The Six Hats
(adapted from material by Dr. Edward de Bono)

White "Hat": Facts/Data - The White Hat represents pure knowledge gathering, data collection, and historical account. It asks, "What do we know?" It addresses cognition. The process involves exploring facts rather than personal opinions. "First class" facts consist of ones that are checked and proven, while "second class" facts include information believed to be true. Information that is missing is also included here. This "hat" should remain neutral and unbiased.

Red "Hat: Emotions - The Red Hat represents feelings and hunches. This hat legitimizes emotions and explores fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates. This hat feeling by focusing on "This is how I feel." It addresses affect by focusing on hunches, intuition, and signal. The red hat is the opposite of neutral, objective information (White Hat). Here there is no need to give reasons or justification for the subjective feelings. The Red "hat" identifies emotions. It is often helpful when providing feedback for just one person to identify emotions, "gut" feelings and/or hunches the person may be feeling. When more than one person takes on this role the peer may feel overwhelmed.

Green Hat: Growth The Green Hat symbolizes fertility, growth, and the value of seeds. It involves creative thinking and the search for alternatives while generating new concepts and new perceptions. The green hat is the "thinking outside the box" creative hat. It asks, "What haven't you considered before?" It involves brainstorming and free association which explore new possibilities, alternatives, ideas, and concepts.

Yellow Hat: Optimism The Yellow Hat symbolizes sunshine, brightness and optimism; it is positive and constructive. It addresses feasibility, benefits, advantages, and savings. It asks, "What could happen (positive)?" The Yellow Hat addresses reframing and permits visions and dreams. Yellow Hat thinking helps keep the group going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.

Black: Risk Analysis/Problems "Hat" The Black Hat focuses on critical negative judgments, a risk analysis. It identifies dangers and potential problems. It is the logical negative and addresses possible negative effects and what may potentially happen. It can be used to determine weakness in an idea. It also addresses why it does not fit – facts, experience, policy, system and ethics. It asks, "What may be hazardous?" The Black Hat Thinker is a gatekeeper, not a dream breaker.

Blue Hat: Pull it Together - The Blue Hat represents the management of the thinking process. Blue Hat thinkers are like the orchestra conductors seeking the proper balance and blending of the other five hats. It asks, "What is the conclusion?" Blue Hat thinking is a final reflection on the other five hats that have been both over and under-utilized in the problem solving exploration. The Blue hat is also responsible for summaries, overviews, and conclusions.

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Six Thinking Hats