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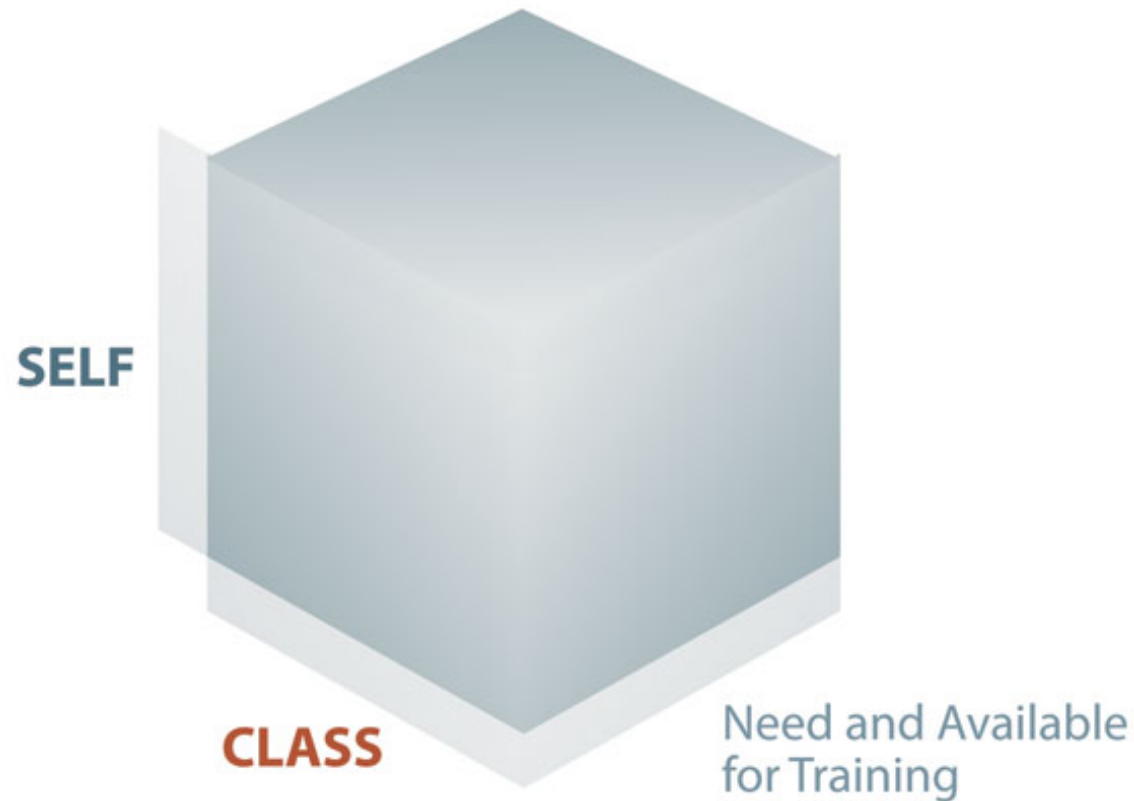
'Surround Sound' IT training: A multi-dimensional learning approach

Joseph R. Czamecki
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According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the annual training budget for 46 percent of British organisations ranged between £50,000 and £1,000,000 in 2010 alone. But is that money going to waste? The latest training research indicates it might be, *writes Joseph R. Czamecki (pictured).*

Conventional Training Approach



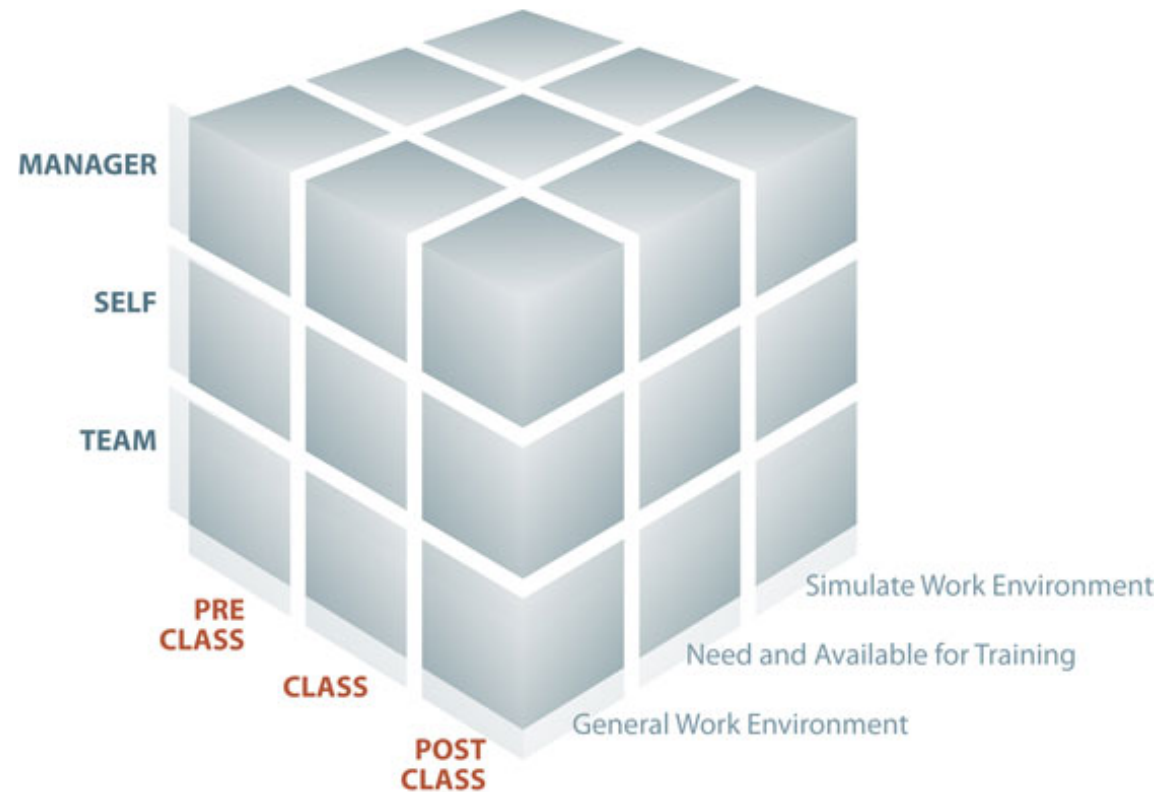
IT professionals are well acquainted with the traditional paradigm of training; the training experience is comprised of the learner, his or her needs and availability, and a straightforward training class (see figure 1, above). While this seems fairly simple, the reality is actually more complex. There are numerous factors that influence the successful outcome of training other than what occurs in the classroom. They are multi-dimensional and, when properly addressed, create a virtual "surround sound" of training that will result in richer learning outcomes for the learner and greater value to the organisation.

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In order to understand the idea of surround sound training, we'll examine the dimensions in turn, which consist of people, training phases and training content, (see figure 2, below). In the people dimension, the learner is not alone. The manager and the learner's team have the potential to enhance the learning transfer by understanding that new skills and knowledge were learned and supporting the learner's application of that new knowledge in the workplace.

"Surround Sound" Training Approach



In the next dimension, we need to think about training in phases outside the classroom and incorporate pre- and post-class training. Pre-class preparation will get the trainee in the mindset to learn. In terms of pre-work, it can involve doing some research, reading an article or listening to a podcast on the class topic. This is also the time to get buy-in from one's manager so the learner is positioned to practise what was learned in class.

Post-class activity can incorporate a range of post-learning tools and programmes. A recent global study by ESI International on organisations' results in the transfer of learning show employees leveraging post course tactics, some of the more low-cost tactics include discussions with the manager or team leader, on-the-job tools, informal support such as social networks or online fora, and communities of practice such as peer groups and coaching.

The third dimension of surround sound training balances content that is highly customised to the specific work environment of the learner but also generic to learn how to apply it in many different situations. The careful balance required in IT is to provide training that learners can apply immediately on the work to hand, while also providing general subject matter knowledge that can be applied outside the specific work area environment.












The ESI study found that the top three strategies indicated as the most important for the transfer of learning are (1) that trainees have the time, resources and responsibility to apply learning; (2) trainees have manager support; and (3) the instruction approach simulates the actual work environment. However, study results also showed that organisations of 60% of those surveyed do not have a formalised approach to apply learning on-the-job, and only 23% of managers hold more formal pre- and post-training discussions. Under these circumstances, an understanding of the three dimensions of training impacts and how to address them is even more critical.

Real-world case studies from our experience bear out the effectiveness of the surround sound training approach. For example, to simulate the work environment for a large IT-financial organisation that needed training to help them standardise their project management methodology, classes were tailored using company-specific case study workshops. For a financial services organisation receiving training in project management and negotiation skills, follow-up coaching and post-training reinforcement webinars were provided. In the case of an IT services organisation, Business Skills training was reinforced by encouraging learners to practise on internal stakeholders. Regardless of the method used, the key to training

is reinforcing what's been learned and practise, practise, practise!

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