Calls for Change: Seeing Cancel Culture from a Multi-Level Perspective

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Abstract: Transition Design offers a framework and employs an array of tools to engage with complexity. "Cancel culture" is a complex phenomenon that presents an opportunity for administrators in higher education to draw from the Transition Design approach in framing and responding to this trend. Faculty accused of or caught using racist, sexist, or homophobic speech are increasingly met with calls to lose their positions, titles, or other professional opportunities. Such calls for cancellation arise from discreet social networks organized around an identified lack of accountability for social transgressions carried out in the professional school environment. Much of the existing discourse on cancel culture involves whether the phenomenon represents a net positive or negative. This narrow, for-or-against cancel culture frame is reductive, preempting inquiry into where the phenomenon is situated in the dynamics that facilitate and inhibit change. Exploring cancel culture from a Transition Design perspective broadens the range of potential administrative responses from either resistance or acquiescence to experimentation and co-creation.

This paper uses a multi-level perspective (MLP), one of the tools of Transition Design, to define call-outs and cancellations of faculty as niche-level innovations in access to institutional accountability and collective empowerment. From this perspective, the rise of cancel calls signals: (1) deficits in the regime-level norm of academic freedom; and (2) shifts involving identity politics at the landscape level. Recasting these calls as "innovations" creates an opportunity for higher education administrators to experiment by proactively piloting structural, co-created changes to accountability systems. Embracing the MLP framework centers the context from which cancel calls emerge, orients solutions toward concerns at the root of these calls, and contributes to the recognition of Transition Design as a practical field of study.

Keywords: Cancel culture - Call-outs - Cancellation - Multilevel perspective analysis - Higher education

[Abstracts in spanish and portuguese at pages 101-102]

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Introduction

Transition Design offers a framework for engaging with complexity and is informed by the understanding that while there is no single template for responding to complex, "wicked" problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973), "small intentional changes in the present…can radically shift a society's transition trajectory and make a big difference in where it ends up in the future" (Irwin & Kossoff, 2021a). Cancel culture is a complex phenomenon that presents an opportunity for problem solving that draws from Transition Design approaches in framing and responding to this trend. The term cancel culture describes the performance and the repercussions of "cancel calls", which are demands made through collective, semi-anonymous speech. There are many theories on the origins of cancel culture. Manavis (2020) posited that the catchphrase, "you're cancelled" was, "created by teens who rescinded their support for problematic celebrities." Romano (2020) located the first pop-culture reference to cancelling someone in a line from the 1991 film New Jack City, and argued that the idea entered the social imagination from there. Cancel calls are triggered by the identification of transgressive conduct. Those aggrieved by the conduct connect themselves, formally or informally, into a social network. This network then communicates with or issues a "call" to an individual or entity that confers power or resources to the transgressor. These calls seek to terminate or restrict the transgressor's access to power on the basis of the identified conduct. When these calls are successful, the transgressor has been "cancelled".

Some authors see cancel culture as not new but as a permutation of prior forms of expressing communal dissent (Manavis, 2020; Romano, 2020). Cancellations, like shunning, or retaliatory loss of status, may not represent a truly new form of social accountability. Government authority has been used to make pariahs of communists and civil rights leaders. "Cool" kids have ostracized "geeks". What may be unique in this present moment is the status of the parties wielding power through exclusion. Cancel culture tends to represent the organization of the disenfranchised –the historically left-out– exerting power against those who are used to having it. Thus, the innovation in the growth and spread of cancel culture may be the attempt to use "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1983).

The emergence of cancel culture has been controversial, in large part, due to its challenge to institutional forms of accountability (Manavis, 2020). In the United States, undergraduate and graduate school faculty accused of or caught using racist, sexist, or homophobic speech are increasingly met with cancel calls: to lose their positions, titles, or other opportunities affiliated with their professional status (Wendel, 2021). Calls for cancelation generate pressure, if not sanctions, for failure to comport in the manner expected by the group seeking it. As a result, norms involving academic freedom, faculty conduct, and the power dynamic between students and school leaders have become the subject of an increasingly public-facing critique. As such calls rise in frequency, are organized by increasingly more sophisticated social networks, and are catalyzed by media coverage, cancel culture is produced and reproduced from the novel idea that one can no longer "get away" with saying or doing certain things that were once tolerated, accepted, or ignored.

The existing discourse on cancel culture typically involves whether the phenomenon represents a net positive or negative (Alexander, 2020; Romano, 2020). When cast as "attempts to ostracize someone for violating social norms", the resulting critique often focuses on whether cancel culture itself is helpful or harmful (Norris, 2020). As one journalist described it, "one person's online mob is another person's vehicle to hold someone accountable" (Lizza, 2020). Focusing on whether cancel culture is "good" or "bad" limits the discourse to value-based assessments of this trend. It creates a false binary that pits the presence of cancel culture as a problem against the emergence of cancel culture as a solution to a problem. Moreover, such complex, "wicked" problems cannot be sustainably addressed from a reductionist posture (Irwin & Kossoff, 2021a). If cancel culture is only either good or bad, institutions may feel constricted to respond only in one of two ways: resist or acquiesce. Exploring cancel culture through the Transition Design framework broadens the inquiry in to the function of cancel culture –that is, to the structural causes of the phenomena. Ultimately, this approach opens the range of potential administrative responses to include experimenting with proactive, co-created systems of accountability. One of the tools of Transition Design involves using a multi-level perspective (MLP) (Irwin & Kossoff, 2021b). Conceptualized by Geels (2005), "the MLP is usually used for historic case studies of socio-technical change and not to explain or to predict ex ante developments in specific socio-technical arenas" (Kern, 2012). However, it has been used to describe and analyze complex, long-term processes as well as develop and assess public policy (Kern, 2012). Among the four pillars of the Transition Design approach, the MLP is recognized as a tool for formulating theories of change (Irwin, 2020). This framework casts change as emerging from a process of oscillation between innovation and adoption within three ideological dynamics carried out over time. Adapting this framework to the challenge of designing in ways that account for social complexity is useful in "identifying both intractable, entrenched areas within the system and opportunities for disruption … and … can inform strategies for more powerful interventions aimed at exponential change …" (Irwin & Kossoff, 2021b).

This essay applies an MLP analysis to the emergence of cancel culture within institutions of higher education in the United States. This essay argues that, from an MLP perspective, call-outs and cancellations of faculty can be understood as niche-level innovations in access to institutional accountability and in new forms of collective empowerment. Further, cancel culture signals the presence of deficits in the regime-level status quo of academic freedom within higher education and shifts at the landscape level involving identity politics. Recasting calls for cancellation as innovations invites faculty and higher education administrators to respond to this emergent behavior through experimentation and co-creation, rather than choosing to either fight it or succumb. Such responses must address the need for transparency and inclusion, latent in many cancel calls, in partnership with affected stakeholders. Moreover, by applying the MLP framework to instances of attempted and effective cancellations in the U.S. system of higher education, this essay focuses the conversation on what the phenomenon signals within the arc of societal transition, rather than on whether or not it should exist. Change is inevitable, yet the promise of Transition Design lies in identifying opportunities to structure and design that transformation. Drawing from the structural context that the MLP provides, this essay concludes

with recommendations for responding to the unmet need for engagement, transparency, and inclusion at the core of many calls for cancellation. Embracing Transition Design approaches like MLP centers the context from which cancel calls emerge, orients solutions toward concerns at the root of these calls, and contributes to the recognition of Transition Design as a practical field of study.

Cancel Culture and the Current Critique

In the United States, institutions of higher education are sites where cancel culture is frequently observed. In April 2018, a DePaul University law professor who used the N-word had his class cancelled after students filed a complaint (Fisher, 2018). In February 2021, a University of Illinois-Chicago law professor included the redacted use of the N-word on an exam (Zeisloft, 2021), after which a petition, signed by over 400 individuals, demanded that the professor step down from all of his committee appointments. Ultimately, his classes were cancelled, and he was put on administrative leave for several weeks. In March 2021, a Georgetown University law professor was terminated following a petition started by the school's Black Law Students' Association calling for her removal. This call was informed by a video recording, in which the professor, as part of a discussion about patterns in class participation, says "I hate to say this. I end up having this angst every semester that a lot of my lower ones are Blacks…Happens almost every semester. And it's like, 'Oh, come on.' You get some really good ones, but there are also usually some that are just plain at the bottom. It drives me crazy" (Lumpkin, 2021). The colleague with whom she had the discussion (and who was arguably complicit in his failure to contradict her) was placed on leave. That same month, calls for cancellation were raised by protesters, organized by the Korean American Society of Massachusetts, seeking the resignation of a Harvard professor who published a paper titled "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War," which dismissed decades of testimony by women describing the circumstances of their involvement in sex trafficking and "detailing coercion, enslavement and brutal rapes that could happen multiple times a day" (Branigin, 2021).

However, not all calls for cancellation are effective. For example, in 2015, students at Vanderbilt University circulated a petition calling for the suspension of a professor who criticized the Muslim faith (V. S., 2015). The professor retired two years later, seemingly on her own terms (Tamburin, 2017). In August 2020, the Georgetown Black Law Students Association called for the suspension of professor emerita status for a faculty member who used the N-word while reading aloud from an article on hate speech in a class at the University of California, Irvine Law School (Fleisher, 2021). The professor remains listed as holding that role (Rubino, 2018a). However, successful or not, calls for cancellation –and the culture surrounding them– represent a seemingly unique use of collective organizing to name and seek redress from harm caused by those with access to institutional power. This organization creates an identity for the anonymous aggrieved and gives voice, visibility, and leverage to those who, as solitary individuals, would have little of each.

Analysis of cancel culture is often limited to critiques that weigh its benefits against its harms. In an opinion piece for The Atlantic, Mounk (2020) argued that cancellations – in the form of firing individuals from their employment– do more harm than good in the effort to "root out racial injustice". Another contributor noted that cancel culture is a productive tool of social justice activism, which has "propelled anti-racist movements" by embracing "the leveling effects of social media to empower marginalized voices (Kornhaber, 2020). Meanwhile, an opinion writer for The New York Times posited against cancel calls, arguing that "…civilization moves forward when we embrace rule of law, not when we abandon it" (Brooks, 2019). However, this discourse offers little instructive benefit to higher education administrators grappling with the prospect of receiving a(nother) cancel call. Approaching cancel culture from an "either-or", pro versus con stance may leave administrators feeling forced to choose a side in the moment of actual conflict. They can either acquiesce to the demands of the offended constituency or resist and support the offender. Facing this limited range of responses, they may remain focused only on the instant manifestations of cancel culture rather than inquire after its structural origins or long-term implications.

Contextualizing cancel culture in a change framework, like the conceptual MLP on transitions, invites new questions to the critique of this phenomenon. Rather than ask whether cancel culture needs to be cancelled, this framework seeks to understand where call-out behaviors operate in the arc of social evolution. It centers the systems through which ideas progress from innovation to adoption to default positions, rather than focusing on the ideas themselves. This perspective offers insights into the conditions that give rise to new organizational forms as well as what such formations may signify about the continued resilience or susceptibility of established norms. Thus, familiarity with the MLP can orient administrators toward developing proactive responses to calls for cancellation that address the trend at the structural level.

Cancel Culture through the MLP lens

The MLP is a framework used in analyzing the introduction, adoption, and entrenchment of new forms of technology and social organization (Genus & Coles, 2008). It contextualizes transitions as occurring in response to, or as being resisted because of, continuances or disruptions across three dynamic levels of scale: the macro (landscape), the meso (regime), and the micro (niche) (Grin *et al.*, 2010). Each level represents aspects of the human context that facilitate or pose barriers to change. In a relationship described as "a nested hierarchy", the constraints and opportunities at each level determine the scope of social change, from impacting just a few at the micro level to dominating prevailing understandings at the meso level and influencing postures and mindsets at the macro level (Geels & Schot, 2010). The MLP is best understood as a means of framing the dynamics that determine the lifecycle of the articles of human ingenuity –some catch on, some are internalized, and some are forgotten over time. Seeing cancel culture through an MLP lens involves, first, identifying the practice as operating within one of the three levels of

scale, and then recognizing that the societal impact of this behavior is the product of the interchange between the levels of scale over time.

Mindsets, deeply entrenched beliefs, and macro-economic forces are the type of dynamics in play at the landscape level. The landscape is the most resilient of the three levels of scale to the vectors of change. In the MLP, the landscape describes those aspects of the human context from which it is difficult to deviate and enormous pressure to maintain the status quo emanates. Deeply rooted cultural understandings and transactional practices are accounted for in the landscape. Landscape-level forces, like racism and capitalism, are beyond the direct influence of most individual actors, "yet stimulate and exert pressure on them at the regime and niche levels" (Wikipedia, 2021). Only cataclysmic events, such as wars, natural disaster, pandemics, or other significant civil upheaval, have demonstrated the force necessary to disrupt and spark change at this macro-level dimension. It is difficult for evolutionary transitions to scale up to the landscape level. When ideologies and practices do reach this level, they become entrenched, and only rarely altered.

Call-out and cancel-seeking behaviors are not a manifestation of longstanding postures or mindsets. The deeply entrenched presumptions that typify the landscape are those which are most resistant to change. In contrast, the presumptions that spur cancel culture can fall along a broad range of ideological views, reflecting whims as well as staunchly held beliefs (Bromwich, 2018). Further, conceptions at the landscape level tend to alter slowly while resisting the influence of individuals or small group actors. On the other hand, cancel culture is directly within the sphere of influence of direct actors. These groups affirmatively decide to call out or cancel, and whether these actions grow in power is determined by the decision of other actors to join in. Because cancel culture can reflect a range of postures and is directly shaped by human choice and collective action, it cannot be considered a landscape-level phenomenon.

Rules, both formal and informal, can be understood as regimes (Geels, 2005). The regime or meso-level, represents the aspects of the human context shaped by institutional structures and social practices normalized by code, tradition, and shared expectations. Laws, policies, and group norms are interconnected in a way that creates the context in which choice and action are induced or restrained (Geels, 2005). This dimension is more permeable in the sense that it is more subject to disruption from the other dynamics than the landscape level. More specifically, rules are subject to prescriptive and unofficial processes for change, and there are mechanisms through which new rules may be created or enacted (Geels, 2005). The resilience of the regime level comes from the support of ideologies at the landscape level, and the extent to which rules must be fixed, normalized, and enforced to be reliable (Geels, 2005).

Cancel culture is incongruent with the characteristics of the regime as it has no codified or widely-recognized rules and is not represented by any sort of institutional organization. Groups who cancel do so in ways that are unique to the particulars of a situation by relying upon the use of different resources to situate the call-out. In 2015, cancel calls arose in response to an email sent by the then associate master of Yale University's Silliman College by those who saw the message as encouraging the use of racially insensitive Halloween costumes (Hudler, 2015). Cancel calls were also raised for the associate master's husband and master of Silliman College, who defended her message. In this instance, the call-out

involved an escalating series of events, including the circulation of an open letter, the convening of an open forum, and in-person confrontation of the subject of the call (Hudler, 2015). In contrast, during the summer of 2019, a cancel call was affected simply by circulating a signed petition asking that a Penn Law professor be relieved of her duties. This action came after the professor reportedly argued that the U.S. would "be better off with more whites and fewer nonwhites" (Flaherty, 2019). These examples illustrate that there is no single script for the performance of cancel culture. Cancel calls are decentralized movements. The groups that organized at Yale are not necessarily those that organized at Penn. There is no single union, organization, or recognized group that cancel culture "belongs" to. While calls for cancellation may create a context in which some disciplinary action is induced, the process for doing so is *ad hoc* in a way that is distinct from predictable, regime-level adjudication processes. Further, cancel culture does not, perhaps yet, represent the status quo of dispute resolution. Part of the disruption cancel culture creates is its performance in ways that are "anti-democratic" and thus, outside the United States' mainstream conceptions of due process and justice.

Ruling out its place in the more fixed and resilient dynamics at the landscape and regime leads to the conclusion that cancel calls are niche-level phenomena. The micro-, or niche-level, has been defined as the "locus for radical innovations" where the development of new ideas, technologies, or artifacts emerge (Geels, 2005). It is the dimension in which human learning and experimentation takes place. The niche is also where the social networks needed to support such activities are nurtured and coalesce. It is the least stable and most permeable of the three dimensions. The niche level is where sparks of ingenuity flare, striving to catch fire and burn through to the reliable hearth of the regime. Sociologists have located the "build up of social networks and the coordination of activities by shared rules and perceptions" as activities that take place at the niche level (Geels, 2005).

From the MLP perspective, cancel calls may be considered an innovation. Drawing, perhaps, on the historical lineage of dissent speech, boycotts, and shunning to achieve political ends, cancel culture employs current day social media and other tech platforms to foment collective empowerment and leverage institutional accountability. The decision to call for an individual's cancellation, like other niche-level phenomena, emerge from the activity of micro-societies of offended groups. In some cases, these groups perceive that they lack access to institutional forms of accountability or to the information needed to evaluate how accountability structures are functioning. In others, they feel excluded from the community they are meant to learn in and contribute to. Finally, cancel culture reflects the instability of niche-level activities. The formation of discrete social networks organized around an identified lack of accountability for social transgressions carried out in the professional school environment seem to remain intact only for as long as outrage may last. The shared experience of group-identity harm and the aggregation of target and allied groups is limited. On the basis of these characteristics, cancel culture may be viewed as a niche-level innovation in access to institutional accountability and collective empowerment.

Cancel Culture's Place in Societal Evolution

Societal transition takes place against a backdrop of interplay between the dimensions of the niche, regime, and landscape over time. Once the level of a phenomenon has been identified, the MLP framework next prompts inquiry into what phase in the circular causality of social evolution the phenomenon has achieved (Geels, 2005). MLP views transitions as follows:

> … a sequence of four alternating phases: (i) the pre-development phase from dynamic state of equilibrium in which the status quo of the system changes in the background, but these changes are not visible; (ii) the take-off phase, the actual point of ignition after which the process of structural change picks up momentum; (iii) the acceleration phase in which structural changes become visible; (iv) the stabilization phase where a new dynamic state of equilibrium is achieved (Geels, 2005).

Inquiry into this system of causality can be used to orient those using the MLP to respond to cancel culture as a niche-level behavior to the stage in the change process this innovation has achieved. At the pre-development phase, thinkers, inventors and early adopters experiment with novel approaches in petite social networks that do not challenge the norms of the regime (Geels, 2005). Here, transition designers or other stakeholders can look to the actors making use of the idea and reflect by asking the following questions: are they mainstream actors? What is their relative power? Is the experimental activity targeted at a particular set of norms within the regime? The answers to these questions determine whether an innovation is within this first phase. If the actors are on the social fringe, have little individual or collective power, and if the activity is not aimed at dominant institutions or rules, the activity is within this first phase.

A second phase of transition is recognized as niche interventions gain traction and spread through greater exposure, as their benefits appeal to an increasing number of users. However, even as the interventions spread to more social networks, "as long as the regime remains stable, niche innovations have little chance to diffuse more widely" (Geels, 2005). Transition designers and stakeholders can recognize this phase by assessing the scope and breadth of the intervention's use. Sporadic adoption of a novelty indicates its register at this second phase.

Competition with the established regime distinguishes a third phase. Here, the benefits of the innovation are leveraged against the resistance of non-adopters "when the activities of social groups become misaligned" due to deficits in the regime or when "social, cultural, or economic changes at the landscape level" put pressure on the regime (Geels, 2005). These factors create opportunities for niche-level practices to evolve into norms. This stage can be identified as increasingly diverse actors with powerful social networks make use of the novelty. Further, at this phase, the use of the new practice consistently proves persuasive and consequential.

Replacement, or the substitution of norms, characterizes the final phase. Here, innovation completes its journey from novelty to norm. Once firmly lodged into the accepted status

quo, the newly reconstituted regime has the opportunity to influence the landscape, even as landscape-level forces continue to put pressure on the regime to maintain social stasis. From the MLP perspective, the process through with a novelty evolves from the social fringes to the mainstream to the zeitgeist plays out against the dynamics of each level of scale. This construct provides a useful orientation as to the location of a particular activity in the evolutionary cycle of transition.

On the basis of the examples cited above, cancel culture can be seen as progressing from the second to the third phase of transition. It is evolving from a novel practice that is gaining traction to a practice that takes place frequently enough to be in competition with the status quo. Specifically, the practice of cancel culture is in competition with the regime-level norm of academic freedom, the principle that faculty are free to teach as they see fit. It was first promulgated as a core value of higher education in 1915 by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2021). Academic freedom is rooted in the ideas that "institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good…" and that "the common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition (AAUP, 2021). From this position, faculty must be granted wide latitude to express their prerogatives, even if doing so creates disruption. In 1970, commentators noted that "controversy is at the heart of the free academic inquiry, which the entire statement is designed to foster" (AAUP, 2021). This norm, in tandem with the economic security that comes from tenure, is intended to both protect faculty from political conditions that might de-incentivize certain scholarship and make space for the tensions of truth-seeking inquiry. Academic freedom is a lesser known and understood concept, even though it has characterized the prerogative of academic institutions for a long time. Because it was intended to incubate a certain amount of controversy, academic freedom as a regime-level norm is vulnerable to both shifts at the landscape level and innovative ideas emerging from the niche.

The idea that academic freedom should continue to include the latitude to cultivate controversy without consequence is being unmoored from the top down by landscape-level shifts driven by identity politics. Bedrock beliefs about the hierarchical and binary structure of gender and social caste have been nudged to the political left by the gains of movements such as #metoo and Black Lives Matter (Greene *et al.*, 2019). Such movements seek the opportunity for visibility, collective empowerment, and participation in accountability structures. Simultaneously, cancel culture applies pressure from the bottom up by affording participants the experience of each of the same. Consider, for example, the instance of law professors saying the N-word. Some professors speak the N-word aloud when it appears in a text that they have assigned as part of the course they teach as an example of hate speech or to illustrate a hypothetical. In this context, some feel that this is necessary to prepare law students for the "real world" (Patrice, 2018; Rubino, 2018b; Above the Law, 2021). When calls arise for the cancellation of faculty who use the N-word while teaching, it reveals the existence of those who were harmed or offended by the act as well as their allies. The rise of the call makes clear to the transgressor that their conduct did not insult one but many. It creates a witness that makes clear to the harmed that they were not alone. Thus, calls for cancellation collate agency by operating as leverage for those who understand that they do not have access to the mechanisms of institution-level change (Patrice,

2018). The collective action signifies an unwillingness to accept that the broad terrain of academic freedom may continue to encompass the use of certain types speech. Reliance on the behaviors that characterize cancel culture reflects the perception of the offended group: that they lack access to institutional forms of accountability or, at least, to the information needed to evaluate how accountability structures are functioning.

To the extent that new social habits and organizational strategies become codified or otherwise baked into expected everyday ways of being, regime-level change occurs. Cancel culture has become increasingly wide spread and familiar to the point where, in some instances, faculty are "cancelled" before cancel calls even foment. A professor at Duquesne University's School of Education who used the N-word in class and encouraged his students to do so as well was put on paid leave after a student in his class posted a video recording of the conduct. "Within moments of learning of the incident," the Dean apologized to the students in the class and criticized the professor's actions (Deto, 2020). Some faculty expect, if not fear, their vulnerability to the practice. After referring to herself as a "slaveholder" during a faculty meeting, the then Dean of CUNY School of law decided to cancel herself by stepping down from her leadership role (Klein, 2021). These actions seem to reflect the internalized belief that cancellation is the one proper response to hurtful or harmful conduct.

College and graduate school administrators ignore the meta-communication of cancel culture at their peril (Vassallo, 2020). Cancel Calls do not simply operate to signal the violation of current norms but operate to signal the need for a normative shift. The emergence of cancel culture is a factor that has the potential to transform the relationship between students, faculty, and administration across higher education and graduate-level education. The tension between the stability of academic freedom as an existing norm and the momentum around engaging cancel culture as an approach to collective empowerment and institutional accountability exemplifies the third phase in the MLP's circular causality of change. As the penultimate phase, the resolution of this tension will inform whether cancel culture evolves further; from something new, to the new normal.

MLP-Informed Responses to Cancel Culture

The four phases of transition framed by the MLP do more than simply highlight the systems through which change occurs. The context each phase provides enables problem solvers to regard the adoption of new social behaviors as either signals of deeply entrenched systems, manifestations of current social norms, or experimental innovations in new ways of interacting. Further, this process is not *fait accompli* –the paradigm merely represents a model for how things could go. Recasting cancel calls as "innovations" invites school administrators who are working to build and maintain inclusive campus communities to turn their focus away from the good or bad debate that encircles much of the discourse on cancel culture. The understanding that cancel culture threatens but has not yet permeated the regime means that there is bandwidth in the timeline of change for administrators to foster and engage in some experimentation of their own. Such innovations must be ori-

ented towards the desire for inclusion and the opportunity to participate in whether and how institutions hold their members accountable to the collective. It is these unmet needs that have pulled into power the social webs that enact cancel culture.

Inclusive environments are those in which a range of perspectives may be respectfully voiced and heard because the humanity of each contributor is affirmed. Novel approaches to promoting group visibility through a culture of inclusion can be generated by taking a pro-active, system-building approach to setting the terms of community membership and exclusion. Efforts to promote discourse over difference must be accompanied by institutional processes that support facilitated opportunities to talk through disagreements. There is an unmet need for, and thus opportunities to create, organizational environments that facilitate intentional investment in relationships of trust. Predicated on the understanding that removal is not restorative, trust can be created through the use of practical community accountability standards that both hold members accountable and hold them in community. Moreover, there is a need to iterate for platforms that support empathy and vulnerability as professional practices. Administrators might try out different incentives for faculty to partner with students to articulate standards for reconciliation. Such standards must acknowledge that we will hurt each other on occasion, but we have a choice in how we work and learn together. Further interventions might involve teach-ins that offer strategies for how to forgive, how to offer sincere apologies, and how to sit with discomfort. Administrators must be willing to model how to balance the freedom to stir controversy with the responsibility to accept negative feedback with grace. Given that all such leaders could find themselves at the mercy of being labeled a transgressor (accurately or falsely), there should be ample motivation to take on the habits of those who practice holding themselves accountable.

Cancelling, though attractive on some levels, may ultimately prove to be unsatisfying. It says to those making the call that your cause can be realized simply by silencing or removing the target of your call. Emphasis on instances of individual conduct eliminates the need to invest in the structural or systemic interventions an academic institution might otherwise have to make to truly get to the wicked problem the calls emerge from. From this perspective, cancelling serves no one: those making the calls, whose systemic concerns go unaddressed; the target of the calls, who, if cancelled, avoid having to confront how their conduct was incompatible with the community they were a part of; nor the institution, as its resilience is challenged whether it resists or complies with the call. If the antidote to hate speech is more speech, then perhaps the lack of due process and exclusion inherent in cancellation must be met with more access to accountability systems and more inclusion.

Conclusion

Cancel culture may be regarded as an emergent niche-level experiment in generating institutional accountability and fomenting collective empowerment. Cancel calls leverage landscape-level shifts in identity politics and signal deficits in the regime-level norm of academic freedom. Seen through the MLP lens, cancel culture is currently at the point

in the transition cycle where it is in direct competition with the longstanding principle that faculty should be free to spark controversy. Recasting calls for cancellation as "innovations" invites school administrators who are working to build and maintain inclusive campus communities to turn their focus away from the good or bad debate that encircles the discourse on cancel culture. Shifting the critique away from a reductionist view, the MLP framework ultimately orients administrators toward the opportunity to develop and co-create novel interventions that can compete with cancel culture. Experiments in new forms of student engagement that foster inclusion and accountability in community can disrupt the allure of cancellation by addressing the needs at the core of such behavior. Change in human society is inevitable. These evolutionary changes often represent the ripple effects of histories that are too complicated to trace. A thesis of Transition Design is that such complexity does not render us passive actors to change (Irwin & Kossoff, 2021a). Armed with a way of understanding the present moment and the potential future it points to, MLP offers a valuable tool for those wishing to use Transition Design to address complex social problems.

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Resumen: Transition Design ofrece un marco y emplea una variedad de herramientas para abordar la complejidad. "Cancelar la cultura" es un fenómeno complejo que presenta una oportunidad para que los administradores de la educación superior se basen en el enfoque del Diseño de Transición para enmarcar y responder a esta tendencia. Los profesores acusados o sorprendidos usando un discurso racista, sexista u homofóbico se encuentran cada vez más con llamados a perder sus puestos, títulos u otras oportunidades profesionales. Dichos llamados a la cancelación surgen de discretas redes sociales organizadas en torno a una falta de rendición de cuentas identificada por las transgresiones sociales realizadas en el entorno de la escuela profesional. Gran parte del discurso existente sobre la cultura de la cancelación implica si el fenómeno representa una red positiva o negativa. Este estrecho marco cultural de cancelar a favor o en contra es reductivo y evita la investigación sobre dónde se sitúa el fenómeno en la dinámica que facilita e inhibe el cambio. Explorar la cultura de cancelación desde una perspectiva de diseño de transición amplía el rango de posibles respuestas administrativas desde la resistencia o la aquiescencia hasta la experimentación y la creación conjunta.

Este documento utiliza una perspectiva multinivel (MLP), una de las herramientas del diseño de transición, para definir las convocatorias y cancelaciones de profesores como innovaciones a nivel de nicho en el acceso a la responsabilidad institucional y el empoderamiento colectivo. Desde esta perspectiva, el aumento de las llamadas canceladas señala: (1) déficits en la norma de libertad académica a nivel de régimen; y (2) cambios que involucran políticas de identidad a nivel de paisaje. La reformulación de estas convocatorias como "innovaciones" crea una oportunidad para que los administradores de educación superior experimenten pilotando proactivamente cambios estructurales creados conjuntamente en los sistemas de rendición de cuentas. Adoptar el marco MLP centra el contexto del que surgen las llamadas de cancelación, orienta las soluciones hacia las preocupaciones que están en la raíz de estas llamadas y contribuye al reconocimiento del Diseño de Transición como un campo práctico de estudio.

Palabras clave: Cultura de cancelación - Call-outs - Cancelación - Análisis de perspectiva multinivel - Educación superior

Resumo: O Transition Design oferece uma estrutura e emprega uma variedade de ferramentas para lidar com a complexidade. A "cultura do cancelamento" é um fenômeno complexo que apresenta uma oportunidade para os administradores do ensino superior se basearem na abordagem do Design de Transição para enquadrar e responder a essa tendência. Professores acusados ou pegos usando discurso racista, sexista ou homofóbico são cada vez mais chamados para perder seus cargos, títulos ou outras oportunidades profis-

sionais. Tais pedidos de cancelamento decorrem de discretas redes sociais organizadas em torno de uma desresponsabilização identificada por transgressões sociais praticadas no ambiente escolar profissional. Muito do discurso existente sobre a cultura do cancelamento envolve se o fenômeno representa uma rede positiva ou negativa. Esse quadro cultural estreito, a favor ou contra, é redutor, antecipando a investigação sobre onde o fenômeno está situado na dinâmica que facilita e inibe a mudança. Explorar a cultura do cancelamento a partir de uma perspectiva de Design de Transição amplia a gama de possíveis respostas administrativas, da resistência ou aquiescência à experimentação e co-criação.

Este artigo usa uma perspectiva multinível (MLP), uma das ferramentas do Design de Transição, para definir chamadas e cancelamentos de professores como inovações de nível de nicho no acesso à responsabilidade institucional e ao empoderamento coletivo. Nessa perspectiva, o surgimento de chamadas de cancelamento sinaliza: (1) déficits na norma de liberdade acadêmica em nível de regime; e (2) mudanças envolvendo políticas de identidade no nível da paisagem. A reformulação dessas chamadas como "inovações" cria uma oportunidade para os administradores de ensino superior experimentarem pilotando proativamente mudanças estruturais e co-criadas nos sistemas de responsabilização. Abraçar a estrutura do MLP centraliza o contexto do qual emergem as chamadas de cancelamento, orienta as soluções para as preocupações na raiz dessas chamadas e contribui para o reconhecimento do Design de Transição como um campo de estudo prático.

Palavras-chave: Cultura do cancelamento - Chamadas - Cancelamento - Análise em perspectiva multinível - Ensino superior