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When we attempt practical thinking, there are three fundamental difficulties:

1. *Emotions*. We often have a tendency not to think at all but to rely on instant gut feeling, emotion and prejudice as a basis for action.
2. *Helplessness*. We may react with feelings of inadequacy: "I don't know how to think about this. I don't know what to do next."
3. *Confusion*. We try to keep everything in mind at once, with a mess as a result.

The six thinking hats method is a simple and practical way of overcoming all three difficulties.

Emotions are an important part of thinking and, in the end, all decisions and choices are made on the basis of our feelings. Emotions at the right place in thinking are essential. Emotions at the wrong place can be disastrous. The six hats method allows us to use emotions and feelings at the right place.

Helplessness arises when we do not have any general-purpose thinking actions that can be taken. The six hats method provides us with a basic framework for thinking actions. There are now definite "next steps" that can be taken.

Confusion arises when we try to do too much at once. Often when we try to think about something, our minds go off in several different directions at the same time. The six hats method allows us to take one direction at a time.

Full-Colour Thinking, One Colour at a Time

In the kitchen, have you ever found yourself stirring a sauce, chopping up carrots, mixing a batter and reading a recipe all at the same time?

In the classroom, have you ever found yourself marking the roll, collecting money, making announcements and tending to an ill child all at the same time?

THE SIX THINKING HATS CONCEPT

*Thinking is
divided into six
different modes.*

TEACHER NOTES - Black Hat

The following description is intended to serve as background for teacher reference. Consult it when needed to clarify how the black hat may be used and overused.

With the black hat, the words *checking* and *checking out* are very important to explaining its uses. These words convey the essence of critical thinking—and do not carry a negative image.

We know the positive uses of checking something:

In Australia when a new drug is presented by a pharmaceutical company, it is thoroughly checked out by the Australian Drugs Evaluation Committee to see that it is not harmful.

In the production and serving of food, there are strict rules of hygiene to prevent the people who eat the food from becoming ill. Inspectors are always checking to see that these rules are followed.

When a manufacturer produces a new toy, this has to be thoroughly checked to be sure that it is not harmful—no sharp edges that might cut, no pieces that might be bitten off and swallowed by a child, etc.

The black hat checks things in the same way. Black hat thinking helps us avoid making mistakes and doing silly things. It also points out difficulties and dangers.

Uses of the Black Hat

The main uses of the black hat are these:

1. Checking for evidence
2. Checking for logic
3. Checking for feasibility
4. Checking for impact
5. Checking for fit
6. Checking for weaknesses

We shall examine each of these uses one after the other. As we do, notice that the purpose of the black hat is not to *attack* but to *examine* an idea or situation.

Checking for Evidence

One use of the black hat is to check the evidence which supports the truth of some statement or claim: Is this true? Is this right? Is this correct? What is the evidence that supports this idea?

Checking for Logic

Another use of the black hat is to check the truth or validity of a logical argument: Does this really follow? Someone may claim that if we have *A* and *B* then *C* must follow. Black hat thinking checks this claim. We might even check the use of the word *must*. It is possible that *C* might follow, but that is not the same as *must* follow. This is a black hat check for logic.

Checking for Feasibility

With the black hat, we may examine a suggestion to see if it is feasible, possible or likely to work as claimed. Will this invention work? In practice, can this be done? Will this plan succeed?

With questions like these, we may find actual mistakes or gaps or find that something is missing. For example, a year level team that is proposing to implement a new kind of student assessment looks to see if its plan is feasible or workable. The black hat asks if this can be done. How will it work? What might be the difficulties?

Checking for Impact

Anything we do has consequences. Our actions affect other people and the world around us. So we need to get input on the impact of the change before making a final decision.

With the black hat, we may check to see what negative effects a suggestion or idea will have. What might be the difficulties? What dangers are likely to arise? How will this affect other people? How will it affect the environment?

The most important part of checking the impact of an idea is the effect it may have on values. Obviously, the idea suits the values of whoever is making the suggestion—but how does the idea affect others' values?

We need to check the impact of a suggestion very carefully. It may be too late to go back after the idea has been put into use.

Checking for Fit

With the black hat, we may check the fit of what is suggested with what we already know. On a very simple level, we might ask, do these clothes fit? Will this fit in the box? Does the plug fit in the socket?

We also may check an idea to see if it fits the facts as we know them. How does this fit our information? Does this idea fit our experience in this field? Does this fit personal or general experience?

We may also want to know whether an item, policy or plan fits in with a system: Does this fit the rules, the laws or the regulations? Does this fit the normal procedures? Does this fit our strategies and objectives?

We can check to see if an idea fits our standards and ethics. Does this plan, policy or item fit the standards and ethics of our group or society—even if this is not a matter of law? Is this fair? Is this honest?

As for values, we could ask, does this fit our values or the values of our group or society?