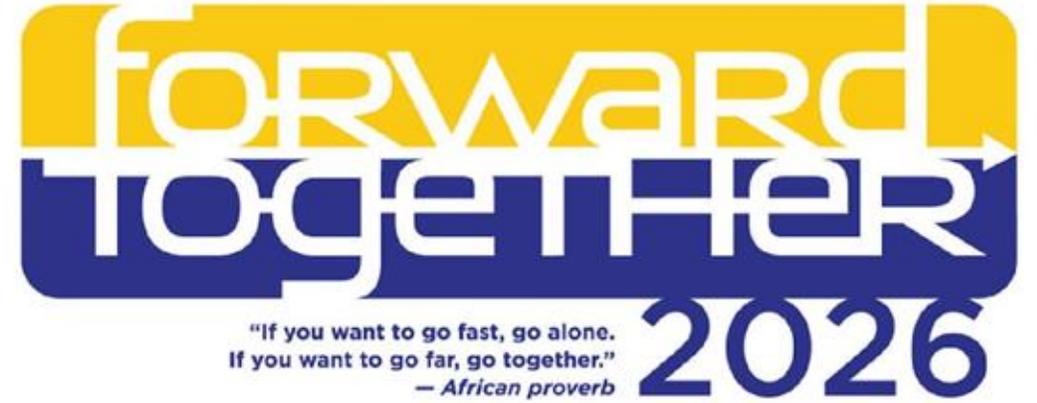




Colorado Charter Schools Annual Conference

February 25-27, 2026
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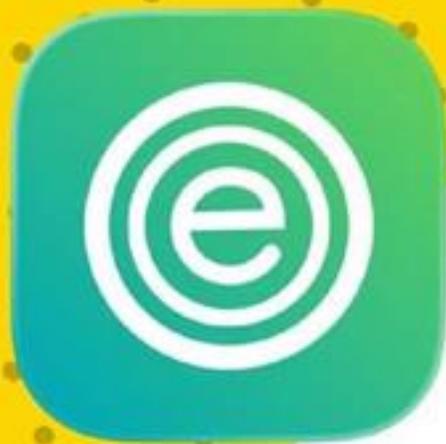
Charter School Leadership in Uncertain Times: The development of proactive organizational resilience

Dr. Ian Stout, Executive Director
Loveland Classical Schools

Blue Bell
February 26, 2026 | 11:00-12:00pm
Hot Topics



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Objectives

- To understand what is meant by “proactive organizational resilience”
- To discuss examples and strategies of proactive organizational resilience
- To begin applying a frame of proactive organizational resilience in your own school setting



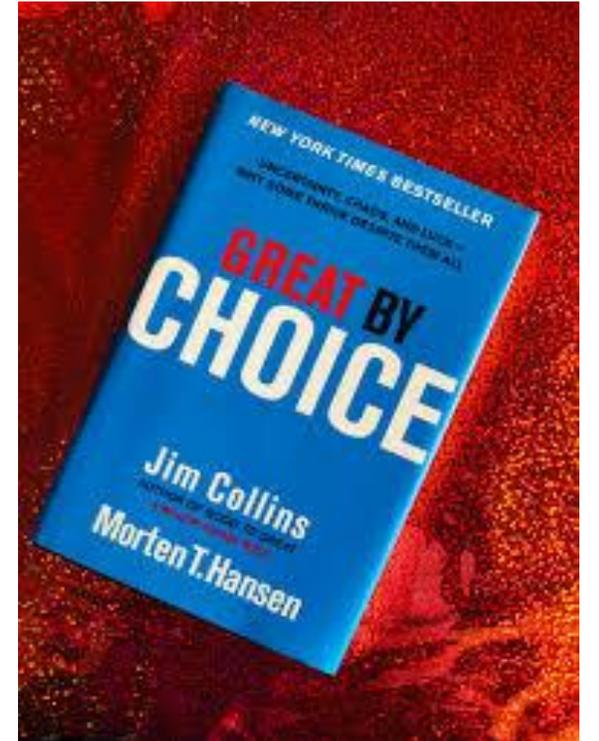
Ground Setting

The development of proactive organizational resilience

Jim Collins' "Productive Paranoia" is a leadership framework from his book *Great by Choice*, where leaders maintain hyper-vigilance to anticipate disruptions before they happen.

Rather than being scared, this mindset channels fear into systematic preparation—building cash reserves, maintaining buffers, and creating contingency plans to thrive during turbulent, uncertain, or unexpected, bad times.

It involves constantly asking "What if?" to anticipate risks, build buffers, and ensure survival, as exemplified by leaders who prepare for, rather than fear, future crises.



Ground Setting

Leading a public charter school in 2026 USA:

- Sociopolitical Swings
- Restructuring of the Geopolitical and Global Financial Order
- Macro-economic Pressures and the Potential Impact on School Funding
- Pandemic and Health Emergency Events
- Other “Black Swan” Events
- Locally, New Legislation and Evolving Definitions of “School Choice”



Ground Setting

Race to the South Pole: Amundsen and Scott

On October 18, 1911 after the Antarctic winter, Roald Amundsen's team set out on its drive toward the South Pole. Captain Robert Scott began his trek three weeks later.

At around 3pm on December 14, 1911, Amundsen raised the flag of Norway at the South Pole. He had reached the Pole a full month before Captain Scott arrived. Amundsen and his crew returned to their base camp on January 25, 1912, 99 days and roughly 1400 nautical miles after their departure.

Scott left his base camp with his team to the South Pole on November 1, 1911. He finally reached the South Pole on January 18, 1912, disappointed to learn that Amundsen had beaten him to it. The return journey was tortuous. Weak from exhaustion, hunger, and extreme cold, his last diary entry is dated March 29, 1912. He died in his tent alongside two of his men.



Ground Setting

Roald Amundsen's approach to supply depots was based on meticulous, "business-like" planning, focusing on over-provisioning and precise marking, which provided a significant safety margin compared to Robert Scott's 1911-1912 South Pole expedition. Amundsen utilized a "7-depot" system with heavy, redundant supplies, while Scott relied on fewer depots with supplies that were only just sufficient for the journey.

Key Comparisons of Supply Depots

- *Quantity and Volume:* Amundsen established seven food depots for his return journey, whereas Scott, by comparison, relied on far fewer, with some sources noting only two major, well-stocked depots along the main route.
- *Total Supplies:* Amundsen started with three tons of supplies for five men, while Scott, despite having 25 total men for the expedition, started with only one ton. Amundsen had roughly ten times more food and fuel per man.
- *Marking Strategy:* Amundsen marked his depots by placing 20 black flags in a line extending 10 miles east-west, intersecting his course. This ensured he could find them even in poor visibility. Scott marked his with a single flag, making them harder to find in bad weather.
- *Placement and Location:* Amundsen's depots were placed farther south and were more frequently spaced. Scott's main, critical "One Ton" depot was placed 50 km (about 30 miles) short of its intended 80°S position, a crucial factor in the failure to survive the return trip.
- *Fuel Security:* Amundsen ensured all paraffin fuel cans were soldered closed to prevent evaporation and leakage, a problem that plagued Scott's depots.

Return Security: Amundsen's depot strategy allowed for the possibility of missing a depot, while still having enough supplies to continue. Conversely for Scott, missing a single depot was fatal.



Ground Setting

Key Aspects of Productive Paranoia for Charter School Leaders:

- Constant Vigilance: Successful "10X" leaders (those outperforming their industry 10-fold) don't assume the future will resemble the past. They assume that high-impact, unforeseen events will occur. (*"Not being complacent and too comfortable"*).
- Building Buffers: For example, it is the practice of having extra cash reserves for your school, which serve as "extra oxygen canisters", such as in Amundsen's race to the South Pole; meaning, having more supplies than necessary to survive.
- "What If" Analysis: Leaders constantly ask "what if" regarding potential negative scenarios, ensuring they can handle crises from a position of strength.
- Actionable Fear: It separates fear-based paranoia (unproductive worry) from productive, calm, and clear-headed action to mitigate risks.

From: Collins & Hansen. *Great by Choice*. (2011)



Examples and Strategies

Charter Sector Case Study:

Loveland Classical Schools' preparation for a potential new disease outbreak (COVID-19).

January 2020:

- We began considering “What If” this new disease in East Asia isn’t contained by non-physical national borders in an interconnected world?

February 2020:

- We drafted a contingency plan overview of shutting down for a week to revamp to a fully online model and drafted of an outline of a remote learning plan.

March 2020:

- As the “COVID shutdowns” were approaching, LCS was already in final discussions to move to remote learning unilaterally, and we had our technology and communication plans in place to go.
- When the “COVID shutdowns” finally came, we approached the situation as an opportunity to stand-out in our offering for our students and families as opposed to a reactive stance.

Relatedly, LCS was then the first and only school locally in Loveland/Berthoud to reopen for in-person learning in August 2020, serving as a “test site” for the implementation of distancing protocols and hybrid offerings with in-person school for other local schools.



Examples and Strategies

The ability to hold two opposing ideas simultaneously allows for nuanced understanding and to function amidst complexity, often called dialectical thinking or embracing cognitive complexity, enabling one to see both hope and despair or right and wrong in a situation without falling into decision-paralysis, fostering growth, deeper understanding, and better decision-making by avoiding solely black-and-white thinking.

Key Concepts & Terms

- F. Scott Fitzgerald: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function".
- Dialectical Thinking/Dialectics: The capacity to hold contradictory truths as valid, integrating them to reach a more complex understanding, a key concept in psychology and philosophy (Hegel).
- Cognitive Complexity/Dissonance: Holding conflicting beliefs (dissonance) can be uncomfortable, but managing it (complexity) allows for deeper insights rather than just choosing one side.

Why It's Important

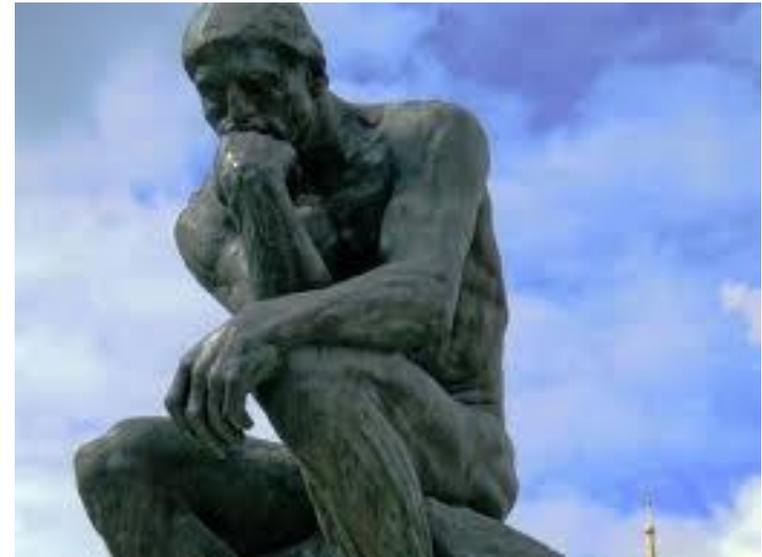
- Deeper Understanding: Moves beyond simplistic "either/or" to embrace the "both/and" reality of situations.
- Resilience & Function: Allows functioning effectively even when things seem hopeless or contradictory, such as maintaining hope amidst despair.
- Growth & Innovation: Essential for seeing multiple perspectives, updating beliefs, and finding creative solutions in complex problems.



Examples and Strategies

Quick disclaimer. The ability to ‘hold two opposing ideas simultaneously’ is not the same as believing that Truth does not exist, in of itself, and believing that everything is relative (i.e. “ultimate relativism”, which is actually a contradiction in terms).

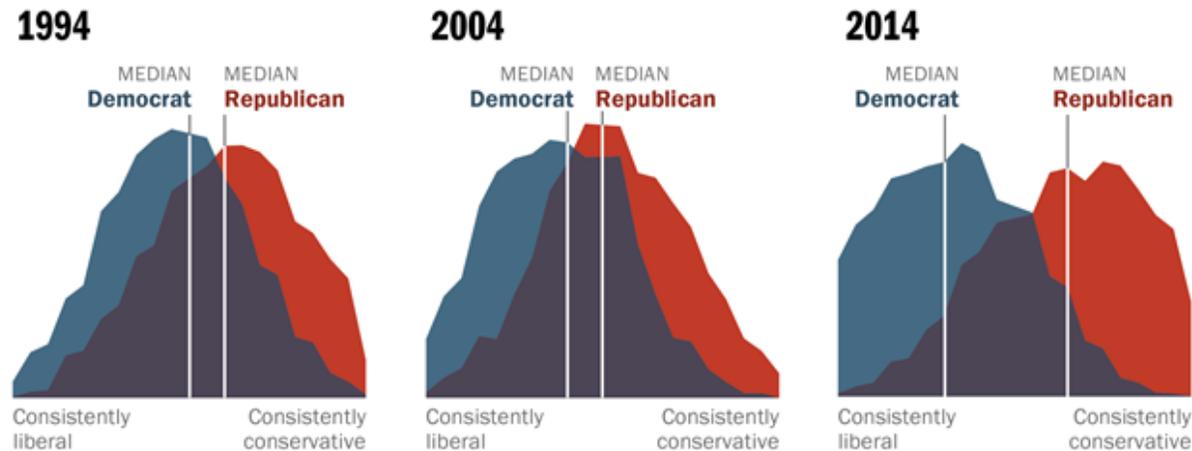
Rather, this is the skill to have both hope and concern in a difficult situation without falling into fear-based decision-paralysis, fostering growth, deeper understanding, and better decision-making by avoiding dichotomous black-and-white thinking.



Examples and Strategies

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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Applying a frame of proactive organizational resilience in your own school setting

- What are examples of potential risks to your charter school organization?
- What are ways that “productive paranoia” and “seeing two truths” can assist with analyzing that risk?
- What are your initial thoughts on strategies or approaches to address this risk?
- How should these strategies or approaches be measured for implementation?
- Does Board-level strategic planning make sense in your setting?



Applying a frame of proactive organizational resilience in your own school setting

Finally, what are systems, capacity, or outlooks that need to be implemented for your charter school to also operate with proactive organizational resilience?



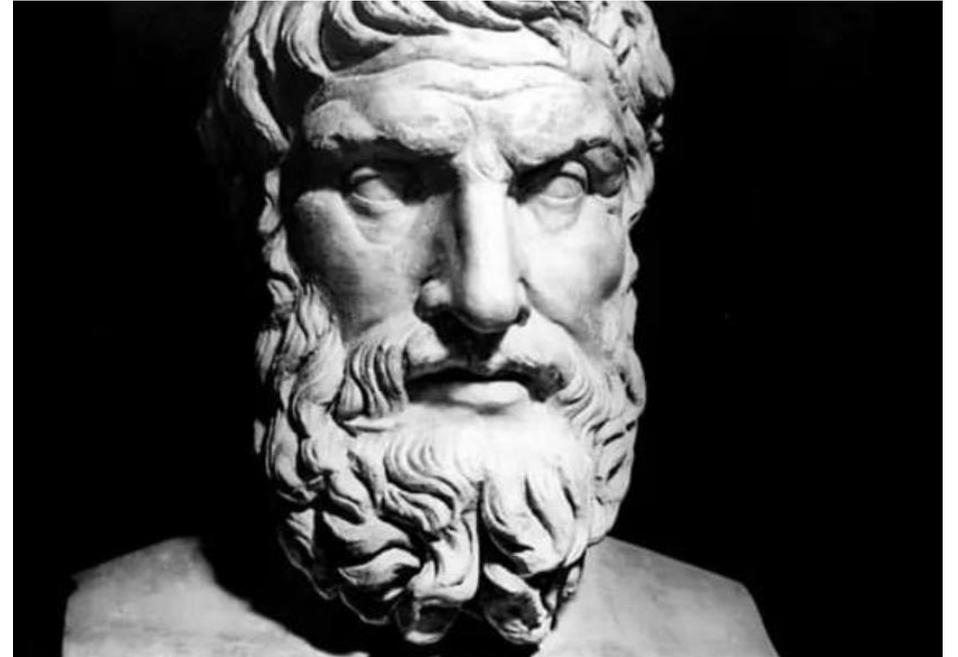
Classical Stoic Wisdom for Contemporary Times

“To bear trials with a calm mind robs misfortune of its strength and burden.”

– Seneca (ca. 10CE)

“People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them.”

– Epictetus (ca. 100CE)



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