ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING WITH OPEN BADGES

BY JOYCE SEITZINGER

In a digital age, in which so much of our work and learning happens online, there is one thing that has lagged behind: the credentials we issue. Certificates and diplomas most often still come in paper and arrive on our desk by snail-mail or are handed out with a handshake after a long day in a classroom. Often these certificates end up in someone's drawer with a copy in their HR file.

At the same time we have seen the emergence of digital credentials in the form of badges in other arenas. Maybe you are a gamer and have earned badges on your Xbox. Maybe you have written a review for TripAdvisor? Or maybe you've worked for an organisation that issues digital badges as part of their performance system. You may have collected digital badges in many places. However there are three problems with most existing digital badges: they are difficult to verify, easy to copy and not portable between systems.

The emergence of open badges

In 2011 the Mozilla Foundation began work on open badges, or perhaps more accurately, on the Open Badge Infrastructure (OBI). The OBI is a set of protocols and technologies that work together to make it possible:

- For learners to get recognition for the things you learn;
- For organisations (or actually anyone) to give recognition for the things you teach;
- For anyone to verify skills and
- For anyone to display your verified badges across the web.

Technically, an open badge is an image file, a .PNG with metadata encoded in it in a JSON file. This metadata becomes part of the .png at the time of "baking" (the process of creating and issuing an open badge).

The kind of metadata that is included in the badge, is exactly that which helps us circumvent the digital badge problems mentioned above.

Badge image

Badge name
Description
Criteria
Issuer
Evidence
Date issued
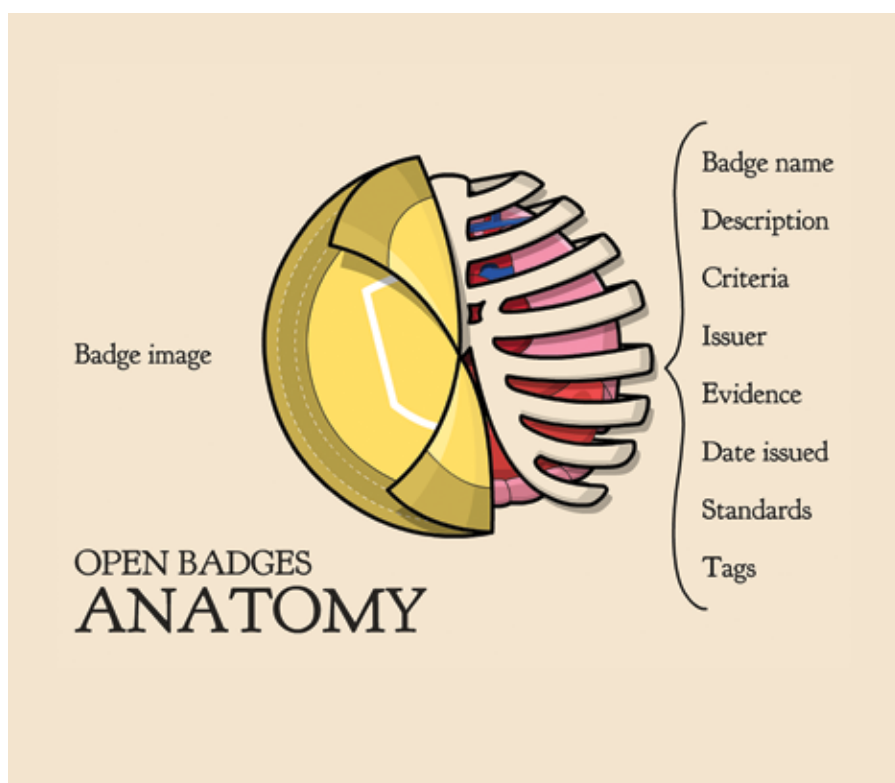Standards
Tags

OPEN BADGES
ANATOMY

Image: Kyle Bowen

Open badges are a flexible, visual and digital way to recognise learning that matches the lifelong learning we now do in our work every day.

The name and description give the badge an identity. The criteria state what the learner had to do in order to earn the badge to clarify what the badge stands for. Information about the issuer is included so the badge can be verified. And a link to evidence can be included to show the work the learner did to be issued with this badge. Think of the role portfolios could play in a badged learning system here. Finally it includes the date the badge was issued and, if necessary, an expiration date.

How does it work?

Let's imagine a common scenario. An organisation runs a diversity module as part of its induction program for its customer service employees. It decides that this module will be recognised with an open badge. The criteria for the badge are set by the diversity trainer, and as the learner completes the online module through the passing of a quiz, the diversity badge is issued to the learner via its Learning Management System (LMS). Our learner, one of the customer service workers, is notified about this via the system and in an email. She can now choose to leave the badge in the organisation's LMS, but she can also export it to an open badge backpack. Anyone can set up their own backpack to manage their open badges, at http://backpack.openbadges.org, a site maintained by the Mozilla Foundation. However the backpack technology is federated, so organisations can maintain their own open backpacks too.

In this case, our learner moves it into her Mozilla open backpack, as she has also been collecting open badges from other organisations. She earned a badge on social media skills via a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and also

has a community service badge from volunteer work she did for a local charity. She moves all these badges into a public folder so they can be viewed by other people. Together these badges begin to tell a powerful story about who she is as a worker and what her skills and interests are.

She now goes to LinkedIn which, as a company that has agreed to be a displayer of open badges, allows her to display her badges, so they can be seen by peers and current and future employers.

A worldwide learning and skills badge ecosystem

When you begin using open badges you become part of a larger badge learning ecosystem started by the Mozilla Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation but which now includes many other organisations. As of March 2015 there were 14,000 issuers worldwide with 2 million badges issued and 342,300 badges sent to backpacks.

Where are open badge opportunities for learning and development teams?

Because open badges are so flexible and stackable, they are a great match for the new social learning approaches that let people upskill when they need. Use open badges to recognise different phases of a mentoring relationship. Or to signify different roles people take in existent communities of practice, like a technology steward or an event organiser. Let teams and individuals make suggestions for other badges they would like to see in your organisation's badge system. Open badges not only let learners see and display their skills and achievements, but they also let

organisations see what skills they have available or need to cultivate.

Open badges are a flexible, visual and digital way to recognise learning that matches the lifelong learning we now do in our work every day.

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