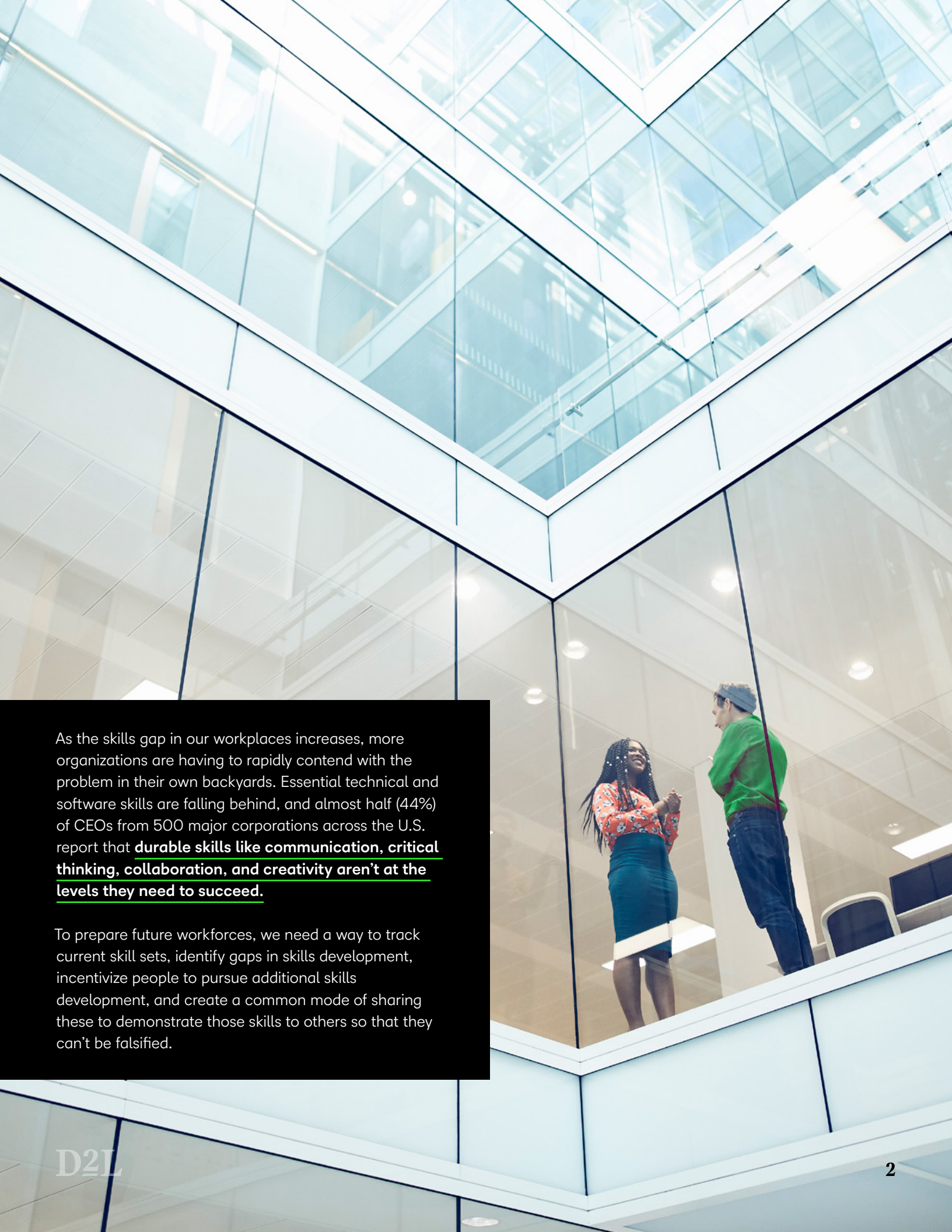# D2L

Addressing the Skills Gap
with Micro-Credentialing

As the skills gap in our workplaces increases, more organizations are having to rapidly contend with the problem in their own backyards. Essential technical and software skills are falling behind, and almost half (44%) of CEOs from 500 major corporations across the U.S. report that **durable skills like communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity aren't at the levels they need to succeed.**

To prepare future workforces, we need a way to track current skill sets, identify gaps in skills development, incentivize people to pursue additional skills development, and create a common mode of sharing these to demonstrate those skills to others so that they can't be falsified.

A Tale of Two Candidates

Imagine your organization is hiring a new software developer. You're down to two candidates, both with nearly identical work and educational experience. Many organizations will turn to social media to review additional information and help make a decision at this point. While doing so and reviewing the two candidates through LinkedIn, the hiring manager sees that in the past years, one of them has earned digital certifications for Microsoft Office, taken several open courses on Node. JS from IBM, attended several conferences on software development and received badges for them, completed an open university course on success in the workplace, and been awarded badges for collaboration and creative problem solving.

DANIELLE WILTON

Credentials

- B.Sc. Computer Science — 2011
- 5 years developer at Shooli
- 3 years developer at start up
- 10 LinkedIn recommendations

SUREKHA KAUR

Credentials

- B.Sc. Computer Science — 2011
- 5 years developer at Spied Piper
- 2 years at local start up
- 5 LinkedIn recommendations
- Microsoft Office certifications
- IBM Node.JS Contributor course
- IBM LoopBack Advocate course
- EDEN conference badge
- Collaboration award
- Creative problem solving award
- Success in the workplace University course

A rather simple question to ask based on these results: who are you likely to interview first? If you answered Surekha, you just proved that digital micro-credentials work! These digital credentials showcase Surekha's continued development of skills. While Danielle may also be advancing in her own professional growth, because she doesn't appear to have received any accreditations, she can't easily and quickly demonstrate her progress.

What Are Micro-Credentials?

Micro-credentials are a representation of a competency or achievement earned through participation, progression, completion, and demonstration of learning. These are created using the Open Badges specification managed and advanced by **the IMS Global Learning Consortium**. Badges are verifiable by the issuing institution and can always be checked to confirm that there is no misrepresentation of a learner's credentials.

Once created, these badges are issued and can be shared across a variety of platforms—such as portfolios and social media—and with any specific individuals or institutions the owner would like.

Badges contain various metadata about how the learner achieved the badge, who issued it, and what evidence is available to demonstrate the skill. These are not just stickers for adults, but instead contain key information about what a learner did to earn this badge, the competency aligned to it, and information on the organization issuing the badge to ascertain validity.
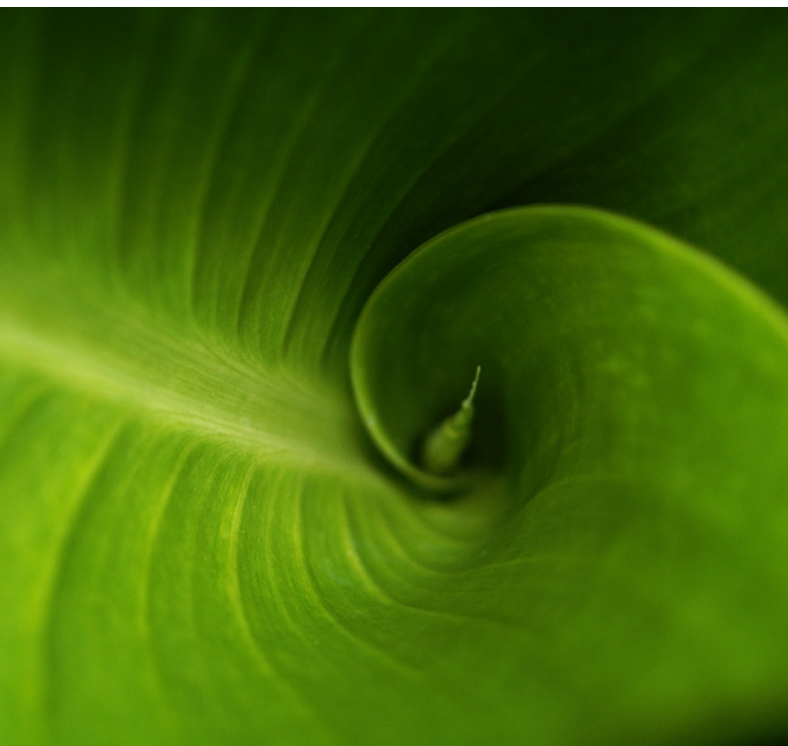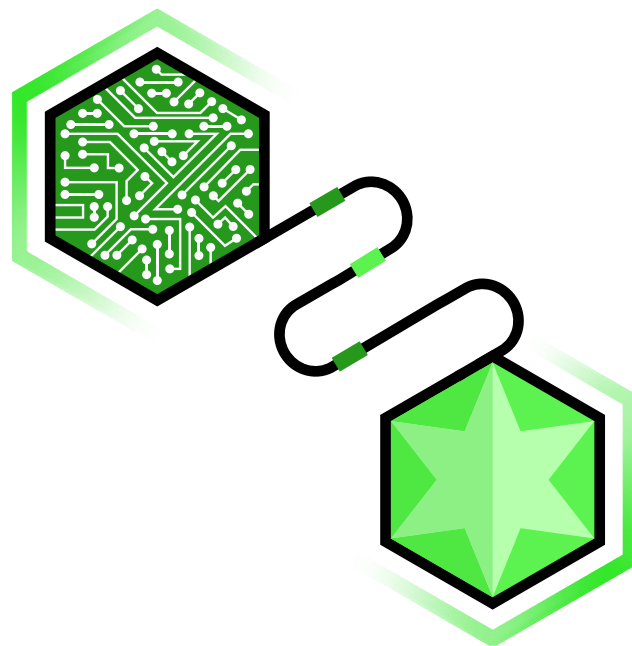
THERE'S DATA INSIDE!

- Badge name
- Badge URL (description)
- Badge criteria
- Badge image
- Issuer
- Issue data

- Recipient
- Tags
- Alignment (standards)
- Expiration date
- Evidence URL

What Challenges Do Micro-Credentials Solve?

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Get digital accreditation that you can take with you.
Since open badges can be earned and exported in your digital backpack, you can take them with you for the rest of your life without ever having to worry about where you last put them (like we all inevitably wonder at some point about our paper degrees).

Provide others with insight into your professional development and demonstrate efforts to improve.
Micro-credentials make it easy for you to exhibit the ongoing professional development you have pursued beyond previous education. This is incredibly valuable because, as more people embrace a continuous learning lifestyle, we need to be able to prove that we didn't stop educating ourselves 10 years ago when we left our college or university.

Incentivize yourself to pursue new skills with micro-credentials acting as a currency in the workplace.
Borrowing from the psychological success of reward schedules in gamification, well-constructed micro-credential systems in an organization can encourage learners to learn more, participate in a greater number and variety of skills development opportunities, and create a career path to success.

What Challenges Do Micro-Credentials Solve?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

Identify areas for improvement as well as the distribution of talent and gaps.
As your organization begins tracking skill sets earned through avenues like courses, projects, and mentorships with badges, the data represented will inform how you tackle skills gaps at not only an individual level, but also for the organization as a whole.

Increase completion, productivity, and engagement.
When IBM launched their digital badges program in 2015, enrollment and completion immediately improved (by 129% and 229%, respectively). **As a direct result of incorporating their badging strategy**, "87% of badge earners say they are more engaged because of [the program]" and "sales professionals who have earned digital badges are more likely to achieve sales quotas than employees who have not earned badges."

Demonstrate a culture of learning.
Companies that want to set themselves apart as learning organizations and retain their employees need to offer continuous skills development. Key to creating a clear path for an employee's career involves identifying skills that may currently be missing and those needed for the next five years and beyond. By leveraging micro-credentials tied to competencies for projects and new roles, you can give people a straightforward understanding of what they need to do to succeed and distinguish your organization as one that genuinely cares about enabling its employees to progress and grow.

Help create alignment with skills needed for continuous improvement across sectors.
The skills gap isn't something we're going to solve by pointing fingers and laying blame with educational institutions, private training providers, governments, or corporations. To move forward, we will all need to come together and devise strategies for communicating the skills provided, needed, and achieved.

Micro-credentialing is an important tool you can leverage to bring stakeholders together around a single table and establish a common, comprehensive framework and language for building and demonstrating the knowledge and skill sets we'll all need to thrive in the future of work.

What Badges Should Our Organization Create?

Begin by answering some fundamental questions:

1. What do we value in our employees?

2. What skills do you want to recognize both now and in the future?

3. Are these badges for fun, compliance, or to measure the development of certain skill sets? (You can have all of these!)

4. Will you be tying these badges to competencies? Do you have competencies mapped for each role?

5. Will you need to create different badges for different departments? How will you differentiate between them?

6. Will you share these badges across multiple courses?

7. Are you using meta-badges that consist of multiple badges (also known as stacked credentials)?

7 Badging Best Practices

KEEPING IN MIND YOUR ANSWERS TO THE ABOVE QUESTIONS, CONSIDER THESE SEVEN TIPS:

1. Tie the badges to the core competencies that your organization needs.
This is where most organizations miss the mark. Instead of creating meaningful micro-credentials based on performance of key skills benchmarked to competency frameworks for specific roles, they create a series of fun badges that don't get recognized because they aren't tied to professional development.

2. Create badges based on completion, measurement, progress, and experience.
If you only issue badges every time someone answers on a discussion forum or completes a course, then you're missing out on the continuous and never-ending nature of learning. Your badging system should recognize different levels of mastery. Add indicators like stars to demonstrate progression. Provide lower-level badges based on progress and demonstrated measurement of lower-level (Bloom's) tasks, such as quiz completion. Graduate your employees to higher levels based on continued experience.

3. Create badges that represent organizational values as well as technical skills and durable skills like the 4 Cs (collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking).
Think about the skill gaps you've identified in your organization and consider ways to reward individuals who are taking the time and making the effort to improve themselves in key areas. Remember that most of these badges will need to be manually issued, so you'll want to involve leaders in their administration.

4. Don't give everyone the same badges.
One thing we all know from our gamification theory is that there's power in scarcity! Make badges that are specific to departments and roles so that employees can aspire to maximize their talents. Using these credentials as currency in the workplace helps create career pathing and incentivize professional development.

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5. Create meta-badges that are challenging to get.

Any skill needed in the workplace is made up of multiple competencies, and your micro-credentials should reflect that. Meta-badging, or stacked credentials, a more complex way to structure your badging, requires multiple badges to earn a meta-badge! Imagine after you've received badges for communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration that you receive a Super 4C badge that demonstrates your interpersonal genius!
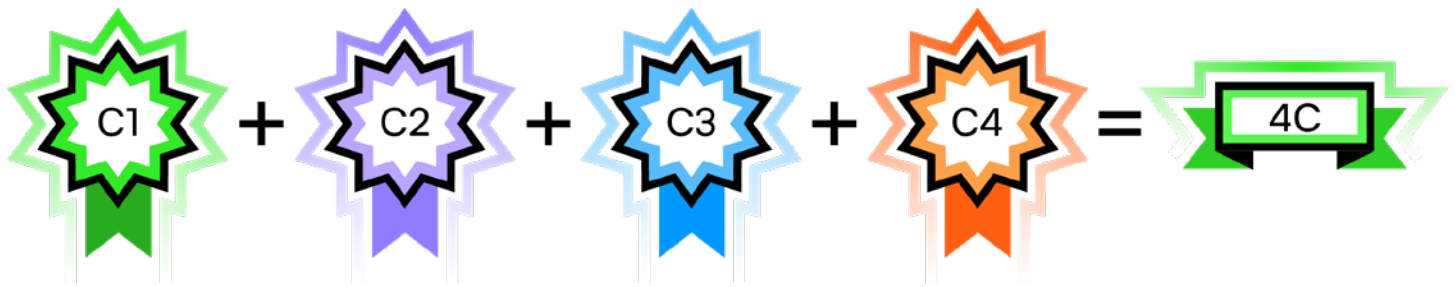
6. Create a variety of badge types—not just micro-credentials.

Badges can motivate and incentivize, and they don't all have to be based on competencies. Personally, I'm very proud of the badge I got from D2L last year for my contest-winning chili. I'm not going to share this with the world, but it incentivizes me to participate more in company functions when I know there's a little reward and recognition at the end. If badging isn't at least a little bit fun, it may not provide all the value it can.

7. Start small, test, and expand.

Don't begin with a massive rollout of 100 badges. Start small. You'll find it easy to set up (you can use a table template in a word processor to help you plan), but it's easier to test the efficacy of the badge types that resonate with your organization if you have a smaller set and test group.

CONCLUSION

Micro-credentialing has the potential to make lasting change in your organization and empower your employees to take control of their careers. For more information on micro-credentials, **IMS Global** is the consortium responsible for Open Badges stewardship. Their website is a great resource to help you advance your strategy for credentialing! I've also found **openbadges.org** to be a good primer for getting started.

About the Author

Jeff Salin is the Manager of the Learning Experience team in the Learning and Creative Services department at D2L. He is a passionate educator, focusing on scenario-based learning, gamification, and Experiential Learning. He's also into audio engineering, music, triathlons, and all things food.

Kaplan Financial: Gamifying Accountancy Courses to Boost Performance

Accountants and finance professionals are required to pass high-stakes examinations to progress their careers. To help these learners develop the skills for success, Kaplan Financial leveraged tools within D2L Brightspace that put gamification at the heart of learning—inspiring effective studying practices.

71%
of Kaplan Financial learners believe gamification has a positive learning impact

THE CHALLENGE

Implement effective learning strategies to take a proactive approach in encouraging learning behavior.

THE SOLUTION

Working with Learning and Creative Services, Kaplan introduced gamification to help achieve learning goals.

THE RESULT

Inspire learners to improve their drive, determination, and diligence and demonstrate a clear correlation between high gamification scores and strong final assessment marks.

Read the full success story. ›

> We were attracted to the D2L Brightspace Learning Platform because it came packed with many of the features that we were hoping to introduce, such as the badging feature. The D2L team were **instrumental** in helping us customize the **solution** to our unique needs too, helping us expand our vision and get our PoC up and running in under three months.
>
> - Stuart Pedley-Smith, Head of Learning, Kaplan Financial

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ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalized learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology products—D2L Brightspace and D2L Wave— enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world. Learn more at **D2L.com**.

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