

The Decision Making Process

The concept of "Six Hats Thinking" was created by Edward De Bono who looked at the effect of making a decision from six different perspectives. This approach can be successfully used individually or in a group.

This concept is a form of "role playing" in which the solution of a problem is considered from the perspectives of six different **Stages of Critical Thinking** and the articulation the views of the aspirations and concerns that represents each stage in the process described.

Six Stages of Critical Thinking

Stage 1

This stage collects data and considers facts, figures and information, identifies any gaps in knowledge and either fills the gaps or acknowledges there is missing information.

This method of thinking usually uses historical data or case studies to predict future behavior that forms the basis to prepare a cost/benefit analysis.

Stage 2

This is an emotional stage, where intuition, instinct, and irrational responses are interjected into the process and considered.

Stage 3

This is stage represents a negative, pessimistic, "the world is going to end" response. This viewpoint is useful as flaws and assumptions can be flushed out and addressed, and contingency plans prepared.

Stage 4

This is where optimism prevails and is the polar opposite of the stage 3. This is where benefits and concept of an added value are considered.

Stage 5

This stage is used to put some creativity into the process. What other options exist? Is there a trickier, smarter solution?

Stage 6

This stage epitomizes the person who facilitates the decision making process and balances all of the other stages.

How can the Six Stages of Critical Thinking be used to solve a problem?

Let's assume that you are involved in a small volunteer organization and you have been assigned to communicate information to your organization.

This is new territory for your organization. They have historically used face-to-face training, but it is increasing difficult to arrange meeting sites, dates, and times for workshops and seminars.

You have been given the responsibility to assemble a team of individuals to develop a prototype (working model) of how the trainers would deliver the content.

Stage 1 Thinking

Determine the finances allocated to accomplish the project. Are the numbers of participants of previous face-to-face training numbers:

- Declining?
- Generally stagnant?
- Increasing?

Were feedback surveys circulated? Did feedback suggest a growing proportion would prefer a training solution that could be delivered "on demand" at the option of the participant wherever and whenever desired.

Does your organization have a web presence that is continuously updated? How easy is it to upload new content to the web site? Do various project leaders have direct access or must everything go through a “Web Master?”

Stage 2 Thinking

The team is nervous about their lack of experience in managing online training. They are concerned their roles will change into being technical support and no longer doing what they enjoy or are good at.

Stage 3 Thinking

Negative, pessimistic, thinking flushes out concerns about the cost and complexity of establishing an online training platform, particularly if no one else has experience using an online environment to communicate the targeted course content.

Divide the production team into three distinctive groups:

1. Technical Production considerations
2. Content/Subject matter areas
3. Project manager who understands how to coordinate and provide direction to both groups.

How does this project fit with existing workload? Remember that everyone is volunteering his or her time and computer skills?

Will there be a group of “Content Experts who will be responsible to determine what is communicated?”

Will there be a need to have the final project reviewed by the Board of Directors of the organization prior to its launch?

Stage 4 Thinking

Optimistic thinking frees the team up to break the project up into manageable chunks, with agreed deadlines, and a deliverable product.

They realize that if everything goes according to plan, there may be other ways the organization can benefit converting from off-line into on-line training.

Stage 5 Thinking

Spending some time considering solutions that are “out side the box” reflects a willingness to consider creative ways to deliver training, both off and on-line. The result is considering different training solutions, which had previously not been considered.

Stage 6 Thinking

Throughout the discussion, one person assumes the role of “Team Leader” of the “Critical Thinking” decision process, ensuring no single thinking style dominates or colors the others.

A process of “Critical Thinking” forces you to consider many different perspectives when making a decision, and break out of your habitual thinking style.

This technique is useful in both newly formed and established teams (Committees) because the process is easy to follow. There is an established and proven way to avoid being side tracked into dead end or circular thinking.