

Chapter 4

Designing and Developing Microcredentials

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers a guide to designing and developing microcredentials, highlighting their key characteristics, benefits, and theoretical foundations. It explores core design elements, including the value for higher education providers and learners, assessment methods, partnerships, infrastructure, and financial planning. The development process encompasses market analysis, governance and accreditation, and strategies for integration and transferability. Quality assurance and continuous improvement are emphasized, focusing on delivery methods, technological platforms, assessment strategies, and alignment with labor market needs. The chapter stresses defining specific skills, providing evidence of achievement, and engaging internal and external stakeholders. Implementation strategies cover promotion, marketing, leveraging partnerships, and effective branding. Practical insights are provided through case studies and examples of successful programs. The chapter concludes with a discussion on future trends and challenges, offering a forward-looking perspective on microcredentials.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, microcredentials have increased in demand, triggering the attention of educators to think about learning outside of the traditional educational pathways. The driving force behind this demand is a shift by industry leaders to better understand what job qualifications and skills are essential to perform a wide variety of jobs (Hancock et al., 2022). Changes in technology and labor shortages have increased the need to find qualified staff while leveraging existing staff through up-skilling strategies. With skills-based hiring on the rise (Fuller et al., 2022), industry leaders are increasing collaboration efforts with members of academia to help them solve a variety of work-related concerns. Some of these concerns include retention, efficiency, productivity, and employee satisfaction where human resource efforts also highlight succession planning and professional development. Educators are cognizant of the challenges and industry demand as they explore learning models that will prepare students, employees, and job seekers with the job-readiness skills they desire.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and societal challenges have changed the traditional workplace, leading to hybrid models that include remote work and adaptations to processes and procedures. Unsurprisingly, employers have been prompted to be more flexible as they focus on productivity within a technology shift that includes changes in the workplace guided by artificial intelligence (Putnam, 2024). Consequently, there are many possibilities for short-term learning options centered on job readiness and outcome achievement that can appeal to a variety of ages across a variety of industries. Further, creating a career-long learning culture supports skill development that prepares employees to adapt to any organizational change with confidence that they will have the support they need to be effective and succeed.

As the lasting effects of the Great Resignation continue, many organizations are seeking out opportunities to address employee satisfaction, burn-out, recruitment, and retention concerns. Professional development opportunities drive up-skilling of employees, which is needed to align to the changes in technology, policy, and the environment. In a study conducted by Putnam (2024) over 63% of leaders listed “upskilling as a top priority in the next year” (p. 9), and 43% noted having budgeted for reskilling. Unsurprisingly, employees want more options to increase their chances of job advancement with consideration to time, cost, and work-life balance. One strategy some employers are using to attract and retain talent is tuition reimbursement. Financial assistance for learning that aligns with career goals creates a win-win situation for the employer and employee (Sheather & Slattery, 2021). Microcredentials can meet that need as a positive resource for career development that also serves to develop employees in preparation of future career moves (Humphrey et al., 2021).

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