

Case Study: Connex



Connex used Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking to develop leadership competencies in employees identified as high-potential company leaders.

The Story:

Connex holds 54% of Romania’s mobile telecom communications market, and their network covers 80% of the country and 95% of Romania’s population. The company was founded in 1997 and had anticipated 25,000 activations in its first year; instead it received 100,000. For three consecutive years, The Economist recognized Connex as the “Best Company in Romania.” However, Connex realized that sustaining its position as the market leader would require a great deal of creativity and innovation.

In 1999, Connex identified a number of employees with high potential to become company leaders and wanted to develop their leadership skills. However, Romania had adopted the free market only 10 years prior, so even bright, well-educated employees had little experience with the skills necessary to compete successfully in the free market.

Connex Human Resources Director Valerie McGee explained their challenge to Denyse Lynch, a certified de Bono instructor. According to Valerie, the company needed its leaders to be creative, risk-taking entrepreneurs, capable of making sound decisions and empowering others. Additionally, she hoped to get people thinking and working together to face the new business challenges of the post-communist era.

Connex chose two pilot groups of potential leaders to be trained in Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking. Denyse recommended they first be trained in Six Thinking Hats to develop their ability to think and work together, followed by Lateral Thinking to develop their creative abilities.

Each of the pilot groups participated in one week of Six Thinking Hats training followed by one week of Lateral Thinking training.

At the end of each session, Denyse asked participants to complete a detailed evaluation on the methods. She then summarized the evaluations and shared the feedback with senior management. This enabled them to gauge the success of training initiatives against their requirements for developing leadership competencies. The evaluations overwhelmingly indicated that the training was meeting the requirements. Additional de Bono training was requested, this time with cross-functional groups. Over the next two years, Denyse conducted many more training sessions as well as application workshops.

A graphic of a white notepad with a silver paperclip in the top left corner. The notepad contains a summary of the case study, organized into sections: Summary, Challenges, Methods, and Results. The text is in a clean, black, sans-serif font.

Summary:
Connex used Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking to develop leadership competencies in employees identified as high-potential company leaders

Challenges:

- Develop leadership skills in employees
- Reengineer business processes

Methods:

- Teach Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking to increase leadership abilities
- Included Six Thinking Hats in a reengineering program

Results:
Targeted employees developed the required leadership competencies. Saw tremendous changes in customer sales, service, and retention.

Results showed that the company benefited greatly from the tools, so Denyse recommended that Connex train one of its employees to teach the tools to the rest of the organization.

This would promote ownership and commitment to the tools, and it would also support Connex's business strategy of market leadership. Consequently, Simona Popovici, Director of Organizational Development and Employee Communication, became certified to teach Six Thinking Hats.

Simona wanted to apply the Six Thinking Hats to specific issues and then track the outcomes. With management endorsement, she instituted the Six Thinking Hats as a fundamental element of the new Business Process Reengineering initiative. Simona knew that the results would further engage the support of senior management and would motivate employees to use the tools.

The new initiative entailed analysis of the changing market conditions and the rapid growth of the customer base. This led an executive team to identify 13 processes to be reengineered. Each member of the executive team took one process and led a cross functional team through an exploration of ways to redesign and improve the process in order to meet new business objectives. Some of the objectives included customer service, activation process, retention process and bad debt process.

The results of the process improvements were evident. The average speed of answer to customer service calls was reduced from 225 seconds to 40 seconds. The average amount of customer calls received per month went from 3 to 1.2. Activation time was reduced from 8 hours to 15 minutes. Voluntary customer churn rate was reduced by more than 50%. Bad debt was reduced from 4% to 2.18%.

In conjunction with this successful initiative, Simona sponsored "Innovation Day"—an event designed to publicly recognize employees who used the tools consistently and correctly. This positive recognition included a description of how the employees' use of Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking had improved Connex, and Simona guessed that this would encourage more employees to get involved with the de Bono methods.

The awards ceremony was the highlight of the day, as numerous employees were acknowledged for using Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking in their daily work setting. During Innovation Day, employees identified additional barriers to innovation. They generated Green Hat suggestions leading to an action plan to overcome those barriers.

The senior managers were pleased with the success of Innovation Day and the new level of creativity that had been sparked within the organization after using Six Thinking Hats in the reengineering project. They were so pleased, in fact, that they decided to certify four more Connex employees as de Bono trainers. Senior management's support led Connex to adopt and implement the tools quickly, which transformed the entire organization. The high-potential employees started transitioning into leadership positions better equipped and confident in their skills.

