

Margaret Rosemary, a gestalt psychotherapist, reports on her varied use of the **Communicube:**

I let people make of it what they will and have a collection of buttons, shells and random objects to use. As a gestaltist, I interpret how people use the squares or the layers in terms of what they project onto the structure or what they currently see as figure or as ground in their life.

Examples from my practice of the different ways the structure can be used include:

One man used it to demonstrate, and come to terms with, how he perceived his place in his family.

A child showed me what was important in her life by nominating the top layer as the most important, then placing different objects on each layer to represent people and activities.

One group used it to describe and explore relationships within the group by placing objects to represent themselves at a particular distance and angle from other members of the group.

Some people have wanted a list of rules before they start and I've generally tried to refrain from giving this.

The Communicube is helpful when people have got stuck, for new clients, extremely shy clients or people who have no idea what therapy is or don't know what to say. As soon as they look at it the structure triggers off their own imagination rather than the onus being on me as a therapist. I don't have to design the session: it hands back control to the client. They immediately begin to project onto it. I might say: "If this structure was your life what would you put in the middle?" or "What's occupying you most this week?" They can then put an object symbolising what's figure for them (in gestalt terms) and they might use other objects to symbolise what's ground. That immediately opens up multiple possibilities even if they only put two objects on the structure.

One woman put a bright shiny bead on the top in the middle – herself – representing how good she felt; but lurking down at the bottom level was a dark, ugly, misshapen lump. I elicited that she was trying to ignore this lump, which, she said, represented her family. I was able to say, "Hang on, what about the lump at the bottom?" Instead of allowing her to split herself between her bright, shiny character and her dark, ugly character, I invited her to work with both parts of herself and her feelings. At first she wasn't ready to acknowledge the dark bit had anything to do with her. Using the layers of the structure I was able to encourage her to make links between the light and dark and she placed a series of objects between them so that we could travel round and down the layers from top to bottom.

"I would know my shadow and my light,
So shall I at last be whole"

Michael Tippet: A Child of Our Time.

Another client came to see me in the midst of an appalling work tragedy. One day, on a hunch, I put the structure out in the room, instead of in a cupboard, just before his session. When he came into the room he said, "Is that something I can play with?" It was a tremendous relief to him just to play rather than to immerse himself again in the tragedy unfolding at work. He used the structure as a toy. It made me realise that instead of staring at him earnestly I had another function: as a playmate. He needed time out.

On another occasion it was at first impossible for the person to play: he came to me for supervision and in his mind I, as supervisor, was going to tell him what to do. I could see that all the onus was on me to be the expert. I brought out the structure and placed it between us: the placing was significant. I asked him, "How about using this structure to describe how you are with the client with whom you are having difficulties?"

He was immediately furious and said, "Are you expecting me to play during these sessions?"

I said, "You might play sometimes but would you be willing to explore your relationship with your client through this medium?"

He said, "Absolutely not!"

I did not move the structure and said, "OK how do you want to work with this problem?"

He said, "I've described the difficulty. I expect you to tell me what to do."

I said, "If I tell you what to do your own expertise is going to be lost."

Then he stopped and changed direction and had a long think. At the end of the long think he said, "I think my client wants me to tell her what to do." We were in effect re-enacting what was happening in his therapeutic work. At a later session he explained that he had experienced the structure as a physical barrier to me, so that he could not get access to my guidance. His client was expecting him to produce therapeutic techniques that would solve her problems rather than enable her to experience her own power. He also freed himself up to play at subsequent sessions and this made him much more available to his client. The Communicube waited because the structure does not have pride or ego and so it is available when the client/supervisee is ready. He eventually used it very successfully.

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