White Paper

OPEN BADGES AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

New currency for professional credentials

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INTRODUCTION

Courses, credits, and credentials are well-understood “currency” in our educational ecosystems – but what does it take for badges and competencies to be recognised currency, particularly for learners who become job seekers and the employers who would value their achievements?

Open badges provide a framework to begin to answer this question and build a new currency that can represent more learning, connecting learners directly to jobs and career advancement. Open badges use a common technology standard, the Open Badges Infrastructure, which defines the information stored with each badge and ensures that each badge is interoperable within a broader ecosystem. Badges using the standard can be combined, stacked, and shared, enabling learners to earn them from different contexts and display them to represent their professional competencies. Open badges use common definitions as delineated by the standard specification; consequently, information about standards alignments, criteria for competency mastery, and third-party endorsements can be included in the badges to add value.

In developing badges and badge systems that reflect educational and workplace competencies, it’s important to understand the ecosystem in which the badges will reside and the requirements of the ecosystem’s stakeholders. This paper analyses how badges work in ecosystems of interrelated stakeholders and processes. It presents an open badges ecosystem model and a conceptual framework for considering the ecosystem of a particular community.

OPEN BADGES ECOSYSTEM MODEL

Open badges ecosystems used for competency-based learning can be understood through the perspectives of six principal sets of stakeholders: learning providers, assessors, jobseekers, employers, standards organisations, and endorsers. These stakeholders relate and interact through five components: badges, competency definitions, verification, authentication, and validation (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Open Badges Ecosystem Model

(Source: (Derryberry et al., 2013))
When badges are tied to assessments that are themselves aligned to industry standards and best practices, the likelihood of finding the right match between a jobseeker (badge-holder) and an employer is greatly improved. Learning providers can use these alignments to offer programs that better match employer requirements and offer greater value to their learners.
Endorsement of Badges in an Open Badges Ecosystem

For open badges to gain recognition and acceptance, endorsers as well as processes for verification, authentication, and validation are needed. This includes authenticating that the badge-holder is the one who earned the badge, and verifying that the badges came from an authorised source. The technology of an open badge system implementation addresses these needs by verifying that a specific badge was in fact issued to a specific learner by a specific issuing organisation.

However, this says little about the value of the badge. Learning providers have traditionally relied on academic accreditation and/or reputation to substantiate the value of the credentials they issue. Badges are agnostic as to the learning processes leading to competency mastery, so badge systems open the field for non-traditional learning providers as well as innovative learning methodologies in traditional institutions. With these new approaches comes the need for validation of learning through meaningful, reliable assessment methodologies that reflect the targeted competencies; without such rigour, the value of the badges is questionable.

Endorsers provide third-party validation that recognises the value of badges as assessed and issued by specific badge issuers. Endorsers are organisations with the expertise to analyse the quality of specific badges, including how the badge is defined, the competencies it represents, its standards alignments, the process of assessing the badge-earner, and the qualifications of the badge-issuer to structure and evaluate the learning achievement represented by the badge. Jobseekers, educators, and employers can view endorsements to better understand the value of specific badges.

CONCLUSION

Understanding how to value and fully integrate new ways of evaluating and communicating learning into society, specifically via open badges, requires a full ecosystem approach. This ecosystem consists of stakeholders – the badge-issuers, earners, and employers who directly exchange badges for recognition, reputation, and evaluation – in concert with organisations and entities that add standards and endorsements to the badges to influence their valuation. The interplay of these stakeholders, perceived value, and usage of the badges involves much more than the badges themselves; also involved are authentication, verification, and validation of the competencies and learning they represent. By understanding these ecosystem factors, we can design the right systems to expand the adoption, acceptance, and impact of badges’ value.

References/Sources