

# EXPLORING THE FRINGE



→ MICROCREDENTIALS, AND  
→ FLIPPING, AND  
→ MOOCS

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A blue silhouette of a city skyline with various skyscrapers of different heights and shapes, set against a background of light blue rays emanating from the top.

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We asked 157 individuals whose associations use technology to enable and enhance learning in the association market about three emerging types of learning: flipped classes, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and digital badges and microcredentials.

The clear takeaway is that these offerings are still fringe. None has above a 10-percent adoption rate, and more than a quarter of respondents indicated they weren't sure if their organization offers these emerging types of learning, suggesting they aren't even clear on what the terms mean.

Here we look at these three fringe formats—what are they and when might they make sense to use.

### Flipping

Flipped learning offers preparatory or foundational content outside of the classroom and uses class time for more active learning. It flips the traditional

approach of using class time for lecture and non-class time for hands-on work related to the lecture.

“Class time” might mean a seminar, a conference session, or even a Webinar, and “hands-on” might mean problem-solving activities, case studies, or facilitated discussion, among other possibilities.

We can consider flipping a specific application of the older idea of blended learning that mixes instructor-led teaching with asynchronous learning.

Flipped content can come from a variety of sources, including video captured from conferences, clips from Webinar recordings, brief audio or video interviews with subject matter experts, screen recordings, and the variety of publications that most associations already produce.

Some find the popular definition and application of flipping too narrow.

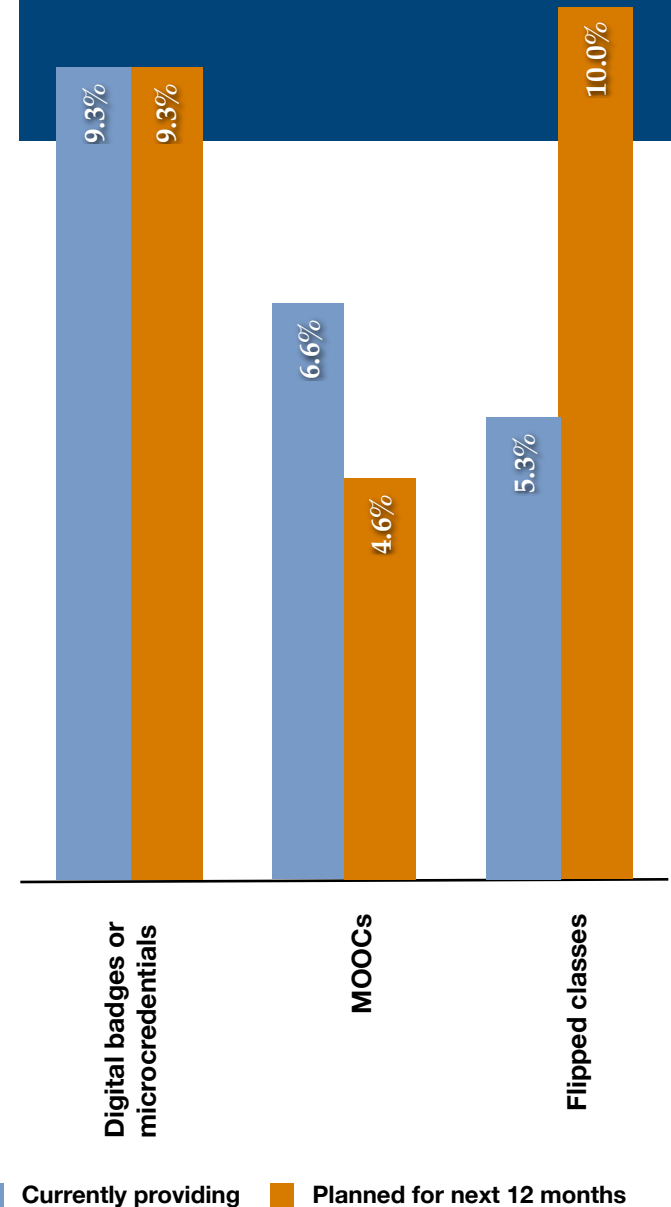
## flipping *noun*

\ 'flɪ-pɪŋ \

: learning strategy that offers preparatory or foundational content outside of the classroom and uses class time for active learning

### Which of the following does your association provide or plan to provide?

This data comes from Tagoras's *Association Learning + Technology 2014* report (<http://www.tagoras.com/catalog/association-learning-technology>).



“[F]lipping can mean more than watching videos of lectures. After all, a video of a lecture is still a lecture,” argue Barbi Honeycutt and Jennifer Garrett in “Expanding the Definition of a Flipped Learning Environment” (<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/instructional-design/expanding-definition-flipped-learning-environment>). They continue:

*One of the essential goals of the flipped classroom is to move beyond the lecture as the primary way to deliver information and structure class time.... There are other ways to define the flip. It can be described as moving from an instructor-centered learning environment to a student-centered learning environment. It could also be defined as shifting from individual to collaborative strategies.*

By this broader definition, flipping doesn’t even have to make use of technology—or, at least, any modern technology. Flipping is about active, participatory learning, the kind of learning where learners are engaged and involved in creating new knowledge.

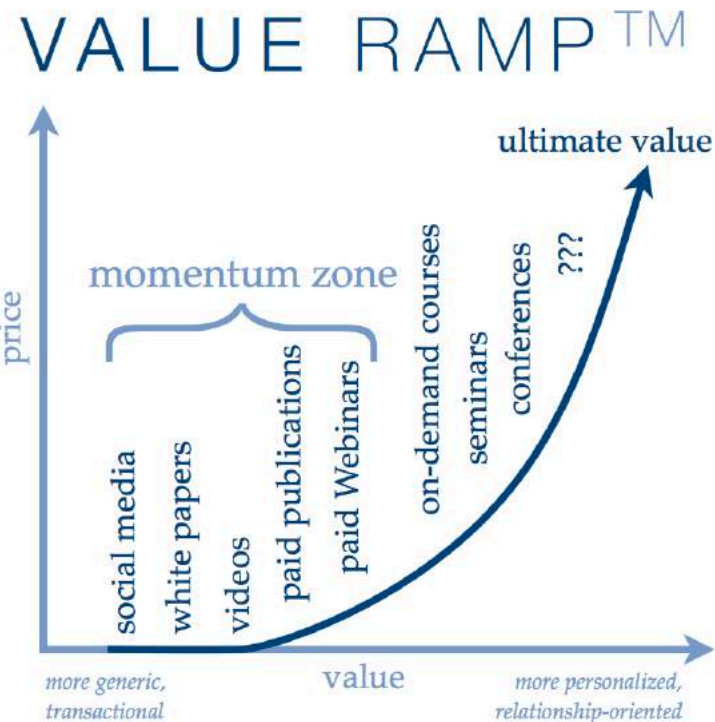
### WHEN TO CONSIDER FLIPPING

The flipped classroom has made notable inroads in K-12 education, but flipping can also be particularly powerful for organizations in the business of adult

The Value Ramp depicts the relationship between price and value—provide more value in the eyes of the potential purchaser, and you can charge more. To get to higher prices, you need momentum. The initial part of the ramp, in which you provide significant increasing value at no or low cost, is the momentum zone.

Lower-value and therefore low- or no-cost options might include social media or white papers, while place-based seminars and conferences might deliver high value at a commensurate cost, as in the sample Value Ramp shown here.

Note, though, that no format is inherently of more or less value. A Webinar may appear anywhere along your Value Ramp—it’s what you do with and in the format that determines its value.



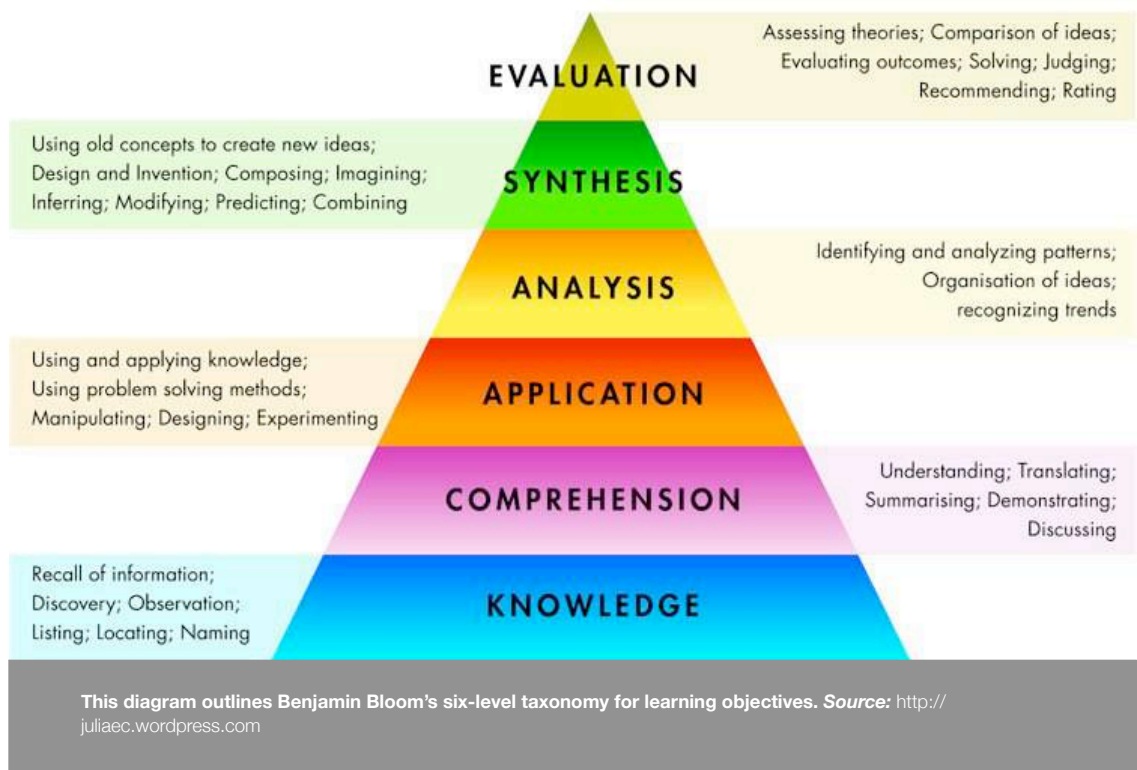
continuing education and professional development because it can address three critical areas: marketing, business model, and learning.

- Flipping to market

Chunks of educational content often make for great content marketing—and content marketing is essential for organizations that need to attract prospective learners, demonstrate value, and maintain an edge in increasingly competitive markets.

Successful Internet marketers have long known that giving away foundational content is one of the most effective ways to lead customers toward higher-value content for which they charge a premium. Flipped content can help you fill in gaps in your portfolio of education products that underpins your Value Ramp. Often organizations focus their educational offerings in the middle, neglecting not only the high-value, high-price products but also the

## BLOOMS TAXONOMY



lower left of the ramp that helps put learners on the path to being dedicated customers.

- A flipped business model

Flipped content, however, does not have to be free content. It can be bundled with an existing product, like a seminar or conference, to help elevate the value—and price—of

the combined offering. In this case, only registered and paid learners get access to the flipped content.

Covering lower-level learning (knowledge and comprehension) outside of class and focusing class time (in one of the many forms class time may take) on higher-level application, analysis, synthesis, and

evaluation can be a differentiator in hypercompetitive markets, as that type of high-impact learning is hard to commoditize and more resistant to downward price pressure.

- Flipping to learn

Last, and certainly not least, flipping can be an incredibly effective learning model. Indeed, the learning that flipping enables is what makes it so effective as a marketing tool and a business model.

Flipping can even out differences in prior knowledge among learners before class, making it possible to raise the instructional bar and deliver more educational value in the class. Learners' varying prior knowledge is a perennial issue, particularly among attendees at conference sessions.

Flipping can also help support distributed, spaced learning by allowing for exposure to and absorption of content over time rather than in the one-and-done framework of many learning offerings. Distributed learning improves recall, meaning the long-term impact of your educational offerings is greater. Flipping could turn out to be the salvation of

traditional event-based learning, which has always been limited in what it can realistically achieve in a single session.

### ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON FLIPPING

If used in the broader sense of enabling active learning, there’s arguably no situation where flipping couldn’t make for better learning outcomes. Add the organizational benefits of building brand visibility and authority to the better outcomes for learners, and flipping seems like a no-brainer.

The reason more organizations aren’t doing it—or aren’t doing more of it—probably comes from the difficulty in doing it well.

Developing out-of-class content and preparing for a more constructivist classroom requires time and effort from instructors and facilitators and may demand they abandon their ingrained mindset about what teaching is and what a class is. If your organization relies on volunteer subject matter experts for developing and delivering education, this can be a particularly tricky obstacle.

Out-of-class preparatory and foundational content may require a significant investment of time, money, and other resources. You’ll need to weigh whether the topic warrants that

investment. How many learners might you reach with the content? Is the content evergreen, or will it need frequent updating? Is the content a hot issue that might not be relevant if time for a fuller flipped model is taken? Depending on your answers to these types of questions, flipping may not be justified—or you may need to scale back your vision for the preparatory and foundational content to something simpler, faster, or cheaper.

Lastly, a common concern about flipping is that, to be effective, it requires learners to come to class having done the pre-work. We understand the concern—but

think too much emphasis is put on it. *All* learning requires active participation from learners. Flipping may do more to expose some learners’ failure to engage, but the issue is not unique to flipped classrooms. In addition, systems—technology-driven or more old-fashioned—can be put in place to verify pre-work has been completed before learners come to class.

We expect to see the flipped model grow, as people continue to feel strapped for time and want to make best use of time spent with peers, teachers, and facilitators.



Khan Academy (<https://www.khanacademy.org>), more than any other organization, has put flipped learning on the map with its exhaustive library of short videos on topics from algebra to chemistry to art history.

As Khan Academy founder Salman Khan writes in *The One World Schoolhouse*, his 2012 manifesto on what education should be, “The old classroom model simply doesn’t fit our changing needs. It’s a fundamentally passive way of learning, while the world requires more and more *active* processing of information.”

## From the Field: STC's Pursuing Its First MOOC and Dabbling with Flipping

Lloyd Tucker, director of education and meetings at the Society for Technical Communication (<http://www.stc.org>), strives to be in the front when it comes to technology-enabled learning. His members are big on technology and expect their society to be on the leading edge too.

STC is in the development stage for a MOOC on technical communication. The MOOC's modules map to the society's five special interest groups, and Tucker's enlisted volunteers from the SIGs to be active in chat rooms and otherwise support the main instructors.

The overarching goal is to show the world what technical communicators and writers do. "The MOOC is to spread the word about the profession as much as it's about education," Tucker says.

Tucker's also pursuing flipped learning to help the society deliver better to its international members. STC offers certificate courses that last six to eight weeks and use Moodle to combine 90 minutes of synchronous online instruction a week with online homework and tests. One of the courses is taught by two instructors—both based in the U.S., but one on the West Coast and one on the East Coast. He can make online class times work for U.S. and European audiences. But Australia, China, and India don't work—unless someone's up in the middle of the night.

That practical scheduling issue combined with the potential benefits of flipping led Tucker to record the instructor lectures, and a group of approximately 20 will be the guinea pigs for viewing those lectures in advance and then using synchronous online class time, which will be led by a single instructor, to discuss the videos, ask questions, and review assignments.

If all goes well, Tucker imagines STC will expand the flipped model to other courses and offerings.



Society for  
Technical  
Communication

## MOOCs Change Lives and Microcredentials Will Catch On Faster Than Flipping

### Excerpts from an Interview with Curt Bonk

We caught up with Curt Bonk via phone and asked his thoughts on MOOCs, flipping, and microcredentials. We found the following bits from the conversation particularly interesting.

#### MOOCS

**Tagoras:** What qualifies as a MOOC?

**Bonk:** People will say—and I have said it myself—that MOOCs happened way back in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s with television and radio. Massive open radio courses. Massive open tv courses. So the word *online* is important in the name to distinguish from radio-based or tv-based or correspondence-based or satellite or books on tape or any earlier iterations of massiveness.

**Tagoras:** When is a MOOC right? Is it a good vehicle for continuing education and professional development?

**Bonk:** PD is one of 20 kinds of MOOC I've come up with, and it's the type I offer. In a PD MOOC, you don't have to worry about assessment, *as much*, and you don't have to worry about completion, *as much*. People are so hung up on whether someone has completed all of the modules that they lose sight of the fact that people have significantly changed their lives from learning a small piece or have had the learning impact them in a unique way that no one would have thought about otherwise and that they might not have ever encountered had they not taken the MOOC.... More than 80 percent of people who completed our two surveys (one with more than 1,500 respondents) have experienced a life change of some kind, whether small or large.

#### FLIPPING

**Tagoras:** Can we trust that the average adult is prepared to take advantage of the opportunity that flipped learning offers?

**Bonk:** We're running into resistance now from students who don't necessarily buy into the flipped notion. This is a whole new model, and many instructors aren't used to it. Blended learning and fully online learning just took some training and time. Now people are less resistant to both. Flipping the classroom, some people might say, is easier,

Curt Bonk is professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University and president of CourseShare. Drawing on his background as a corporate controller, CPA, educational psychologist, and instructional technologist, Bonk offers unique insights into the intersection of business, education, psychology, and technology. An authority on emerging technologies for learning, Bonk reflects on his speaking experiences around the world in his popular blog, *TravelinEdMan*. He has authored several technology books, including *The World Is Open*, *Empowering Online Learning*, *The Handbook of Blended Learning*, *Electronic Collaborators*, and *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY*, a free e-book (<http://tec-variety.com>).





but I think in some ways it might be harder. If you are trying to flip a lot of classrooms, the majority of classrooms...to really transform education to a flipped model, we could be 30 years away from that.

**Tagoras:** When would flipping continuing education and professional development make sense?

**Bonk:** Flipping makes some sense in science, where you can do demonstrations. And biology and chemistry and physics. Flipping makes sense in my *Psychology of Learning* class, where people can come to class prepared to discuss theories, have more debates, do analyses. In remedial classes, it makes a lot of sense. Or it might not be a remedial class, but a remedial learner in a traditional class, so you might not be flipping for everyone, but just those who need that extra TLC. Also areas where the content is changing, and there're a lot of media elements out there—you don't have to do a lecture to flip; you can rely on existing media. For my *Emerging Technologies* class, there's a lot out there in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* that I have my students watch before coming to class.

## MICROCREDENTIALS

**Tagoras:** What's your perspective on digital badges?

**Bonk:** Any way in which you verify the person and the skills—if it's a badge, a certificate, or whatever—people who are hiring out there are going to want that. Badges are going to happen faster than flipped classrooms because they go back to the notion that resumes will be changing. I predict more than half of the working population of the world will have some kind of identifier or mark related to their informal learning on their resume before than more than half of instructors adopting flipped learning.

Curt Bonk, Mimi Lee, Tom Reeves, Tom Reynolds are at work on a forthcoming book titled *MOOCs and Open Education around the World*, to be published by Routledge.

## Microcredentials

In our 2014 *Association Learning + Technology* report, we asked respondents if they offer digital badges or another microcredential. We didn't define what "another microcredential" might be, given the inherent limiting danger of listing options. What we had in mind, though, is any kind of credential that focuses on a specific skill or at a granular level of achievement—as opposed to credentials like undergraduate or graduate degrees or full-blown certifications that focus on a broad body of knowledge and a range of skills.

The Microcredentials Research Group at Arizona State University compares badges and microcredentials (<http://altcred.org/about>):

*The space of “badges” and “microcredentials” is largely coterminous, but there are some significant ways in which they do not intersect. Badges must present an*

*iconographic or visual symbolism. A text “badge” makes little sense. Microcredentials often include an iconographic representation, but it is not essential. This is important for spaces like Twitter (where the visualization of the badge is less important than, say, a shortcode) or in cases where the microcredential is passed without any visual representation at all.*

Along with their more granular focus, microcredentials typically differ from traditional credentials in two other key ways. First, they embed information about what the learner has done. As the Microcredentials Research Group puts it, “Rather than *standing in* for the collection of knowledge and assessment that led to the earning of the credential, microcredentials act as a *pointer* to the criteria, endorsement, and ideally the demonstration of the skills or experience represented by the microcredential.”

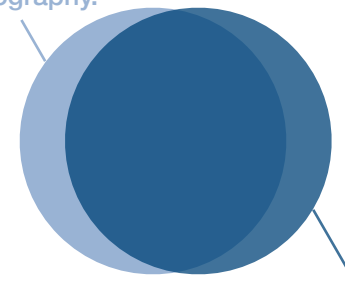
### microcredential *noun*

\ 'mī-krō-kri-'den(t)-shəl \

: attestation of qualification, competence, or authority that focuses on a specific skill or at a granular level of achievement

Badges and microcredentials are largely coterminous.

Badges include iconography.



Microcredentials link to the issuer, criteria, and evidence.

Second, as a result of the pointer nature of microcredentials, it's often easier for organizations to issue microcredentials than traditional credentials. Microcredentials can be essentially self-verifying, meaning the burden on the issuer to have a strong brand and reputation as an authority is lessened because the microcredential relies more on demonstrated action than the fact that a specific issuer is behind it. So microcredentials may prove democratizing forces in the credentialing realm. Of course, if a microcredential comes from a respected source—and associations are often the go-to resources for their fields or industries—that only serves to further the value of the microcredential.

## WHEN TO CONSIDER GOING MICRO

Today's half-life of knowledge is short. The skills gained through a college degree may only be valid for five years (<http://blogs.hbr.org/2012/09/mind-the-skills-gap>).

Employment is precarious, and frequent job changes are common. Millennials average only two years in a job (<http://www.payscale.com/gen-y-at-work>).

We expect to live longer. The average life span is now almost 79 years in the U.S. (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lifexpec.htm>) and 70 years globally ([http://www.who.int/gho/mortality\\_burden\\_disease/life\\_tables/situation\\_trends/en](http://www.who.int/gho/mortality_burden_disease/life_tables/situation_trends/en)).

These facts combine to make now a moment ripe for the potential of microcredentials, in particular three applications.

- Slicing and dicing traditional certification

While traditional certification certainly has a place and a purpose, its requirements might be too high a hurdle for learners who want to show skills or knowledge in a domain but don't have the time or money (or incentive) to invest in a long, expensive process—some association certifications require a

bachelor's degree from a university accredited by the association.

Not all situations warrant the investment of a traditional certification, particularly when the certification is voluntary and in fields where the pace of new information is rapid. In those cases, a microcredential may be the Goldilocks offering—not too hard, not too easy, just right—that lets learners show their knowledge and skills.

What's more, microcredentials can be created as part of an optional series and combined to add up, ultimately, to an overarching certification. In her article "Consider the Micro-Credential as an Alternative to Traditional Certification," written for the American Society of Association Executives, credentialing expert Mickie Rops makes this point: "Consider...the possibility of stacked micro-credentials, meaning that you offer several micro-credentials that can 'stack' upon each other, perhaps even ultimately leading to an industry certification. But, the key is that micro-

## Big Players in Microcredentialing

Open Badges—started as a collaborative project between MacArthur Foundation, Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC), and Mozilla—is a non-proprietary "online standard to recognize and verify learning" (<http://openbadges.org>). Others, like Degreed (<http://degreed.com>) and Credly (<https://credly.com>), similarly aim to help learners collect and share evidence of their diverse learning accomplishments—traditional college degrees, online learning, and more.



credentials can offer value along the way."

If you already offer a certification, you may be able to remix what you have and break it down into microcredentialing offerings. If you're looking at creating a new certification, consider whether a traditional, all-or-nothing certification is needed, or if you might be able to build it modularly and offer value along the learning path.

- Microcredentials as part of a portfolio

Microcredentials make great sense in a learning ecosystem and, even more targeted, in a credential

ecosystem. Not everything should be a microcredential. You probably wouldn't want a surgeon who only has a digital badge in perioperative care to operate on you.

But microcredentials can serve as a valuable offering in your portfolio, and, as with flipping, they can help you fill in your Value Ramp.

In his paper "Insurgent Credentials II: What Is Sociologically Significant About Digital Badges?" Michael R. Olneck states, "[C]redentials gain their meaning only in relation to one another." So think about what your microcredentials mean in relationship with your other learning offerings and credentials. Besides seeing if you have full-blown certifications that might be broken down into stackable microcredentials, can you use the designation of *microcredential* to distinguish some offerings from others?

- Microcredentials to demonstrate impact

We see a role for microcredentials in what's increasingly a focus on the impact of learning. Perhaps most obvious at this point in health care, with its focus on performance improvement, learners and those

who mandate or suggest learning want to show more than participation. They want to see how learning changes behavior.

With their portfolio nature, microcredentials seem primed to move us closer to showing impact and to tying into "living" resumes that not only report what someone has done but serve as portfolios showing what they have done—that is, they may not only show completion of certain requisites but also contain indication of what was done to meet those requisites, presumably demonstrating real skills not just the information to develop skills.

While they may not quite reach the top end of Donald Kirkpatrick's four levels for learning evaluations (<http://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/OurPhilosophy/TheKirkpatrickModel>), or Donald Moore, Joseph Green, and Harry Gallis's seven levels of CME outcomes measurement (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

This infographic explains Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation. Source: [flirtingwelearning.wordpress.com](http://flirtingwelearning.wordpress.com)

**UNDERSTANDING KIRKPATRICK'S 4 LEVELS OF EVALUATION**


**what is it for?**  
 Assessing training is critical. Luckily for instructional designers, Donald Kirkpatrick developed a four level model in the late 50's to do just that. Decades have passed since and still no one has come up with a more effective method to evaluate training. That's because the Kirkpatrick model works!

1

**REACTION**

**what does it measure?**  
learners' reaction to the training

**how do you measure that?**  
questionnaires after training




2

**LEARNING**

**what does it measure?**  
improvement in knowledge, skills and abilities

**how do you measure that?**  
pre- and post-training testing




3

**BEHAVIOUR \***

**what does it measure?**  
capability to apply new skills, knowledge & abilities on the job

**how do you measure that?**  
testing and observation




4

**RESULTS**

**what does it measure?**  
impact of training on the business

**how do you measure that?**  
scorecard looks at impact/return (financial, customer, internal)



\*referred to by some as "performance"  
\*\*created by @nicole\_legault



[pubmed/19288562](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19288562/)), microcredentials and badges can track nicely to Kirkpatrick level 3, behavior, and Moore, Green, and Gallis's level 5, performance, by embedding information about the learner and perhaps including direct evidence.

### ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON MICROCREDENTIALING

Microcredentialing is a trend we think likely to grow rapidly from this early-adopter phase, as it's natural territory for associations. Learners are likely to increasingly appreciate and seek out ways to demonstrate their ongoing learning in what we term "the other 50 years"—the typical lifespan after adults leave higher education.



#### From the Field: CEWD's Stackable Credentials

The Center for Energy Workforce Development (<http://www.cewd.org>), a consortium of electric natural gas and nuclear utilities and their associations, has developed the Get Into Energy Career Pathways Model that uses an eight-tiered system to move learners from basic training in work readiness and employability skills through industry-specific knowledge and skills to, ultimately, job-specific training.

Certificates awarded on achievement of competencies at each level create a system of stackable credentials. For example, a technician who attains basic and industry competencies has the foundation to take additional training for a specific job skill, such as wind or smart grid technologies, without having to start from scratch.

The stackable credentials provide a foundation for new entrants into the energy workforce and support ongoing career development. Training associated with the credentials can evolve, as jobs and new technologies evolve, to remain relevant and up-to-date.

## You're Ahead and Likely Don't Feel Like It Thoughts from Digital Ignite's Tamer Ali

The great ideas presented in this document may sound somewhat overwhelming if you're just beginning the process. Getting things going (and I purposely avoid calling it "embarking" as I always think of big, slow ships taking off from port) may seem to be the hardest part of any speculative, strategic venture.

The good news is there are things in your favor that your organization may leverage.

- Captive audience

Your organization represents and can likely call an existing audience its customers already, whereas the providers offering advanced learnings described in this paper are typically spending millions of (venture capital-fueled) dollars in marketing.

Your organization's brand awareness gives you an immediate head start for any programs; this is key when you may be offering free content in exchange for the monetization later in the form of certifications or advanced offerings. If you're not spending as much on marketing, you can shift these funds to developing content.

- Free resources

Your experienced audience members and constituents may offer their help for free in content development in the spirit of contribution to their alma mater (your organization). If this is freemium content that you offer to the masses as a MOOC or otherwise, this may play well with a contributor who seeks to join a worthwhile cause in exchange for career recognition.

- Trust

Related to your audience advantage is the trust related to your brand awareness. This is not a trivial concept—and one that startups and grey market competition cannot recreate overnight. Your emblem or logo means something of high value and quality that placed on the right content will immediately garner attention.

- Staying power

The venture capital-fueled entities that are most associated with MOOCs and newer approaches to learning technology are also dependent on the hands that release funds. In general, the venture capital industry (notoriously) doesn't have a long-term viewpoint on education (yet); therefore, poor results for programs they fund may cause early closures and exits of some programs. This will reward organizations with long-term views on and plans for education in their industries. Assume volatility, the constant need for knowledge as industries change, and that your audience will continue to need a trusted source for the professional development needs through all this. Your organization is well suited to handle the ups and downs.

### SOME IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

So, now, where to get started? I leave you with some general (by design) ideas that should apply to multiple industries.

- Reboot on the foundations of your profession.

Consider a renewed approach on the key principles in your profession as a flipped course or MOOC. The basic principles can be redone as the source lecture or course

material, which can be supplemented by live instruction delivered in person or through technology.

- Follow an emerging topic course with an exam and certificate or microcredential.

Is there an emerging topic in your industry worthy of a new course that can lead to a microcredential or certificate? In most fields, there are new forces of change that offer great opportunities for new subject matter in including topics like ethics, cost control and efficiency, safety, social computing / networks, globalization, and risk management.

- Try some competition.

Introduce a game-like program for all audience members to submit to a weekly quiz question presented on your Web site. Every three months, people can earn a microcredential that indicates their knowledge in the topics presented.

### IN CLOSING

You're not alone—many organizations face the new paradigms of learning delivery with excitement and hesitance to start. Again, leverage your head start and your inherent advantages in the market. Organizational challenges aside, you're definitely in a good position—and an enviable one. But a plan and a start are necessary, and there's no better time than the present.

I wish you the best of luck in your efforts and hope we can continue the dialogue: #strategiclearning.

*Tamer Ali  
president and cofounder  
Digital Ignite*

### About Digital Ignite

Digital Ignite was founded in 2006 with the vision of building a better learning experience for the adult, working professional. Our goal was to break the model of impersonal e-learning technologies, to create a personalized, social, and engaging experience that was learner-centric. Moreover, we wanted to develop a platform that could handle the rigors and demands of critical learning and professional education programs: a platform with scalability, global presence, and the infrastructure to deliver great, rich experiences. In short, we thought e-learning deserved the same advances in personalization, aesthetics, analytics, and overall infrastructure that the Internet continues to experience.

We round out our offering with a key focus “beyond implementation” with a dedicated team of learning experts with decades of experience implementing successful education programs. Our team works with client stakeholders to maximize their investments in technology, while also strategizing best approaches for future educational product development.

[www.digitalignite.com](http://www.digitalignite.com)

## MOOCs

While there's some debate about what constitutes a microcredential or flipping, massive open online courses (MOOCs) suffer more than those other two fringe formats from debate about what it is—debate that has even prompted the evolution of subgenres.

A massive open online course, or MOOC, is a free online course in which large numbers of people can enroll. MOOCs typically feature a blend of video content, discussion boards, downloadable readings, and peer-to-peer evaluation of learning.

Beyond that, differences of opinions emerge. The first MOOCs to evolve were focused on the social aspects of online technology and hewed to a constructivist theory of learning—that is, participants were considered both learners and teachers, and content was driven by each individual learner's needs and wishes rather than the covering of a set syllabus. These have come to be called cMOOCs.

xMOOCs evolved later but have arguably become better known, as they get most of the media attention. Key examples include Coursera, edX, and Udacity. These MOOCs bear the mark of their higher-ed origins and tend to feature celebrity teachers recording

lectures, follow tight syllabi, and often can be done alone (something that would render a cMOOC meaningless), even if peer learning is encouraged.

Once you start playing with acronyms, the fun begins. So more recently, vocational MOOCs, or VOOCs, have been heralded as “a partial solution” to “an area that has a great need for low cost, scalable solutions” (<http://www.ufi.co.uk/primer-moocs-voocs>), and Donald Clark posits eight types of MOOCs—and makes the point of saying the list isn't definitive (<http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/moocs-taxonomy-of-8-types-of-mooc.html>).

Anant Agarwal, CEO of edX, the online learning destination founded by

Harvard and MIT, cites five reasons MOOCs work and still matter ([http://www.ted.com/talks/anant\\_agarwal\\_why\\_massively\\_open\\_online\\_courses\\_still\\_matter](http://www.ted.com/talks/anant_agarwal_why_massively_open_online_courses_still_matter)). MOOCs incorporate active learning, self-pacing, instant feedback, gamification, and peer learning.

While Agarwal comes from an xMOOC perspective, the five reasons hold true for cMOOCs too, if potentially in differing proportions—cMOOCs tend to turn up the dial on the active learning, self-pacing, and peer learning even more, and while the instant feedback will depend on the community, and gamification tactics may be less likely to be used.

### WHEN A MOOC MIGHT BE THE RIGHT MOVE

The key to success with a MOOC is having a clear understanding up front of why you're offering it, what you hope to achieve, and how you will measure success.

Consider the following when thinking through a MOOC offering.

- MOOCs as marketing

If they live up to the *massive* part of their name, MOOCs offer tremendous marketing potential. As with flipped content, they can help

**MOOC** *noun*  
 \ 'mük \  
 : massive open online course



establish you as an authority in your field and recruit new members, perhaps even bringing new individuals into the profession or industry you serve.

But with great opportunity comes great risk—the massive part of the name also means you’re opening yourself up to a lot of negative exposure if all doesn’t go well.

- MOOCs as magnifiers

To have the marketing potential work for you, highlight your really phenomenal content and teachers—your great content and teachers. Too often organizations are reluctant to give away their best stuff—but that may be just what’s required to have a successful xMOOC.

As economist John McArthur observes (<http://johnmcarthur.com/2013/11/massively-open-5-key-rules>), xMOOCs have the potential to take the luck out of getting a good teacher by expanding the ability of excellent teachers to reach learners:

*I call it the “One to N” experience, meaning one teacher in a room, standing in front of some N number of students.*

## CFP BOARD

### From the Field: The CFP Board Uses a MOOC to Boost Awareness

A nonprofit that fosters professional standards in personal financial planning in large part through its certified financial planner certification, the CFP Board (<http://www.cfp.net>) is working with the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of Illinois to co-develop a MOOC on financial planning and literacy.

Currently at the course outline stage, the MOOC will be a series of video vignettes, with actors, that highlight life situations that warrant financial advice.

Dr. Charles Chaffin, director of academic programs and initiatives at the CFP Board and co-leader of the MOOC’s development team says, “This course will be designed with a 17-year-old’s attention span in mind, as opposed to a baccalaureate for-credit course.”

The free course is being pursued as an awareness initiative, as Dr. Chaffin sees limitations, as well as benefits, inherent in the MOOC format: “MOOCs are not ready to replace for-credit courses. There are too many variables, most notably admissions and assessment measures, that make it almost impossible to offer for-credit. Certainly regional accreditors are viewing this notion similarly at the present time. However, I do think that a well-developed MOOC can have elements (assessments, videos, lectures) that can be repurposed into other mediums. An association can use a MOOC to enhance awareness of their discipline, profession, service if they can find an academic partner who can assist in making the course and the subject matter accessible.”

*Historically, a small N has been preferred for its richer presumed student-teacher interaction, although this is subject to luck regarding the quality of the relevant professor. Today the formula has been flipped.*

*MOOC efforts focus on both growing the N and limiting the role of luck. The core idea is that any number of people, even millions at a time, should be able to take a course with the best professors in the world.*

If you have a star subject matter expert or a topic that's a perennial favorite, showcasing her or it in a MOOC may be an effective way to magnify the impact.

- MOOCs for the masses

To be massive and take the advantages that come with it (connectivity, crowdsourcing answers and knowledge, etc.), there needs to be a large potential audience. This suggests that more basic, general content lends itself to a MOOC as opposed to advanced, highly specialized content.

Lastly, let's consider two situations where a MOOC might not be a good fit.

- If revenue is your main goal

While purists argue the *open* in the name means no money required, others are looking to charge for MOOCs—or for some added level of service (e.g., the MOOC is free, but if you want a certificate, that costs). In any case, the monetization of MOOCs is still playing out. While MOOCs have attracted a lot of venture capital—Coursera attracted \$22 million in its first year (<http://chronicle.com/article/Major-Players-in-the-MOOC/138817>)—it's not clear what the revenue model for MOOCs will be.

For the foreseeable future, it seems safest not to expect MOOCs to generate revenue but to rather view them as an investment (e.g., for marketing).

- If verification of completion of set content is important

With the connectivist approach of cMOOCs, you don't get to define what's learned, so they won't help with set content. While xMOOCs work from defined content, completion rates are abysmal—6.8 percent per one study (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/05/10/new-study-low-mooc-completion-rates>). Some argue that's okay, that learners come to MOOCs with their own needs and interests in mind, regardless of the syllabus. In their piece in *The Atlantic* (<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/01/the-tricky-task-of-figuring-out-what-makes-a-mooc-successful/283274>), Justin Reich and Andrew Ho argue, "[D]ropping out' is not a breach of expectations but the natural result of an open, free, and asynchronous registration process, where students get just as much as they wish out of a course and registering for a course does not imply a commitment to completing it." And we tend to

agree that completion is not necessarily a great measure of effectiveness or value. But the point still remains—if ensuring learners complete all the content, then a MOOC may not be the right choice.

### ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON MOOCS

While MOOCs have been around since 2008, when Stephen Downes and George Siemens offered the Connectivism and Connective Knowledge course (CCK08), 2012 took MOOCs in a different direction with the launch of edX, Coursera, and Udacity, and 2014 introduced VOOCS. The sheer volume of activity in the realm of MOOCs—and the redefinition and reposturing of MOOCs—testify to something compelling in the offering that's driving organizations to work to find an effective model.

So, while only 6.6 percent of respondents offer MOOCs and only 4.6 percent more plan to begin offering MOOCs in the next year, according to the survey behind our 2014 *Association Learning + Technology* report, we're excited about the massive models enabled by MOOCs and expect more associations to embrace it in the coming years, as they realize the ready-built audience of their profession or industry could benefit from a MOOC offering.

## Final Thoughts on the Three Fringe Formats

All three trends we looked at here can be seen as a response to the difficulties of traditional education—flipping gets away from the dominance of the lecture and the teacher-as-expert paradigm; microcredentials challenge monolithic degrees that don't provide much detail about what was studied, much less what the student can (or can't) do; and MOOCs (particularly the xMOOC offerings of Coursera, Udacity, etc.) defy the universities' monopoly on top content and teachers.

All three trend areas also intermingle—a MOOC might be used to flip what happens during class time, and the combined offering might come with a microcredential.

While these offerings are fringe, we see great potential and predict growth in flipping, microcredentials, and MOOCs. Your goal, though, shouldn't be to jump on the bandwagon, but to consider these newer offerings along with other options to build your portfolio of learning offerings strategically as you focus on creating and delivering value.

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### About Tagoras

Through a combination of independent research, educational events and strategic consulting, Tagoras helps organizations in the business of lifelong learning maximize the reach, revenue, and impact of their offerings.

We provide our clients with a unique blend of experience in marketing, technology, and education and back it up with years of successful projects with clients like the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA), the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), and the College Board.

Tagoras reports include *Association Learning + Technology*, *Association Learning Management Systems*, *Association Virtual Events*, and *The Speaker Report: The Use of Professional and Industry Speakers in the Meetings Market*.

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