

Six Thinking Hats Future Mapping

Category
Strategy

Purpose

The Six Thinking Hats Future Map leverages the 6TH model to combine idea creation, problem solving, and strategic planning into a single framework with the goal of understanding the challenges, opportunities and ideas needed to reach the desired future state of an initiative. The end result is a list of artifacts that can serve as success criteria, starting backlog, and known impediments.

Description

Framework name:	Six Thinking Hats Future Mapping
Participants:	Initiative, product or project leaders
Framework goal:	Explore challenges, opportunities and ideas for implementing a new initiative, product or project.
Framework guidelines:	<p>Start by creating a visual framework on flip charts or on a virtual whiteboard. There should be eight roughly equal sections large enough for the participants to place physical or virtual post-it notes so that they can be easily read by everyone.</p> <p>Label the sections in the following order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blue Hat: Goals Review ● Red Hat: Check-In ● White Hat: Current State ● Yellow Hat: Future State ● Black Hat: Barriers ● Green Hat: Implementing the Future ● Blue Hat: Next Steps ● Red Hat: Check-Out <p>Whenever possible, use Hat Imagery and the colors to label your sections. This helps participants to remain focused and in sync on what is the focus at any given stage of the retrospective.</p>
Boundaries provided:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maximum of 8 participants ● External facilitation strongly recommended ● 90 minute timebox

Resources used:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level definition and success criteria for the initiative, product or project. • In-person: Whiteboard or wall, image of framework, large Post-It notes • Online: Collaborative workspace (e.g. Miro or Mural)
Actionable outcome(s):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detailed success criteria (White Hats) 2. Starting Backlog of work (Green Hats) 3. Initial impediment backlog (Black Hats) 4. Next step action plan (top 2 Backlog items)

Detailed Facilitation Guide:

Note: The example facilitation and instructions uses an Agile adoption initiative as the example. This can be replaced with any initiative, product or project. Tailor the wording to fit your needs.

Prologue: Explaining Six Thinking Hats

Time: 5 minutes

Goal: Explain the concept of Six Thinking Hats

Example Instructions: *“We are going to use the Six Thinking Hats framework today. Based on Edward De Bono’s book, the concept is to focus our thinking in specific areas to work to a shared goal. Similar to how preventing multitasking reduces error and shortens time to completion, using the Six Hats framework will allow us to quickly move through a concept and to potential solutions.”*

Blue Hat: Set the Stage

Time: 5 minutes

Goal: Set purpose and goal for activity.

Example Instructions: *“During this exercise we are going to imagine that we have successfully transitioned the organization into an adaptive Agile organization. We will create a better picture of what success looks like in this new Agile organization when we get to the Yellow Hats.*

Our goal is to examine the accelerators, obstacles and ideas for implementing Agile in our organization. We will do this by walking through each of the Six Thinking Hats in turn. By doing so we will be able to develop a clear picture of what it is needed to make Agile successful for your organization.”

Facilitation Tips:

- Before starting, answer questions and ensure there is clarity on the purpose and how the participants will move through the thinking hats.
- Ensure they understand they need to stay with the current hat for each phase.
- It is useful to have a Vision statement as a starting point for picturing the future state of the initiative, product or project. You can use our [Vision Statement Framework](#) for this.

Red Hat: Check In

Time: 5 Minutes

- Briefing: 1 minute
- Activity: 2 minutes
- Debrief: 2 minutes

Goal: Allow participants to get their feelings out and processed so they can more easily engage in the exercise.

Example Instructions: *“Take two minutes to capture how you feel about the idea of moving to Agile. Each sticky should be a one or two word statement that expresses your personal feeling. There are no right or wrong answers here, we just want to understand where everyone is coming from.”*

Facilitation Tips:

- This hat is set in the current time, looking forward. How are they feeling right now?
- Encourage them to not overthink. *“Put the first word that comes to mind down. You can always add another post-it”*
- During debriefing ask participants if they want to share anything about the items they created. This is purely optional to allow those more comfortable with speaking to share their feelings.

White Hat: Current State

Time: 10 minutes

- Briefing: 1 minute
- Activity: 7 minutes
- Debrief: 2 minutes

Goal: Create a fact-based picture of the current state in relation to the proposed initiative.

Example Instructions: *“For the next several minutes we are going to focus on facts. What is currently going on in the organization related to designing, developing and delivering value to the customer? What is our release cycle? What’s our quality?”*

By understanding where the organization is right now, it will be easier to create our desired future state and understand the benefits and challenges of implementing Agile in the organization.”

Facilitation Tips:

- This hat is set in the current time, documenting the current state that exists. For example, what are the features of the 1.0 version of a product? What is the current release cycle for new software development?
- Participants will often start with opinions - “we’re too slow” - or color their facts with subjective terms - “The release was really sloppy”. Remind participants to keep to straight facts for the time being. E.g. “We release once a year”, “The defect count on the last release was 50% higher than the previous release.”
- During debrief ask clarifying questions on any fact that is not clear. Ask participants to do the same. Have participants update post-it notes to clarify.
- Neither precision or an exhaustive list is critical here. The purpose of this stage is to anchor the participants in the activity and prepare them for the next three hats.

Yellow Hat: Future State

Time: 10 minutes

- Briefing: 1 minute
- Activity: 7 minutes
- Debrief: 7 minutes

Goal: Understand the expected and desired benefits of the initiative.

Example Instructions: *“It is a year from now. We have been fully Agile for over three months now and are conducting an organizational retrospective. What would our successes look like? Be specific.”*

Facilitation Tips:

- Participants may have trouble moving to the future. It can be useful to create physical and visual cues. Write an exact date on the flip chart. Put some movement in by having the participants physically change walls from where the White Hats are. Play a short video clip from a time travel to the future show like Back to the Future or Meet the Robinsons.
- Encourage specificity. “Fewer defects” is not a clear future state. “50% reduction in customer reported issues” is a clear statement.
- Clarity in the debrief is key. Understanding expectations of what success looks like, before starting, ensures a greater likelihood of success.

Black Hat: Gather the Data- Barriers

Time: 15 minutes

- Briefing: 1 minute

- Activity: 7 minutes
- Debrief: 7 minutes

Goal: To collect all potential barriers, blockers, and challenges to reaching the proposed future state.

Example Instructions: “Now we’re going to look at the challenges we faced in becoming fully Agile and what we did about them. This taps into the principle of not raising problems without having a proposed solution.

Instead of writing “HR will never agree”, try something like “HR resistant to role changes, leveraged an industry model for Agile roles that HR adopted.”

Facilitation Tips:

- Remind participants to think in the future state where we have already conquered this impediment.
- As with the White Hat, debrief is important. Understanding all the Black Hats for an initiative will make it possible to develop plans to address them and improve overall success.

Green Hat: Implementing the Future

Time: 15 minutes

- Briefing: 1 minute
- Activity: 7 minutes
- Debrief: 7 minutes

Goal: Generate organization specific actions and ideas for how to execute the initiative.

Example Instructions: *“We know what success looks like. We’ve looked at the things that could block success and developed ideas to combat them. Now let’s start to put down how we will go about building a successful Agile initiative.*

What are the steps we took to get to the Yellow Hat future state? Be specific.”

Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage specificity. The better the detail, the easier it will be to convert to actionable tasks moving forward.

Blue Hat: Close- Next steps

Time: 10 Minutes

Goal: Create a next step action plan

Example Instructions: *“Let’s look at how we can create a set of next steps to start the journey towards our desired future state. The Yellow, Green and Black Hats become inputs to planning the roll out of the initiative.*

- *The Yellow Hats are success criteria and goals. We will use them to craft acceptance criteria that will tell us if we are successful with the initiative*

and our top level features. From this we can derive metrics for measuring the success.

- *The Green Hats represent our starting feature backlog. We will further refine these and then prioritize them using 20/20 or a similar exercise.*
- *The Black Hats represent our impediment backlog. We further refine them and prioritize which are the most important to deal with first.*

We also want to favor action over analysis. Right now we are going to do a quick prioritization of the Green and Black hats. The goal is to determine the top two items we want to immediately address with a goal of keeping the ball rolling.

Facilitation Tips:

- Facilitate two Dot Voting exercises with the participants, one for the Green Hats and one for the Black hats.
- After Dot Voting is complete, ask for volunteers to be the sponsor for the two impediments selected. They are agreeing to organize meetings or actions to resolve the impediments.
- The Green Hats will go to the designated Product Owner for the initiative and will be the top priority for refinement and execution.

Red Hat: Close- Check Out

Time: 2 Minutes

Goal: Close the session

Example Instructions: *“Let’s take a minute to check-out. We’ve just tackled an intense and emotional subject. Put down at least one post-it with a one or two word description of how you are feeling about the Agile initiative now.”*

Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage them to not overthink. *“Put the first word that comes to mind down. You can always add another post-it”*

Source Notes

[Six Thinking Hats](#) was created by Edward De Bono. Future Mapping is based on the concept of Future Perfect Approach written about by Fuglsany and Mattsson in [Cambridge University Press](#) . The 6TH Future Mapping Framework was created by Joel Bancroft-Connors, Principal Consultant at Applied Frameworks.