



ACTIVITIES  
THAT SUPPORT  
DEEP COLLABORATION

# SIX THINKING HATS FOR ROBUST DISCUSSION

## Context:

De Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats' is a tool for exploring problems and ideas from different angles. There are different modes of thinking about problems and ideas, however it is easy to get stuck in just a few of them. By spending dedicated time on each thinking mode, teams can uncover hidden insights, unlock creative thinking and see that many different perspectives are true.

This tool has become part of the workplace language of our team and informs many discussions. We recommend using it when exploring the discussion questions in this guide.

## Why use it?

- To solve complex or complicated problems
- To pressure test existing ideas or thinking
- If your team is unable to come to a shared understanding of how to solve a problem
- If you need creative solutions or insights

### Time required:

20 MINS EACH

Allow at least 20 minutes per problem or idea

### Who should participate?

Any part of the collaborative team or the whole team

### Materials required:

Whiteboard or butchers paper and pens

## Process:

1. Familiarise your team with the six thinking hats (as outlined on the following page).
2. One person should 'wear' the Blue hat. This means that they are facilitating, and it is their job to remind others when they are reverting to their default thinking hat and encourage people to stay on the hat in question.
3. Write the question, issue or idea on butchers paper or a whiteboard.
4. Decide how many minutes you will spend on each hat, and use a timer to keep track.
5. Go through the hats one by one, starting with White and ending with Green. Discuss the issue at hand only from that specific angle for the dedicated time period.
6. Capture notes as you go, ideally in different sections of the paper or in different pen colours.
7. Once you have gone through all the hats, have an open discussion about how people now think about this issue, question or idea.



### The process hat

Thinking about thinking.  
Facilitator's hat.

**Key Question:**

What process should we use to work this out?



### The creative hat

Ideas, possibilities,  
add-ons.

**Key Question:**

What are the wildest creative solutions we can think of?



### The data hat

Information and data. Neutral and objective.

**Key Question:**

What do we already know about this issue?  
What do we need to find out?



### The positivity hat

Positive aspects.  
Logical reasons are given.

**Key Question:**

What is great about this issue?  
What is the opportunity?



### The feelings hat

Intuitions, hunches,  
gut feelings. No reasons are given.

**Key Question:**

How do I feel about this issue?



### The critical hat

Difficulties, weaknesses,  
dangers. Logical reasons are given.

**Key Question:**

What could go wrong with this idea/issue?

**Credit:** Edward De Bono: <http://www.debonothinkingsystems.com/tools/6hats.htm>

# COLLABORATION READINESS ASSESSMENT

## Context:

Collaboration isn't always the best way forward. If your internal culture or processes are at odds with the modes of working and thinking that collaboration requires, then it is likely to be a challenging, expensive and ineffective process.

Being honest about where your organisation is at is the first step in making great strategic choices.

## Why use it?

- To work out whether to start a collaborative project
- To understand why you might be struggling with an existing collaboration
- If you need clear sense of whether your organisation is ready for deeper collaborative approaches
- To identify areas that your collaboration representatives will need extra support in to collaborate well

### Time required:

45 MINS

### Who should participate?

Your organisation's senior management team plus the staff member/s who will be representing you in the collaborative project

### Materials required:

Printouts of the following 2 pages for all participants

## Process:

Score yourself along each scale on the following two pages. It is best to use this process as a deep discussion tool with your senior management team and the individuals who will be working on the proposed collaboration.

Collaboration seems like the thing to do, but we haven't thought about the challenges and benefits very much or how this collaboration will affect our broader organisational goals.

**How clear are you on the reasons you are collaborating on this project?**

We've thought deeply about whether collaboration is the best approach, and we have decided that not only does the issue at hand require collaborative approaches, but also that collaborating will further our own goals and vision.

We focus on productivity and efficiency. People are rewarded for working hard, not talking about their feelings.

**How much does your organisation value and support the development of 'soft skills' like communication?**

Interpersonal soft skills are central to our organisational culture. All of our staff are trained in these areas and encouraged to develop them.

Strategic plans are developed by senior management and there is little room for flexibility in how it is delivered or changed.

**What is your approach to strategy and adaptation?**

Our on-the-ground team members contribute significantly to strategic development, and we expect them to adapt the strategic plan to the circumstances as they go.

We have concrete timelines, activities and outputs that we must deliver on in our funding agreement or similar.

**How much flexibility do you have with the approach, timeline and outputs of your project?**

Our funders, board etc. understand this project is collaborative and innovative and expect things to change significantly as we progress.

Any significant decision must be approved by the manager through formal approval processes.

**Who has authority to make significant decisions?**

We encourage staff members to make important decisions independently.



We're able to do a single day workshop on this, but then have to start the action.

**How much time and resources do you have to build relationships and alignment?**

We have the ability to dedicate a month or two to the initial stages of building alignment.



To be honest, I think our board/funders etc. would expect us to keep our cards up our sleeve and ensure we retain as much control over the outcomes as possible.

**How willing are you to actively share power and authority with your collaborators?**

We already talk openly about power and privilege within our organisation and teams and are curious about what it is like to actively share power with collaborators.



**Add it all up.  
Which side do you lean towards?**



Collaboration is likely to be very problematic as you don't currently have the skills or the culture that facilitates effective and fruitful collaboration.

You may need to use more traditional collaborative approaches or work out specific systems to support your collaborative staff to engage well with the collaboration. Perhaps they will need explicit permission to work in ways that differ from your day-to-day working culture.

You are so ready for deep collaboration and are well positioned to get a lot of out of the process.

# STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

## Context:

A 'Strategic Triangle' is a simple tool for clarifying and presenting the short and long-term goals of your project. It allows you and others to see how individual activities ladder up into higher strategic objectives and outcomes and provides a great reference throughout the project lifecycle to make good strategic decisions quickly.

Doing it as a collaborative group creates strong alignment.

## Why use it?

- To get clear around what you want to achieve and the best way to go about it at the beginning of a project
- To streamline, cull or prioritise activities or ideas
- To clarify alignment around what you are trying to achieve and/or how to get there

### Time required:

3 HOURS

### Who should participate?

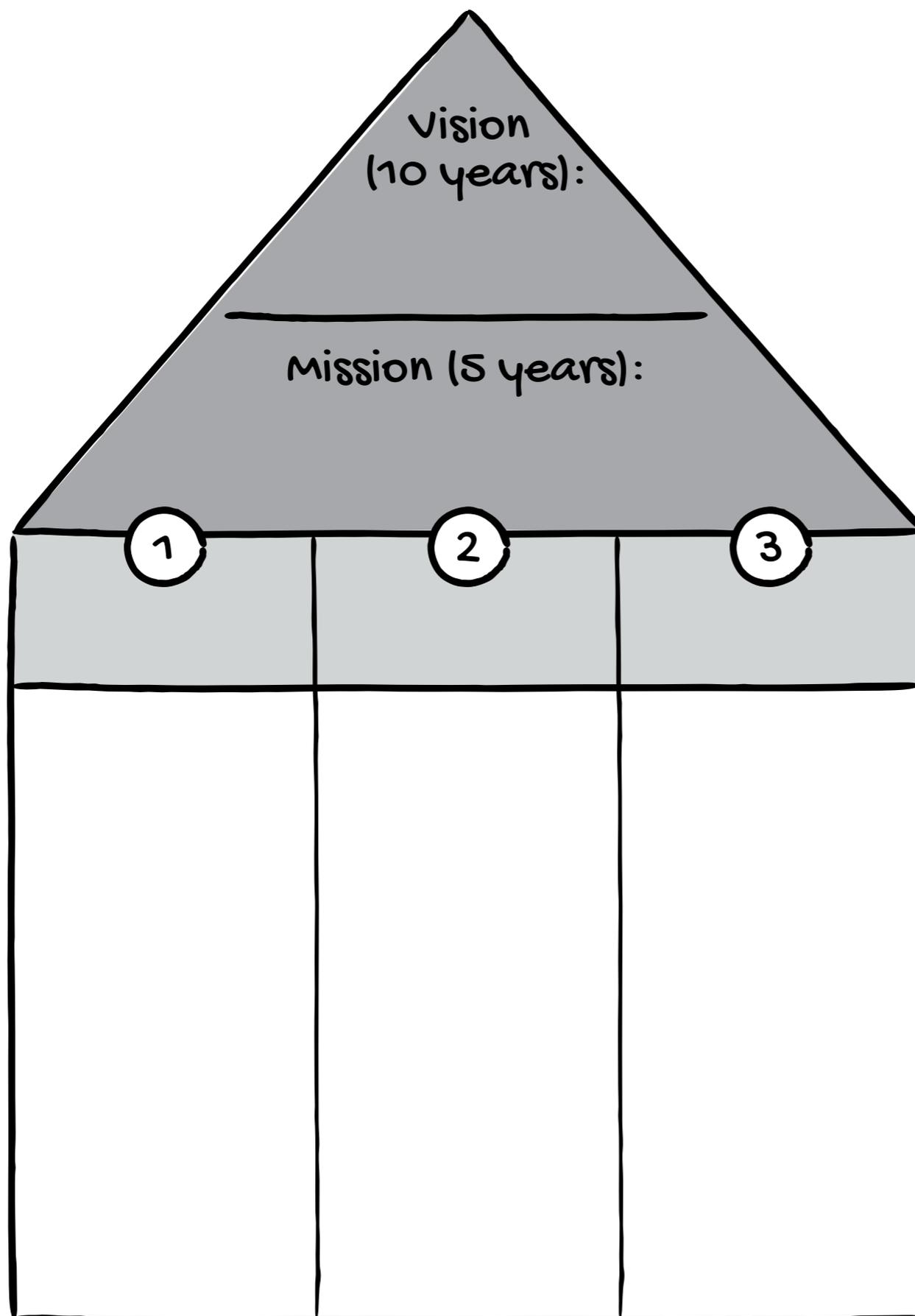
All core team members and at least one senior manager from each organisation

### Materials required:

Whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, butchers paper

## Process:

1. Draw the 'Strategic Triangle' on a whiteboard or butchers paper.
2. Work on each segment of the triangle until you are close to agreement.
3. Explain what each segment is (you can use the thought starter questions in the image below if needed).
4. Each person writes their own version (or a few versions) of that segment in private, then shares with the group.
5. The facilitator writes all of the individual versions up on the whiteboard, and highlights any repeating themes or words.
6. The group discusses what an interim version of that segment could be.
7. After going through the whole triangle, return to the top and see if any further clarity has emerged around the best phrase for each segment.
8. Remember: strategy is the art of knowing what not to do or include.

**Description:****VISION:**

The big dream that you are hoping to achieve or contribute towards with your project.

**Thought starters:**

What do you want to be known for in 100 years?  
What would have to happen for you to say 'great, we're done now'?

**MISSION:**

The milestone goal that will let you know you are well on your way to achieving your vision.

What is a tangible 'slice' of your vision that, provided all goes well, you can imagine actually achieving in this project?

**STRATEGIC PILLARS:**

The three outcomes you absolutely need to get right during the following 12 months in order to deliver your mission and vision.

What needs to be in place to make your mission possible?  
Often a structural, financial and program pillar?

**DELIVERABLES:**

Key project deliverables or activities that enable your strategic pillars.

This creates context and direction for the activities. If an activity doesn't fit into one of your pillars, perhaps it should be culled.

# PLANETS AND MOONS

to discover shared values

## Context:

'Planets and Moons' is a fast and structured brainstorming technique that creates consensus by accounting for individual ideas and then identifying recurring themes for further exploration.

In this instance we are describing how to use this exercise for discovering shared values, but it is excellent for any brainstorming you need to do.

## Why use it?

- To develop and agree upon shared values
- To find consensus or agreement on the most important themes within a larger topic
- To break down a complex process or problem into identifiable and more manageable parts

### Time required:

30-90  
MINUTES

### Who should participate?

All team members should participate

### Materials required:

Butchers paper, pens, sticky notes in at least 2 colours

## Process:

### Step 1: Individual ideas

- Get clear on the question you are exploring. In the case of values, it would be: "What are the most important values for us to adhere to when working together?"
- Spend 5-10 minutes as individuals writing down all possible responses. Use post it notes and only include one idea on each post it note.
- Keep going – when you think you have run out of ideas, push

yourself to come up with more - these ideas will likely be the most interesting ones!

### Step 2: Present and cluster

- One by one, present your ideas back to the group and stick them up on butchers paper or a wall where everyone else can see them. Explain what you meant by each one as you put it up.
- If someone else has already put a similar idea up, place yours next to theirs. The same idea occurring multiple times indicates it is important.

- Once everyone has finished putting their ideas up, play with creating different clusters that feel like they have similar ideas in them. The trick here is to look at different ways you could group ideas together. At this stage, it's all about exploring nuance.
- For example, you may have a theme emerging around 'Animals' and another around 'Plants' – or you might decide to collapse these and create one cluster called 'Nature'. Alternatively, you might split a theme called Nature out into two separate themes: one called 'Plants' and another called 'Animals'.
- When you are happy with the clusters/themes, circle all the

notes in that cluster and give the cluster a name that describes what it is about.

### Step 3: Developing the clusters

- Work out how each cluster could come to life in your specific context. In this instance, how could it be articulated as a value? You can use the individual ideas within the cluster as jumping off points for creative ideation, or combine a few together into a more substantial idea.
- Write your list of developed values onto butchers paper, then cull and prioritise them until you get to a maximum of 8 values.

## Example



# ROLE MAPPING

## Context:

When people come together to work on a project it is vitally important to have a shared understanding of who will do what. This activity creates clarity and alignment on roles and allows people to get to work with clearly defined tasks. It supports people to be proactive and self-accountable.

## Why use it?

- To create clarity around roles for the individuals and the organisations involved
- To create clear accountability areas
- To create alignment

### Time required:

3 HOURS

### Who should participate?

All key team members must participate

### Materials required:

Butchers paper, sticky notes in at least 2 different colours, markers, Bluetack

## Process overview:

1. Create a profile of each person's and organisation's professional skills and attributes.
2. Use 'Planets and Moons' to brainstorm and delineate all the work tasks and categories required by the project.
3. Allocate tasks to individuals via discussion.
4. Finish up with an open discussion about potential challenges.

## Step-by-step instructions:

### Create individual professional profiles

1. Start by understanding each individual's work history, experience and skills. Ask each person to talk for 3-5 minutes on this topic, then ask anyone else in the room who knows them professionally to add any other key points. The areas covered should be:
  - Relevant work history and experience
  - Unusual work history and experience
  - What are they good at?
  - What do they love doing?
  - What are they bad at?
  - What do they hate doing?
  - What are they less-than-good at or less-than-passionate about, but can do if no one else can?
2. Create a synopsis for each person where it's easy to see during the brainstorming session.
3. Do the same for each organisation involved - what are their strengths and weaknesses, what are they bringing to the table, what external restrictions may affect roles?

### Brainstorm and delineate tasks and activities

4. Do a 'Planets and Moons' process ([see page 24](#)) to capture all the different tasks that are needed to get the project goals achieved. Group the tasks into activity areas and name these activity areas.

### Allocate tasks

5. Create an open, facilitated discussion around which activities - or groups of activities - are an obvious fit for certain

individuals/organisations.

6. Discuss how to allocate what remains. Take into account the availability of team members, organisational needs/priorities and willingness to learn new skills.
7. Take particular note of which activities don't sit comfortably in anyone's remit. These might require professional development or external contractors.
8. Also take note of where multiple people have clear expertise in the same area. This area should be allocated to one person only, however they may have a requirement to seek advice from the other experienced person.

### Write up role descriptions

9. Get each individual to write up their role description, including accountabilities and KPIs. Share this with the group for discussion and feedback.
10. Group people into their organisations, and have them write up an organisational role description. Share this with the group for discussion and feedback.

### Discuss learning and conflicts

11. Finish with an open discussion around:
  - How similar are the roles to what people had previously understood?
  - Where are there overlaps between roles that might be confusing? How can we address these overlaps to create clarity?
  - Does anyone need greater resources (time, support, other) to be able to deliver well on their role?
  - Where will the group need support (training, consultants, internal support) to deliver the project well?

# MIRRORING

## Activity #6

### Context:

The most important and under-developed communication skill is active listening. The core of active listening is to pay close attention to what is being communicated, ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand and then reflect back to the speaker what you have heard to receive confirmation, before adding your own perspective, story or information.

This sounds like a simple exercise but people unused to mirroring may be surprised just how difficult it is to deeply listen and understand the other person, when our tendency is to want to 'contribute' to the conversation.

### Why use it?

- To increase awareness of the role of listening in communication
- To improve active listening skills
- Allows the speaker to feel respected and supported

#### Time required:

30-60  
MINUTES

#### Who should participate?

All core team members

#### Materials required:

Chairs arranged in groups of three

#### Credit:

Adapted from:  
<http://www.communicationskillsactivities.com/>

### Process:

1. Set up the team into groups of three. This can be done on Zoom breakout rooms if your team is dispersed. One person is the speaker, one is the listener and one is the observer.
2. The speaker is to tell three stories about their life. Start with something simple such as what they ate for breakfast. Then move on to more complex and emotive stories such as a recent argument with someone close to them. It is even more powerful if the stories are about interactions between the speaker and listener.
3. As the speaker tells each story, the listener paraphrases the important points of what they are hearing, and mirrors this back to the speaker. The listener may ask clarifying questions, however may not add new information, opinions or stories about their own experience. The listener continues to mirror until the speaker agrees that the essence of their experience has been accurately reflected back to them.
4. The listener must remember that it is not their job to resolve the issues raised in the stories, provide advice or ask questions about the outcome of the issue being discussed.
5. After the 3 stories are shared and reflected, the listener, speaker and observer discuss what they noticed about the activity.
6. The participants switch roles and repeat the activity until all have been the speaker, the listener and the observer.

# SEVEN MINUTE LIFE STORIES

## Context:

Trust arises when we feel we know another person: their history, their personality, their experience. This activity is a simple way to 'get to know' your team members and is very effective for building trust and connection.

## Why use it?

- To build trust
- For better teamwork
- To create connection

### Time required:

30-60 MINS

depending on size of group

### Who should participate?

All core team members

### Materials required:

Chairs set up in pairs, timer

## Process:

1. Set up the room with chairs in pairs, a little away from each other for some degree of privacy.
2. Ask people to pair up with someone from a different organisation who they don't know well.
3. Each person has seven minutes to tell their life story to the other, making sure they include events that have resulted in them ending up working on this project.
4. Each person then shares three reflections about their

partner's story with the broader group:

- "Something that surprised me about my partner's life was..."
  - "Something that I could really relate to in their life story was..."
  - "Something that was really different from my experience was..."
5. Allow time for unstructured social time afterwards, to allow the newfound connections to be explored.

# ELEPHANT QUESTIONS

## Context:

Elephant Questions help us to name the 'elephant in the room', or the thoughts and concerns that may be uncomfortable or vulnerable. Effective communication within a team requires courage and openness, as well as trust that we will be listened to and respected, even when we say things that others don't like.

These questions are a quick way to practice courageous communication and to create a safe space for authenticity.

## Why use it?

- Improved skills in courageous communication
- Increased sense of trust and psychological safety

### Time required:

40  
MINUTES

### Who should participate?

All team members can participate, including people more distant to the project, such as senior managers, finance managers etc.

### Materials required:

Chairs and timer

## Process:

1. Set up the room like musical chairs - an inner circle and an outer circle, facing each other. Ensure that anyone who knows each other well are in the same circle.
2. Use a timer that can ring every minute.
3. Each person in the pair has one minute to respond to each of these three open sentences, making each round 6 minutes. It is important that the listener only listens, and doesn't respond to what is shared by the speaker.
4. Elephant questions/open sentences:
  - "My biggest doubts about this project are..."
  - "What you need to know about me to work well with me is..."
  - "The 'elephant in the room' is..."
5. The outer circle changes place to sit with the next person after each round.
6. Allow at least three rounds.
7. Open a 10-minute group discussion for reflection on what was challenging, what was rewarding and what was surprising about the exercise.



The Radical Guide to Collaboration was written in 2020 by Stephanie Clerc and Madeline McGarvey, in collaboration with the Culture Well team: Nera Komaric, Janine Philips, Benjamin Haynes, Jimi Wollumbin and Michele Goldman.

[Who is Culture Well](#)

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