

Octaikon: an educational model of human faculties

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Summary

This paper describes a graphical model of human physical and spiritual faculties which has been derived from a wide range of existing concepts. Ten faculties are identified which summarise the aptitudes, abilities or processes which people use to relate to their environment, to other people, and to what they perceive as the spiritual or divine. An overview is given of the various ways in which the model can be used as an educational tool to help develop the faculties, and to understand and apply the concepts, ideas or theories about human function, behaviour and belief upon which the model is based. Different model formats are described, showing how the tool can be used for all ages and learning situations, such as in: kindergartens, schools, universities, families, churches, and businesses. A vision for the tool is described where it becomes a life-long learning tool that has a place in all types of development programmes which aim to improve human relationships and well-being. The website www.octaikon.co.uk provides further details.

Development of the model

Background

The model and its uses have evolved over nearly two decades, within the context of a career working as a tropical forester in international development, in which I have taken an increasing personal interest in the human factor. Forestry as a profession has changed significantly over the last thirty years from one that was technically focussed on protecting and cultivating trees by excluding people, to one that now puts the interest of people first - before the trees and forests from which they benefit. Throughout this transformation, new disciplines have been embraced and training carried out in psychological, social and managerial sciences – to compliment the traditional technical and biological subjects. This change of emphasis has helped to explain why many forest conservation projects frequently failed. More often than not, causes were not the technical, but the unpredictability of human nature, personality clashes and inappropriate roles and responsibilities that have led to conflict – and which I occasionally experienced first hand.

At the same time, while working abroad, I was exposed to a variety of political regimes, cultures, and faiths which led me to question the divisions and conflict that these engendered, and the barriers thrown up between science and religion. Additionally, my own growing family helped me to realise the difficulty and possible pitfalls waiting for the unwary in children's upbringing and education.

These problems concerning our being, behaving and believing have motivated me to carry out a wide ranging overview of psychological, managerial, spiritual, and theological opinions, theories and ideas, with the aim of defining issues and finding answers. I discovered a wide range of viewpoints - from the rigorous, materialist, objective and scientific, through to the spiritual, subjective, and speculative. Some verged on the fanatical, it seemed, and in some cases it was difficult to discern the wise from the weird. However, as a researcher, I tried to keep an open mind and consider them all.

One thing was particularly notable. Many ideas appeared to be similar, or connected in one way or another – and in several cases it seemed that the authors were reinventing the wheel, and just using different terminology. The quote from Ecclesiastes often came to mind: “There is nothing new under the sun.” I became increasingly convinced that a balanced approach was needed to the use of the concepts, informed by all points of view. Therefore, to help understand these ideas, I realised that a way of summarising, comparing and contrasting them would be needed, and came up with the so-called *Octaikon* model as a means of doing this.

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Justification for the design

Many of the concepts studied distil down to two or four descriptors of a human being (e.g. Hippocrates' four temperaments), or multiplies - eight or sixteen e.g. Myers-Briggs' personality types), in the form of intersecting axes or circular arrangements (e.g. Belbin and Pretty's eight team roles). Where descriptors were plotted opposite each other, they tended to contrast, whereas those adjacent showed similarities. Pairs of descriptors were either treated as discrete extremes or formed continuous variables.

At the same time, I wanted to consider how to represent spiritual ideas along with these physical factors, so as to incorporate the concept of a human being having both body and soul (which I approached from a Christian viewpoint). These ideas often seemed to be thought of as concentric rings, but with an indefinable overlap. Not surprisingly, many representations were more variable in conception and had fewer common factors, but this fact I discovered later in the study.

After some experimentation, I decided on a graphic table or map, in the shape of an irregular octagon, derived from five squares and four triangles (see Fig.1). This seemed the best compromise to represent the different relationships of factors, and allowed the outer parts to represent the "body", and the inner part to represent the "soul". It could be easily drawn on a computer using vector graphics, and text or symbols added as required.

A further and final development was to avoid use of lines to define the shape (and interfere with any text), using a circular spectrum of colours that would serve to emphasise contrasting or complimentary elements. To generate this, I used four basic colours for the outer squares (red, yellow, green and blue) with appropriate intermediate colours. It was relatively easy to decide how to assign the colours, given that their sequence was fixed, and only one orientation seemed to be the best "psychological" fit for all the faculties, as described later.

To contrast the soul from the body, the central square was kept white, merging into the surrounding colours, so as to emphasise the indefinable boundary between them. This formed a satisfactory graphic, where the colours and shape were as minimalist as possible, allowing superimposed text or symbols to be easily read.

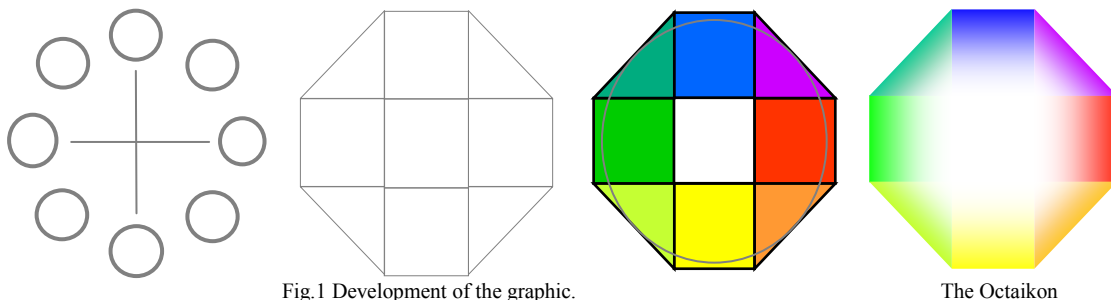


Fig.1 Development of the graphic.

The Octaikon

Comparison with other models

For convenience, I named the graphic an *Octaikon*, since it is both an octagon and plays the role (in my view) of an Orthodox icon – a window into understanding the spiritual world. The word is also unique. It is important to note that although I hoped the graphic would help consider the spiritual, there is nothing inherently mystical in it, implied or otherwise. However, an octagon is a useful symbol which, according to Tresidder, mediates between the symbolism of the square (earthly existence) and the circle (heaven or eternity).

It was only after I had been using the graphic for some time that similarities in form and substance with other ideas were uncovered. Some modern managerial concepts are illustrated using similar if not identical colours and definitions. This is coincidental, but not surprising, given the simple rationale adopted. See for instance the *Insights* and *ColourWorks* websites with respect to team roles and personality types. However, these other models all focus on one topic and do not include the spiritual element.

I found that the spiritual dimension was represented in many contrasting ways in other cultures, but had limited parallels – such as the Mandala, the seven Chakras, the nine personalities of the Enneagram, and the Kabbalistic ten emanations of the divine. The Celtic cross shape has all the graphic elements, and could be used as a substitute. However, the *Octaikon* is intended to be a rational and logical diagram of human faculties, and is more like a template for a mindmap than anything else (see Buzan).

The model's ten faculties

The term “faculty” has been used for the elements of the *Octaikon* since all the concepts on which the graphic is based seem to be describing either human aptitudes, abilities or processes – all of which are appropriate synonyms for the word. The faculties can apply not only to the human “body”, but also to the spiritual “soul”. They can thus be thought of as both physical/material or spiritual in function, depending on the scientific and religious understanding of the user. The following faculty names and descriptions emphasise the essence of each one, and are necessarily a summary. The colours and symbols (in brackets), and the initial capital letter are simply to aid identification for users of different ages.

Four main faculties

These are classified as “main” since they occur in one form or another in all the existing concepts studied.

- The faculty of *Observation* comprises the input of sensory data (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) and also the ingestion or acquisition of material needs, such as drink, food, clothing, and money (green/leaf).
- The faculty of *Interpretation* concerns the process of thought (cognition) using the brain, including analysis of sensory data and transformation into useful information. It could also include instinct (blue/cloud).
- The faculty of *Expression* concerns the way in which knowledge (information put in context) is communicated or expressed to other people (and to one’s self) using various forms of spoken or written language (yellow/star).
- The faculty of *Application* is also an output, but concerns the way the whole body is used to apply knowledge into practical action. If done in the right way, it is equivalent to wisdom (red/triangle).

The most intuitive orientation is with Interpretation at the top (head), and Observation at the left (input).

Four outer linking faculties

These are described as “linking” simply because they occur in one form or another between the four main faculties in concepts that have a circular arrangement of eight descriptors.

- The faculty of *Monitoring* (linking observation and interpretation) is concerned with the process of classifying input according to utility or value, helping to discard what is not needed, and identifying what is missing (turquoise/spectacles).
- The faculty of *Judging* (linking interpretation and application) is concerned with making decisions, choices or judgements between alternatives, based on thoughts or actions (purple/scales).
- The faculty of *Directing* (linking expression and application) is concerned with guidance in the process of translating knowledge into wise action – not only of the individual, but also of other people (orange/hand).
- The faculty of *Creating* (linking observation and expression) is concerned with intuitive or inspired abilities to sense or know immediately without reasoning. It covers all artistic talents (lime-green/rosette).

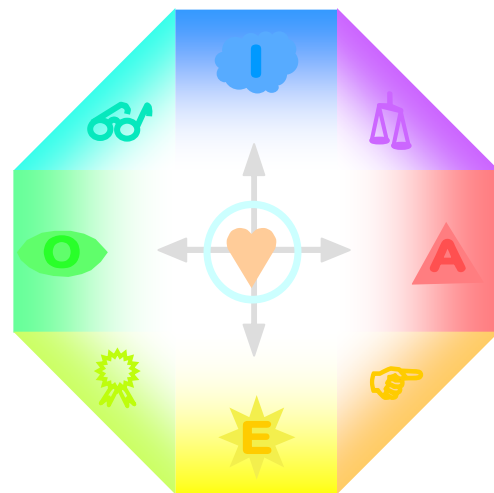


Fig 2. The faculties labelled

Two inner intersecting faculties

These last two complete the links between the four main faculties across the centre of the diagram. They are not so easily identified in existing concepts, but the descriptions given here can be deduced and seem to work well.

- The faculty of *Reflecting* (linking vertically interpretation and expression) concerns the process of inner dialogue, memorising, meditation or thinking over problems, ideas and concepts. It includes communication with the divine and prayer (blue ring).
- The faculty of *Relating* (linking horizontally application and observation) concerns the process of establishing relationships with other people, both leading and following, and noting results and feedback. In its ideal form it could be thought of as showing divine, unconditional love (brown heart).

Using the model

A website is being developed (www.octaikon.co.uk) which provides full details of the origin of the graphic (in narrative form). All the suggested uses and resources given below can be found there - see the lower left menu on the home page under *Educational Resources*.

Understanding and developing the faculties

A basic way of using the *Octaikon*, suitable for many ages, is to consider the ten faculties as a framework for examining how well people are taking care of themselves and forming good relationships. Various ways of doing this have been developed (and are on the website), as follows:

- *Okki the Acrobat* (flash animation), takes the viewer through the ten faculties, using an animated character (in the form of the graphic). This is aimed at primary school children.
- *Interactive Octaikon* (flash animation) is suitable for self study at secondary stage and above, and also explains the ten faculties.
- *DIY Octaikon* (flash animation) is suitable for primary school children, and is designed to help remember the structure of the graphic and the names and symbols used.
- *Okki-Stuff* (PDF and Powerpoint slides) presents information on the website as a set of 200 one-page resources in booklet form, suitable for a wide range of ages, which can be printed out as needed.

Included in the PDF file is a set of pages that provides a simple explanation of the faculties. This is followed by pages that, for each faculty, contain a series of synonyms (to help understand its scope) and questions (answered 'yes' for success). These can be used for directed or self-study. For example, for the Observation faculty, users are asked how they care for and use their senses; for the Reflecting faculty, questions cover the need to listen to conscience, controlling the emotions and taking time to meditate or pray.

Another approach provided in the resource booklet is to imagine a particular life situation (e.g. a child in a playground, or undergraduate at university) where the user is encouraged to see how they would (or should) be using each faculty in that particular situation. For younger people, games have been developed that focus on each faculty and help to explain and develop them. Examples of the pages are given below.

The figure displays four pages from the *Okki-Stuff* resource booklet, each featuring a different activity or game. Each page includes the *Octaikon* graphic, a list of synonyms, and a set of questions.

- DR.OKKI's CHECK-UP 5: REFLECTING**: A checklist of 20 questions about reflection and meditation, accompanied by a list of synonyms like 'Bear in mind', 'Brood', 'Chew over', etc.
- OKKIVISTA: PLAYGROUND IN THE PARK 2**: A scenario-based activity where the user is asked to use the faculties in a playground setting, with a list of synonyms and a set of questions.
- OKKI@PLAY: FACULTATE!**: A family game where players use the faculties to guess words, with a list of synonyms and a set of questions.
- OKKI@PLAY: REFLECT OR RECALL!**: An activity for all ages where the *Octaikon* is used to stimulate and share thoughts, with a list of synonyms and a set of questions.

Fig. 3 Examples of pages from the *Okki-Stuff* resource booklet.

Analysing and comparing existing concepts.

As previously explained, the graphic was first used to compare existing concepts, and discover what elements they had in common. A wide range of topics were looked at, and included physiology, philosophy, psychology, politics, sociology, management, health, education, spirituality, religion and theology. Examples are given below which will give an idea of the range of topics covered. There are few points to bear in mind.

The diagram can be used at different “scales” or levels. It can represent a person in their entirety; one physical or abstract aspect of that person (e.g. the brain, or communication); and also groups or communities of people. Some of the concepts are obviously correlated with the faculties and are easy to map objectively. However, many are more subjective, as the link between the faculties and the concept elements is less clear. In these cases it is possible that another user would map in a different way.

It should also be noted that some researchers define terms differently from those used for the faculties, and so an element may not be mapped as expected, judging from the terminology. This does not devalue the use of the model, provided the rationale for mapping is explained. For example, The Myers-Briggs indicator uses ‘*intuitive*’ information to correspond to “gut-feeling” and is best mapped on the faculty of application (and not the creative faculty, with which intuition might normally be associated).

In some cases, even though an idea is related to human function, there may be very little correspondence with the *Octaikon* faculties. The *Octaikon* can nevertheless be a useful *aide-memoire*, simply by associating colours and position and thus acting as a mindmap.

EXAMPLES OF SECULAR CONCEPTS

The examples given below are extracted from the *Okki-Stuff* booklet, where they are called *Okki-maps*, and are presented with an explanatory text on one page, and rated for ease of use from simple, self-explanatory to complex, needing prior knowledge of the concept.

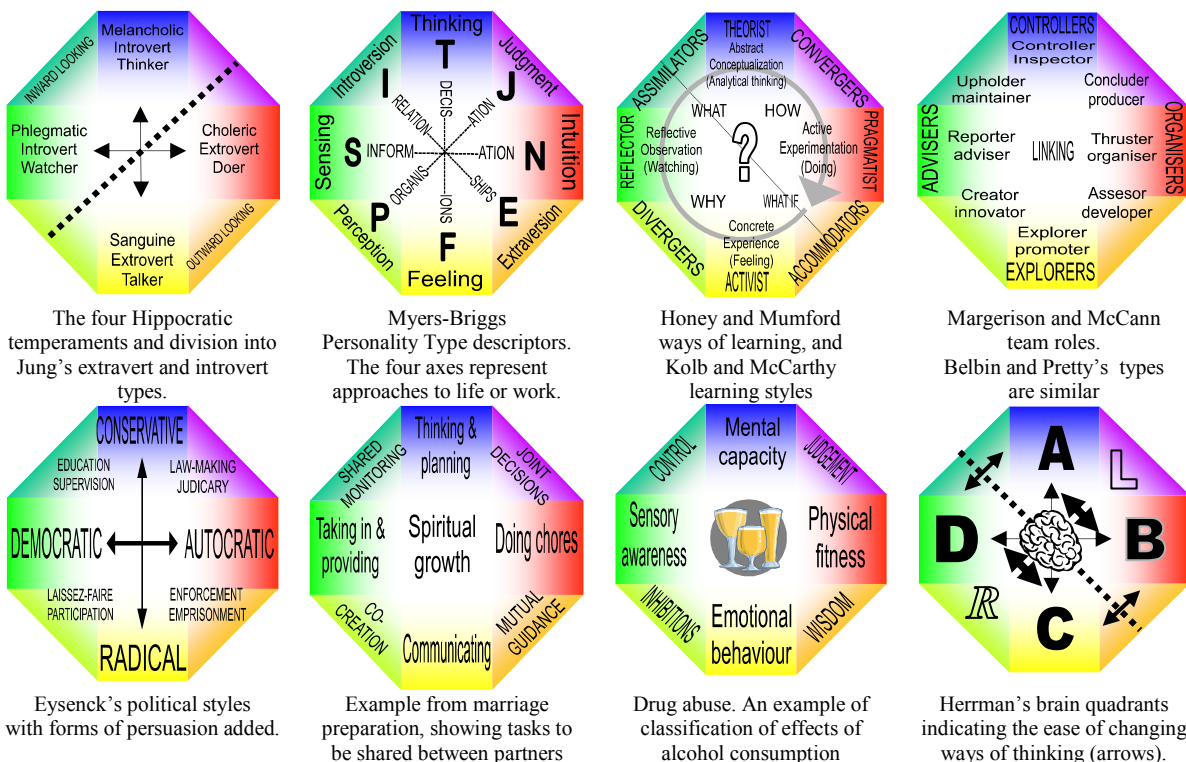


Fig. 4 Examples of secular concepts mapped onto the *Octaikon*

EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTS WITH A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

The next examples show how abstract or spiritual concepts can be mapped, making more use of the centre white area. The example of the spiritual disciplines (Foster) show how a concept might be mapped to all ten faculties. In the case of the paranormal phenomena map, the descriptions go outside the diagram, to emphasise that although the spiritual world can be thought of as *within*, it is also *without* – or *throughout*. The model may help in visualising and discussing new ideas such as those of morphic fields put forward by Sheldrake, that seem to bridge the physical and the spiritual.

Potential users of the model may consider that there is no spiritual dimension to existence, that religious concepts are irrelevant, and that the idea of a soul is unhelpful. In this case, the central area can be usefully considered as a person's goal in life – what is most important to them.

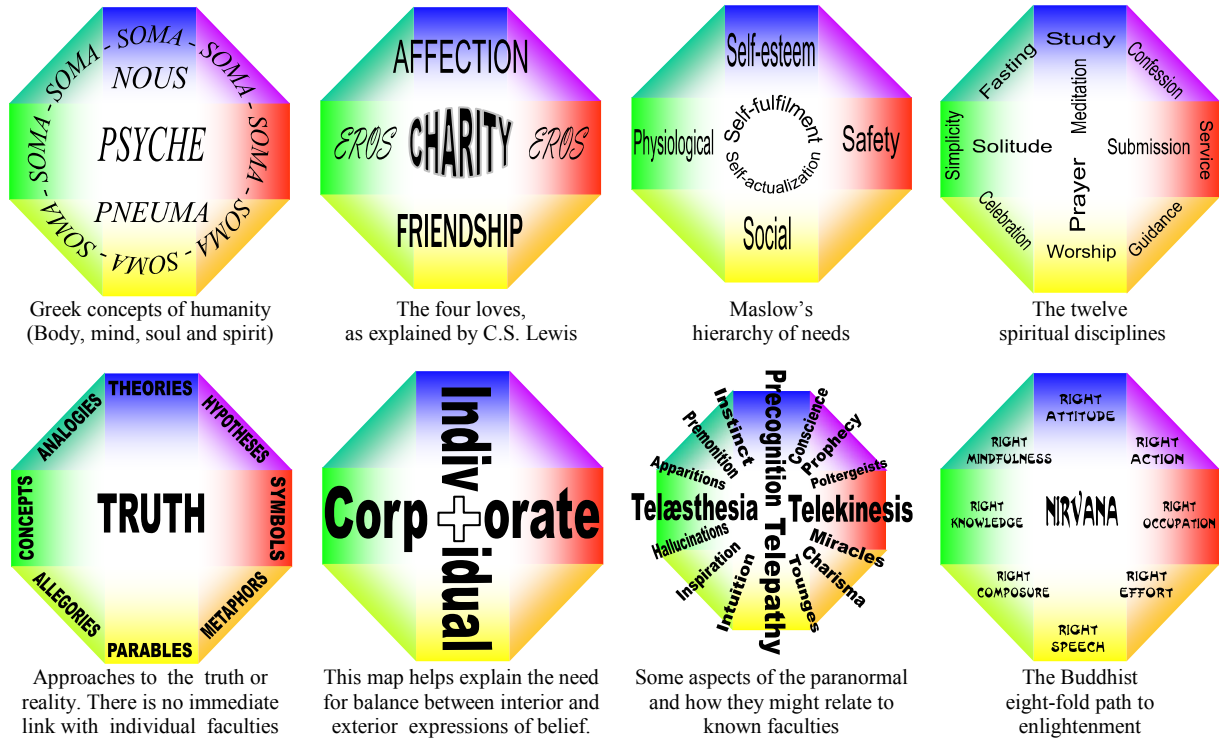


Fig. 5 Examples of concepts with a spiritual element, mapped onto the Octaikon.

Over eighty ideas or concepts have so far been mapped in this way. Besides well known and accepted ideas, there are those that test the limit of the tool. Several attempts have been made to map the core elements of complex religious doctrines for catechesis, with some success. Also, I have found it a very useful tool for making connexions between ideas in unexpected and creative ways, so that new concepts can be generated and explained – e.g. in understanding the development of humanity in its entirety, and the development of religions and their denominations.

Other ways of using the model

Besides being available as Powerpoint slides and in PDF format, some of these maps have been converted into animated GIF images, suitable for inserting into e-mails and uploading to mobile phones or iPods. The idea is to take an idea that has wide educational interest, simplify it, and share it with friends or colleagues, thus expanding learning opportunities. Examples are on the website. Laminated blank diagrams can also be produced, to facilitate mapping new ideas by hand, using an erasable marker.

OKKI-BLOCS

A later development was to turn the *Octaikon* model into a physical set of magnetised coloured wooden blocks (currently called *Okki-blocs*), making the idea independent of computer use. These blocks can not only help in games or group discussions about the faculties and other concepts at primary level and above, but are also suitable for kindergarten age, to help in developing dexterity, understanding shape, and colour recognition – supporting Montessori concepts of learning. As such, they can usefully lay the foundation for later use in primary schools, when abstract ideas are introduced and associated with the colours, thus promoting the aim of a life-long learning tool. For a movie clip introducing the blocks, see YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1060QRwN1I> (the link is also on the website).

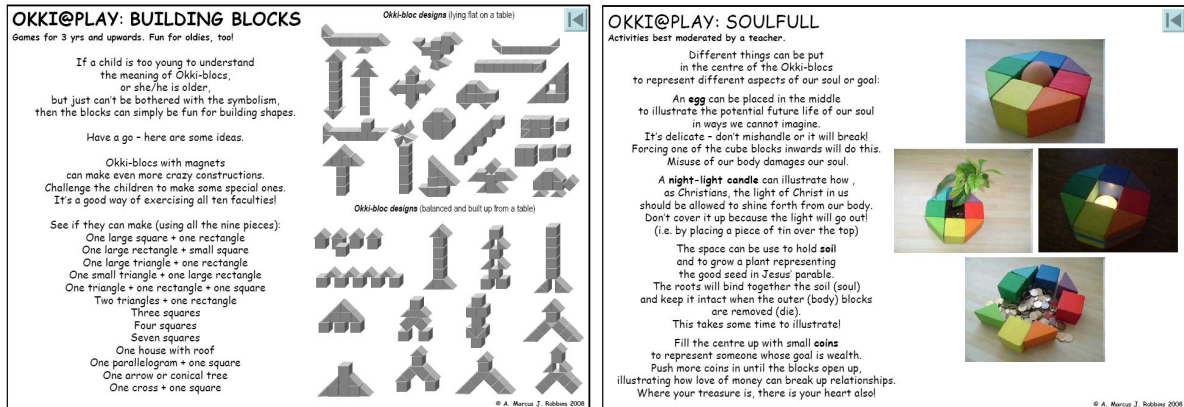


Fig. 6 Examples Okki-Stuff pages explaining the use of *Okki-blocs*.

OCTAIKON ISLANDS

The most recent development has been to create a three-dimensional image of the Octaikon, in the form of a volcano-shaped island, set in an ocean. This diagrammatic and allegoric representation is visually very striking, and the additional third dimension allows for incorporation and discussion of other concepts – such as Ken Wilber's AQAL concept in integral philosophy, Rupert Sheldrake's morphic fields, and various ideas of Eastern spirituality. This idea is currently being developed both as still images and as 3-D animations. *Okki-blocs* can also be used to represent the island allegory.

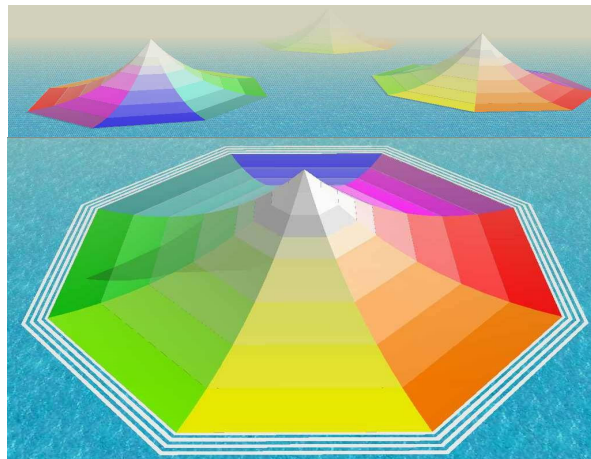


Fig. 7 Examples of the 3D model of the Octaikon island

Conclusion

The various formats of the *Octaikon* model and the range of topics that can be studied should demonstrate its potential use in many learning situations. So far, it has been tried out with encouraging results in a Montessori kindergarten (*Okki-blocs*), a primary school (*Okki the Acrobat* movie) – to help understand topics related personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship - and at University level undergraduate and short training courses (*Octaikon* maps) for management subjects. It has been discussed with a range of potential users, most of whom appreciate the value of the model. It has proved a very useful and creative tool for analysing and

comparing existing ideas that are concerned with being, behaving and belief, and for generating new associations and concepts.

It is clear from discussions and trials that some people are not helped by the graphic mind map design, nor by the colours used. To help these and other people with colour or total blindness, versions of the graphic can be made in shades of grey or using lines, and the blocks can easily be made with surface textures or Braille symbols, thus potentially increasing accessibility to people of all abilities, cultures and ages.

My vision for the model is one where it is widely used as a life-long learning tool that can be developed to embrace new technologies, teaching methods, and learning situations. I envisage it making a significant contribution to helping people understand and accept the differences between themselves, both physically and spiritually, thus improving relationships and well-being worldwide.

I am currently developing a wider framework (*Terraikon*) for understanding world resources (not only the environmental, economic, and social, but also the spiritual), which uses the *Octaikon* as its central focus, so that people are better equipped to help solve the wider issues of global development (details are also on the website).

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