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Kinetic cities
The future of municipalities

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Imagine a city where permits are filed and granted at the click of button through a mobile app.



Imagine a city where office space is redistributed to accommodate in-person and virtual models of working.



Imagine a city government that is a highly desired employer, where staff feel empowered and find meaning in their work.

Welcome to a kinetic city.

The rise of cognitive and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has led to the development of smart cities, cities that use data and digital technology to enhance the quality of life of its residents, economic growth, and sustainability. At the same time, smart technologies and the Internet of Things (IoT) are affecting how work is done through human-machine collaboration.

The workplace has been evolving over the past couple of decades, with digital communication, collaboration platforms, and societal changes launching the rise of distributed and virtual teams. The acute impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these changes, leading organizational leaders to rethink their office spaces and virtual ways of working that may never have been considered had it not been for the crisis. These technological and societal shifts have, along with changing labour force demographics, also led to new workforce models.

Organizations, including municipalities, are realizing that younger employees are not as likely to commit an entire career to a single organization as previous generations had, and that employers' use of the gig economy has enabled outsourcing and crowdsourcing for talent. Furthermore, the pandemic has called into question the future of cities in terms of where and how people work. If the ways we've adapted are not fleeting but continue well into the future, cities will need to be nimbler to respond to changes to things like infrastructure, taxation, and services.

But there is a larger question here around the future workforce of municipalities: how can local government leaders convert these ongoing changes into a winning strategy while delivering on their commitments to their residents? They'll need to closely to examine the implications for the future of their work, their workplace, and their workforce. They'll have to consider how to align their employees and organizational culture to the challenges of the future. They'll also have to look at their own resiliency and ability to foster purpose, potential, and perspective throughout the organization.



Welcome to the kinetic city

Municipalities must do more than react to the emerging changes and challenges—they must plan, act intentionally, and actively respond. And they must do this now, because what we describe as the future of work is, in fact, already at the doorstep. To ensure their communities persevere through the volatility and thrive long into the future, municipal governments must become what we define as a kinetic city.

A kinetic city is one that optimizes how its employees interact with physical and digital solutions to deliver exceptional services to the residents of that city. It achieves this through modernized digital capabilities and an established technological ecosystem. While smart cities use modern technologies to collect and analyze data to make decisions, create policies, and manage resources, kinetic cities enable and empower their workforces to employ data and technology to make work more efficient and to serve residents by streamlining processes and maximizing accessibility.

Kinetic city workers do not merely use technology, and technology does not replace workers. Instead, the technology is “humanized”—to do this, workers collaborate with technology to exemplify distinctly human traits, such as critical thinking or empathy. The result is an



elevated employee experience, an engaged workforce, support for the person or people making data-driven decisions, operational efficiency, and resident-centricity, a system centred around meeting the needs of the residents.

The journey starts at the top, with municipal leaders actively guiding the transformation. They can consider how work is being done, what the optimal workplace environment is, and what workforce capabilities are required. They can be bold in developing and implementing ambitious digital, workforce and workplace strategies. As stewards of the public dollar, kinetic city leaders can ensure such transformation improves services, service delivery, and, ultimately, lives and livelihoods.

A kinetic city exists at the intersection of the future of work, workplace, and workforce. Honouring its commitments as a steward of the public dollar, it embraces the move toward enabling humans and technology to collaborate more effectively. Keeping the focus on its residents and services, the kinetic city optimizes the work environment to maximize the potential of its workers, empowering them with technology and tools to enable them to choose where and how work gets done. Being a public entity with obligations to fairness and transparency, the kinetic city recognizes capabilities across a broad range of talent, seeks to curate personalized and elevated experiences of all, and engages its employees to provide a superior experience for residents.



KINETIC CITY

Work transformation

Redesigning *work* allows us to create sustainable value for an organization by developing new work outcomes that are focused on making work more human and are enabled by the interconnection of work-related technologies.

The public sector has a reputation for moving more slowly in matters of change and innovation than private-sector companies. However, public-sector and government entities demonstrated during the pandemic that they can move quickly to adapt to virtual work, increased demand for remote service delivery, and extreme economic uncertainty. These changes set a precedent for how such organizations will operate beyond the crisis, including how and where work gets done, and how and what services are offered to residents. For municipal leaders, this means imagining what the job of the future could look like if it were more digital, contained less dull work, or allowed more time to serve residents. We then can work backward to determine what technology, structure, and skills are required to make that future job materialize.

The case for innovation and modernization

Being largely successful in adapting to the complexities of the pandemic to the benefit of both residents and governments has provided impetus for innovation within the public sector. Importantly, there's an opportunity to continue innovating at pace to achieve operational efficiency and effective service delivery. At its core, this is what a kinetic city is all about.

For instance, building digital infrastructure and modernizing technology can open avenues for improving and expanding resident services. Think about the implementation of a 311 mobile app for requesting services like pothole repairs; it reduces friction for residents thanks to its convenience and ease of use. Increasingly common in municipalities across Canada, the introduction of a 311 app in some cities resulted in a substantial increase of service requests,¹ illustrating how effective digital advancement can be for municipalities.

Now imagine how additional resident services can be improved through digital solutions. Think about permit applications, licence renewals, assessment inspections, public transportation pass purchases, and so on.² Modernizing digital capabilities to improve resident services like these can elevate the resident experience.

Modernization can also eliminate the time and resources spent by both residents and city staff on administrative tasks such as completing forms and other documentation, resulting in efficiencies.³ This highlights another feature of kinetic cities: efficiencies are not only realized through friction-reducing approaches to services, but can also be introduced through digital improvements to operational processes. Robotic process automation (RPA), for instance, allows employees to move from low-value manual tasks to high-value work. RPA can speed up procurement,⁴ reduce manual work in the finance function,⁵ and streamline human-resources processes.⁶

Becoming digital and data-driven

By growing their digital capabilities this way, municipalities will be future-proofing their organizations. They can also use the data gathered from a wide variety of sources to inform decisions and make evaluations on things like civic governance, capital and operational budgets, program development, and internal service delivery. For example, with the right data, the human resources (HR) function would be better equipped to deliver the right training to the right people and at the right time.

We can take a broader lesson here from the pandemic. Public-sector organizations are using real-time data to track and model the spread of the coronavirus, coordinate vaccine rollouts, and manage health care capacity—they're able to quickly assess a situation and pivot their response if necessary.⁷ Indeed, an advanced digital infrastructure can facilitate data-sharing at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels, increasing a city's ability to prepare, respond, adapt, and scale to improve resident services and optimize operational efficiency. This can be taken a step further for municipalities by expanding the possibilities for data analysis to include AI and machine learning, which would also help in building resilience against future uncertainties.

The digital capabilities described here may seem futuristic for many towns and cities. But they're available now, and they're inherent to kinetic cities. Capitalizing on them requires a digital mindset that seeks to reduce the sizable gap between the digital experiences that residents typically have with their local governments and the digital experiences they, as customers, already enjoy with their retailers or private service providers. Municipalities will also have to reskill and upskill their workforce to support digital literacy and digital ability, while also preparing for greater integration of human and machine within the work itself.

We call on municipalities to make their digital strategies a priority and adopt a roadmap for establishing robust digital capabilities. There are also tremendous opportunities for municipalities to collaborate, share, and potentially co-invest in the development of platform solutions.



A tale of two cities

In considering the potential future of municipalities, let's look at an example of how two relatively similar cities might fare in the face of real changes to the work, workforce, and workplace.

City A is traditional and takes a conservative approach to its operational practices. Leaders are comfortable in their functions and believe the focus should remain on keeping things status quo—bringing things back to normal is their goal when faced with disruption.

City B, on the other hand, is forward-looking and realizes its traditional practices regarding employee culture, resident needs, and technology must change. Leaders are eager to redefine the way they operate so they are better able to anticipate disruption and change, and optimize how they serve their residents.

We'll follow these two cities as we explore what the future of work will bring for municipalities.



KINETIC CITY

Workplace transformation

The workplace is where work used to get done, but work itself has now become more digitized and virtual so is more a mindset than a specific physical space. The purpose of the office is therefore shifting to become a driver of other organizational outcomes, an attractor of talent, and a representation of the organizational brand.

If the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated anything in the workplace, it was establishing remote work as the norm. Although at the time of this writing some organizations, including municipalities, have started to welcome workers back into offices, there's an ongoing conversation about continuing remote work indefinitely or establishing alternative workplace arrangements. The idea of the kinetic city thrusts municipalities into the middle of these conversations with the understanding that where employees work affects how they work, what they need to be productive and collaborative, and how office spaces will be used.

The adaptive workplace

Throughout the pandemic, employees have proven that they can be as productive working from home or other place of their choosing as they were when working within a shared office space.⁸ Moreover, some employees enjoy the option of working from anywhere they feel comfortable, along with the additional flexibility and control over when they work.⁹ Because of this, municipal governments are considering permanent remote work or hybrid policies. The kinetic city realizes the benefits of flexible work arrangements by implementing an adaptive workplace model.

The adaptive workplace seeks to unlock employee potential by encouraging people and teams to work where (and when) they are most engaged and most productive. Depending on the particular task, some may find they're more productive in a coffee shop, while others may prefer a boardroom setting or their living room. Indeed, with the adaptive workplace model, there isn't necessarily cause for employees to be in the same city, region, or even time zone, depending on the task. The adaptive workplace also provides leeway in working hours or days, again depending on the particular task. This enables flexible leave policies and other work arrangements that suit the needs and preferences of employees (e.g., in response to child care or elder care schedules).

Following from this evolution of work, the workplace transformation of the kinetic city introduces unprecedented opportunities for municipal governments. With the adaptive workplace model empowering employees and leading to more engagement and productivity,¹⁰ workers are more likely to stay and new talent is more likely to be attracted. Furthermore, the talent pool may significantly broaden if positions can be based in any geographic location. Importantly, the adaptive workplace model will position municipalities as employers of choice, enabling them to remain competitive with private-sector employers.

Enabling collaboration in many forms

One of the key factors in making the adaptive workplace a success is enabling employees to collaborate even when the team isn't all together in the same physical space. Therefore, adopting new tools and technologies to facilitate communication and collaboration is imperative—from effective virtual whiteboarding to seamless workshoping to casual virtual watercooler chats, the goal is to make it

as easy and convenient as possible for teams to work together and connect while fostering trust. This will also help with breaking down inter- and intra-governmental silos, by adding ease and convenience to communication and collaboration.¹¹

Part of the task will include preparing employees to be properly equipped for heightened virtual collaboration. Municipalities must be prepared to provide hardware such as laptops and mobile devices, offer stipends for technology upgrades or supportive services such as high-speed internet, and provide appropriate licensing for software subscriptions and fair use.

Municipalities must also be prepared to reimagine how their physical office space will be used. The space will need to be focused on connected collaboration and co-creation rather than shaped by individual desks or workstations. Imagine conference rooms equipped with large touch screens, cameras, microphones, and accessibility applications that allow in-office employees to easily connect with their remote team members and replicate in-person meetings or working sessions. This might sound like something that's only possible for private-sector organizations, but kinetic cities seek to be leaders in the public sector by providing the right tools and environments to enable an adaptive workplace.

What's more, outfitting employees and offices with advanced collaboration technologies will become necessary as resident trends and preferences lean further toward remote service delivery, requiring new channels and supporting digital infrastructure. Consider the example of virtual inspections. Or consider how a municipality might improve the experience for mayors, councillors, and residents during remote public meetings or town halls.

To make these successful endeavours would require the same tools and equipment that would make effective virtual collaboration possible. A kinetic city sees all this as parts of its technological ecosystem that serves both its residents and its employees and elected officials.

Of course, as municipalities are stewards of public dollars, their leaders will have to consider the costs of establishing such an ecosystem. With a sizable part of the workforce working remotely, some of their current physical office space will become redundant. Unneeded or unused office space may be reduced by eliminating dedicated offices and introducing hotelling or hot desking, in which employees reserve a desk or workspace a day (or less) at a time; if they work remotely one day, then that space can be used by another employee.

This reduces the office footprint and frees up opportunities to repurpose unused space or, if they own the real estate, to sell it off. Repurposing can mean renting or subletting, which would introduce a revenue stream to help offset the costs of equipping employees and retained office space with tools and technologies. It may even mean introducing new support for residents, such as converting surplus space into affordable housing for at-risk residents.



Let's check in with City A and City B

City A is still trying to adjust to getting back into the office as the pandemic eases. Although many of its employees asked for flexibility to work remotely, leadership thought it best to "return to normal" and bring workers back to the office. But instead of taking the opportunity to revitalize the office space around collaboration, social connections, and innovation, they left their office space pretty much as it was. Some employees decided to resign in favour of organizations that allow for flexible work arrangements. Furthermore, because leadership simply wanted to return to the way things were, no thought was put into using the pandemic situation as an opportunity to invest in its digital infrastructure to better support resident services. As a result, City A is seeing early signs that its residents are less engaged.

City B reassessed its workplace policy and strategy at the tail end of the pandemic, with its operational and HR leaders working together to develop an adaptive model. Responding to employee preferences, City B is seeing a trend of increased employee retention. Moreover, it seized an opportunity to expand its talent pool by recruiting from regions outside its municipal boundaries. Because of this initiative, City B was able to secure top talent for its new digital initiative branch, which grew from the development and adaption of an updated digital strategy. City B is now beginning to implement a robust digital infrastructure to support the digital capabilities needed for the adaptive workplace model, as well as the innovation of resident service delivery. It's still early days, but the signs are that both residents and employees are reacting positively.



KINETIC CITY

Workforce transformation

To address the needs of a changing workforce, municipalities must strive to provide opportunities for employees and leaders to continue their professional growth and adapt based on their potential rather than on their existing skill set or certification.

The journey to becoming a kinetic city is incomplete without a transformation of its workforce and leadership strategies. A kinetic workforce is one that humanizes technology while focusing on employee well-being, considers diversity and inclusion its central premise, and embraces a digital mindset while promoting resident-centricity.

Creating meaning in work

As one HR leader told us, “by impacting the lives of our employees, we’re impacting the lives of our citizens.” This idea is brought into perspective when we understand that the kinetic city is a social enterprise, which is “an organization that shoulders its responsibility to be a good citizen (both inside and outside the organization), serving as a role model for its peers and promoting a high degree of collaboration at every level of the organization.”¹² For municipalities, this means being good citizens for their residents (outside the organization) and for their employees (inside the organization).

Shifting labour force demographics combined with a greater sense of social responsibility has created a demand for organizations to be experience-focused and team-oriented.¹³ This trend points to the importance of creating meaning in work, and aligning the employee experience with the human experience. It is therefore incumbent upon municipal governments, as social enterprise leaders, to enable a so-called human-first organization that can understand and act on the moments that matter.

Developing human-first capabilities

Fostering a human-first organization requires first taking a hard look at the current culture of the organization and determining what it needs to be. Reaching that target state will include both appealing to the right talent and building the capacity of the current employees.

Attracting the right people starts with considering the skills and qualifications required for the positions that are available. Traditionally, these have centred on technical wherewithal. Having proficiency at building financial models, for example, used to be foundational for qualifying for a financial analyst position. But financial-modelling chops alone won’t contribute to the human experience within the role or within the team. Rather, skills like empathy and communication are needed to foster a human-first employee experience. This suggests that simply possessing technical skills, or merely being digitally literate, is not sufficient for the workforce of the future. Traditional hard skills and qualifications must be augmented by the so-called soft skills, ultimately representing the characteristics of people. The implications of this are made stark with remote work, where employees may have very limited physical interactions.



Building the capacity of current employees will also require a change in approach. The traditional objective of providing training to the workforce has been to improve the work being done. But an upskilled worker won't be productive if she isn't finding meaning at work or is caught up in a toxic work environment. The approach must be upended to create that meaning and an experience that fosters personal connection and purpose. Thus, the aim of establishing a human-first employee experience is to achieve a more effective, innovative, engaged, and productive workforce without forcing it.

Equally important for kinetic cities is empowering employees to prioritize their well-being and encouraging them to contribute to “flexible and responsive policies and practices that balance individual needs with those of the team and the organization.”¹⁴ Integrating well-being into work is an empty idea if it isn't defined by the people it's intended to serve.

Moreover, being good citizens within the organization requires leaders to demonstrate their own commitment by communicating what well-being means for them and how it can be integrated into their work, and being respectful of how their employees choose to do so. For example, if a leader is in the habit of sending emails outside the regular working hours of their staff, the staff will be left with the impression that reading and replying to the emails (and any attending work) is expected outside their regular working hours. A leader can signal a more mindful approach by making use of program settings to ensure emails are only sent during working hours.

Combining the importance of providing a human-first experience with the advances discussed in the adaptive workplace section, we can see that learning and development as an HR process should similarly evolve as part of a broader organizational strategy. Deploying virtual lessons is just the beginning—virtual reality and augmented reality, digitally enabled point-of-use and on-demand training, and real-time feedback are also possible.

Addressing systemic imbalances

Recent headlines about long-standing systemic imbalances in society have brought a variety of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) issues to the forefront. The importance of these, and remedial actions to resolve them, is undeniable. At its core, acknowledgement and corrective action is about building a foundation of trust between an organization's workers and its leaders. Kinetic cities would not be reactive—they would embrace a more inclusive and equity-centric approach in managing staff. This point was illustrated by one city manager we interviewed, who had a bold vision that the demographic make-up of the local government should mirror the demographic profile of the municipality it serves. The manager's vision is already being implemented to manage that city's talent acquisition and leadership recruitment activities. It may serve as a guide for other municipalities in thinking about DE&I and how to put thoughts into actions.

Redefining the relationship with unions

We've been discussing how a municipality can transform into a kinetic city through a robust digital strategy, an adaptable workplace model, and a humanized work culture. Yet some may feel constrained by labour relations and may not believe they can undertake the changes necessary to enable a transformation. And unions no doubt have many questions about such a process. We suggest, however, that a kinetic city has redefined its relationships with unions as part of the reimagining of its work, workplace, and workforce.

Unions exist to protect important worker rights. Yet the foundational content of collective agreements that spell out those rights was developed in the mid-20th century, long before the pervasiveness of technology and the current trends this paper has addressed. Before the turn of the latest century, jobs were typically defined in terms of a collection of tasks that needed to be completed within a given timeframe. This standard has radically shifted in recent years. As we've seen, technological advances and new ways of working have resulted in jobs becoming less static and less task-oriented. Automation is taking over mechanical work, and networks of teams have replaced reporting hierarchies. The result is that jobs are more fluid and dynamic, and workers bring or stretch their skills on specific projects or teams. Consequently, jobs require more than performing fixed tasks with a fixed skill set.

What's even more interesting: not only do workers have to be flexible in what they do and how they perform, they want it that way. While they're expected to apply broad-yet-integrated capabilities to meet emerging demands, we're seeing a trend where workers are eager to gain these broad and integrated skills to

develop their potential as professionals. Gone are the days where an employee is satisfied with a job defined by a fixed set of tasks. Increasingly, they're looking for opportunities to take on new roles and have new responsibilities, which will eventually result in extending their experience in an increasingly fast-changing labour market.

In other Deloitte publications, we urge employers to provide their employees with such opportunities for professional growth.¹⁵ But it's difficult to urge municipalities in the same way because they typically have a heavily unionized environment. Requiring, or even encouraging, unionized employees to continually shift in their roles and responsibilities presents a host of labour relations challenges, as does stretch roles for non-unionized or partnership employees when they encroach on unionized roles and responsibilities.

In one of our interviews with a municipal labour relations officer, we heard that these challenges are exacerbated by a growing, eager portion of the workforce asking for opportunities to take on new roles and responsibilities. Unionized staff are often disappointed to hear the limitations on such opportunities due to constraints in collective agreements, and some feel they must leave the organization to achieve their developmental goals. This of course adds to the difficulty of retaining talent. Our present point, however, is that municipalities are in a challenging predicament given that current work and workforce trends are at odds with their unionized environments. This impacts their ability to deliver and improve resident services.

We still urge municipalities to provide their employees with growth opportunities, but with an additional recommendation: to reimagine their relationship with their unions. Engaging unions as partner organizations that jointly have the employees' best interests in mind is one way to proceed. In this reconceived relationship, HR and labour relations officers would work closely with union heads to redefine collective agreements in terms of skills-based positions rather than task-based jobs. The idea of security transitions from being about keeping one's job to maintaining the right skill set. This will give employees flexibility to advance toward their development goals by taking on different roles and responsibilities, and it will allow municipalities to keep pace with current workforce trends and remain competitive as an employer. Involving unions in conversations about the future of work will invite an environment of co-creation, an opportunity for unions to help shape the future for unionized employees.

A workforce with ample opportunity to advance professional development skills combined with a modern conception of collective agreements would put municipalities on a similar playing field as non-unionized employers to support the development and delivery of relevant resident programs and services.



Enabling municipal leadership

The recent Deloitte publication Future-proofing cities in a post-pandemic world outlined how cities can build resiliency in different areas by focusing on four key capabilities: nimbleness, scalability, stability, and optionality.¹⁶ Though much more can be said of these, we'll focus here on the characteristics necessary to future-proof municipal leaders.

As work, the workforce, and the workplace rapidly evolve, and as the future remains more uncertain than usual due to the pandemic, leaders must:

- **Be bold and develop** new traits and behaviours that can facilitate the growth and development of employees
- **Embrace a new mindset** to derive value in partnership with technology
- **Execute solutions** for positive business and resident results

To achieve this, we emphasize a set of four CARE characteristics municipal leaders must embody.



Courage

Difficult decisions will have to be made, and boundaries will have to be pushed. Leaders must not only drive but sustain focus on the human experience, implement the right recruitment policies, reinvent labour relations, and seek out the right partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. This means:

- Being willing to take the first steps in advocating and enacting change
- Having the endurance to carry out long-term plans
- Maintaining accountability to their commitments
- Encouraging others to tackle challenges head-on
- Being provocative and challenging the status quo¹⁷
- Being confident in responding to the needs of residents and the demands of city council



Agility

To ensure their municipality's use of technology is providing long-term value while meeting resident needs, municipal leaders must possess agility to respond, behave, and lead appropriately to anticipate future needs in an ambiguous present. Being agile means:

- Embracing uncertainty in radically fluctuating environments
- Being comfortable with discomfort
- Adapting to different situations as they arise
- Adopting a fail-fast/learn-fast mindset for themselves and their teams



Resiliency

The future of work is being shaped by crises and disruption created by technological advances, political turmoil, and natural disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide stability and encouragement to their teams and organizations, municipal leaders must be resilient. This entails:¹⁸

- Being genuinely empathetic of the stresses employees, residents, and the community may be feeling
- Having the ability to stabilize the organization to meet the crisis at hand while finding the opportunities the emergency creates
- Taking decisive action based on imperfect or incomplete information
- Being transparent about current realities—including stating what they don't know—while also painting a compelling picture of the future that inspires others to persevere



Empowerment

The future of work will be different, so municipal leaders must enable their teams to work differently. This is especially important when it comes to elevating the employee experience and reimagining the partnership with unions. An empowering leader:

- Builds trusting relationships with their employees, in which they trust their employees to get work done and provide value to the business while the employees trust them to do the right thing
- Adopts a growth mindset
- Enables teams to be innovative, providing resources and support for new ways of working
- Encourages everyone to bring their whole selves to work, by ensuring the application of diversity, equity, and inclusion measures



Making the choice

The future of work is here. The changes to the work, workplace, and workforce that we've been discussing in this paper are not what municipalities need to address in the coming years—they are changes that are unfolding now.

Technology will continue to advance, and we will have to keep pace in redefining work to maintain a human-first experience for employees. Further, as we emerge from the pandemic, leaders will need to continue to rethink where and how work is done to maximize the potential of employees, improve services to residents, and amplify value for money. Municipalities are not immune to this.

Municipal leaders have a choice: they can either stay the traditional course and respond to the fundamental changes we're already seeing in real time, or they can act now to shape a better future for their employees, their organization, and the residents they serve. As our "tale of two cities" example demonstrates, the outcomes of these two options are very different.

We encourage leaders to be courageous, agile, resilient, and empowering to aim for a more prosperous future for their employees and residents alike.

Let the rise of the kinetic city begin.



Endnotes

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