

The people closest to a problem are often best placed to resolve it: by involving your employees in solving the problems affecting the team you can access their ideas and increase their engagement at work. People are more likely to commit to a solution they have helped create.

De Bono Thinking Hats



To explore a problem from different viewpoints
To reach a solution that might not have otherwise been thought of

We can be predisposed to perceive a problem and work to a solution in the same way. For example, we might focus on intuition over looking for facts, or be over optimistic and not examine risks. Devised by Edward de Bono, the six thinking hats lets you examine a problem from different points of view, but also aligned as a group.

I. Explain to the team that we going to approach a problem from different directions.

II. Explain the theory of the thinking hats and that we will expect everyone to shift their thinking as required by the hat and that the team all puts on the same hat at the same time.

III. The White Hat is about data—looking for information, analysing past trends and learning from this. It is also about identifying what data is missing.

IV. The Red Hat is emotional—what are gut reactions, what do people feel about this problem and the possible solutions?

V. The Black Hat represents rational negativity—consider what might not work, what problems lie ahead and

how can they be anticipated? Here play Devil’s Advocate and express what could go wrong.

VI. The Yellow Hat is positivity—what are the benefits of the solution, what successes will come from solving this problem?

VII. The Green Hat represents creativity—what ideas can be generated? Look for alternatives, possibilities, explore ideas to their conclusion ,or work back from the desired state and plan each step to get there.

VIII. The Blue Hat is worn by the chair to decide when everyone needs to change to a new hat, or return to a previous one.

IX. Ensure the actions are noted and agreed with everyone.

Identify the Elephant



To identify and mitigate a tacit, or unspoken, issue that is affecting the team’s ability to perform

The “elephant in the room” refers to a issue that is affecting the behaviour of a group or team but no-one wishes to discuss. At worst, under addressed problems create other issues that cannot be meaningfully addressed and then ineffective workarounds are put in place. This tool is used to have a frank discussion and generate solution options.

I. Assess the situation and sense whether there is something affecting the dynamics of the team.

II. Think about how you might approach the subject. If the matter is particularly sensitive there is a potential danger in simply starting a discussion on the issue when others are unprepared, so have a plan on how you will steer the conversation.

III. Raise the issue—you might make an opening statement about how you sense there is an issue that is not being discussed and that there seems to be an elephant in the room.

IV. Remind the team about their goals and is there anything we should be talking about that is currently ignored? Are there taboo subjects?

V. The responses you get will depend on the feeling of trust within the team. The conversation can be framed as a positive one, however, such as “so what are we going to do about this issue so that it no longer gets in our way?”

VI. Be mindful that the elephant may be a person of influence and whether it is appropriate to discuss this with your team. If not, then perhaps your manager peers are the right people to talk the issue through with. Consider how you can influence this person positively.



Things to think about: Creativity can be difficult: often because we can limit our own thinking on what is possible and how creative we are. Resources can be found on the **Creativity Toolkit**.

Things to think about: There is of course the possibility that you are the elephant or are somehow connected with it. Asking for feedback about your leadership style can help to avoid this issue.

Forcefield Analysis



To identify a range of issues which are likely to be influencing a team, and use this as a means for decision-making and problem-solving

Developed by Kurt Lewin, this tool helps to separate all the contributing issues surrounding a problem: the “drivers” that support movement towards a goal or objective and the “blockers” that are hindering movement. This variation is used to explore actions to strengthen drivers and weaken blockers, and many can be found online.

I. Identify the issue to be resolved and articulate the proposed solution to this problem.

II. Set up a chart using the diagram below, without the arrows.

III. With the team identify the driving forces that are pushing towards the desired outcome.

IV. Then identify the resisting forces that are making the decision difficult to implement.

V. Ask a team member to allocate a score of 1-10 to each item and agree these through discussion. Alternatively use larger arrows to represent the most significant forces on each side.

VI. Ask what can be done to improve the strength of the driving forces (the relative score they have been given)

VII. Ask what can be done to weaken the resisting forces and generate ideas.

VIII. Agree an action plan and implement.



Things to think about: This tool can draw out the less obvious factors that affect a decision or solution, so the analysis should consider intangibles such as the team’s own optimism or fears.

Fishbone Analysis



Identify and analyse the cause and effect of a problem

Developed by Kaoru Ishikawa, the Fishbone Analysis model has similarities to the well-known Mind Map model, but presents a linear progression of thinking which is more logical. While it can appear complicated at first sight, the model allows for a simple progression of thinking, but also deep exploration of the causes of a problem.

I. Prepare the team as to the purpose of the session.

II. Identify and define your problem and write it at the right-hand side of the page. Add the spine of the fish as a line to the left of this problem.

III. Work out the major factors involved in the problem—these are added as the large bones running off the fish’s spine.

IV. Analyse each problem and collect as many possible causes as possible—connect these as a series of smaller bones forming from the large bones.

V. Analyse the results and investigate further—for complex problems you may need to add smaller bones in the same way.

VI. Recognise where you may not have the detailed knowledge to identify sub-factors that might be causing problems and identify who can help.

VII. When satisfied, consider which of the possible causes is actually contributing to the problem—when you know what the real problem is identify and implement a workable solution.



Things to think about: A SWOT or PESTLE analysis might be a useful way to populate the fishbone if you are unsure where to start. See the **Assessing the Environment** toolkit for more information.

Manager Toolkits

more available at <https://www.aston.ac.uk/staff-public/hr/organisational-development/leadership/managers-toolkits>