

SIX THINKING HATS-A TRAINING INTERVENTION IN SOFT SKILLS

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Introduction

Decision Making is the essence of any profession, especially business and management. Choices, decisions and the consequences or results constitute the hall mark of a manager's personal and professional life. Making career choices, selecting the profile of a company, investment decisions are sometimes baffling and put a manager in a state of indecision. Infact, these are the occasions when a manager has to think in a rational, pragmatic and methodical way to arrive at good decisions. Managers rely on a set of decision making tools that are scientific, practical, rational and methodical in all respects.

It is rightly said that confusion is the biggest enemy of one's thinking. Thinking big should be preceded by thinking good. Thinking good always leads to good and effective decision making. Thinking good encompasses different facets of being clear, rational, logical, factual and emotional. Many a time, individuals take decisions that do not have a 360 degree perspective as a result of which they encounter problems, bottlenecks, opposition, discouragement to their ideas and plans. Sometimes, it could be the business or the projects. The challenge before a person or a professional or a business is to take a decision which is foolproof and failsafe. There are numerous techniques which help a manager in decision making but may not address a broad spectrum of views.

Six Thinking Hats is a powerful tool in decision making followed by many individuals and organizations the world over. It is propounded by the famous author Edward De Bono in his widely acclaimed book of the same title 'Six Thinking Hats'. Six Thinking Hats is very simple to

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understand, implement and reap good results. This decision making tool could be used by individuals, managers or organizations to address a plethora of problems and issues, both personal and organizational.

This paper focuses on:

The importance of Six Thinking Hats in decision making and its efficacy in personal, professional and organizational matters-Problems or issues

Benefits of Six Thinking Hats

Training the Business Management students to use Six Thinking Hats (decision tool) in order to develop structured thinking in the decision making process.

To develop and view a problem or issue from different perspectives

Benefits of using it as a training intervention in business schools or organizations to promote structured thinking and analyse a problem or issue from various perspectives

Key Words

Structured Thinking, Decision Making, Six Thinking Hats Analysis, perspectives

Background

IBS Hyderabad is one of the top B-Schools of India which has a structured module for training the MBA students in Soft Skills training. The Soft Skills training is imparted to the MBA students in the PEL (Personal Effectiveness Lab) Module. Six Thinking Hats was added to the Soft Skills curriculum in the year 2007. It is one of the most favored topics in the Soft Skills curriculum. Students participate with lot of enthusiasm and discuss an issue or a problem using Six Thinking Hats as a decision tool. In the last six years about 5000 MBA students were trained in this module and numerous issues were discussed in the class room. The response to the concept is highly encouraging and overwhelming. The author as a Soft Skills trainer has conducted training to the managers of various corporates. Different issues or problems confronting the organization were discussed using Six Thinking Hats as a decision tool.

Six Thinking Hats

It is a process of structured thinking which guides an individual or a manager to take a decision after taking into consideration six important facts. Infact, the six hats represent six facets of thought or thinking in six different angles. It is a comprehensive approach which avoids the pitfalls by identifying the lacunae or gaps in an individuals thinking or approach to various issues. It is noteworthy to mention that an individual or a group will have a well rounded view of a problem, issue or a situation. An individual or a group is encouraged to move from the habitual thinking style and take decision only from the financial or monetary angle. On certain occasions, a decision is to be viewed from an emotional or an intuitive angle. There could be least resistance to an organization implementing a new policy or a plan.

The person is encouraged to use his brain by wearing a hat of a particular color. Each hat is a metaphor for a thinking state. 'Wearing a particular Hat' is a symbolic representation of thinking in a particular direction. Sometimes, a manager is puzzled with the complexity of a problem or situation and does not know how to proceed in a given situation. Six Thinking Hats is a perfect tool which bestows on a manager, a definite approach by thinking in a set pattern. The process allows the manager to consider all the perspectives. Therefore, it is a perfect guide in the decision making process. It can be put into action by an individual or a group of people. A hat is something one can easily put on and take off. The hats are visual cues for a manager to allow an easy switch in his mode of thinking. The best and the beautiful aspect of this method is that it can be taught to children as well as top managers.

The 'Six Hats' being considered are 1. White Hat 2. Red Hat 3. Yellow Hat 4. Black Hat 5. Green Hat and 6. Blue Hat.

White Hat is the information hat. The person or group wearing the White Hat is entrusted with the job of collecting the data and information relating to a problem, project or issue on which a decision has to be taken. This will help to identify the gaps or lacunae in the knowledge. Besides, it will help to analyze the past and also extrapolate the future trends. The white Hat thinking revolves around three important aspects viz. information already known, information needed and sources of information. Thus, White Hat thinking focuses on facts, figures, data, information which is available or which is needed to be procured.

Red Hat is the emotional hat. The person or group will concentrate on feelings, instincts, gut reactions, emotional aspects or the intuitions. Most of the times decisions are taken without an iota of thought to the emotional aspects or feelings. Red hat thinking concentrates on the feelings, hunches, gut instinct, and intuition.

Yellow Hat is about the positives or strong points. All the advantages are focused upon. In times of crisis, wearing a yellow hat or yellow hat thinking offers the motivational tonic. Positive thinking builds up confidence of a group or an individual. Yellow hat thinking is basically optimistic thinking or taking a decision with due consideration to positive aspects, values, advantages or benefits.

Black Hat is hat of judgment and caution. Black hat thinking focuses on problems, negatives, barriers, hurdles, and obstructions. All the weak points or the negatives of taking a decision are considered. Identification of the weak points helps a manager in preparing the contingency plan or be ready with an action plan for a detour. During the Black Hat thinking the following points or questions could be raised. What could be problems and where can we go wrong? The focus of the black hat thinking is on difficulties, potential problems, disadvantages, weak points or negatives.

Green Hat is the creative hat and focuses on the creative solutions for the problems. Person or group putting on the green hat will come out with creative ideas of implementing the decision. No criticism is put forth to encourage an incessant flow of ideas from the people. Ofcourse, the practicality of the solutions are considered at a latter time by the implementation team. Green Hat thinking focuses on better ways of doing a particular thing or choosing alternatives. Green hat thinking does not concentrate on the cost of getting things done. It focuses on creativity and the creative ways of possibilities, alternatives, solutions and implementing new ideas.

Blue Hat focuses on the implementation aspects of the plans. Generally, the blue hat people are the top managers or the people chairing the meetings. Operational focus is the important

aspect of the blue hat thinking. For a problem or decision, the operational or implementation aspect is very important. The blue hat enables the person or group to make realistic judgements in implementing any thing. The focus is on managing the things by preparing appropriate action plans based on reasonable costs.

Advantages the six thinking hats approach

The advantages the six thinking hats approach are listed below.

- Different view points are considered
- Creative decision making is involved
- Plans are sound and resilient
- Saves a lot of time
- Team building
- Addresses the ego problems
- Logical decisions are arrived at.

Execution of Six Thinking Hats

It can be adopted by an individual manager or a group of managers in arriving at a decision.

When a manager has to decide individually, he can direct his thinking in a particular dimension and the points are noted. For example, when the manager has to decide the positives of a decision, he has to put on the 'yellow hat'. It is possible that while thinking the positive aspects of an issue the negative points could flash. They are recorded by the manager immediately.

When using the Six Hats method in a group, all the members involved role-play at the appointed time. No person is asked to wear a single hat for the entire time. Everyone wears a different hat, and switches to another at the same time.

A very practical and a better way is to allow the person to wear a hat according to his attitude or thinking style. The person also feels happy, satisfied and comfortable to think according to his\ her attitude. For example, the pessimist in a group is asked to wear the Black hat and find out all negatives or weak points about a decision or issue. The optimist is allowed to wear the yellow hat and come out with advantages or strong points or positives of an issue or a problem. A trouble shooting manager or a doubter is asked to wear the black hat and play a devils advocate. Similarly, an emotional manager is asked to put on the red hat and concentrate on the emotional aspects. The

creative genius is encouraged to go or think, the green way and come out with creative solutions. The person in the group exhibiting leadership qualities is encouraged to put on the blue hat or the implementation hat. The problem or issue is dissected or analyzed from various perspectives. It will enable a person to arrive at good decisions.

Executing Six Thinking Hats in a class room setting

The students were divided into groups of eight students each and were given contemporary issues to analyse and make a presentation. One person would introduce the topic; another person would sum up the discussion. The remaining six members are encouraged to wear the six hats and elucidate the points. It enables each member to focus on the issue in a particular or a very specific angle. The topics were wide ranging like

- Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Retail
- FDI in Education
- Shifting of Nano project from Singur to Sanad
- Reliance getting into the FMCG sector
- Daichi taking over Ranbaxy
- Tata taking over Corus
- Managerial Job in Reliance or Infosys
- ADAG's (Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group) foray into Movies
- Vodafone's Advertisement (Zoo zoos)
- Bharti-Wal Mart Tie up
- Vedanta Taking over Cairns India
- Revival of Kingfisher Airlines
- Entrepreneurship or Job
- Vice-President of a Start-up or Manager of a Top Company
- Indian Premiere League (IPL)
- A Business School Starting a Medical School

The topics enabled a very interesting and informative discussion and the students acknowledged that it was a good learning experience- working in a team, report writing and presentation skills. It also enabled the team building process as the students were required to work in a group of eight members, gather the information, prepare a report and make a PowerPoint presentation to the class. Current topics could be given to the students to discuss. This would make the sessions interesting and the students would also get a wider perspective of the current issue or problem.

Process Chart for executing Six Thinking Hats (Concept & Practice) in a Class Room

Faculty introduces the concept of Six Thinking Hats to the students
Faculty gives a situation on the contemporary events or topics
Divides the students into groups of six/eight members each and three days to prepare*and a issue or problem/situation is given
Each group is given 20 minutes to make a power point presentation to the class. Each student to don a hat and discuss with the class
Question and answer session
Each group to submit a report to the faculty

*An alternative method of executing the decision tool is to divide the class into six groups. Each group is asked to present it's views from a single perspective.

Primary outcomes

1. The students could organize their thinking pattern in a structured way
2. The students could arrive at a decision which is rational, logical, factual
3. The decision addressed all aspects, including the emotional issues

Secondary outcomes

1. Students could work in teams and hence it promotes Team Building
2. Improved their communication and presentation skills
3. Report writing
4. Empowerment
5. Decreases conflict in teams
6. Increases cooperation
7. It saves a lot time.

Examples of Companies using Six Thinking Hats

Emerson Scroll Compressors Saves Over \$400,000: Plant Managers Use Innovative de Bono Communication Tools to Tap Strengths of Straight-Shooting Workforce.

3M Used Six Thinking Hats to Create Products for New Markets.

Food Processing Announces 2010 R&D Team Winner: Hormel Foods--"All the responsibility and accountability is built on trust and encourages the freedom to explore and be creative. One of our team members, Dan Hirst, is a trained leader in Edward de Bono lateral thinking training, which makes remarkable use of several skills that encourage not only out-of-the-box thinking, but removing the box barriers entirely. Everyone in R&D and many in the corporate office have been trained in this program."

J Walter Thompson Hits the Mark with Creative Campaign: Six Thinking Hats method used to develop a Ford Focus ad campaign

Pittsburg Plate Glass Company (PPG) used Six Thinking Hats to overcome competing interests and opinions in choosing an alternative business strategy and deciding whether to shut down a plant.

Motorola used Lateral Thinking and Six Thinking Hats to develop a high-tech, hand-held communications device.

Six Thinking Hats in action at Statoil--the drilling goes on and millions are saved

Well-Known Pharmaceutical Company Uses Lateral Thinking Tools to Power Idea Generation in Kaizen Initiative.

Boeing used Six Thinking Hats to erase partisan lines between union and management and to thoroughly analyze a challenge and come to a solution.

Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC) used Power of Perception Tools to bring up new questions and help them anticipate industry changes.

Collaborate or Evaporate: Focus on Facilitation/Six Thinking Hats Tools Help Advance Strategic Community Initiatives for Long-term Economic Impact.

Hewlett-Packard used Lateral Thinking & Six Thinking Hats to help organize a strategic planning meeting.

Source: http://www.debonoforbusiness.com/asp/case_studies.asp Date: June 3, 2013

Conclusion

Six Thinking Hats is a powerful tool for managers or would be managers to develop a very practical and proactive approach to look at problems and situations. The procedure adopted in a class room helped train the students to develop and inculcate a thinking habit or style to look at a situation from various perspectives and arrive at a decision. Besides, it develops team spirit, improves communication in a group, reduces meeting time and may get innovative solutions to problems. Confrontation is replaced by cooperation in a team or group. It is useful for individuals or groups in effective decision making.

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