We all use different types of thinking, usually without realising it. For example, we may react emotionally or objectively, or just be critical of every suggestion that’s made. Most of us have one or two thinking styles we tend to use most of the time without even thinking about it! Without our realising it, a discussion in a CLT can be affected by the approach each member brings with them. So – difficult subjects don’t get tackled properly and are not resolved. Edward de Bono offered a way of approaching difficult subjects. Using his ‘Six Thinking Hats’, team members can step out of their usual thinking style and assess a situation more objectively.

Look at the ‘Thinking Hats’ on the opposite page and ask yourself which ‘Hat’ you tend to wear most often. And whether there are ones you’d never wear. De Bono points out that no thinking style (or ‘Hat’) is any better or worse than any other, but a balanced team needs all ‘Hats’ so that together the members can consider all the aspects of whatever issues they are facing. This encourages collaborative working.

In de Bono’s method members of the team step out of their usual thinking styles and all wear the same colour ‘Hat’ at the same time, firmly directed by the person leading on that occasion. This helps the team as a whole to be more objective.

1. Look at the six hats, keeping in mind what you learned about yourself in the **Belbin Team Roles** exercise, which of the hats do you most naturally tend to wear at a meeting? Try to be as honest as you can be. You may, of course wear more than one hat.

2. Then share your thinking with the rest of the group – does everyone agree with your conclusions? Would other members of the group be inclined to think that you also wear other hats?

3. At a future meeting when you are faced with a difficult issue to discuss, try using the process as described opposite, and see if it helps you to come to any decisions. It’s important that the group facilitator is clear and firm about which hat you are all wearing at which stage, and that every member sticks to that hat until told to change. You may well want to use large sheets of flipchart paper to note your reactions at each stage.



**The Six Thinking Hats Approach**

The Six Thinking Hats method could be used in a sequence first of all to explore the problem, and then develop a set of solutions, and finally agree on an approach.

**Step 1**: Present the facts of the case (white hat)

**Step 2**: Encourage people to share their gut feelings about the project (red hat)

**Step 3:** Generate ideas on how the case could be handled (green hat).

**Step 4**: Evaluate the merits of the ideas:

• List the benefits (yellow hat)

• List the drawbacks (black hat).

**Step 5:** Get everybody’s gut feelings about the alternatives (back to the red hat).

**Step 6:** Summarise, agree a decision, next steps and an action plan and adjourn the meeting (blue hat).