Leadership Bites:
Creative Thinking
LEADERSHIP LEARNING IN 20 MINUTES

NHS Leadership Academy South East

Background
Being able to think differently in order to create and find efficiencies and solve problems is a skill, and sometimes we may find ourselves 'stuck in a rut' or unable to think outside the box. Whether you are aiming to generate new ideas or fix a problem which you're finding difficult, this guide can help.

Creating a thinking environment
It's important to consider encouraging a thinking environment when working with others, and below are elements to help ensure the environment is right before getting started:

Listening	Focusing with genuine interest and respect; parking your agenda
Appreciation	Practising a ten-to-one ratio of appreciation to criticism
Encouragement	Avoiding competition or jealousy
Equality	Focusing on each other as thinking peers; giving equal turns and attention; keeping agreements and boundaries
Diversity	Understanding and valuing differences
Feelings	Allowing the expression of anxiety, laughter etc to restore the ability to think again
Physical environment	Ensuring accessibility, light etc
Information	Providing a full and accurate picture of reality
Ease	Offering freedom from rush or urgency
Incisive questions	Removing assumptions that limit ideas

Think – Do you currently encourage these behaviours? How can you enhance the thinking environment even more?

'6 Hats' –an exercise to try…

Six Thinking Hats is a system designed by Edward de Bono, who carried out research on the human brain and identified six distinct directions in which the brain can be challenged. 6 Hats describes a tool for group discussion and individual thinking involving six coloured hats. It is a powerful technique for looking at decision making from different points of view. It allows emotion and scepticism to be brought into what might normally be a purely rational process, and it opens up the opportunity for creativity within decision making.

White Hat — Data, facts, information known or needed

Red Hat — Feelings, hunches, instinct and intuition

Black Hat — Difficulties, potential problems, why something may not work

Yellow Hat — Values and benefits, why something may work

Blue Hat — Manage process, next steps, action plans

Green Hat — Creativity, solutions, alternatives, new ideas

So, how do I use it?
As the hats do not represent natural modes of thinking, each hat must be used for a limited time

only. Also, some will feel that using the hats is unnatural, uncomfortable or even counterproductive and against their better judgement.

Coloured hats are used as metaphors for each direction. These metaphors allow for a more complete and elaborate segregation of the thinking directions. The six thinking hats indicate problems and solutions about an idea the thinker may come up with. The idea is to spend time with 'all hats' on and to switch between them all – sometimes the white hat can be used/worn for a longer period of time – gathering from other sources etc.

6 directions/hats:

Blue = Managing; what is the subject? what are we thinking about? what is the goal? Can look at the big picture.

White = Information; considering purely what information is available, what are the facts?

Red = Emotions; intuitive or instinctive gut reactions or statements of emotional feeling (but not any justification)

Black = Discernment; logic applied to identifying reasons to be cautious and conservative. Practical, realistic – critical thinking/negative judgement

Yellow = Optimistic response; logic applied to identifying benefits, seeking harmony. Sees the brighter, sunny side of situations.

Green = Creativity; statements of provocation and investigation, seeing where a thought goes. Thinks creatively, outside the box.

Lateral thinking through a 'Hackathon'

A hackathon is described as an activity for a period of time which encourages a burst of creative energy. Some hackathons may last for a couple of hours, or a day, and some may last longer, depending on the outcome you are trying to achieve. First formulate a 'how to' statement for your problem. Don't put a lot of effort into it, just let it flow. E.g. 'how to increase productivity'.

Then make your statement more extreme. For example, with the statement above, you could make it 'how to have the best productivity in our industry'. If you said 'increase sales by 10%' you could make it 'increase sales by 100%'. Look for excellence in your statement. However high the aspirations of your 'how to' statement, make them even higher.

Now consider the implications. It may be enough to say that the extreme 'how to' should be your goal. Often excellence is both desirable and achievable. In some cases though, it may be impractical. You may have gone from 'dominate the market' to 'dominate the world'. In that case, consider how you can modify your original s statement to make it more like the extreme without the negative or impossible aspects.

Follow the steps below to take your team through a successful 'hackathon':

Take a question which the group is interested in, for example: "How do we reduce the number of car accidents due to speeding?"

1) Take a question which the group is interested in, for example: "How do we reduce the number of car accidents due to speeding?"

2) Rephrase your question in a challenging and engaging way: *"How can we reduce speeding in 30mph zones by 90%?"*

3) Explode your thinking outwards by asking **"What if"** (goal is at least 50 "What if…?" questions)

4) Choose the most thought provoking 'What if…?' to explore further, e.g. "What if we rewarded people for not speeding?"

5) Rephrase the 'What if…?' into a 'How might we…?' e.g. **HOW MIGHT WE reward people for not speeding?**

Give it a go

Why not apply the 6 Hats in your next team meeting by allocating a hat each to one of your colleagues to discuss a particular problem statement? Make sure you limit the time spent wearing each hat and perhaps rotate them around at a sensible point in the conversation

Time to reflect…

Take some time to note down your thoughts on what you've learned;

What resonated?

What has made you curious?

What small changes could you make to start having an impact differently and quickly?

What might you need to share with your team, and commit to 'testing and learning' together?