

Addendum: This is a Call to Action.¹

(Supplementary to the submission titled ‘Lean:
The Measurably Efficient Musical’)

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Lean: The Measurably Efficient Musical offers a satirical take on Lean, a series of management programs and policies adopted across ministries by the Saskatchewan government. While the specific policies that inspired the musical are located in Saskatchewan, the implications are global; Lean is but one of multiple incarnations of the Toyota Production System and New Public Management (NPM). Under NPM, governments transform their public sectors into simulated and competitive quasi-corporate sectors by transposing private-sector-derived accounting, management, and production technologies (Ward 2012) regardless of how inappropriate and deleterious these may be to the sector’s traditional mission (Parker 2011). The widespread global adoption of NPM in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is one of the most significant developments of our time (Lapsley 2009; Ward 2012). NPM methods or, as Lapsley labels them, “the cruellest invention of the human spirit” (1), have been “...exemplified in countries including Australia, Canada, Eastern European countries, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, the UK and the USA” (Parker 2011:437).

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Academics, civil servants, and public service users alike have reached a “triple M” crisis of *market*, *managerialism*, and *measurement*. The various streams of globalized neoliberal ethos, the incremental creep of audit culture, and NPM technologies of governance have now formed a powerful confluence that is restructuring entire societies (Power 1994; Shore 2008). Audits find their origin in the world of accountancy, financial regulation, and verification (Shore 2008). But since the 1990s, audits have extended their reach to realms where they once never existed, and now permeate most aspects of our lives. There are environmental audits, computer audits, teaching audits, government audits, health audits, risk management audits, and so on (Apple 2007; Shore 2008). Alarming, the “...financial audit appears to have mutated and spread not only across professions, but also across continents, from the UK and North America to Brazil, Australasia and continental Europe” (Brenneis, Shore and Wright 2005: 7). Shore (2008) elaborates, “a key characteristic of the audit process is that it actively transforms the environments into which it is introduced—often with dire, unforeseen consequences” (281). Indeed, the audit process can be likened to genetically-modifying an organism by forcibly inserting foreign DNA into it. The foreign DNA modifies the host organism, to be sure, but also alters the host’s very nature with unpredictable results.



The children gather for value-added assessment time.
Photo by Eagleclaw Thom.

Saskatchewan's provincial government has adopted the DNA of the Toyota Production System model, or Lean, described in *The Toyota Way to Healthcare Excellence* (Black 2008). Accompanied by high-priced consultancy contracts, Lean's financial costs have been the subject of much debate in the legislature and the press (for example, see Smith 2015). However, little has been said about the social costs. Drawing on Laspley's (2009) aforementioned observation, *Lean: The Measurably Efficient Musical* explores the impact of New Public Management/Lean on interpersonal relationships and the human soul. The setting is an elementary school, a sector that has become important terrain for Lean management theorizing in everything from market-friendly school architecture to standardized testing (Price Waterhouse Cooper 2014). The musical's locations include the walk to school, the classroom, the staff room, and finally, the playground.

In the context of elementary school education, Lean management manifests itself within a wider paradigm that seeks standardization, deprofessionalization, depersonalization, and centralization of power, surveillance, and control. Under such circumstances, attention naturally shifts from the whole child to the expanding needs of bureaucracies (Miller 1993). This shift can be traced back to early 19th century efforts to "modernize" curriculum by harnessing it to the needs of the state and the marketplace (DeYoung and Howley 1990). The trend was greatly accelerated under neoliberalism with the introduction of education management concepts derived from the management-speak of Japanese auto manufacturers (Zangwill and Kantor 1988). In Saskatchewan, this was formally introduced via the Ministry of Education's Continuous Improvement Framework, which mandated complex reporting regimes and "accountability conferences" to track provincial core indicators, a process that has since been replaced by annual strategic plans that are similarly data-heavy in orientation (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2011).

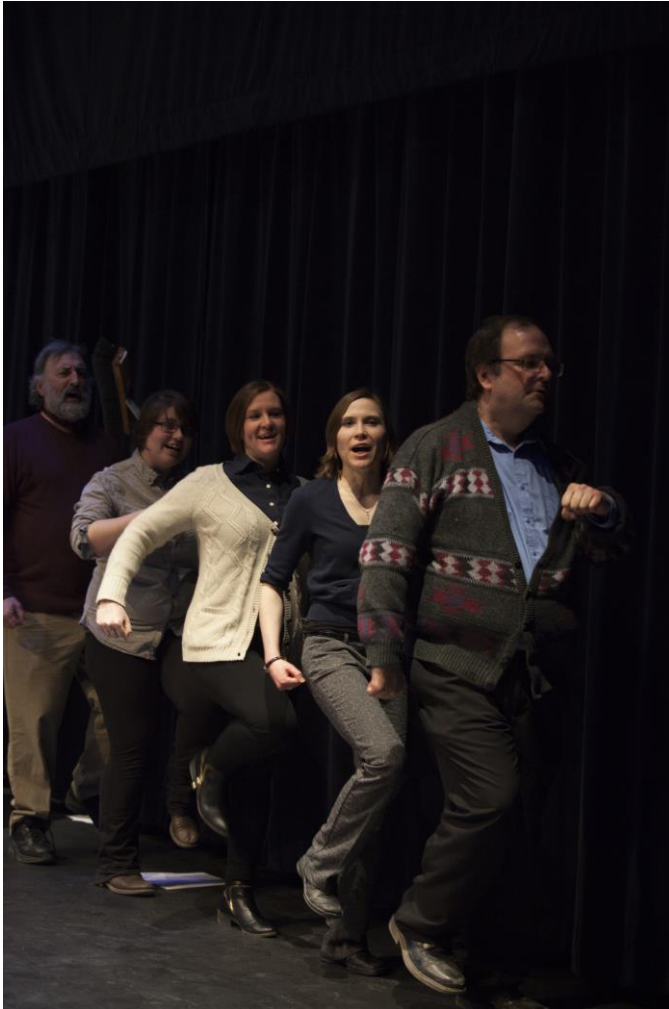
As schooling becomes the prerogative of the state and the market, allegiance to a local school, a connection to one's teacher, or simply to have free time to horse around "appear as merely sentimental anachronisms" (DeYoung and Howley 1990:76). Meanwhile, the playground remains as a small gap between the surveilling eyes of home and school, a netherland that appears dangerous and unpredictable to systems of control. In her

memoir *Nobody Cries at Bingo*, Dawn Dumont (2011) describes a tight-lipped white teacher marching across the playground toward “us—the Native kids” (119), who have been spied pummeling each other. After the teacher leaves,

We laughed until our guts were sore. We laughed ... because we were still separate and wild. We laughed because they could not touch us with their rules, not out here on the playground. We laughed because they had everything else, but we had the best games. Scary, dangerous and violent games—but ours. (120)

It is not surprising that such uncontrolled territory would be a target for efficiency models. A letter to parents from the Regina Public Schools presents the replacement of recess with “classroom breaks (such as brain breaks) in a regulated setting” as a means “to maximize instructional time and time on task” (Fladager 2015). The language of Time-on-Task (ToT) relates to “takt time,” derived from the German *taktzeit* and defined as “the necessary pace or beat of the work in order to meet ... demand” (Health Shared Services Saskatchewan 2014). In an educational setting, ToT refers to increased curriculum-based instruction time. Its emphasis assumes other uses of time do not significantly benefit student learning, although Kohn (2006) observes there is evidence ToT in fact ranks lower than other factors impacting student achievement, except in cases where rote learning is required.

Kohn (2006) notes that ToT’s ultimate concern is to quantitatively manage student behaviour. In this vein, the letter to parents states that 30 minutes spent daily transitioning students between playground and classroom would be regained, along with “hundreds of minutes” lost to managing student behaviour (Fladager 2015). It is not surprising that these concerns were exclusively targeted toward Regina’s inner city community schools, in both the Catholic and public systems.² This corresponds with a study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Pediatrics*, which found children without recess were significantly more likely to be Black or Hispanic, and to come from low-income homes (Barros, Silver, and Stein 2009). The researchers partly attributed this trend to the pressure of the “No Child Left Behind”³ policy. Schools in socially and economically challenged neighbourhoods eliminated recreation time in their struggle to meet rigid new test standards and efficiency demands. It’s fitting, then, that in the final



School staff march to 'The Call of the Kaizan.'

Photo by Eagleclaw Thom.

act of the musical *Lean*, the efficiency model should unravel on the playground, at the hands of unruly children. If public services are today's factory floor, the creative, chaotic energy of children remains a spanner in the works.

The musical was developed for community-based amateur theatre, and written so that it could be easily reproduced.

Its conception followed the tradition of single-authored theatre for social criticism, but with some aspects of popular and community-based theatre, under the general umbrella of Applied Theatre, i.e., theatre with a pedagogical/social change mission (Prendergast and Saxton 2009).

The author was informed by anecdotes shared by frontline civil servants, while the cast and crew breathed life into the script and its presentation, editing and adding lines based on their own experiences and perspectives. The musical's [debut](#) was presented at the University of

Regina on March 20 and 21, 2016, to sold-out audiences. Cast members included elementary and secondary students, educators, and community activists. The printed program included [an insert](#) about New Public Management, which was also posted on the Web, along with links to [classroom lesson plans](#) on Taylorism and a [Q & A](#) with the author. Audience members reflected a wide range of citizens, such as public servants, students, educators, labour leaders, and theatre fans. A group of volunteers who had undergone a Lean process were invited to ‘Lean up’ the production. Adapting copies of exercises obtained from actual Lean workshops, the volunteers measured and critiques audience members’ walking strides, discouraged “wasteful” socializing in the lobby, and peppered theatre-goers with complicated process-related questions, asking them to rank various aspects of their experience during the journey to their seats. This had the effect of revealing that excessive auditing in fact slowed down and confused the act of entering a theatre, revealed in a satirical white-boarded evaluation report presented before the start of the play.



Working out script suggestions.
Photo by Eagleclaw, Tom.

Thus the process of creating and presenting *Lean* was a means to exchange and present knowledge about workplace trends. By adopting community theatre as a means to explore New Public Management, *Lean: The Measurably Efficient Musical* rows against the current of what academics have been lately trained to regard as acceptable scholarship. To the extent that one believes institutions of higher learning hold the *potential* to disrupt existing hierarchies and inequitable power structures and the *possibility* to create spaces that welcome and foster alternative ways of knowing and being, then here is a canary's message.

Current global trends indicate a time of exciting possibility as social justice (Lincoln and Denzin 2011) and community-engaged (Hall, in press; Lepore 2015), participatory (Reason and Bradbury 2007), decolonising, place-based and Indigenous epistemologies (Tuck and McKenzie 2015), as well as alternative forms of research production, output, and dissemination (Gelmon, Jordan and Seifer 2013; Spooner 2015) continue to assert their inherent legitimacy in an academic landscape that is increasingly called upon to feature praxis (Guba and Lincoln 2005) and relationally oriented research outcomes (Lincoln 1995; Tuck and McKenzie 2015). Indeed, what counts as an acceptable form and “product” or “output” of our scholarship must continue to be contested, disrupted, and broadened to include artefacts well beyond the scope of traditional peer-reviewed journal articles and impact factor measures, if the academy is to resume meaningfully transacting with our communities and our collective and critical methodological imagination. We must vociferously resist audit culture, NPM, Lean, or any other forms of governmentality that seek to reduce the creative human spirit to standardized widgets for zombie production lines. Make no mistake, this is a call out: The current audit culture moment demands our immediate attention and collective action.

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Endnotes

¹ Portions of this article are based on Spooner, M. (in press). "Qualitative Research and Global Audit Culture: The Politics of Productivity, Accountability, and Possibility." In N.K. Denzin Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

² Saskatchewan has a publicly funded separate school system under the Saskatchewan Act, which allows a Catholic or Protestant minority in any given jurisdiction to separately deliver publicly funded education.

³ “No Child Left Behind” was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002 as an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Through threat of withholding funds for non-compliance, its intent was to hold schools accountable for student achievement. The Act has been heavily critiqued for its over-reliance on standardized testing, which has been found to be deleterious to student learning and intended educational goals.