
The Four Thinking Hats

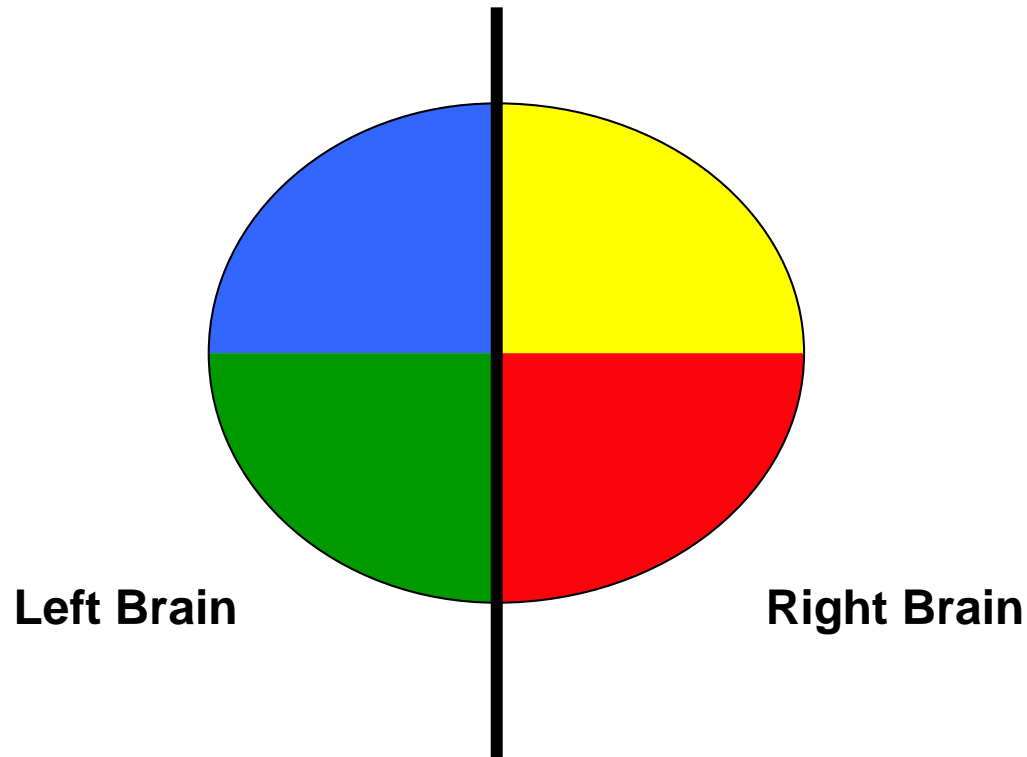
*The Rushing Center
Furman University*

Herrmann Brain Dominance Index

- Ned Herrmann (1922-1999), Manager of Management Education for GE, conducted research on how to maintain or increase an individual's productivity, motivation, and creativity
- Sponsored by GE, he developed and validated the **Herrmann Brain Dominance Index (HBDI)**, a scored and analyzed survey designed to measure an individual's thinking and learning preferences
- The HBDI is based on a comprehensive four part **Whole Brain Model**



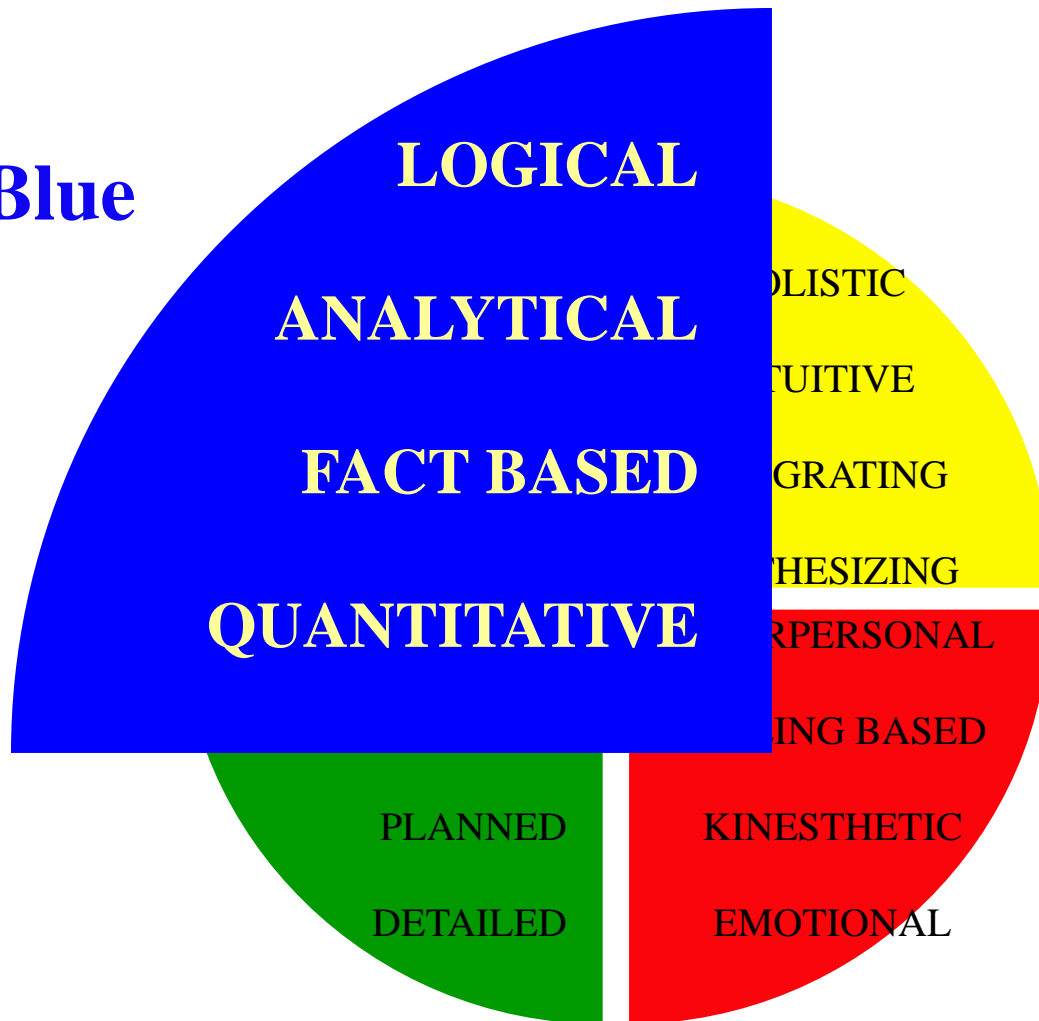
We All Use All Four Quadrants



But each person will prefer certain quadrants over others – this preference is what the HBDI attempts to measure

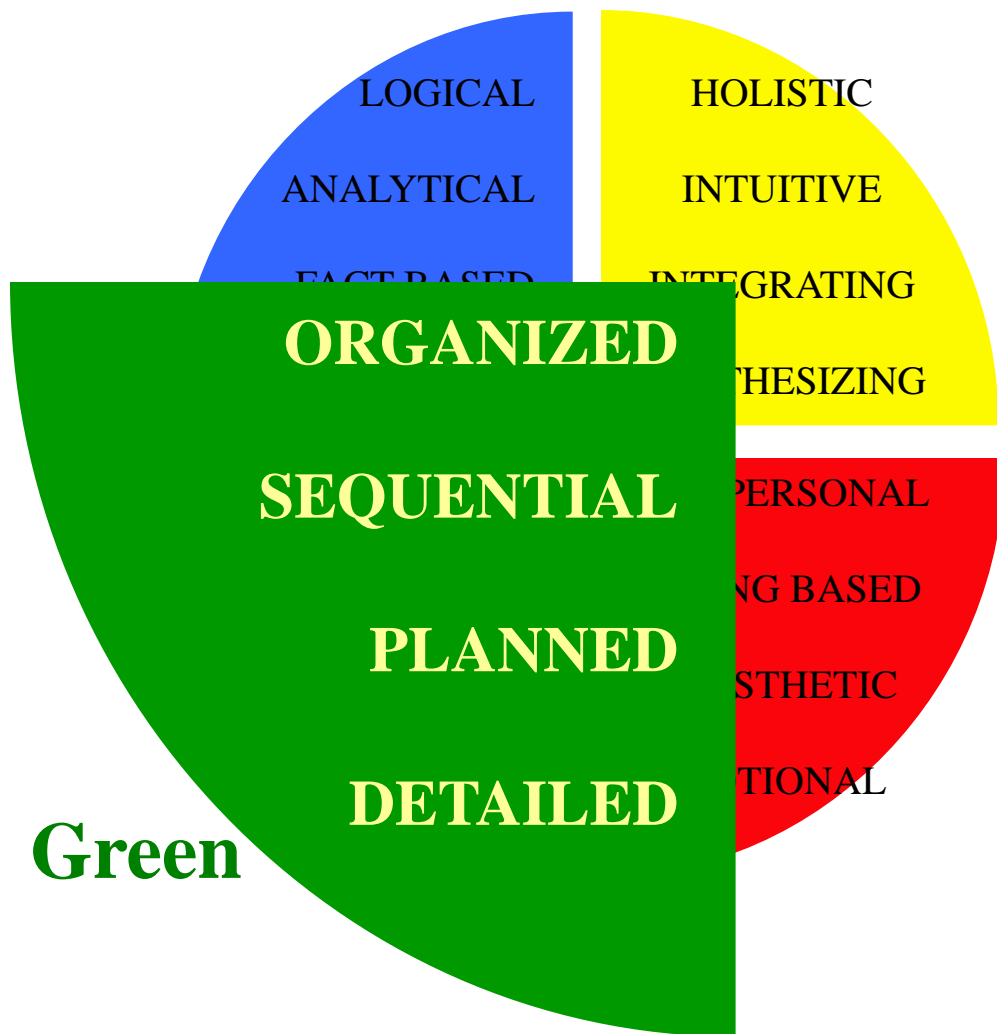
“Blue” Quadrant Preference

Blue



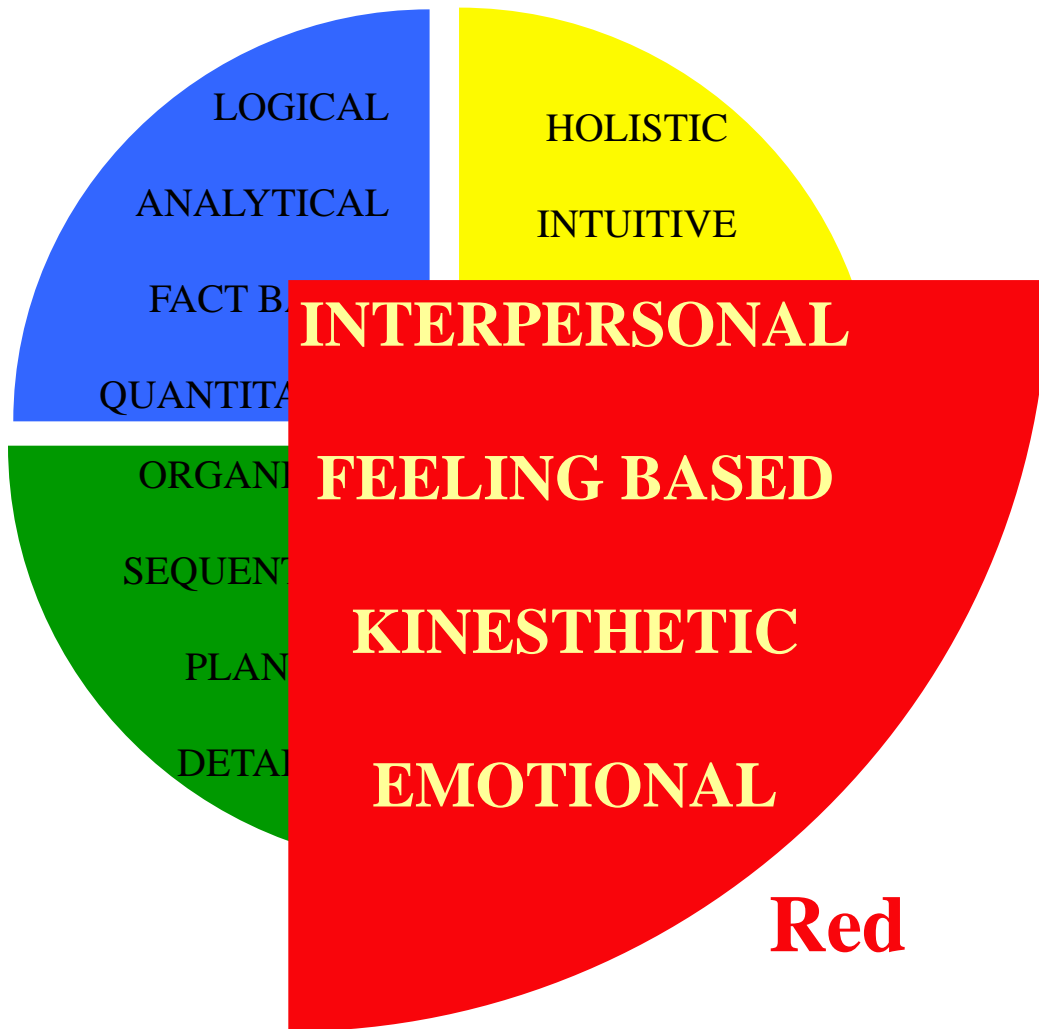
- Gathering Facts
- Analyzing data
- Problem solving logically
- Arguing rationally
- Measuring precisely
- Understanding technical elements

“Green” Quadrant Preference



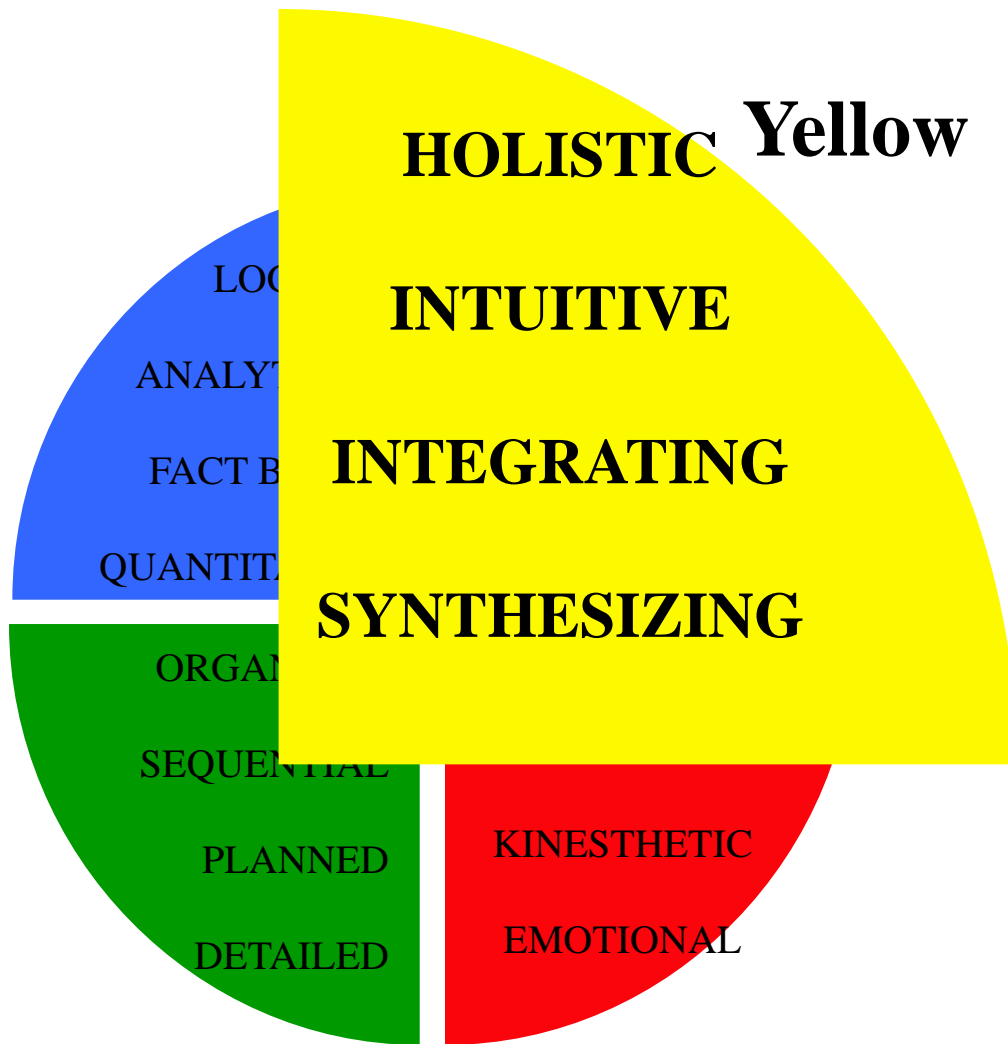
- Approaching problems practically
- Reading the fine print in documents and contracts
- Organizing & keeping track of essential data
- Developing detailed plans and procedures
- Articulating plans in an orderly way

“Red” Quadrant Preference



- Anticipating how others will feel
- Intuitively understanding how others feel
- Picking up on non-verbal cues of interpersonal stress
 - Persuading
 - Conciliating
- Understanding emotional elements
 - Considering values

“Yellow” Quadrant Preference



- Seeing the big picture
- Recognizing new possibilities
- Integrating new ideas and concepts
- Bending or challenging established policies
- Synthesizing dissimilar elements into a new whole
- Problem solving in intuitive ways

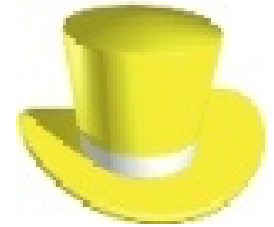
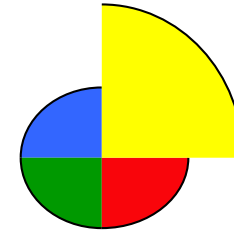
Four Thinking Hats

- **The colors of the four hats correspond to the four colors in the Herrmann Brain Dominance Index.**
- We all have the ability to use these four quadrants of our brain – in other words we can all put various color hats on if we want to.
- If we don't think about it consciously, we are inclined to wear only one or two of these hats – our preferred quadrant(s) – in our problem-solving.
- The four hats are a great communication tool to ensure that team members engage all four quadrants – hence we may get some insights we would have otherwise missed!

The Yellow Hat

When you are wearing your **yellow hat**, you ask questions like the following:

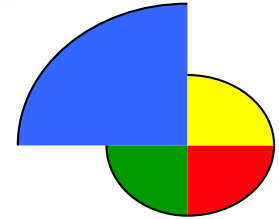
- What are the big picture issues here?
- What if ... ?
- Can you create other ways to do this?
- How could you frame the problem differently?
- What new ideas can we brainstorm about?
- What other possibilities for a solution are there?



The Blue Hat



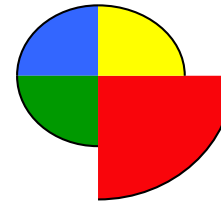
When you are wearing your **blue hat**, you ask questions like the following:



- Who, What, When, Where?
- What do we know about this issue?
- What are the most relevant facts about the issue?
- What additional things do we need or want to know about it?
- How can we analyze the information we have collected to reach a logical conclusion about our action/decision?

The Red Hat

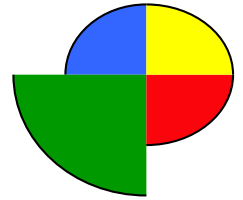
When you are wearing your **red hat**, you ask questions like the following:



- What are your feelings on the issue?
- What action/decision would you prefer based on your feelings?
- What prejudices are present?
- What is your hunch about the issues and the discussion under consideration?
- What is your gut feeling about the proposed solutions or action?
- What does your intuition tell you?

The Green Hat

When you are wearing your **green hat**, you ask questions like the following:



- What steps are needed to implement the proposed solution or decision?
- How should these steps be organized?
- What are the likely road blocks and how can we ensure that they will be handled?
- What resources do we need and how will we garner them?
- Can we devise an organized plan to accomplish our agreed upon goal(s)?

Using the Four Thinking Hats

- A leader can use the four thinking hats to **facilitate better meetings**:
 - Solicit different kinds of thinking from everyone. “Okay, let’s all put on our yellow hats for a moment ...”
 - Move off a stalled subject (or person) without offense. “Okay, Bob has given us a great green hat summary. Let’s now try examining the issue with our red hats on. Linda, could you get us started? ...”
 - Diffuse a tense situation by inserting a little humor at times. “Well, we’ve surely examined the blue hat view thoroughly. Let’s shift hats for a little breather. George ...”
- The four hats are also a way to **encourage participation by everyone**, without making anyone uncomfortable.
- The bottom line is that the four hats can elicit **whole brain thinking** that a group might otherwise not engage in.