

Decisions, decisions!

* Are you a decisive person in general?
* Are making decisions important in your job?
* What decisions do you normally have to make?
* What is the most difficult decision you have ever made?
* Are you the only one who makes decisions in your team?
* Do you think this is the best way? Why/why not?
* How do you usually make decisions?
* Is there a process that you follow? If there is, outline the process and give a brief summary of what happens at each stage.
* Do you know of any decision-making techniques? If so, can you give an example of how they work?

Six Hats Theory

**(adapted from www.mindtools.com)**

There are six differently colored hats. Each hat represents a different way of thinking. Each hat can be used in a meeting to channel thinking in a certain direction. Look at the following explanations below and summarize the content of each in your own words:

* The viewpoint of each and the advantages of using each hat.
* Can you think of any weaknesses associated with each hat?

**White Hat**  
With this thinking hat, you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them. This is where you analyze past trends and try to extrapolate from historical data.

**Red Hat**  
Wearing the red hat, you look at the decision using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally, and try to understand the intuitive responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.

**Black Hat**  
When using black hat thinking, look at things pessimistically, cautiously and defensively. Try to see why ideas and approaches might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan or course of action. It allows you to eliminate them, alter your approach, or prepare contingency plans to counter problems that arise.

Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans tougher and more resilient. It can also help you to spot flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance, leaving them under-prepared for difficulties.

**Yellow Hat**  
The yellow hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it, and spot the opportunities that arise from it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.

**Green Hat**  
The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.

**Blue Hat**  
The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, and so on.

* Which hat/way of thinking would you associate with yourself? Note this could include a mixture of hats.
* Is there any hat which you normally wouldn’t use?

Real-life practice

* Think of a process you are involved in at work in which decisions are necessary.
* Sketch the process briefly and describe it to your partner/trainer. At which point are decisions needed?

**Describe the last time a decision needed to be taken**

Use the six hats technique to make the decision. Make sure you use all the hats. The following are examples of how the technique could be used:

* Everyone uses the same hat and focuses thinking in one direction.
* Use a pile of coloured cards to represent the six coloured hats. Distribute them to the participants in a random manner. Each participant must then assume the style of thinking corresponding to their card. After a set time, participants are dealt new cards.
* One person assumes the blue hat (usually the trainer to start) and directs the others to use a variety of hats.
* Was the result different from real-life? If so why do you think that is?
* Do you think this technique could be useful in practical situations? Why/Why not? Would you change anything to the theory? Another hat or a different way of using them?

Trainer notes

This activity is designed to engage people who often have to make decisions at work. Participants will practise reformulation and questioning/answering skills, as well as the language for agreeing/disagreeing politely. It also has a practical aspect (regardless of English) and may enhance their awareness and use of another decision-making technique. I used this activity following on from personality types found at work and language of agreement/disagreement.