

# **The Six Thinking Hats for Better, Faster, Safer Decision-Making in Public Health**

130th AFDO AEC

**Picture the scene...**

**“What data do we have?”**

**“What are our options?”**

**“My gut says this is bigger than it looks.”**

**“If we overreact, we damage trust.”**

**“If we wait, people get sick.”**

**“Could we try a phased response?”**

**“What decision are we actually making?”**

**Disclaimer 1/2: this is the short version.**



**Disclaimer 2/2: you are the experts in food safety.**



# The core idea has three elements

## **The Hats**

Distill six productive modes of thinking

## **Parallel thinking**

Deploy them in structured, productive way.

## **Decision support**

Clarify and buttress decisions.



**Find your colored cards!**

## **The Hats**

Distill six productive  
modes of thinking

## **Parallel thinking**

Deploy them in structured,  
productive way.

## **Decision support**

Clarify and buttress  
decisions.



**Different mental models,  
not personality types.**



**Each valid, each powerful,  
each incomplete.**



衆瞽  
探象之二

一圖



# For each:

**Big idea:** what is it?

**Motivation:** why bother?

**When we use it:** where does it show up?



# The blue hat

**Big idea:** process and structure

**Motivation:** discipline and clarity in service of a shared goal

**When we use it:** sharing the objective of a meeting, managing time

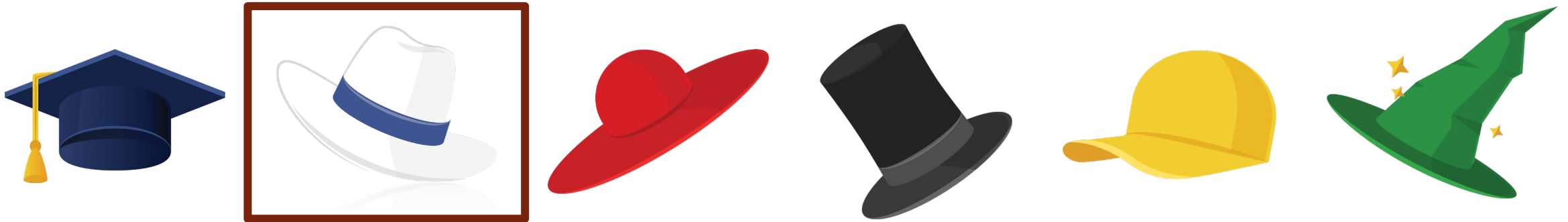


# The white hat

**Big idea:** facts; what we need and how to get them

**Motivation:** space for information that will further the goal

**When we use it:** presenting research, survey results

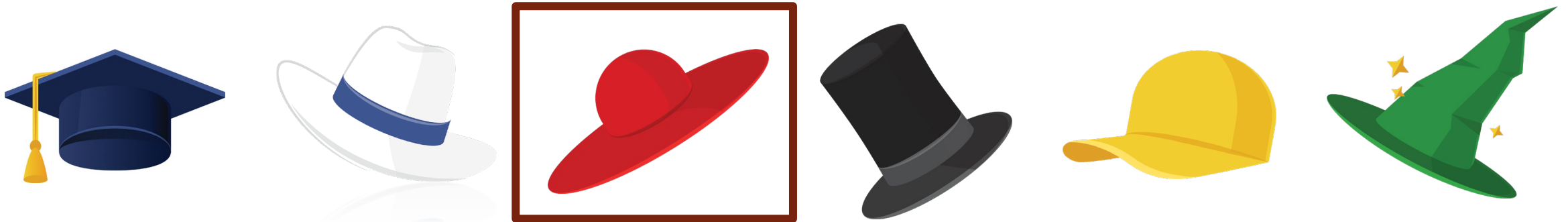


# The red hat

**Big idea:** feelings, without justification

**Motivation:** controlled engagement with powerful emotions

**When we use it:** getting gut reactions to a situation



# The black hat

**Big idea:** risks and cautions

**Motivation:** preparing for potential downside

**When we use it:** critical feedback on a proposal



# The yellow hat

**Big idea:** benefits and opportunities

**Motivation:** analytic rigor in looking for upside

**When we use it:** “What worked well in what you just heard, and why?”



# The blue hat

**Big idea:** creativity

**Motivation:** unconstrained generation!

**When we use it:** brainstorming, lateral thinking



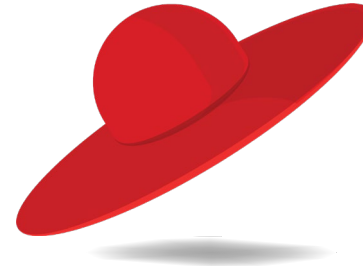
## PROCESS

Thinking about thinking  
What thinking is needed?  
Organizing the thinking  
Planning for action



## FEELINGS

Intuition, hunches, gut instinct  
My feelings right now.  
Feelings can change.  
No reasons are given.



## FACTS

Information and data  
Neutral and objective  
What do I know?  
What do I need to find out?  
How will I get the information I need?



## Six Thinking Hats

## BENEFITS

Positives, plus points  
Logical reasons are given.  
Why an idea is useful



## CREATIVITY

Ideas, alternative, possibilities  
Provocation - "PO"  
Solutions to black hat problems



## CAUTIONS

Difficulties, weaknesses, dangers  
Logical reasons are given.  
Spotting the risks



# Pop quiz: wave the relevant card

**Facts?**

**Emotions?**

**Risk?**

**Value?**

**Options?**

**Process?**

**Six hats.  
Six valid modes of thinking.  
Each useful.  
Each incomplete.**



**“What data do we have?”**

**“My gut says this is bigger than it looks.”**

**“If we overreact, we damage trust.”**

**“If we wait, people get sick.”**

**“Could we try a phased response?”**

**“What decision are we actually making?”**

**White**

**Red**

**Black**

**Yellow? Black?**

**Green**

**Blue**

## **The Hats**

Distill six productive modes of thinking

## **Parallel thinking**

Deploy them in structured, productive way.

## **Decision support**

Clarify and buttress decisions.



**The Hats are not the method.**

**The method is structured parallel thinking.**



**Cards again: show us your preferred  
professional thinking mode**

**Cards again: now show us the blue card**

**Not agreement; alignment.**

**Parallel thinking is a shared commitment to use each of the Hats in a specified order.**



# Vertical thinking: different modes simultaneously

- 1) Situation update
- 2) Review available data
- 3) Discuss risks
- 4) Discuss public communication
- 5) Consider operational options
- 6) Decide next steps



# Parallel thinking: same Hat same time

- 1) Decision to be made
- 2) What do we know, what do we not know, and what can we learn quickly?
- 3) Immediate instincts or concerns
- 4) Risks with action and inaction
- 5) What public value are we trying to protect or create?
- 6) Ideation: options or adaptations are available?
- 7) Decision
- 8) Recap and next steps



**Balanced application of the Hats.**

**Broad application of the Hats.**



## **The Hats**

Distill six productive modes of thinking

## **Parallel thinking**

Deploy them in structured, productive way.

## **Decision support**

Clarify and buttress decisions.





**You're not just imagining it;  
making good decisions well  
is hard.**

See, for example, Kahneman, D., Lovallo, D., & Sibony, O. (2011). Before you make that big decision... *Harvard business review*, 89(6), 50–137 and Nutt, P. C. (1999). Surprising but true: Half the decisions in organizations fail. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 13(4), 75-90.



# Two contributions:

Blue Hat  
**discipline** to be  
clear on what is  
being decided,  
how, by whom.

**Rigor** that  
comes from  
using all the  
Hats.

See, for example, Kahneman, D., Lovallo, D., & Sibony, O. (2011). Before you make that big decision... *Harvard business review*, 89(6), 50–137 and Nutt, P. C. (1999). Surprising but true: Half the decisions in organizations fail. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 13(4), 75-90.



# The Hats as guards against failure modes

White	Better evidence	Acting on rumor, assumption, or fog
Red	Better judgment	Suppressed concern or false objectivity
Black	Better risk control	Naive action or preventable harm
Yellow	Better purpose	Defensive decisions
Green	Better options	False binaries and stale playbooks
Blue	Better execution	Vague agreement with no owner, trigger, or next step



## 4) Rapid simulation



A regional food safety team receives several consumer illness complaints connected to a multi-location restaurant group.

One preliminary lab signal is concerning but not yet confirmatory.

A major community festival starts tomorrow.

The operator is cooperative but worried about reputational harm.

Local media has begun asking questions.



 **Mentimeter**

RT 

Replace this slide



Open Menti to edit



Loading PowerPoint Add-in...



Mentimeter



Replace this slide




Open Mentimeter to edit




Loading PowerPoint Add-in...



Mentimeter 11

Replace this slide 

Open Mentimeter to edit 



Loading PowerPoint Add-in...



 **Mentimeter** RT 

---

Replace this slide 

---

Open Menti to edit 



Loading PowerPoint Add-in...

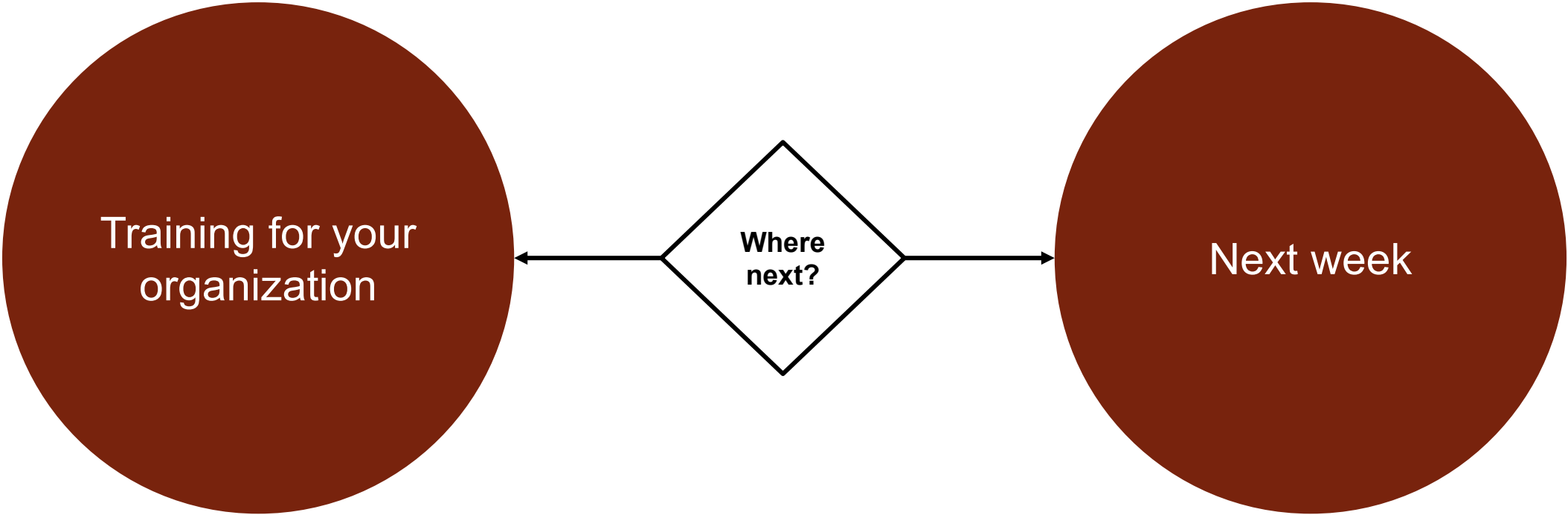


**The awkwardness is part of  
the experience!**



## 6) What to do with it?





## **Monday morning toolkit (1/2):**

**Apply the lens of Hats to an existing agenda. How will people show up for each item? Will that be helpful?**



## **Monday morning toolkit (2/2):**

**Add some Blue, Red and  
Yellow to a meeting.**



# 7) Close



**Let us return to the  
beginning.**



**One last card show: which Hat is likely to be missing?**

**That is the work!**

**Not louder meetings.  
Cleaner thinking. Better  
decisions.**



**Thank you.**