

The Significance of Digital Badges in Enhancing Transparency in Learning Evaluation Processes

~Series: The potential of digital badges from the perspective of instructional design (3) ~

Kei Amano

Graduate School of Management, GLOBIS University the Chief Research Officer
20 October 2024

As part of research on digital badges, attendance at the international conference "Badge Summit" held in Chicago in 2018 provided an opportunity to explore diverse possibilities. The event featured demonstrations of systems and sharing of educational practices leveraging digital badges across various domains. At that time, practical examples of digital badge applications were still scarce in Japan, making this an invaluable occasion to gain insights.

The keynote speech by Sam Dyson from the Chicago Learning Exchange was particularly impactful. Dyson posed fundamental questions: Why should digital badges be used, and for what ultimate purpose? Digital badges have various features, but the badges themselves are merely tools, that is, nothing more than a means to achieve a purpose. Therefore, the purpose of using digital badges is key. This article introduces key points from Dyson's (2018) speech and discusses the potential applications of digital badges.

Digital Badges and Their Role in Recognizing Individualized Learning (N=1)

Dyson's keynote outlined the use of digital badges in a Chicago Learning Exchange program supporting high school students' self-directed, project-based learning after school. The experiences gained from this program were introduced, highlighting the potential for utilizing digital badges. Regarding the purpose of digital badges, what stood out in this speech was the proposal that they could be used to

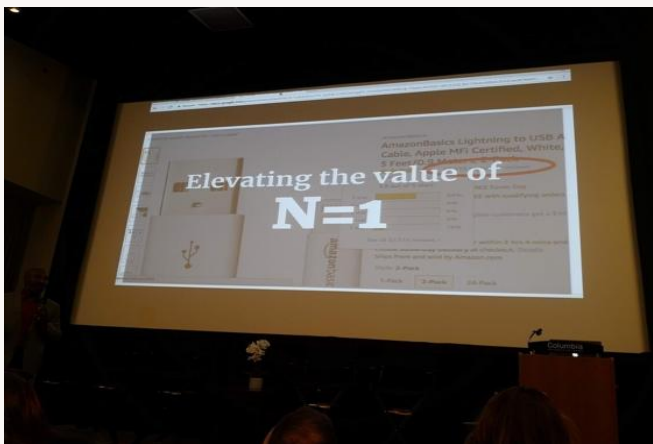


Figure 2: Keynote Slide by Sam Dyson (2018)

(Photographed by the author)

enhance the value of N=1. In other words, it was suggested that educational institutions could utilize digital badges to document and recognize the value of each individual's independent learning.

Traditionally, academic assessments have ranked learners based on objective tests and standardized scores, categorizing achievements into grades like A, B, C. Digital badges, however, allow educators to acknowledge and validate learners' unique achievements based on self-chosen themes and project outcomes. These badges can include metadata about evaluations, as well as links to reports, presentation videos, and portfolios documenting the learning process and products. While paper-based certificates only reflect results, digital badges offer richer information, such as what each learner achieved, how they achieved it, and to what extent (see Figure 1). In contrast to objective or standardized tests, which focus on problems with single correct answers, project-based and inquiry-based learning allows learners to arrive at diverse solutions. Digital badges provide a system for learners to appeal and share these unique outcomes with others.

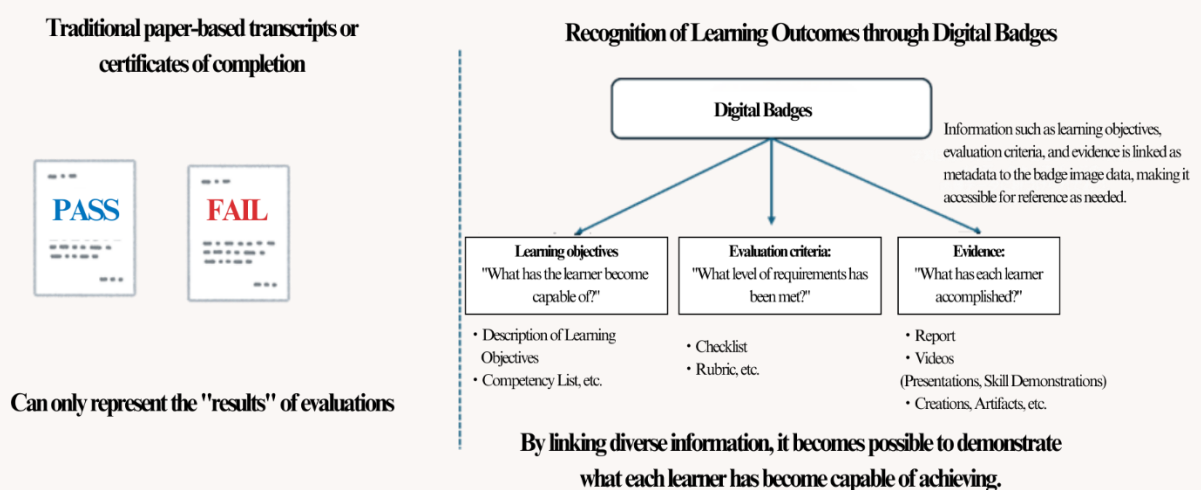


Figure1: Comparison of Methods for Recognizing Learning Outcomes: Paper-Based vs. Digital Badges

In this way, it was proposed that digital badges could be used to recognize and enhance the value of each individual learner.

While digital badges offer various features and hold diverse possibilities for application, this speech presented a clear direction by focusing on their purpose and potential uses.

The Importance of Transparency in Learning Evaluation

While digital badges hold great potential, concerns may arise when attaching diverse learning-related information to badges. By making learning goals, evaluation criteria, and learners' outcomes publicly accessible, digital badges inherently increase the transparency of the evaluation process. For programs with well-designed and reliable evaluation processes, this transparency can positively demonstrate the quality and attractiveness of the program. However, ineffective or poorly designed evaluation processes may have the opposite effect, potentially damaging the reputation of the educational institution. For instance, revealing a lack of fairness in assessments might erode trust among learners or tarnish the institution's brand. Alternatively, programs perceived as certifying learners with insufficient competencies might face widespread criticism. Therefore, without a robust and thoughtfully designed evaluation framework, the features of digital badges may fail to deliver their intended benefits. Conversely, in well-designed programs, the transparency facilitated by digital badges can serve as a powerful marketing tool, highlighting the program's strengths and unique value.

Digital badges have the potential to elevate the value of individualized learning (N=1) and demonstrate effective evaluation processes. However, they also carry risks if integrated into programs lacking a strong evaluative foundation. As an instructional design specialist, I firmly believe that digital badges can only demonstrate their full potential when implemented within programs underpinned by robust and effective evaluation frameworks.

References

BADGE SUMMIT (n.d.) BADGE SUMMIT 2018

<https://www.thebadgesummit.com/2018-badge-summit.html>

(Accessed: August 27, 2024).