

Today in business, as elsewhere, there is a huge need to be constructive and creative. There is a need to solve problems and to open up opportunities. There is a need to design new possibilities, not just to argue between two existing possibilities.

Parallel Thinking:

An Alternative to Argument

Traditional argument is totally useless for such a design process. Instead, we need Parallel Thinking®, where each thinker puts forward his or her thoughts in parallel with the thoughts of others—not attacking the thoughts of others.

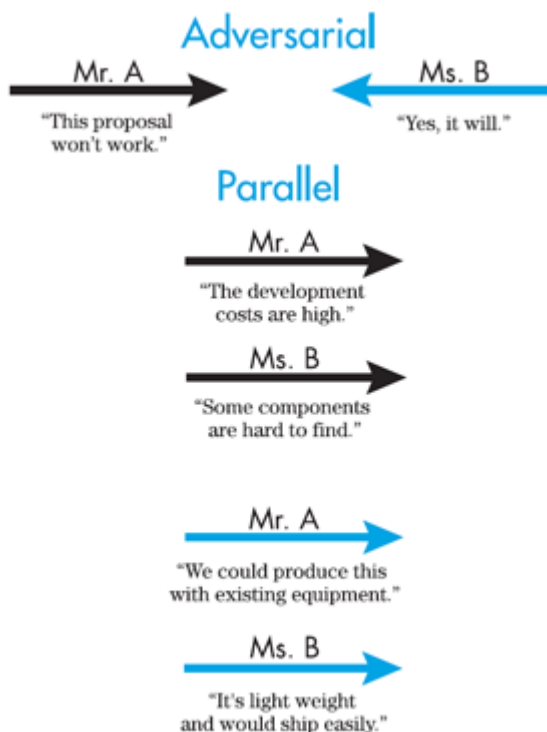
The Six Thinking Hats method is a practical way of carrying out Parallel

Thinking. This method is of fundamental importance because it provides us, for the first time, with a practical method of constructive thinking. We now have a more constructive alternative to argument or drifting discussion.

It is important to understand this very fundamental nature of the Six Hats method in order to appreciate the importance of the method. The Six Hats system is not just another gimmick. This system provides an alternative to that most basic of thinking procedures: the argument.

Parallel Thinking at Work

In traditional adversarial thinking, A and B are in conflict.



Each side seeks to criticize the other point of view. The Six Hats method allows Parallel Thinking. Both A and B wear each hat together as they explore all sides of an issue. Adversarial confrontation is replaced by a cooperative exploration of the subject.

Unbundling Thinking

When we think in the normal way, we try to do too much at once. We may be looking at the information, forming ideas, and judging someone else's ideas all at the same time. The Six Hats method allows us to unbundle thinking. Instead of trying to do everything at once,

we separate out the different aspects of thinking. This way we can pay full attention to each aspect in turn. Think of full-color printing, where the basic color separations are made and then each basic color is printed separately onto the same sheet to give full-color printing. In the same way, we separate the modes of thinking and then apply each mode to the same subject in order to end up with full-color thinking on the subject.

There is a suggestion that the chemical setting in the brain (neurotransmitters, etc.) may be different when we are being positive from when we are being negative and from when we are being creative. If this

proves to be so, then there is an absolute need to separate out the different components of thinking in order to do each properly. It would be impossible to have one brain setting that was ideal for all sorts of thinking.

Separating Ego and Performance

If you do not like an idea, then you are not going to spend much time thinking of the benefits or good points of that idea. This is because if you uncovered sufficient good points for the idea to be accepted, then you would have "lost" the argument.

With the Six Hats method, however, the thinker can be specifically asked to give a yellow hat "performance." This is a challenge to the thinker, who will not want to appear unable to perform this way. So yellow hat thinking gets done even by someone who does not like the idea. In the course of this yellow hat thinking, ideas may turn up which cause the thinker to change his or her mind. It also can happen the other way around. A euphoric supporter of an idea can be asked to do a black hat performance. This may turn up difficulties that reduce the previous euphoria.

Switching Modes

If you ask someone not to be so negative, that person may be offended. But if you ask the person to do yellow hat thinking, there is no reason to be offended. You might also say, "That is good black hat thinking; let us have some more of it." Later you would say, "We have had a lot of good black hat thinking. Now, what about switching to the yellow hat?"

Because the Six Hats system quickly becomes a neutral game, the method provides a very convenient way to switch thinking or to ask for a certain type of thinking. This is not easy to do in any other way without offending the people involved.

Increased Awareness

Because there is now a simple and practical way of referring to different modes of thinking, people become aware that they are stuck in one mode or another.

"I think I have only been doing red hat thinking about this."

"We should make a deliberate yellow hat effort here."

People can now comment on their own thinking and can also comment on the thinking of others. The Six Hats method allows an increased awareness of what thinking is actually being used on any occasion.

Who Is Using the Six Thinking Hats?

The method is widely used at Prudential Insurance (the largest insurance group in the world), and the former president of Prudential, Rob Barbaro, used the Six Hats framework every day with his staff.

Siemens has over 35 certified Six Hats instructors working with employees throughout its European offices.

Boeing is just now taking up the hats in the United States.

The hats are also in use at Honeywell, Motorola, Eli Lilly, Cargill, Fidelity Investments, National Semiconductor, and in many other companies.

Healthcare groups, financial institutions, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, manufacturers, and utilities are just a few of the industries using Six Hats. At the time of publication, over 100,000 people had been trained in the hats in 35 countries.

Key Benefits

Below are some of the key benefits clients find in using the Six Thinking Hats.

- Works—they see results immediately
- Simple to learn, use, and implement
- Not dependent on others (you can use it by yourself)
- Modifies behavior without attacking it
- Empowers
- Can be used at all levels
- Improves cross-cultural interaction
- Reduces conflict
- Encourages cooperation
- Enhances quality of thinking
- Supports other change initiatives
- Is available worldwide

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