



CALGARY ON THE PRECIPICE

The Path to LearningCITY 2025

June 2020

Executive Summary

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A study of this complexity requires an interdisciplinary team of connected and committed scholars. We would like to thank these people for their investment and continued support as we continue the conversation on Calgary becoming a LearningCITY¹:

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¹ This report is the first outcome of the LearningCITY Project. This project is exploring how a city-wide learning system could be re-envisioned to deliver on the priorities defined in Calgary's economic strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For 40 years, economic, social, and cultural factors such as advanced technology and globalization have changed how cities compete to attract new citizens. A city's proximity to natural resources is no longer the driver of its competitive advantage. Instead, a city's ability to attract, develop and retain talent (the people who will live and work there) is the greatest predictor of social, and economic prosperity. That means how cities grow and develop their talent pool is crucial. Today's workplaces demand that people have the capacity to live with uncertainty, adapt to new roles and learn new skills quickly. These skills transcend industries and professions. If there were such a thing as a defining competency, it would be adaptability.

Adaptable people can adjust to the dynamic context of the world today. Adaptability can be reactive, like how many are learning to live in a new reality during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, adaptability can also be proactive and intentional, characterized by anticipating change and planning our response in advance. In this study, we explore the attributes of adaptive people and how they underpin adaptive organizations, systems, and cities.

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Imagine a city of people who view disruption as opportunity. Imagine a population whose talent and skills continuously evolve. Imagine a Calgary that attracts investment and talent from

across the globe because it's known as a city that learns its way forward. We don't believe the question is if this city is the Calgary of the future. Rather, our focus is on how we will realize our potential and whether the speed of change will be fast enough to navigate the precipice on which we are standing today.

At the root of adaptation is learning. So to become a city that adapts, Calgary must become a city that can learn faster and better than others. How do we transform Calgary into a "LearningCITY"? We have to start by changing the learning system.

We argue that how we choose to learn will define Calgary's future social and economic prosperity. Yet the ability for today's learning system to transform to meet emerging demands remains widely debated, because education is one of the most change-resistant institutions in society. Education is also threaded through society, not just in kindergarten to grade 12 and accredited educational institutes, but it's also in employers, professional associations, business ecosystems and in the hands of individual learners. The ways people learn, in short, are incredibly complex. That means there's enormous potential to effect wider change by evolving our learning system.

How can Calgary's learning system be optimized to drive social and economic prosperity in the face of accelerating uncertainty? To answer this question we conducted a multi-disciplinary study into the nature of adaptability and the learning system. This report is the **summary and recommendations**. Herein, we propose establishing a LearningCITY Task Force, guided by the following five pillars:

1. **Transition to an open learning system:** To become a LearningCITY,

Calgary must transition from the traditional closed learning system, which is defined by isolated learning experiences like the path from kindergarten to postsecondary to professional development, into an open, lifelong personalized learning system where people are empowered by and accountable for their own continuous development.

2. **Transition to purpose-based learning:** A LearningCITY needs a learning system that prioritizes empowerment and autonomy for the learner. The learner’s development pathway, their route through the learning system, becomes a personalized climbing wall instead of a predictable ladder. At its core, this open learning system aims to support the development of adaptable people, so the system itself must be adaptable.

of enabling competencies (skills that are useful no matter the context, like communication or citizenship) will be more adaptive than someone whose learning is anchored in domain-specific competencies (skills that serve them in a particular role or context, like welding or cooking). We propose Calgary adopt a *unified community competency model* that aims to develop skillsets that contribute to a person’s ability to adapt. This approach will transcend industries, roles, and professions, creating a unique competitive advantage for our city.

5. **Invest in city-level structural capital:** An efficient, city-wide open learning system requires high-level coordination between many stakeholders. For this to happen, all partners in the learning system will need to ensure processes to advance collaboration and shared learning.

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3. **Commit to universal experiential learning:** An empowered learner learns through a variety of mediums and experiences. Today, many of these learning experiences aren’t hands-on. Therefore, as part of an open learning system, we recommend that Calgary become the first city in North America to adopt a universal experiential learning system incorporating a minimum of 450 experiential learning hours for undergraduates prior to graduation.
4. **Develop enabling competencies:** An individual who has a strong foundation



A PATH FORWARD. TOGETHER.

Today, Calgary's already-fragile economic and social fabric is threatened by both the pandemic and oil prices declining to the lowest level in a generation. These crises provide both a challenge and an opportunity to leverage our learning system as the essential driver of our city's transformation. These major threats and the dramatic changes that Calgarians are experiencing in their personal and professional lives have paved the way toward a different way of thinking about old problems.

The goal of this discussion paper is to start a debate about the future of Calgary and the role of learning and talent development as part of this re-envisioning and rebuilding. Decades of multidisciplinary research show us that embracing uncertainty is difficult for most people, organizations, and systems. The common response is a combination of denial and resistance. For this reason, we focus on the underlying multidisciplinary science to guide us on the many challenges of developing a LearningCITY. In doing so, we conclude that addressing these challenges must start with developing an open learning system committed to accelerating and nurturing the adaptive capacity within each of us. To be a city that adapts, Calgary's citizens must possess the life-long capacity to learn.

This is not simply about adjusting the learning outcomes for students in kindergarten, university, or college. It's about re-envisioning the nature of learning

and the learner by recognizing that traditional education systems, though essential, are only a small component of our city's rich, but fragmented learning system.

A central component of this report is the proposed adoption of the open innovation learning model. This model, adopted by companies ranging from Google to LEGO, recognizes that when you empower people, you accelerate innovation. Learners and employers are no longer customers of the traditional education system. They are, and need to be, co-creators in the learning process at all levels of education. However, with this empowerment comes significant responsibility to invest in this new model.

For learners, it means we must take increasing ownership of our learning, regardless of whether we are 16 or 60. Harvard is developing the Sixty Year Curriculum initiative to develop "new educational models that enable each person to retrain as their occupational and personal context shifts".¹

For employers, it means investing in learning far earlier and on a sustained basis. This investment may be collaboration with experiential learning in high schools, universities or colleges, or investment in training existing employees.

For policymakers and educators, it requires support for the timely development and approval of programs that provide the foundation of a re-envisioned open learning system designed to train adaptable citizens. Collaboration, though, can be difficult, especially across such diverse partners as policymakers, educators, and employers. Therefore, the greatest challenge for most of us is not external, but the embedded rules, routines, practices, and cultures that influence our individual mindsets, behaviours, and organizations. Yet we believe that the collaboration, compromise, and consensus required to implement an agile and open learning

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system anchored in adaptive capacity is an essential step forward.

The challenge to move forward on any of these proposed actions lies in the reality that education is a provincial mandate and is highly politicized. It's also a highly change-resistant sector. Therefore, we propose that Calgary city council establish an independent **LearningCITY Task Force**. This task force would incorporate the lessons learned from the Calgary Bid Exploration Committee, which was established to study the potential of hosting the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Games and could work alongside other task forces including the COVID-19 Economic Resilience Task Force.² The LearningCITY Task Force would be given 12 months to engage the broader learning community (Refer to Figure-5) and explore the following areas:

1. Identify emerging competency demands required to deliver on the *Calgary in the New Economy* economic strategy.
2. Benchmark global "best in class" open learning systems.
3. Audit the existing Calgary learning system, including:
 - a. programming gaps and opportunities

- b. system-level interoperability
 - c. system-level governance
 - d. sustainability of current funding
4. Define a LearningCITY 2025 vision.
 5. Identify early adopter organizations and individuals in the city to rapidly begin open learning system experiments and share outcomes across the ecosystem.



6. Identify opportunities for increasing system-wide collaboration and programming between employers and educational institutions.
7. Recommend a comprehensive path forward, including policy, funding, measurements, and governance to deliver on the LearningCITY 2025 vision.
8. We propose that the task force be structured with five working groups to explore the five pillars (refer to Figure-7). These groups would receive support for extensive stakeholder engagement and benchmarking research through the **LearningCITY Lab**, an open collective of researchers and educators committed to evidence-based innovation in learning. The task force would submit a report to the community within 12 months. It's important to note that the task force should not become a barrier to concurrent innovation within the system.

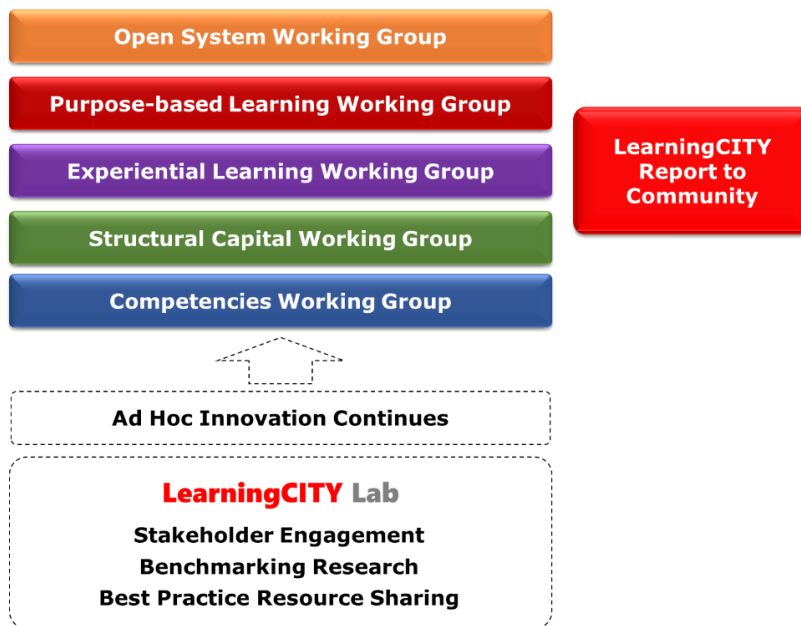


Figure-6: 12-month LearningCITY program



ENDNOTES

¹ Dede, C. (2018, October 19). *The 60 Year Curriculum: Developing New Educational Models to Serve the Agile Labor Market*.

² For an analysis of the CBEC process, please see Finch, D. J., Legg, D., O'Reilly, N., Wright, S., & Norton, B. (2020). A social capital view of an Olympic and Paralympic Games bid exploration process. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1-20.

