



Six Thinking Hats Case Study: 3M

3M is an 18 billion dollar company that offers an incredibly wide range of products. The firm is an industry leader in such diverse fields as health care, office products and transportation. 3M manufactures familiar products, like Post-it® Notes and Scotch® tape, and the firm is one of the 30 blue-chip companies that constitute the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

The Case

3M's filtration unit makes filters for cars, buses and airplanes. When the filtration unit discovered a new market opportunity, they wanted to quickly design a new product. They put together a team of employees from both marketing and product development, and the team hoped to choose the final concept at the end of a one-day meeting. The team generated ten good ideas but did not know how to proceed from there.

Kim Johnson, from 3M's Corporate Research and Development, had previously attended a Six Thinking Hats course. Recalling the benefits of the Hats, Kim decided to conduct a Six Thinking Hats session with the team. Each individual gave input on the ten ideas, narrowing the priorities to the most popular ideas. The team chose its favorite idea, and since that time, 3M has filed for a patent for the new filter.

Later, Kim was asked to assist the Construction and Home Improvement Department, which, among other products, is responsible for duct tape. Through market research the department learned that people used duct tape in a host of unusual ways, from constructing a wallet made of duct tape to holding a car door in place. The department recognized that there was a cult of duct tape enthusiasts around the world, and it wanted to broaden its market with an updated or innovative version of duct tape. To work on this challenge, the department asked Kim to lead three half-day Six Thinking Hats sessions with concept ideation experts.

The first session focused on the Green Hat, and participants gave ideas for a new version of duct tape. In the second session, Kim divided the team into smaller groups and asked them to discuss each of the ideas using the Yellow and Black Hats. In the final session, the group used Red Hat to determine which ideas were the favorites. After the third session, the department decided on the new product: duct tape for women. Rather than the industrial gray color of original duct tape, this version would be a colorful variation. This product is now on the market, thanks in part to the Six Thinking Hats.



Challenges

- Design a filtration device for a new market
- Improve duct tape

Methods

- Use Red Hat to find top priorities
- Use Six Thinking Hats to establish new duct tape product

Results

- Patent is filed for filtration device
- Duct tape for woman is available in the market

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