

Experiment 6: Exploring how conversational scaffolds create spaces for felt sensing

Background

As the comparison of Gendlin's *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* and his *Focusing and Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy* work shows, felt sensing is a pervasive underpinning of everyday life, but sustained emphasis on felt sensing microprocesses is not commonplace. A consequence of this is that there are many situations where more fruitful use of felt sensing could be made.

Looking through the lens of conversational scaffolds, we find practices:

- where the importance of using felt sensing micropractices is made *explicit* (e.g. Young's 'A technique for producing ideas'; John Woolman's Quaker practice as reported in his diary);
- where dependence on felt sensing microprocesses is evident from the ways scaffolds *implicitly* accommodate them, at least in part (e.g. Fisher & Ury's 'Principled Negotiation'; De Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats'); and
- where the possibility of using felt sensing microprocesses is *absent*, out of frame, e.g. where the scaffolding is entirely content-centered (e.g. in socio-ecological systems analysis workshop methods).

Finding ways to embed felt sensing microprocesses into familiar, relevant, conversational practices - leveraging the space they already make, or in new ways - makes sense when more felt sensing is likely to be helpful (e.g. the thinking needs to be relatively holistic, relatively creative, or centred rather than emotionally reactive; examples include negotiations, design processes, parenting).

Research questions, interests

How can established conversational scaffolds be used to support more appropriate, sustained, use of felt sensing microprocesses in conversations where this is likely to be particularly helpful?

Methods

The experiment is

1. **Developing an approach to embedding support for felt sensing into a conversational practice of your choice.**
2. **Using De Bono's creative thinking technique, the 'Six Thinking Hats', infused with felt sensing moves that occur to you.**

The experiment thus involves exploring how conversational scaffolds create spaces for felt sensing at two levels:

- (i) content: thinking through how to weave felt sensing microprocesses into the use of a valued conversational practice; and,
- (ii) process: practicing working in a felt sensing way within the frame that De Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats' provides, and seeing what you can learn from that.

The task

Work in small groups on ways of embedding support for felt sensing into the use of a conversational practice that the group values. Examples of practices you could work on include:

- Principled Negotiation
- Non-Violent Communication
- Parker Palmer's teaching practice
- Quaker practice
- Open Space Technology
- Six Thinking Hats.



The process

The 'Six Thinking Hats' are a different approach to conversation that De Bono developed to help groups think more creatively together.

The "hats" are ways of thinking. 'Putting on a hat' means that the group as a whole dedicates time to one of the following:

- white hat: considering what information we have, what is missing, ...
- green hat: coming up with and explaining creative ideas, innovative approaches, ...
- red hat: heeding and articulating feelings, intuitions, hunches, ...
- black hat: bringing caution, critical judgment, into play ...
- yellow hat: looking for feasibility, benefits, ...
- blue hat: considering what kind of thinking is needed next

Central to the method is what De Bono calls PARALLEL thinking - an alternative to argument - all doing the same kind of thinking at the same time. When everybody is focused on generating new possibilities together, *then* everybody is focused on strengthening these ideas as much as practicable, *then* everybody considers what the strengths and weaknesses of each of the ideas is, ... a very different kind of conversation develops from what happens when one person offers a creative possibility, and the next person jumps straight in with criticisms.

Use this exercise to have an experience of deliberately "changing hats together", as a group, in the way De Bono recommends.

As you are working together, let dipping into felt sensing support your group's work.

Getting started

Use a *structured conversation* in which the whole group *uses a number of the six thinking hats in an orderly sequence* to develop an approach to embedding support for felt sensing into a conversational practice of interest to the group.

To start with use the following three hats in this sequence:

- green hat: what creative ideas, innovative approaches, do we think should be considered?
- yellow hat: looking for feasibility, benefits, ...
- blue hat: what kind of thinking do we need next?

The group changes the hat it is wearing when it is ready to move on.

From then on:

- chosen hat: talk together with everybody using the one hat ...
- then back to: blue hat: discuss what kind of thinking you need next

(When you see someone put on the wrong hat for the current point in the process, gently & kindly remind them which hat the group members are wearing at the moment.)

Reflecting

Reflecting afterwards on the play of felt sensing in your use of De Bono's Six Thinking Hats, consider:

- how you and your colleagues were leveraging felt sensing as you worked;
- ways 'Six Thinking Hats' is tacitly creating space for more felt sensing than ordinary conversation;
- ways 'Six Thinking Hats' constrains or cramps your use of your own felt sensing, if any; and
- what the Six Hats add that is helpful that you would not expect to find if you had a conversational process that was felt-sense-rich but did not have the Six Hats' distinctive features.



More on the different hats

A way to think together more creatively and inclusively than we usually do ...

WHITE HAT

- Data, information, ...
- What information do we have here?
- What information is missing?
- What information would we like to have?
- How are we going to get the information?

RED HAT

- Feelings, intuitions, hunches, emotions, ...
- What I feel about [...] is ...
- My gut-feeling is ...
- I *like*, don't *like*, ...
- My intuition is ...

BLACK HAT

- Caution, preventing mistakes, critical judgment, ...
- The regulations (contracts, ...) let us, and don't let us, ...
- This can't be done because ...
- This won't work because ...

YELLOW HAT

- *Looking* for feasibility ...
- *Looking* for benefits ...
- This might work if ...
- We could benefit a lot by ...

GREEN HAT

- Creative thinking, new ideas, additional alternatives, ...
- We need some new ideas here ...
- Are there any additional alternatives?
- Could we do this a different way?

BLUE HAT

- Thinking about the thinking that is being used. Process-control. Next steps; closures
- Can we have a summary of ...?
- What conclusion have you reached?
- I suggest we try some green hat thinking to get some new ideas ...

Source: De Bono, E. 1996, *Serious Creativity*, HarperCollins Business, London, p.78 ff.

Ongoing experimentation

When it feels easy, welcome, joyful, or interesting, (and only then: not when this feels uncomfortable or unwelcome), during the coming week,
consider whether there are any conversational scaffolds you know that could fruitfully support what you are doing, and, when there are,
experiment with using the scaffold in a felt sensingly infused way, to support both you and your conversational partners.

Let kindness, gentleness infuse and underly what you do. If you feel a soft 'no' to something you are doing or are about to do, pause, back up, and freshly consider what is actually forward for you here.

