

HATS OFF



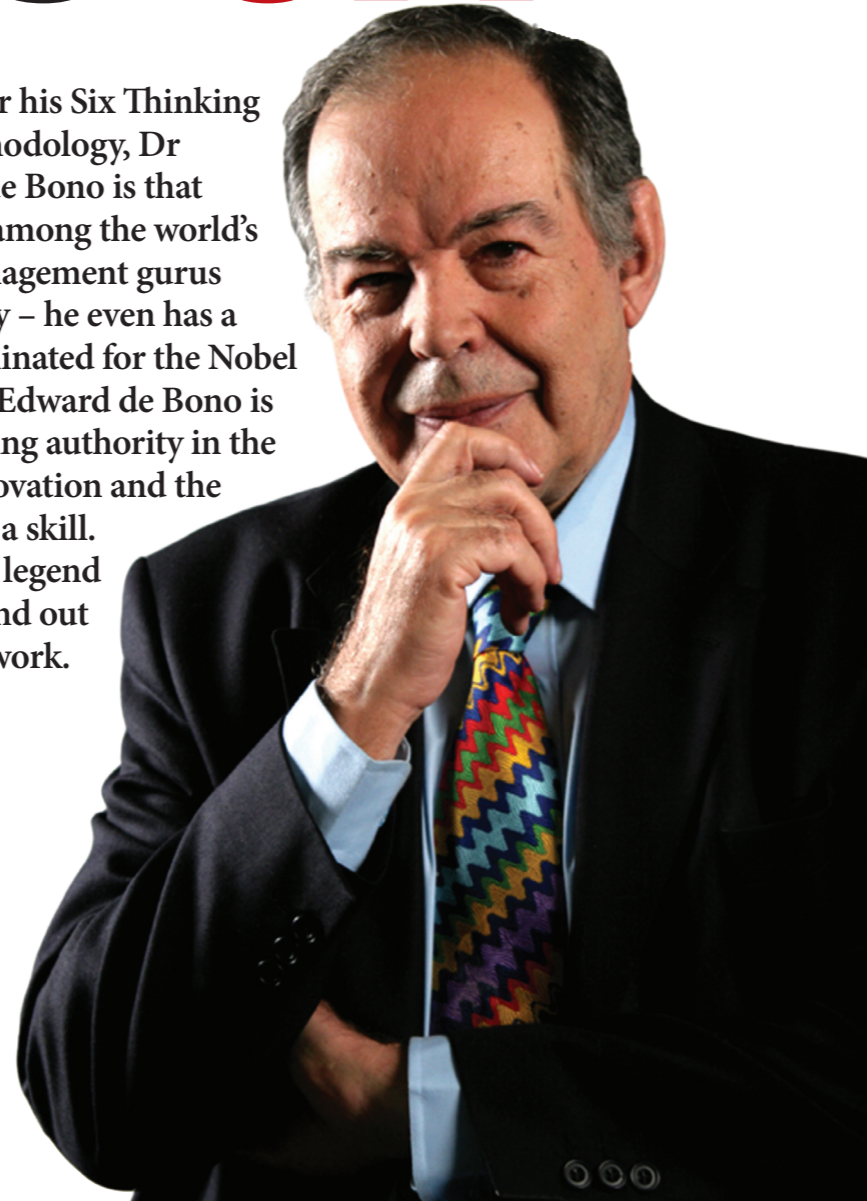
Best known for his Six Thinking Hats methodology, Dr Edward de Bono is that *rara avis* among the world's leading management gurus

and thought leaders of the day – he even has a planet named after him. Nominated for the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2005, Edward de Bono is regarded by many as the leading authority in the field of creative thinking, innovation and the direct teaching of thinking as a skill. VICKY KAPUR talks to the living legend in an exclusive interview to find out more about the man and his work.

He's been described as the father of thinking on thinking. Dr Edward de Bono, the man behind the concept of lateral thinking, which is now part of everyday language and is listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, is equally renowned for his development of the Six Thinking Hats technique and the Direct Attention Thinking Tools (DATT).

Foremost among the group of intellectuals that include the likes of Bill Gates, Michael Porter, Tom Peters, Philip Kotler, Peter Drucker and Stephen Covey, de Bono is an exemplar of strategic probity. Credited with producing thinking techniques that are simple, practical, and powerful, de Bono's thinking techniques are now being implemented in organisations of all sizes.

His Six Thinking Hats philosophy is arguably the most widely used management tool in the world today. "Last year, I was told by a Nobel Prize [winning] economist that they were using the 'hats' during a top economics meet in the United States," he claims.



"Later, a woman in New Zealand told me that she had been teaching the 'hats' in the highlands of Papua New Guinea – probably the most primitive place on earth [with] an almost stone-age culture," maintains de Bono, and adds that it is indeed changing lives and benefiting people across the world. "From an economic congress in Washington to stone-age culture, it is used very, very widely."

In his own words: "It is also being used by juries in courts in the US to reach decisions very quickly." Born in Malta, de Bono was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and has held faculty appointments at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Harvard. He is an M.D. with a Ph.D. in psychology and physiology.

"I was treated as a rather special case and my nickname was 'Genius.' I was the only

boy to have his own personal key to the chemistry laboratory," brags de Bono. But this isn't rodomontade or hollow claims of a senile old man. He has written 70 books with translations into 40 languages and has been invited to lecture in 58 countries, including the UAE and Bahrain.

Dr de Bono, who has a background in medical research, bases his work on an understanding of the brain as a self-organising information system. He has personally taught his thinking skills to more than 200,000 people and has certified professional trainers and facilitators worldwide in his thinking methods.

In fact, the de Bono methods are part of the mandatory school curriculum in many countries, and he has had the honour of having a planet named after him by the International Astronomical Union in recognition of his contribution to humanity.

His instruction in thinking has been sought by many organisations: IBM, Prudential, General Motors, Ford, British Telecom (UK), NTT (Japan), Nokia (Finland), Mondadori (Italy), Total (France), Siemens (Germany), Bosch (Germany), Ericsson (Sweden) and many others. Besides, he has had some unusual clients, like, for instance, the Australian cricket team.

In the early 1990s, he also facilitated thinking sessions for Noble Laureates in South Korea. De Bono may be 75 years old – although he did tell me "not to tell that to the young ladies" – but after more than three-and-a-half decades of writing, lecturing, inventing, and consulting, he has no plans to hang up his hats yet.

"There is so much to be done and so much that can be done... For 2,400 years, we've done nothing about human thinking – about the software for human thinking. And that's what motivates me to go on," he insists. He continues to travel the world to promote ways of thinking that empower people and institutions to design a better future.

He will be speaking live in Bahrain during a full-day event on 'Maximising Creativity and Lateral Thinking to Deliver Strategic Success' this June. His repertoire of thinking tools includes, besides the Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking, Focus on Facilitation, DATT, Simplicity, and Six Value Medals, among others.

De Bono claims that it took us more than 2,400 years of inactivity after "the software

for thinking was developed by the Ancient Greek 'Gang of Three' – Plato, Aristotle and Socrates – to acknowledge that we need to do something about decoding the behaviour, or software, of the human mind and then manipulating it to achieve the desired way of thinking.

"We've got tens of thousands of people writing software for computers, but for the human mind, virtually nothing," he laments. "Very little new thinking takes place, there's very little 'possibility thinking' that takes place," he regrets. "Currently I think there is very little thinking at senior leadership level."

Ask him why there is such a lack of creative thinking among the world's leaders and de Bono, never shy of calling a spade a shovel, launches into a scathing diatribe on the current system. "Because to get to that position [of leadership], you don't need to show any innovation – you need to [only] play the existing game well and have existing answers ready, but there's no need to be innovative at all," he reasons.

"They [the leaders] don't get there by being innovative, they don't see the need to be innovative, and there's no mechanism for being innovative," argues de Bono. "So much thinking in universities looks backwards, but as I said in one of my books, 'you can analyse the past, but you have to design the future.'"

De Bono has established the World Academy of New Thinking (WANT), which is an association of those who believe in the need for new thinking and the importance of new thinking. The role of this academy is specifically concerned with new thinking in conflict resolution, problem-solving, economic development, education, health and most areas affecting daily life.

In an exclusive interview with *Gulf Business*, Dr Edward de Bono speaks his mind on, inter alia, the lack of thinking in

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the world, the reasons for it, and what needs to be done to improve the situation.

Dr de Bono, could you please briefly outline the genesis of the Six Thinking Hats philosophy for us?

As you might know, my background is in medicine – medical research. Now, let's give an example here – imagine an antelope grazing in Africa and that it hears a sound in the grass. All of its senses – neuronal clusters – that can sense danger are sensitised...activated. So as soon as it hears the noise, it immediately runs away. Such pre-sensitisation is a key part of how the brain works and why it is so efficient.

It is not possible to be pre-sensitised in different directions at the same time just as it would not be possible to design a golf club that was the best club for driving and at the same time the best club for putting. That is why the Six Hats method is essential. It allows the brain to maximise its sensitivity in different directions at different times. It is simply not possible to have that maximum sensitisation in different directions all at the same time.

So, when we are discussing and arguing, we are trying to do everything at once. We need to separate them out – so the Yellow Hat will help you see the benefits more clearly while the Black Hat will help us look at the dangers, and so on. If we try to do all at once, we usually end up looking at [just] the negative. In the usual spaces of an argument, there is an absolute need to separate our [ways of thinking].

This [the Thinking Hats philosophy] is very widely used. Last year, I was told by a Nobel Prize [winning] economist that they were using the 'hats' during a top economics meet in the United States. Later, a woman in New Zealand told me that she had been teaching the 'hats' in the highlands of Papua New Guinea – probably the most primitive place on earth [with] an almost stone-age culture.

She said it was a huge success, which in effect means that it is changing lives and benefiting people across the world. From an economic congress in Washington to stone-age culture, it is used very, very widely. Now, also in the US, it is used by juries in court to reach decisions very quickly, using the Six Thinking Hats [technique].

Shouldn't thinking come naturally to humans – why should it need to be taught?

Thinking comes naturally, as it comes naturally to animals – but that is survival thinking... and routine thinking. And that isn't enough. If we want to make progress, if we want to build things, if we want to open up ventures, then we need to do more than just survive.

So do you believe the human race will evolve its process of thinking over time?

I think what is incredible is what little we've done about human thinking – software for human thinking. We've done nothing for 2,400 years. For 2,400 years, we have been content with 'argument', which was never designed to be constructive. Discovering 'what is' may not be the same as designing 'what can be.'

In essence, the software for thinking was developed by the Ancient Greek 'Gang of Three' – Plato, Aristotle and Socrates – which is all about recognising standard situations, providing standard answers and then arguing if there is a difference.

We've done very little in software for thinking for 2,400 years. In fact, we've done virtually nothing – and that's incredible to me. We've got tens of thousands of people writing software for computers, but for the human mind, virtually nothing.

May I ask you what are your current areas of focus and interest?

Well, obviously, there is a lot to be done in the areas of education, schools worldwide... China is trying my work in five provinces – if they like the result, they're going to [implement] it in four million schools.

My other interest is a new language for thinking... because the ordinary language doesn't deal with complex situations and is not international, there is a new language coding system which will be launched on the Internet in about three months' time.

Could you tell us a bit more about this language coding system?

Language has been the biggest help to human progress. Ironically, it has also become the barrier to its own development. We are locked in to words and concepts that are limited and out of date. These force us to see the world in a very old-fashioned way.



The new language coding system allows us to describe very complex situations very simply. It's a form of coding in a way. It's more international... The purpose of the two code systems is to allow us to design, hold and use complicated new ideas in a simple way.

Can this code be taught to anyone?

It has, of course, an ordinary daily use and can be used at a more complex level – as a focus group or in politics and so on...

Can a child learn it, or would you have to be an adult to understand it?

Well, a child can learn it but you'd normally [pick it up in] about two or three years of daily use.

What has been the evolution of the world of management according to de Bono?

I think as management evolves, it will break down into much smaller units, which will obviously work and communicate with each other – a lot like outsourcing at the moment, where certain things that can be [outsourced] are outsourced. These smaller units of management will then connect with each other to complete the big picture.

What are your thoughts on current world leadership – or the lack of it?

I believe we need new thinking... The United Nations is not capable of thinking, because the UN is a representative body and a repre-

sentative has to represent existing thinking whereas countries need new thinking – and [organisations such as the UN] are not free to do their own thinking. So, very little new thinking takes place, there's very little 'possibility thinking' that takes place.

One of the things that I'm trying to set up is a sort of United Nations specifically concerned with thinking of alternatives and possibilities. For example in the Israel-Palestine situation, I would make them vote in each other's elections. Now in that way, the Palestinians would never have elected Sharon [Perez] and the Israelis would never have elected Hamas.

So it would have been a constructive thing – a sort of way forward. Argument does not design a way forward. Argument is about winning and losing. Currently I think there is very little thinking at senior leadership level in the world.

Why is that so?

Because to get to that position [of leadership], you don't need to show any innovation – you need to [only] play the existing game well and have existing answers ready, but there's no need to be innovative at all.

But if there is no perceived need for being innovative, why would people change at all?

They don't get there by being innovative, they don't see the need to be innovative, and there's no mechanism for being innovative.

...And there is no incentive for being innovative either, is there?

So much thinking in universities looks backwards, but as I said in one of my books, 'You can analyse the past, but you have to design the future.' The organisations that are set up are not set up to be innovative, they are set up to be representative, and representative is not innovative...

So is this system not working well enough?

It is working well enough, but not where there is a need for innovativeness, for new thinking, not just survival. By definition, new ideas are 'new' and therefore not representative of current thinking. Agreement on a new idea is very unlikely; so existing bodies wait for ideas to emerge as a process of evolution and consensus.

DE BONO'S SIX THINKING HATS

Six Thinking Hats is a simple, effective parallel thinking process that is designed to help people be more productive, focused, and mindfully involved. And once learned, the tools can be applied immediately.

One can learn how to separate thinking into six valuable functions and roles. Each thinking role is identified with a coloured symbolic 'thinking hat.' By mentally wearing and switching 'hats,' one can easily focus or redirect thoughts, the conversation, or the meeting.



The White Hat calls for information known or needed. 'The facts, just the facts.'



The Yellow Hat symbolises brightness and optimism. Under this hat, one explores the positives and probes for value and benefit.



The Black Hat is judgment – the devil's advocate or why something may not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers; where things might go wrong. Probably the most powerful and useful of the hats but a problem if overused.



The Red Hat signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. When using this hat, one can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates.



The Green Hat focuses on creativity; the possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. It's an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions.



The Blue Hat is used to manage the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensures the Six Thinking Hats guidelines are observed.

The difference between mediocre and highly effective teams lies not so much in their collective mental equipment, but in how well they use their abilities to think and how well they work together.

The Six Thinking Hats technique helps actualise the full thinking potential of teams. And when used as a meeting management tool, the method provides the disciplined process for individuals to be focused and to the point.

But possibly most important, it requires each individual to look at all sides of an issue. The Six Hats method neutralises employee rank in a meeting where several levels of employees are present. It also puts people who are quiet and reserved on an equal playing field with those who are more talkative and might otherwise monopolise a meeting.

Source: www.debonogroup.com

Yet, there are new ideas that simply cannot emerge in this way because they involve a 're-structuring' of existing thinking rather than evolutionary modification. So you need a new way of thinking.

Let us put this discussion in the context of the current subprime crisis – can you suggest a concept to tide it over?

I think we need a new sort of World Bank that would be able to support bodies and countries that are suffering from a currency shortage. A new world bank... perhaps even a new currency would be able to support the system.

You will be speaking soon in Bahrain... what are your views on the Gulf region?

I have been to this part of the world quite

often and I am always quite impressed. I've been to Abu Dhabi and Dubai quite a lot and I find a lot of positive energy around, a lot of new initiatives...

Do you think the oil wealth is being put to good use?

On the whole, yes, but I think the most important thing going on anywhere is peace in the world. I would like to see \$1 billion put towards improving world thinking, in every school, every classroom around the world – I think that'll make more difference to the world than anything else.

What do you expect the world to look like after 10 years?

I think the big blocks and conflicts will tend to dissolve away and people will realise that

war and such things are useless. There will be much more cooperation – I think whole countries will sort of in a way break down into smaller, more relevant parts. I think things will break down into smaller units interacting with one another rather than big blocks.

In 10 years?

Well I think 10 years is a bit short time... I think this will happen in the next 50 years or so.

Tell us about your two favourite books – one written by yourself and another by someone else.

I have two kinds of favourites – one which is the most basic book, *The Mechanism of Mind*, and that book was read by the top physicist in the world – Murray Gell Mann, who liked it very much and commissioned a team of experts to simulate the mind, but that isn't a book for everyone. I would say the one that is the most useful is probably *Theory of Creativity*.

About the one written by someone else... there's no one that comes to mind as there are so many books written by other people that I've enjoyed. No one pops up immediately.

What motivates you to keep working – undertaking extensive travel – at the age of 75?

That's right, I am 75 but don't tell the young ladies that! There's so much to be done and so much that can be done... As I say, for 2,400 years, we've done nothing about human thinking – about the software for human thinking. And that's what motivates me to go on.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add in the end... a message, perhaps?

I'll tell you something particularly interesting to your regional world – as you probably know, Prophet Mohammed [PBUH] had more to say more about thinking than any other religious leader... in his *hadeeth*, he says 'one hour of thinking is worth more than 70 years of prayer'. He says, 'the ink of a scholar is more holy than the blood of a martyr'. He says, 'one learned man is greater than 100 worshippers'... Very, very strong stuff. And there are 130 verses in the Holy Qura'an specifically about thinking. ■