

# THINK BETTER TOGETHER:

## DE BONO'S SIX THINKING HATS + 2

### 8 Hat Thinking Framework



**White Hat**  
Facts & Data



**Red Hat**  
Emotion & Intuition



**Black Hat**  
Caution & Risk



**Yellow Hat**  
Value & Optimism



**Green Hat**  
Creativity & Possibility



**Blue Hat**  
Process & Meta-Thinking



**Gold Hat**  
Integration &  
Real-World Application



**Silver Hat**  
Setbacks, Dependencies  
& Resilience

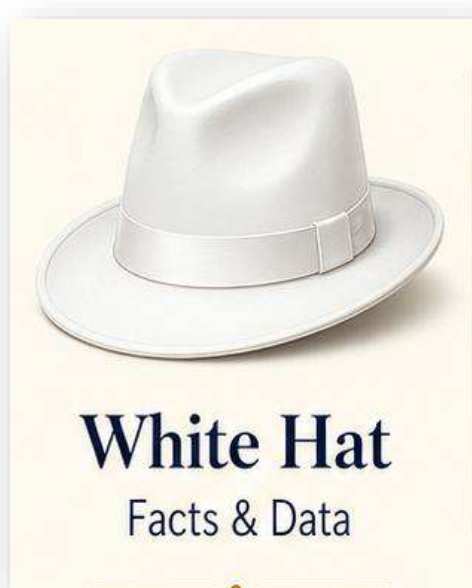
*(based on De Bono Thinking Hats - with a twist)*

## How 8 Hat Thinking helps professionals make decisions that actually stick

Every professional has been in the meeting where everyone agrees on a plan, feels genuinely energised, and then walks back to their desk where the plan quietly dies under the weight of emails, deadlines and competing priorities. The thinking was good. The follow-through was missing.

That gap - between insight and sustained action - is why I have extended De Bono's Six Thinking Hats into an 8 Hat framework. The original model already gives people a powerful way to separate different kinds of thinking. When we add a Gold Hat for real-world application and a Silver Hat for setbacks, dependencies and resilience, the framework becomes genuinely useful for leaders, coaches, project teams, retrospectives, supervision and everyday professional decisions. Because good thinking is only valuable if it survives contact with Monday morning.

### The White Hat: What do we actually know?

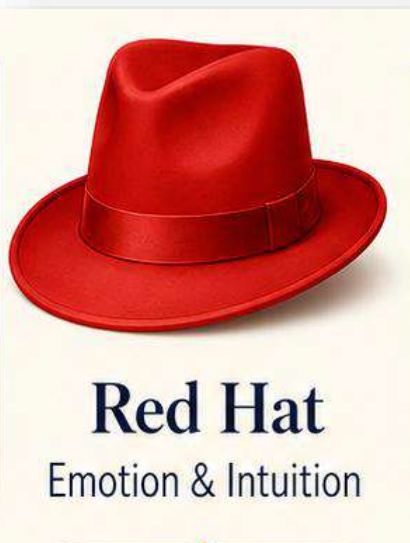


The White Hat starts with evidence. Not opinion dressed as fact. Not the story that has been repeated so often it feels true. Actual, verifiable information.

Most teams make decisions from a cocktail of habit, anecdote and urgency. Someone says "everyone thinks this" when what they really have is a strong perception. The White Hat slows that down and asks: *What data do we have? What is missing? What is assumed? What might be out of date?*

A project manager uses the White Hat before escalating a delay - checking actual delivery dates rather than acting on anxiety. A coach uses it to help a client distinguish between what their manager actually said and what they fear their manager thinks. A finance professional uses it to separate real budget exposure from inherited assumptions. A teacher uses it to look at attendance data before deciding what support a student needs. The White Hat brings humility. When we use it well, we often discover we know less than we thought.

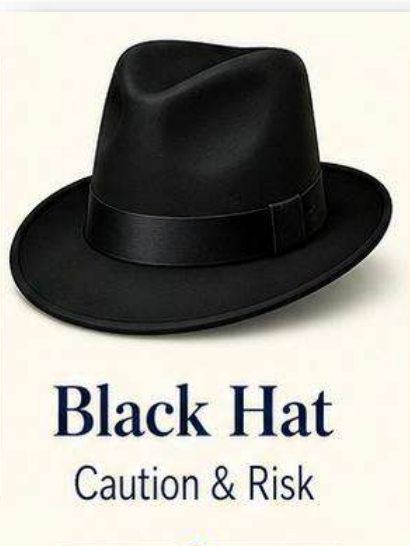
## The Red Hat: What is the room actually feeling?



The Red Hat gives permission for emotion to enter the conversation. This matters because many professional environments still treat feelings as an inconvenience rather than as information. Yet feelings are information. They tell us where there is energy, resistance, fear, excitement, fatigue, belonging or disconnection. A team may be publicly committed to a restructure while quietly feeling exhausted and sceptical. A leadership group may be approving a strategy while sensing that nobody believes in it.

A client in a coaching session may arrive with a practical goal and then notice sadness, anger or relief as they speak. The Red Hat does not let emotion dominate the decision. It lets emotion be acknowledged - so it does not leak out sideways through avoidance, passive resistance or disengagement. Ask the room: *What are we noticing? Where is the energy? What is present but unspoken?* You will be surprised how often the most important thing in the room is the thing nobody has named.

## The Black Hat: What could go wrong?

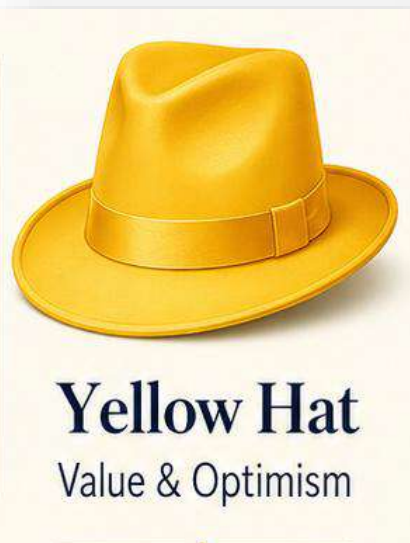


The Black Hat is frequently misunderstood as negativity. It is not. It is critical discernment - the professional discipline of asking *what could go wrong, what are we missing, and what deserves more scrutiny?*

This is the hat that asks whether the fundraising campaign could unintentionally exploit the people it aims to serve. Whether the new software rollout has been tested against real user behaviour.

Whether the contract has a gap that only becomes visible when something fails. Whether the coaching conversation is drifting into territory that needs a therapist, not a coach. In aviation, healthcare, engineering, safeguarding and finance, this hat is non-negotiable because the cost of missing risk can be catastrophic. In every other profession, it is still the hat that stops enthusiasm from becoming recklessness. The Black Hat gives people permission to challenge the plan without being labelled difficult. That alone makes it invaluable.

## The Yellow Hat: What could actually work?

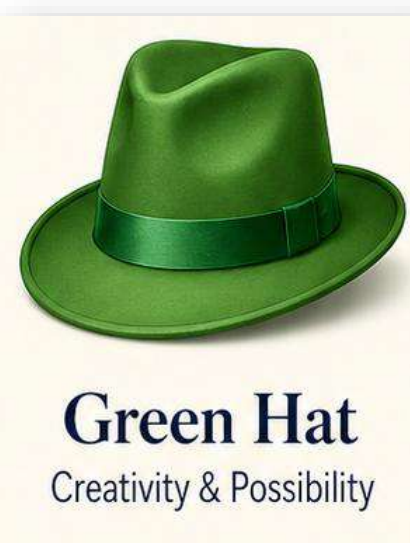


Under pressure, most teams become highly skilled at spotting problems and far less practised at noticing assets. The Yellow Hat rebalances that. It asks: *What is the opportunity here? What strengths do we already have? What is working despite the pressure? What might become possible if this succeeds?*

After a difficult period of change, it is easy for a team to focus only on what was lost.

The Yellow Hat notices what was learned, what relationships strengthened, what capability emerged. In coaching, it supports confidence - asking the client what has worked before, who believes in them, what becomes possible if this goes well. The Yellow Hat matters because people need possibility in order to move. Teams become paralysed when the conversation stays permanently in risk, critique or data. The Yellow Hat brings warmth, energy and direction.

## The Green Hat: What else could we try?



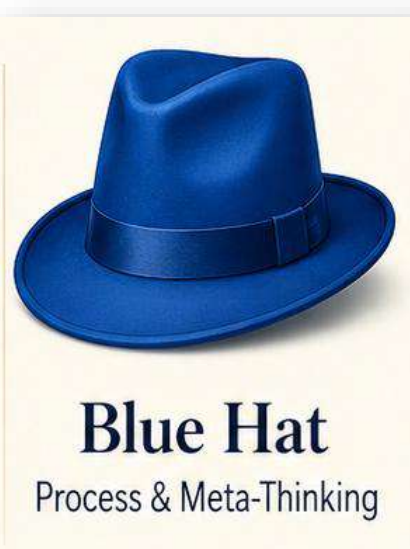
The Green Hat is the creative hat. It steps out of habitual thinking and asks: *What would a different approach look like? What would we do if we were not afraid? What might a small experiment reveal?*

This is where a strategy session stops recycling last year's plan. Where a retrospective moves from analysis into invention. Where a coaching conversation opens up options the client couldn't see five minutes ago.

The Green Hat gives permission to loosen the grip of sensible, polished, efficient thinking - just enough to let something genuinely new in. A metaphor. A wild idea. A question nobody expected.

Creativity is not decoration. It is a serious route into insight, especially when the old logic has stopped working.

## The Blue Hat: How are we holding this conversation?

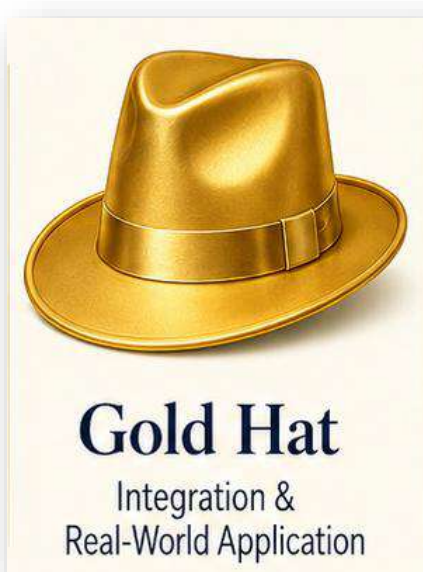


The Blue Hat manages the thinking process itself. It is the hat that notices the architecture of the conversation. *Are we jumping to solutions? Are we stuck in emotion? Have we heard enough data? Who has not spoken? What are we actually deciding?*

Many meetings fail not because the process is poor. People talk over each other, mix strategy with detail, revisit the same ground, or leave without clarity on next steps.

The Blue Hat asks what kind of thinking the conversation needs right now - and whether the group is actually doing that. In coaching, the Blue Hat is closely linked to contracting and re-contracting: *What are we working on? Is this still the most useful focus? What does this session need from us now?* It is also connected with presence. The ability to step back and ask, *"What is happening here - and what does this moment require?"*

## The Gold Hat: How will this actually land in the real world?



This is the first addition. The hat that turns insight into practice. Too many powerful conversations create energy in the room that evaporates by Tuesday. People nod, feel moved, see something differently - then return to busy diaries, shifting priorities and operational noise. The learning never reaches the meeting room, the one-to-one, the client conversation or the Monday morning decision.

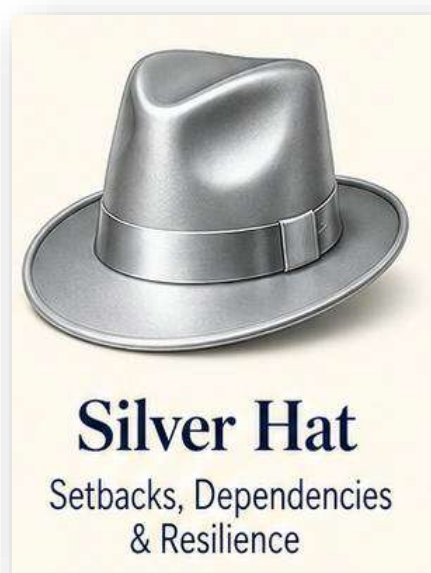
The Gold Hat refuses to let that happen.

It asks: *What will we do differently tomorrow? Where will this show up in behaviour? What needs to be practised? How will we know something has changed?* In a team setting, the Gold Hat turns a strategy day into changed meeting rhythms, feedback habits, decision-making processes or handover practices. In coaching, it asks the client to name the specific conversation they will have, the boundary they will set, the experiment they will run. It stops the team finishing with vague commitments and asks who owns what, by when, and how the team will know it made a difference.

The Gold Hat is beautifully practical. If you decide you want more balance, what changes in your diary this week? If you want to save money, what happens tomorrow? If you want better team communication, what looks different in the next meeting?

This is where the learning becomes gold - because it moves from the head into the world.

## The Silver Hat: What will we do when it gets hard?



This is the second addition. The hat that asks about setbacks, dependencies and resilience. Action plans love ideal conditions. The Silver Hat does not.

It asks: *What are we relying on? What happens if the sponsor leaves, the budget shifts, the technology is delayed, or the team is simply exhausted? Where might resistance emerge? What support will people need? How will we recover and adapt when - not if - something disrupts the plan?*

A project team uses the Silver Hat to stress-test dependencies before launch. A coach uses it to help a client plan for the pattern that could pull them back - without collapsing into fear. A team uses it in a retrospective to ask where resilience came from and where people overextended.

I like silver for this hat because it catches the light differently. It asks us to look at the underside of the plan and notice what is not obvious at first glance.

Setbacks are not failures. They are information - showing us where the system is under-supported, where an assumption was too optimistic, where a relationship needs attention, or where the pace has become unrealistic.

The Silver Hat gives permission to ask: *What will help us stay steady when this becomes hard?*

## Why this works better than linear problem-solving

A traditional approach says: define the problem, analyse the cause, generate options, choose, implement. That works when the issue is clear, technical and linear. Most professional challenges are not.

They are relational, adaptive, systemic and emotionally charged. A restructure is not just a process problem - it is also a fear problem, a trust problem, a communication problem and a resilience problem. A career decision is not just a pros-and-cons exercise - it involves identity, risk, emotion, creativity and the practical question of what happens when the initial enthusiasm fades.

The 8 Hat approach works because it honours that complexity. It prevents the common traps: rushing to action without evidence, staying in critique without hope, generating ideas without implementation, ignoring emotion until it becomes resistance, underestimating dependencies, and finishing with insight but no application.

The Gold and Silver Hats are what make this more than a discussion framework. The Gold Hat asks how the learning becomes real. The Silver Hat asks how the work remains sustainable when the real world pushes back.

## Using the 8 Hats in practice

You do not need to use every hat every time, or always in the same order. A team that is already emotional might need the Red Hat first. A coaching client who already knows what they want might start with the Gold Hat. A retrospective where the team is exhausted might begin with the Silver Hat.

### **The sequence below is a useful starting structure:**

White: *What do we know?* Red: *What do we feel or sense?* Black: *What needs caution?* Yellow: *What has value or possibility?* Green: *What else could we create or try?* Blue: *What process do we need now?* Gold: *How will this be applied in the real world?* Silver: *What setbacks, dependencies and resilience do we need to plan for?*

The point is not to follow the model rigidly. The point is to create a fuller, wiser, more human conversation - one that moves from fragmented thinking into action that actually survives contact with real life.

The White Hat grounds us.

The Red Hat humanises us.

The Black Hat protects us.

The Yellow Hat energises us.

The Green Hat opens us.

The Blue Hat organises us.

The Gold Hat moves us into the world.

The Silver Hat keeps us steady when the world pushes back.

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# Thank You!

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