



## Decision making – What to do When You don't know what to do

### No.1: The rubber band model: Stop Weighing Pros and Cons

When you've tried to take a decision in the past you may have looked at the pros and cons. Weighing advantages and disadvantages can be beneficial as it's a way of trying to understand the balance of a situation.

But there's also a school of thought that sees it as quite negative. The inclusions of "cons" can cast a black cloud over how you're making decisions so here's a tip for making decisions through a more positive lens...

Think about two rubber bands. Each represents the outcome of a choice. One is pulling you left; the other is pulling you right. Tangled in the tension between the bands, ask yourself:

- What's holding you?
- What's pulling you?



These questions frame the issue so that *both* options have a chance to shine. Rather than grappling with bad verses good, the rubber band model compels you to find the attractive aspects of both possibilities when making a decision.

Next time you're pressed to make up your mind, try out the rubber band model. I like the emphasis on attractive qualities; for me, it eliminates some of the anxiety-fueled road bumps that can happen when you're pressed to decide!

Check out no. 2 over the jump for an extra decision making goody!

## No.2: Looking at a decision from different points of view From Edward de Bono's book '6 Thinking Hats'

Six Thinking Hats is a good technique for looking at the effects of a decision from a number of different points of view. This forces you to move outside your habitual thinking style, and helps you to get a more rounded view of a situation.

If you look at a problem with the 'Six Thinking Hats' technique, then you will solve it using all approaches. Your decisions and plans will mix ambition, skill in execution, sensitivity, creativity and good contingency planning.

### How to Use the Tool

Think about the decision or question you have in your head and apply the different styles of thinking below:

- **White Hat:** With this thinking hat you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them. This is where you analyse past trends, and try to extrapolate from historical data.
  - **Red Hat:** 'Wearing' the red hat, you look at problems using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.
  - **Black Hat:** Using black hat thinking, look at all the bad points of the decision. Look at it cautiously and defensively. Try to see why it might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan. It allows you to eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them.  
  
Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real
- benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.
- **Yellow Hat:** The yellow hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.
  - **Green Hat:** The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas. You can check out the creative thinking tools to help with this
  - **Blue Hat:** The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, etc.

**Check out the example over the jump on the next page...**

## Example

*The directors of a property company are looking at whether they should construct a new office building. The economy is doing well, and the amount of vacant office space is reducing sharply. As part of their decision they decide to use the 6 Thinking Hats technique during a planning meeting.*

*Looking at the problem with the White Hat, they analyse the data they have. They examine the trend in vacant office space, which shows a sharp reduction. They anticipate that by the time the office block would be completed, that there will be a severe shortage of office space. Current government projections show steady economic growth for at least the construction period.*

*With Red Hat thinking, some of the directors think the proposed building looks quite ugly. While it would be highly cost-effective, they worry that people would not like to work in it.*

*When they think with the Black Hat, they worry that government projections may be wrong. The economy may be about to enter a 'cyclical downturn', in which case the office building may be empty for a long time. If the building is not attractive, then companies will choose to work in another better-looking building at the same rent.*

*With the Yellow Hat, however, if the economy holds up and their projections are correct, the company stands to make a great deal of money. If they are lucky, maybe they could sell the building before the next downturn, or rent to tenants on long-term leases that will last through any recession.*

*With Green Hat thinking they consider whether they should change the design to make the building more pleasant. Perhaps they could build prestige offices that people would want to rent in any economic climate. Alternatively, maybe they should invest the money in the short term to buy up property at a low cost when a recession comes.*

*The Blue Hat has been used by the meeting's Chair to move among the different thinking styles. He or she may have needed to keep other members of the team from switching styles, or from criticizing other peoples' points.*

Source:

[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_07.htm#sthash.p8Uzanza.dpuf](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_07.htm#sthash.p8Uzanza.dpuf)