Six Thinking Hats Persona Exercise

Identify and engage different thinking styles on campus to craft compelling strategy

Community College Executive Forum

3 Ways to Use This Resource

- Identify the different thinking styles of campus stakeholders
- Craft a persuasive vision that appeals to all thinking styles
- Leverage strengths of various thinking styles to improve strategic vision

Facilitator's Guide

Exercise Summary: Assign participants a "thinking hat" style and ask them to build a persona for that style. Then, based off the persona, have participants practice creating persuasive and compelling arguments for change that appeal to that thinking style.

Exercise Time: 45 minutes, including large group discussion

- Assigned hat worksheet (15 minutes)
- Creating and Conveying Effective Strategy worksheet (15 minutes)
- Group discussion (15 minutes)

Exercise Goal: To familiarize participants with the variety of stakeholder perspectives on campus in order to a) identify the best-fit stage/process that each role should be plugged in to and b) counteract objections to data-driven change through perspective taking

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the exercise, participants should be able to:

- Identify the various stakeholders/situations on campus that display different kinds of thinking
- Understand the personas (including priorities, fears, concerns) typically exemplified by each type of thinking
- Craft a persuasive argument for a data-driven decision that resonates with the Six Thinking Hats personas

Role of the Facilitator: Fairly minimal. This activity is designed to facilitate discussion and ideas-sharing between members. The facilitator will function mostly as a discussion starter (when necessary), and an unobtrusive guide (e.g., if the conversation veers into nonstop complaining).

Do's and Don'ts:

- **Do** allow participants to largely determine the flow and pace of the discussion
- **Do** encourage participants to share ideas and tips with one another
- **Don't** allow the conversation to devolve into simply complaining about certain roles/processes. Ask questions like "What do you think the motivation is behind that?" or "Who has found a solution to this issue?" to guide the conversation to a more productive point

The Yellow Hat: Speculative-Positive

What Yellow Hat Thinking Does:

- Looks for the benefit, value, and potential positive outcome in everything
- Provides deliberate constructive thinking as a counterweight to critical thinking
- Thinks about opportunities, and willing to explore remote possibilities of success
- Makes concrete proposals and suggestions for what to do

Typical Yellow Hat Phrases:

- *I have a vision where we could make this happen*
- *I can see how we get this done.*
- *There are a lot of benefits to trying this.*
- *This is going to work.*
- *If there is a remote chance this will work, we should explore it.*
- *Here is the first thing we should do.*

Typical Yellow Hat Questions:

- *What is the best-case scenario?*
- *What are the benefits?*
- *What are all the reasons we could succeed at this?*
- *What is the best next step?*
- *How much do we stand to gain?*
- *Under what conditions would this work?*

The Black Hat: Cautious and Careful

What Black Hat Thinking Does:

- Prevents groups from doing overly risky things
- Introduces caution and skepticism to the conversation
- Identifies why something may not work
- Points out how something does not fit available resources, policy, strategy, mission
- Questions the strength of the evidence and conclusions

Typical Black Hat Phrases:

- *I can see a number of risks and vulnerabilities for us in this plan*
- *Let's try to see the obstacles so that we can figure out how to overcome them*
- *We need to know how risky this is for us*
- *I'm skeptical this will work as planned*

Typical Black Hat Questions:

- *What is the downside?*
- *What are all the potential problems?*
- *Does this conclusion make sense?*
- *Does this fit our past experience?*
- *Do we have the resources to do this?*
- *Is this in line with our policy and strategy?*
- *What can go wrong?*
- *Will this continue to be sustainable?*

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The White Hat: Facts and Figures

What White Hat Thinking Does:

- Collects available information
- Focuses on objective facts and figures
- Separates facts from interpretation and belief
- Prevents distortion of information and ideas
- Excludes hunches, intuition, judgment, feeling, impression and opinion

Typical White Hat Phrases:

- *I want to start by thinking through what we know about this topic*
- *Just give the facts without an argument*
- *We don't know that for a fact*

Typical White Hat Questions:

- *What data do we have?*
- *What is the evidence?*
- *Is that a fact or a likelihood?*
- *Is that a fact or a belief?*
- *Is that a trend?*

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The Blue Hat: Running the Show

What Blue Hat Thinking Does:

- Acts as the "conductor of the orchestra"
- Organizes and manages thinking of the different hats
- Provides an overview of the conversation
- Makes sure people stick to their hats
- Breaks up arguments
- Asks for an outcome at the end—a summary, conclusion, decision, or solution

Typical Blue Hat Phrases:

- *Let's start by thinking about…*
- *I think we are headed in the right direction, let's hear some more ideas.*
- *We need to hear more from the orange hat to understand the problem.*
- *Now we need some concrete suggestions, let's hear from the yellow hat.*
- *Hold off on the black hat thinking for a moment—we're still listening to ideas.*
- *We're spending too much time arguing.*
- *I hear two conflicting views. We don't have to decide which is correct right now.*

Typical Blue Hat Questions:

- *What perspectives will we need to have a productive conversation?*
- *What do we need to understand to make a decision or come to an agreement?*
- *Is this the real objective here?*
- *Are we getting anywhere in this conversation?*
- *What outcome would be successful?*
- *What do we all agree on?*

The Green Hat: Creative Thinking

What Green Hat Thinking Does:

- Generates new ideas and new ways of looking at things
- Suggests multiple courses of action
- Invested in making changes and innovating
- Interested in thinking through all the alternative ways to solve a problem or launch a new initiative

Typical Green Hat Phrases:

- *I can think of a number of ways we could solve this problem.*
- *We should think through how we could try this idea.*
- *I have a wild idea, but it just might work.*
- *Let's try something different.*

Typical Green Hat Questions:

- *What are all the possible alternatives?*
- *Is there any way we can use this idea?*
- *Can we shape the idea so that it works for us?*
- *How could we test this idea?*
- *What comparisons can we make?*
- *What if we tried it, what would happen?*

Source: Edward de Bono, *Six Thinking Hats: An Essential Approach to Business Management*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1985); EAB interviews and analysis.

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The Red Hat: Emotions and Feelings

What Red Hat Thinking Does:

- Acknowledges the hidden emotions that affect every conversation and decision, bringing them to the surface
- Insists that feelings have a right to be made visible
- Honors and gives voice to gut reactions, intuition, hunches, intuitions, impressions

Typical Red Hat Phrases:

- *I feel like this idea has potential.*
- *I find this solution threatening.*
- *That is an unusual approach.*
- *Don't ask me why, I just don't like this vision.*
- *I have a hunch…*
- *I have a soft spot for…*

Typical Red Hat Questions:

- *What is your gut reaction?*
- *How do we think people will react?*
- *How will our stakeholders feel?*
- *What's our best guess?*
- *What is the opinion about…?*
- *Is this fair?*

Source: Edward de Bono, *Six Thinking Hats: An Essential Approach to Business Management*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1985); EAB interviews and analysis.
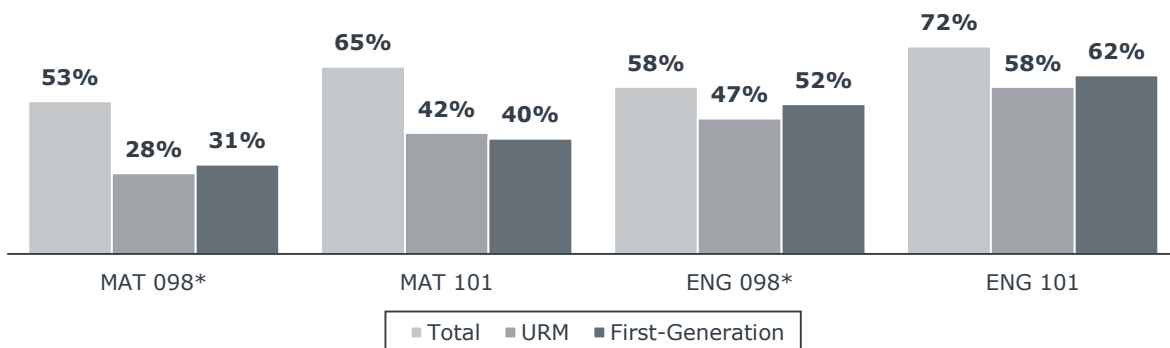
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Creating a Data-Driven Campus: The [Color] Hat

1   What behaviors or tendencies have you observed from campus stakeholders who tend to display [color] hat thinking?

2   What are their day-to-day priorities? What are they concerned about?

3   **Course Pass Rates at Community College First-Year Courses**

	MAT 098*	MAT 101	ENG 098*	ENG 101
Total	53%	65%	58%	72%
URM	28%	42%	47%	58%
First-Generation	31%	40%	52%	62%

a)   How might a [color] hat thinker respond to presentation of this data?

b)   Based on the above data, how would you make a case to a [color] hat thinker to inspire campus change?

* Denotes pre-college level courses

Creating and Conveying Effective Campus Strategy

1 What is the composition of the cabinet, in terms of thinking styles? What thinking style(s) is underrepresented?

2 Where is each color hat thinking valuable when creating strategy? Where should we be plugging in the different thinking hat styles in when vetting and communicating strategic initiatives?

Black:

White:

Red:

Yellow:

Green:

Blue: