

De Bono's hats in project reviews

Dialog consultants often use innovative techniques to undertake consulting assignments.

In this paper we will share our experience in using Edward De Bono's 6 thinking hats in undertaking a post-implementation review.

Concept of the thinking hats

The best way to explain the thinking concept called De Bono's 6 thinking hats is through an excerpt from De Bono's book – "Serious Creativity".

- How do you get time for creative thinking?
- How can you ask someone to make some creative effort?
- How do you stop someone from being persistently negative?
- How do you encourage people to look at the benefits of an idea?
- How do you express your intuition and gut feeling in a serious meeting?

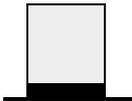
As De Bono explains, "The six thinking hats method is extremely simple but it is powerful in its simplicity. There was a breakfast meeting in Tokyo to launch the Japanese translation of the book Six Thinking Hats. At this meeting were the chief executives of some of the best known Japanese corporations, including Mr. Hisashi Shinto, who was chief executive of NTT (Nippon Telephone and Telegraph). He had just been chosen as Japanese businessman of the year for his feat in privatising this giant organisation. At that time NTT had 350,000 employees and in stock market valuation was worth more than the top five U.S. corporations put together. Mr. Shinto liked the idea of the six hats and asked his executives to read the book. I met him again six months later and he told me the method had a powerful effect on his executives who were now more creative and more constructive."

In the 1990's, IBM used the six hats method as part of the core of their training for their 40,000 managers worldwide. The method is widely used by major corporations including Boeing, Siemens, Du Pont and Prudential.

Schools around the world have integrated the concept into their classrooms. Recently, one of our Senior Dialog consultants has been sought after to speak about the concept and Dialog's use of it at one of the largest private schools in Australia.

Overview of the 6 hats

Here is a simple overview of the 6 thinking hats. Later we will show how it was used in a post-implementation project review.



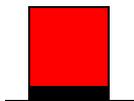
WHITE HAT

Think of white paper, which is neutral and carries information.

The white hat has to do with data and information.

- What information do we have here?
- What information is missing?
- What information would we like to have?
- How are we going to get the information?

When you ask for white hat thinking at a meeting you are asking those present to put aside the proposals and arguments and to focus directly on the information. For the moment everyone at the meeting looks to see what information is available, what is needed, and how it might be obtained.



RED HAT

Think of red and fire and warm.

The red hat has to do with feelings, intuition, and emotions. In a normal meeting you are not supposed to put forward your emotions, but people do this by disguising their emotions as logic. The red hat gives people permission to put forward their feelings and intuitions without apology, without explanation, and without any need to justify them.

- Putting on my red hat, this is what I feel about the project.

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- My gut feeling is that it will not work.
 - I don't like the way this is being done.
 - My intuition tells me that prices will fall soon.

Because the red hat "signals" feelings, they can come into the discussion without pretending to be anything else. Intuition may be a composite judgment based on years of experience in the field and may be very valuable even if the reasons behind the intuition cannot be spelled out consciously. It should be said that intuition is not always right.



BLACK HAT

Think of a stern judge wearing black robes that comes down heavily on criminals.

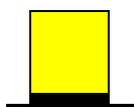
The black hat is the "caution" hat. The black hat prevents us from making mistakes, doing silly things, and doing things that might be illegal.

The black hat is for critical judgment. The black hat points out why something cannot be done.

The black hat points out why something will not be profitable.

- The regulations do not permit us to do that.
- We do not have the production capacity to meet that order.
- When we tried a higher price the sales fell off.
- He has no experience in export management.

Mistakes can be disastrous. No one wants to make mistakes. It is the most used hat and possibly the most useful hat. At the same time it is very easy to overuse the black hat. Some people feel that it is enough to be cautious and negative and that if you prevent all mistakes then everything will be fine. It is easy to kill creative ideas with early negativity.



YELLOW HAT

Think of sunshine.

The yellow hat is for optimism and the logical positive view of things.

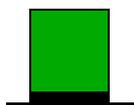
The yellow hat looks for feasibility and how something can be done.

The yellow hat looks for benefits - but they must be logically based.

- This might work if we moved the production plant nearer to the customers.
- The benefit would come from repeat purchases.
- The high cost of energy would make everyone more energy efficient.

The black hat is much more natural than the yellow hat because we need to avoid mistakes and danger for survival. Yellow hat thinking often requires a deliberate effort. Benefits are not always immediately obvious and we might have to search for them.

Every creative idea deserves some yellow hat attention.



GREEN HAT

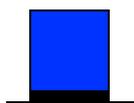
Think of vegetation and rich growth

The green hat is for creative thinking and for new ideas.

The green hat is for additional alternatives and for putting forward possibilities and hypotheses.

- We need some new ideas here.
- Are there any additional alternatives?
- Could we do this in a different way?
- Could there be another explanation?

The green hat makes it possible to ask directly for a creative effort. The green hat makes time and space available for creative thinking. Even if no creative ideas are forthcoming, the green hat asks for the creative effort.



BLUE HAT

Think of the sky and an overview.

The blue hat thinks about the thinking being used. It sets the agenda for thinking.

The blue hat suggests the next step in the thinking.

The blue hat can ask for other hats.

The blue hat asks for summaries, conclusions, and decisions.

The blue hat can comment on the thinking being used.

- We have spent far too much time looking for someone to blame.
- Could we have a summary of your views?
- I think we should take a look at the priorities.

The blue hat is usually used by the facilitator of a meeting, but other participants can put forward suggestions. The blue hat is for organising and controlling the thinking process so that it becomes more productive.

The Project in Review with hats

Now that we have explained the 6 thinking hats, we would like to share an approach that John D'Hooghe, Dialog Executive Consultant, has successfully used to undertake a post-implementation review of a large systems development and deployment project in a government department.

As John explains, "I wanted to ensure that there was full participation from all the project stakeholders during the post-implementation review workshop. I also wanted both a structured approach but with an innovative twist to maintain interest. The 6 thinking hats fulfilled that need."

In preparation for the workshop, John ensured that participants had a little background on the De Bono concept. It is fair to say that some participants were a little apprehensive about using the concept for a post-implementation review. “The secret was to carefully prepare supporting material and relevant methods of using the concept to extract the desired outcome whilst keeping in mind the personality and preferred thinking style of each stakeholder”, explains John. “Considerations such as who is more vocal, who likes to see things visually and who prefers to think through ideas vocally with others were considered”.

In the next section we will show some of the instruments and tools Dialog used to make effective use of the 6 Thinking Hats concept.

In the example of the post-implementation review mentioned, the outputs of the workshop were very informative. Not only were excellent ‘lessons learnt’ recorded but also some improvements to processes were synthesised. These went on to be discussed at other forums and eventually implemented into the department’s IT project processes and systems.

One participant, from the Organisational Management Services unit of the department, went on to use the concept and tools at other non-IT project reviews.

Hats in action

In this section we present some tools used to make the 6 thinking hats work for a particular assignment. Remember these tools may not work in every circumstances. Indeed careful consideration needs to be made before using the tools or concepts. Dialog consultants. It is recommended that you involved someone who has had experience in the toll and techniques the first time you prepare to use the concept in a large group.

The tools are presented as one worksheet for each Thinking Hat. Each worksheet had a facilitation process built around to guide the discussion and eventual outputs.

1. WHITE



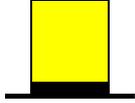
"Just the facts ma'am, nothing but the facts"



Be totally logical and non-judgemental.

Write down some of the facts about the project (e.g. Critical Success Factors, number of users rolled out).

2. YELLOW



"Oh what a beautiful day!"



It's a beautiful sunny day. Be optimistic.

What went well with the project?

What's the good news?

3. BLACK



"The sky was as dark as the midnight raven."

Now the storm has blown in, the roof's leaking and the power has gone off.

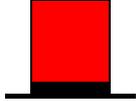
Be critical.

What went wrong?

What could have been done much better?



4. RED



"Feelings, nothing but feelings."



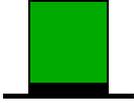
Close your eyes and think about the following points in the project.

Chart how you felt - scared, anxious, angry, happy, exhilarated, sad.

- The day you heard you were joining the project.
- The first week of the project (you may have been part-time).
- The week before the pilot roll-out.
- The week after the pilot roll-out.
- The day of the last roll-out
- Today
- Plot any other points you want.

A large empty coordinate grid for plotting. It features a vertical y-axis on the left and a horizontal x-axis at the bottom, both represented by thick black lines. The grid is composed of 10 horizontal lines and 10 vertical lines, creating a series of rectangular cells for data entry.

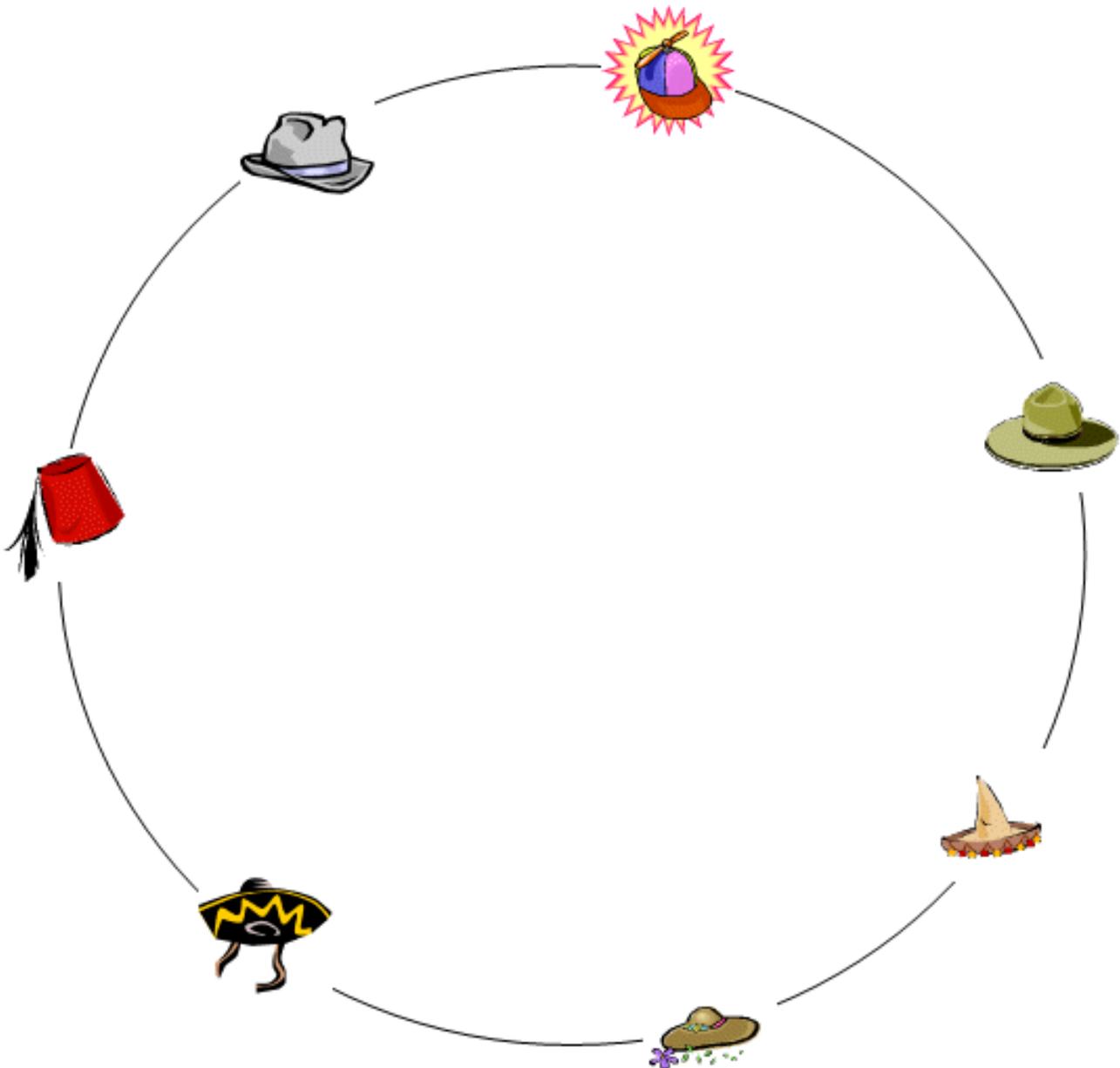
5. GREEN



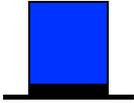
"Adversity is the mother of all innovation."

Be creative.

Draw a picture of what this Project reminds you of.



6. BLUE



"I can see forever."



Take a deep breath.

Ponder over what we've discussed.

Take a helicopter view of the entire project.

Describe what you see.

Conclusion

The use of innovative facilitation techniques such as De Bono's thinking hats can be used successfully on IT projects. Used in the right way at the right time by experienced consultants, these tools and techniques can inject interesting approaches and yield excellent outcomes.

Dialog is more than willing to assist clients in determining the best project processes which match the organisational culture.

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