

# Productivity ALBERTA

Collaboration Innovation Transformation



## The Time Is Now

Changing markets mean Alberta businesses need to increase their productivity in order to compete provincially, nationally and internationally

**A**lberta businesses have always been at the forefront of industrial innovation and productivity in Canada and abroad. Alberta's productivity has led the country for years. But the number that matters – Alberta's productivity growth rate – has faltered, while the growth rate of national and international competitors has accelerated.

But this is changing as Productivity Alberta helps organizations find ways to do business better. By gathering diverse tools and resources in one convenient portal, Productivity Alberta can help create a tailored productivity plan that is right for your business.

Many of these tools and resources are available at [ProductivityAlberta.ca](http://ProductivityAlberta.ca), where organizations can find the most up-to-date information on best-practices and strategies. There are also self-assessment tools to help businesses compare their productivity growth year-over-year, and to help businesses compare themselves to other global benchmarks.

Going beyond the information collected on the website, the staff

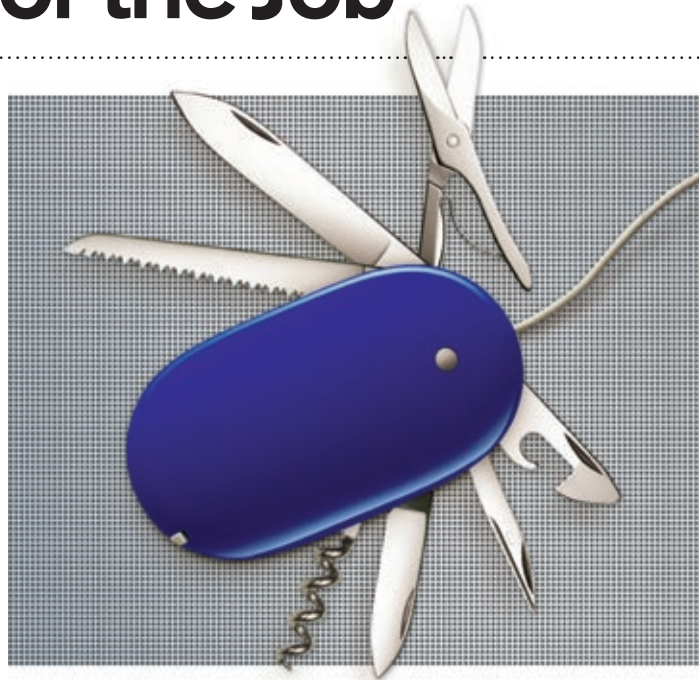
members at Productivity Alberta are ready to help organizations take the often challenging first steps towards building a better, more productive business, says Productivity Alberta senior director Lori Schmidt.

"Many companies that want to improve their productivity, or their competitiveness, have said to us, 'we have no idea where to start,'" says Schmidt. "We want to help by guiding businesses towards the resources that are right for them as they take that next step."

Many Alberta businesses are already reaping the benefits of productivity. With economic recovery and growth predicted in 2010, other organizations are well-positioned to take those first steps now to improve upon existing processes. Increasingly, productivity is becoming part of the overall approach to business in Alberta. It's an approach that will help to position Alberta as one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world in the years to come.

# The Right Tool for the Job

Workplace assessments and productivity planning have already helped hundreds of small- and medium-sized Alberta businesses begin their journeys to increased productivity



**A**s the senior director of Productivity Alberta, Lori Schmidt often hears skewed and outdated notions of what it means when a business looks for ways to get more productive.

Cutbacks. Pink slips. Longer hours. Less pay.

But nothing could be further from the truth. “Productivity doesn’t mean working people harder, or laying people off, and I think that’s really a critical piece,” Schmidt says. “There are lots of things that can be done within organizations in their processes that can really enhance a company and allow people to work smarter and be more engaged.”

It’s here, in the little day-to-day processes, that Alberta businesses have the greatest opportunity to fine-tune their operations and increase the bottom line. It’s also where Productivity Alberta comes in – to help businesses find these efficiencies and become their best.

The journey to productivity has already begun for many Alberta businesses. In the last few years, the Productivity Alberta team has conducted more than 350 on-site productivity assessments for small- and medium-sized private organizations, as well as additional assessments in the health sector in both hospitals and extended care facilities.

During an assessment, a team of professional engineers does a walk-through of a business, and then provides a report with specific feedback about potential areas for productivity improvement within the organization.

Depending on the extent of the recommendations, the

Productivity Alberta team sometimes helps the business implement a productivity plan, but it often connects businesses to a range of services, including private consultants and other business associations.

The initial assessments are available to small- and medium-sized businesses in the producing sector. Schmidt says the audits have already been useful for a diverse range of producers, and there are many more in the province that could benefit from upping their performance. “We work with the broadest range of manufacturing,” Schmidt says. “It could be anything from agri-food companies, to aerospace companies, to metal manufacturing, to equipment manufactures, and it could even be pharmaceutical manufacturers.”

The productivity assessments are targeted to aid businesses with fewer than 100 employees. It’s in these small- and medium-sized businesses that there is often the greatest opportunity for increased productivity.

“Where the real challenge comes is in the small- and medium-sized businesses as they try to grow and expand and look for new markets,” Schmidt says. “That’s generally where some of the resources are needed, to take them to that next level.”

These productivity tools aren’t restricted to businesses in, or near, the large city centres. Productivity Alberta partners with Regional Economic Development Alliance offices to meet the needs of rural regions. Resources are accessible in Calgary and Edmonton, but also in the northern Peace Country, the southern Prairies, and everywhere in between.

## PUTTING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT IN PLACE

- 1) Schedule an on-site assessment with a Productivity Alberta process improvement specialist. These professional engineers have decades of experience working with Alberta organizations to help find productivity gains.
- 2) Undergo an on-site assessment. This includes meeting with plant management, walking through the facility with the plant/production manager and a closing meeting.
- 3) Review the report of recommendations prepared by the process improvement specialist.
- 4) Implement your chosen recommendations, using a process improvement specialist, or another external consultant as a guide.

Part of the strength of Productivity Alberta is the leadership team guiding it. An advisory committee comprised of industry experts provides its best advice about the services and knowledge that Alberta businesses need. This means Productivity Alberta is guided by advice from company CEOs and presidents who have already benefitted from upping their own productivity.

These experts know the journey to productivity is intimidating at first, but they also know that if Alberta businesses are to grow and succeed in a global market, they need to get more productive.

**“Sometimes you’re so busy in the trenches, that it’s difficult to pick your head up and say, ‘Maybe I should be looking for a better way to do things.’” – Ray Mills, Kudu Industries CEO**

Ray Mills, CEO of Kudu Industries, a Calgary pipe manufacturing company, began focusing on his productivity in 1999 after what he calls a “near-death experience” in his business. A slight downturn in the oil and gas industry left the growing business at a crossroads where better management principals and new markets were required to keep the business on-track. After implementing a lean manufacturing model, Mills is sold on productivity principals and he sits on the Productivity Alberta advisory committee to aid other businesses.

Mills says the new Productivity Alberta website is a good place to start looking for resources. “It’s a great place to source

information, or even to begin to learn about what’s available out there,” Mills says. “I find a lot of people don’t know where to start.”

Mills says the website is an ideal tool to begin researching better business practices. From there, he says, it might be time to pick up the phone and get an outside viewpoint from an organization like Productivity Alberta.

“I think the biggest challenge, really, comes with business owners and managers themselves,” Mills says. “Quite often, people think they are doing everything they can, and it’s oftentimes more difficult for them to go out and ask for help. Sometimes you’re so busy in the trenches, that it’s difficult to pick your head up and say, ‘maybe I should be looking for a better way to do things.’”

Fellow Productivity Alberta advisor Paul Verhesen, president of Clark Builders, says that productivity resources exist, but the challenge often comes when businesses want to access them. This, he says, is where Productivity Alberta can help.

“Rather than re-inventing the wheel each time, Productivity Alberta is meant to be an information source to go to, to see what others have done, or what they are doing, or research that they have identified,” Verhesen says. “It’s really there to help all Alberta businesses.”

# Web Ready

## The journey to better business begins at productivityalberta.ca

**P**roductivity Alberta is kicking off the new decade with an online tool kit to help Alberta businesses work smarter in 2010 and beyond.

ProductivityAlberta.ca is a one-stop resource for all things productivity in Alberta. It's the place to begin for businesses that are pondering productivity for the first time, or ones that are looking to improve upon an existing productivity framework.

Productivity Alberta is particularly proud of its online Productivity Assessment Tool, which can help a business measure where it is today, and determine where it wants to be tomorrow. The tool was developed in collaboration with Edmonton-based productivity expert Gary Loblick. As founder of the Edmonton-based Winslow Group, Loblick and his company have advised businesses on productivity and lean manufacturing principles for the last 30 years, in Alberta and globally.

The assessment tool asks business leaders to answer a series of questions about their company that examine the three key elements that drive productivity: leadership and management, innovation, and operational practices. "This really drives some self-analytics," Loblick says.

There are two versions of the assessment tool. The most in-depth version is the best place to start for an initial overview of potential improvement areas. The shorter version takes about half an hour and is designed to be used quarterly to ensure the larger plan remains on-track.

Users can create a confidential log-in to access previous assessment tool results, in order to measure productivity gains quarterly and year-over-year.

Though the initial full-length assessment tool takes about two hours to complete, the time is well-spent. "If you don't know where you're at, how do you know how good you are and where you need to improve?" Loblick asks.

Loblick says the initial stages of productivity self-assessment

### Find it at ProductivityAlberta.ca

- Productivity Assessment Tool
- On-site productivity assessment information
- Case studies from successful businesses
- Video interviews with business leaders
- Calendar of upcoming productivity events
- Contacts for Productivity Alberta staff

are usually eye-opening for businesses who haven't given productivity much thought in the past. "Plain and simple, most businesses think they are much, much better than what they actually are," he says. "The most forward-thinking operations are the ones that believe that they could be an awful lot better in that continuous pursuit of excellence."

In addition to the Productivity Assessment Tool, ProductivityAlberta.ca also combines multiple resources in one place, says Productivity Alberta senior director Lori Schmidt.

"There are lots of different things that are out there, but helping companies find and navigate what they need, when they need it, is really the key," Schmidt says. "This is meant to be a connection point, where we're working with other government departments, associations, and many organizations that offer different services to assist companies with their productivity. We're bringing it under one umbrella."

**Government  
of Alberta**

**Alberta Finance and Enterprise**  
5th Floor Commerce Place  
10155 – 102 Street NW  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L6

T: 780-427-6648  
F: 780-422-2091  
productivity.alberta@gov.ab.ca  
www.productivityalberta.ca