

## What Are the Six Thinking Hats?

The Six Thinking Hats is a simple, effective parallel thinking process that helps people be more productive, focused, and mindfully involved. And once learned, the tools can be applied immediately!

You and your team members can learn how to separate thinking into six clear functions and roles. Each thinking role is identified with a colored symbolic "thinking hat." By mentally wearing and switching "hats," you can easily focus or redirect thoughts, the conversation, or the meeting.



The White Hat calls for information known or needed. "The facts, just the facts."



The Red Hat signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. When using this hat you can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates.



The Yellow Hat symbolizes brightness and optimism. Under this hat you explore the positives and probe for value and benefit.



The Black Hat is judgment - the devil's advocate or why something may not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers; where things might go wrong. Probably the most powerful and useful of the Hats but a problem if overused.



The Green Hat focuses on creativity; the possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. It's an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions.



The Blue Hat is used to manage the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensures the Six Thinking Hats® guidelines are observed

## The Need to Change Thinking Behavior

We have developed many excellent thinking tools for argument and analysis. Our information technology methods are constantly improving. But we have developed few tools to deal with our ordinary everyday thinking—the sort of thinking we do in conversations and meetings. In fact, our traditional thinking methods have not changed for centuries. While these methods were powerful in dealing with a relatively stable world (where ideas and concepts tended to live longer than people), they are no longer adequate to deal with the rapidly changing world of today where new concepts and ideas are urgently needed.



## Historical Background

The fall of the Roman Empire in Europe was followed by the Dark Ages. The so-called barbarian hordes swept across what had been the civilizations of Rome and Greece. Scholarship, reading, writing, and thinking were only preserved in the great monasteries and abbeys of the Church. Naturally, the thinking that took place in the monasteries and abbeys was concerned with theology and with preserving the doctrine and dogma of the Christian faith.

Then came the Renaissance. The Renaissance was brought about by the discovery of the classic thinking methods of the ancient Greek philosophers. This "new thinking" provided a breath of fresh air. Humanity was given a more central role in the universe. Thinkers were allowed to use reason to work things out. Logic was now allowed. It is hardly surprising that this new thinking was eagerly embraced by the "humanists" or non-church thinkers because it gave them a framework for thinking and also for challenging the church. At the same time, this new thinking was embraced by church scholars such as Thomas Aquinas of Naples, who fashioned Aristotelian logic into a powerful, argumentative way of proving heretics wrong. So the two main thinking groups in Western culture adopted, with eagerness, this classic Greek thinking.

## 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. We 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 (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.