Great by Choice Book Review

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Thriving in Uncertainty

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter with a quote from Peter L. Bernstein: "We simply do not know what the future holds" (p. 1). The authors elaborated that organizations cannot predict the future; however, they can achieve their own success despite uncertainty. This uncertainty is due to global changes such as terrorism, technology, and economic crises. Therefore, the authors asked the book's main research question: Why do some companies thrive in chaos and uncertainty while others fail or perform poorly? (pp. 1-2)

Collins and Hansen (2011) found that some companies not only survive in difficult times. However, they continue to grow and become very successful. Therefore, Collins and Hansen (2011) called the most successful companies "10X companies" (p. 2) because they performed at least 10 times better than their industry. For example, Southwest Airlines turned a $10,000 investment in 1972 into almost $12 million by 2002, even though the airline industry faced many crises (p.3).

Collins and Hansen (2011) selected companies based on three conditions: (1) Very strong results for more than 15 years. (2) Working in unstable environments. (3) Starting as small or vulnerable companies. From 20,400 companies, seven 10X companies were selected. These companies include: Amgen, Biomet, Intel, Microsoft, Progressive Insurance, Southwest Airlines, And Stryker. Each of these companies was compared with another company in the same industry that performed less well, such as Apple compared with Microsoft during the 1980s and 1990s. More than 7,000 documents were studied to understand the industry dynamics, founding roots, organization, leadership, culture, innovation, technology, risk, financial management, strategy, strategic change, speed, and luck in order to understand how these companies evolved.

Collins and Hansen (2011) found that the "successful leaders were not more risk-taking, more bold, more visionary, and more creative than the comparisons. They were more disciplined, more empirical, and more paranoid" (p.9). Innovation alone does not explain success.
Fast decisions are not always good. Less radical change accompanied by environmental changes at successful companies. Successful companies did not have more luck than others (p.10).

10Xers

Collins and Hansen (2011) begin with a quote for Roald Amundsen: "Victory awaits him who has everything in order – luck people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take the necessary precautions in time; this is called bad luck" (p.13). Roald Amundsen is one of the two explorers whose stories were narrated by the authors; the other explorer is Robert Falcon Scott. Both wanted to reach the South Pole first in 1911. Amundsen prepared very carefully for the mission. He trained his body, learned survival skills, and studied polar travel. When Scott did not prepare as carefully. He used ponies and motor sleds that were not well tested for the extreme conditions. Amundsen also prepared extra supplies and safety plans. Scott carried fewer supplies and took more risks. Amundsen reached the South Pole first and returned safely with his team. Scott reached the South Pole after 34 days, but he and his team died on the way back.

Scott blamed the circumstances, he noted in his journal: "Our luck in weather is preposterous", "We have had a horrible day", "Add to our disappointment a head wind 4 to 5, with a temperature -22° … Great God!" (p.17). Nevertheless, the difference was not the environment, because both teams faced the same weather and conditions. The difference was their preparation and disciplined behaviour.

Collins and Hansen (2011) presented the "10Xers" (pronounced "ten EX-ers") (p.18). These leaders built companies that perform ten times better than their industry. 10X leaders are

not necessarily more creative, visionary, charismatic, ambitious, lucky, risk-seeking, heroic, or bold than other leaders, but succeed because of their discipline and consistent leadership behaviours. Their success comes from three main behaviours. fanatic discipline, empirical creativity, and productive paranoia (p.19).

Fanatic Discipline

10X leaders are very disciplined and consistent with values, goals, and standards during difficult times. For example, Peter Lewis refused to manipulate the financial reporting of Progressive Corporation just to satisfy market expectations (p.20). Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines, maintained a fun, high-energy culture full of passionate people infused with a rebellious "Warrior Spirit" (p.22). 10X leaders are relentless and monomaniacal. They focus on their goals, follow their standards, and disregard social pressure. Thus, fanatic discipline is extreme, purposeful, and consistent over time, allowing 10X leaders to succeed in chaotic environments.

Empirical Creativity

10X leaders make decisions based on data, observation, and evidence. For example, Andy Grove, CEO of Intel, studied research and data when deciding how to treat his cancer. Roald Amundsen, the South Pole expedition, chose the Bay of Whales as a base camp, despite conventional wisdom calling it unstable. 10X leaders do not avoid risk or bold actions; however, they take creative moves with rigorous evidence, which reduces risk and improves outcomes. Thus, empirical creativity prepares leaders to act confidently in uncertain environments.

Productive Paranoia

10X leaders always think about possible risks and problems; they are hypervigilant and always prepared for unexpected risks, even in good times. They prepare for difficult situations

before they happen. For example, Bill Gates often worried about possible future threats to Microsoft, even when the company was very successful; he used to write “nightmare memo” (p.28). Thus, productive paranoia is using fear and hyper-awareness to plan, prepare, and act effectively. Together with fanatic discipline and empirical creativity, productive paranoia helps 10X leaders navigate chaos and achieve extraordinary results.

Level 5 Ambition

10X leaders are ambitious, but their ambition is for the success of the organization, not only for personal success. For example, Bill Gates dedicated his energy to building a great company, “Microsoft”. Later used his resources to solve global problems, such as fighting “malaria” (p.34). Dane Miller, Biomet, refused to accept the stock-option rewards (p.31). Thus, level 5 ambition means strong leaders defined themselves by purpose, contribution, and impact (p.33). Together, these behaviours help leaders achieve extraordinary results in uncertain environments.

20 Mile March

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter with a quote for Ron Serino: “Freely chosen, discipline is absolute freedom” (p.39). Then compared two companies Stryker as Company A, and USSC as Company B, both companies operate in the same fast-growing industry. Company A grows about 25% per year, but its growth is stable and consistent. And company B grows about 45% per year, but its growth is very unstable, sometimes very high and sometimes very negative (p.40). Over time, Company A becomes the better investment, even though its growth is slower. A $1 investment in Stryker grew more than 350 times from 1979 to 2002, while USSC eventually disappeared after being acquired (p.40).

John Brown's 20 Mile March

Collins and Hansen (2011) explained the idea of the 20 Mile March by comparing two ways to walk 3,000 miles from San Diego to Maine. One person walks 20 miles every day, in good weather and bad weather, and eventually succeeds. Another person walks 40 – 50 miles on good days and rests on bad days, becomes exhausted and fails. When John Brown became CEO of Stryker in 1977, he believed that consistent effort is better than irregular, extreme effort. John Brown created a rule that the company must grow 20% in net income every year. This rule became known as "the law"; moreover, he created the "Snorkel Award" (p.42), which was hung on the wall of the managers who failed to reach the goal, so they were below the performance level and in danger of drowning. Stryker hit its 20 Mile March goal and achieved its growth goal more than 90% of the time (p.43). Even when the market was strong, the company did not grow too fast, because Brown chose to maintain stability despite criticism. The 20 Mile March is a clear performance goal that organizations follow consistently. It has two parts a "lower bound", a minimum level of performance that must be achieved every year, and an "upper bound", a limit that prevents growing too fast and losing control (p.44).

Collins and Hansen (2011) listed the good 20 Mile March elements: (1) It sets clear performance markers (lower bound). (2) It creates discipline and pressure to perform and achieve the minimum goal. (3) It includes limits so the company does not grow too fast (upper bound). (4) It is designed by the organization itself, not copied from others. (5) It is within the organization control. (6) It should be evaluated within a "Goldilocks" moderate time frame. (7) It must be achieved consistently over time.

Why the 20 Mile March Win

Collins and Hansen (2011) listed three ways the 20 Mile March helps organizations: (1) It builds confidence because the organization succeeds even in difficult times. (2) It reduces the risk of failure during crises. (3) It helps leaders maintain self-control in uncertain environments.

Fire Bullets, Then Cannonballs

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter by a quote for Robert Noyce: "You may not find what you were looking for, but you find something else equally important" (p.69). The quote emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and improvement. The chapter begins with the story of Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) and Southwest Airlines. PSA created a new airline model with low prices, fast flights, safety, reliability, and a fun culture (p. 70). Southwest copied PSA's ideas, claiming that these "ideas have proven to be successful for Pacific Southwest Airlines" (p.71). Surprisingly, PSA later disappeared, while Southwest became very successful. This example shows that being the first innovator does not always lead to long-term success.

Collins and Hansen (2011) studied several companies and found that the most innovative company was not always the most successful. For example, in biotechnology, Genentech produced more patents and scientific discoveries. When Amgen had a much stronger financial performance (p.72). However, every industry has a minimum level of innovation called "innovation threshold" (p.75), and companies must meet this level to compete. But after that level, more innovation does not always mean more success.

Moreover, great companies do not only innovate. They execute their ideas very well. Collins and Hansen (2011) emphasized the importance of creativity and discipline together. For example, in 1973, Intel succeeded not only because it innovated, but because it delivered

products reliably and consistently. “Intel engineers worked fifty, sixty, seventy hours a week for eight months to fix a glitch problem” (p.76). Advanced Memory Systems was crushed despite the fact that they produced the 1000-bit memory chip first.

Collins and Hansen (2011) introduced the idea “Fire Bullets, Then Cannonballs”. A bullet is a small test with low cost, low risk and low distraction (p.81). A cannonball is a big investment or major strategic decision. Good leaders should fire bullets (small experiments) first, learn what works, then when a bullet hits the target, fire a cannonball (big commitment). For example, Amgen tried many small projects in biotechnology. These were bullets, such as research on vaccines and growth hormones. Eventually, one project worked: Erythropoietin (EPO) for treating anemia. After this success, Amgen invested heavily and launched the product. This was the cannonball, and it became a major success (pp.79-80).

However, there is a danger of uncalibrated cannonballs; a big problem occurs when companies fire cannonballs without testing first. For example, in 1968, Pacific Southwest Airlines launched a bold new cannonball called “Fly-Drive Sleep”, Pacific Southwest Airlines invested heavily in hotels and car rentals without testing the idea first in separate bullets, and checked its feasibility. This strategy failed and led to major financial losses every single year (p.83-84).

Thus, great companies succeed because they test ideas with small experiments, then learn from real evidence, then invest big only after success is proven. This combination of discipline and creativity helps companies succeed in uncertain environments.

Leading Above the Death Line

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: “As soon as there is life there is danger” (p.99). This quote should encourage leaders to pay

attention to the danger, as without precautions, they will suffer. For example, in 1996, climber David Breashears planned to film an IMAX movie on Mount Everest. Seeing dangerous conditions, he decided to turn back and wait. Fifteen days later he returned and successfully filmed the summit. During the earlier attempt, a severe storm killed eight climbers, including Rob Hall and Scott Fischer. The lesson is that good leaders sometimes pause or retreat when conditions are too risky.

Productive Paranoia

10X Leaders should practice productive paranoia. This means they always ask "What if something goes wrong?" and prepare for unexpected problems (p.102). The 10X journey represents long-term success. The Death Line represents a point where a company fails completely (p.103). If a company crosses the Death Line, the organization cannot recover. Therefore, leaders must avoid decisions that could destroy the organization. Thus, 10X Leaders have to practice the three following productive paranoia practices:

Build Cash Reserves: Successful leaders prepare before a crisis happens. For example: "Southwest Airlines had $1 billion in cash on hand and the highest credit rating in the industry" (p.106). Leader Herb Kelleher believed companies must prepare for economic disasters. After the September 11 attacks, most airlines had serious financial problems. Southwest survived and even grew because it had strong financial preparation.

Bound Risk: 10X companies do not take extreme risks. Instead, they carefully manage three types of risk. 10X companies took fewer of these risks than other companies. Bound risk are:

Death Line Risk: This risk could destroy the company completely.

Asymmetric Risk: This risk has a much larger downside than upside.

Uncontrollable Risk: This risk depends on external forces that the company cannot control.

Another important idea is time-based risk. 10X Leaders must ask: How much time do we have before the risk becomes dangerous? (p.111) Sometimes leaders must act fast. Sometimes they should wait and gather more information. For example, Andy Grove carefully studied treatment options after his cancer diagnosis before making a decision.

Zoom Out, Then Zoom In: Successful leaders use a two-step thinking process.

Zoom Out: 10X Leaders step back and analyze the situation. Then ask questions such as: What has changed? What risks exist? How much time do we have?

Zoom In: After deciding what to do, they focus on excellent execution.

10X Leaders understand that some moments in life and business are more important than others, and they perform their best during those moments (p.120). Therefore, they have to: Prepare before crises happen. Avoid dangerous risks. Observe changes carefully. Make thoughtful decisions. Execute with great discipline.

SMaC

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter by a quote for Moliere: “Most men die of their remedies, and not of their illnesses” (p.125). SMaC means Specific, Methodical, and Consistent (p.128). A SMaC recipe is a set of rules and practices that help an organization work in a consistent way. These practices include: What to do. What not to do. In order to help organizations perform well. For example, in 1979, CEO Howard Putnam decided that Southwest Airlines should keep its simple business model, even after airline deregulation. He created a list of 10 clear rules, such as: Focus on short flights under two hours. Use only Boeing 737 airplanes.

Keep low fares and frequent flights (p.126). These rules formed the SMaC recipe for the company. Another example for not to do, Intel: do not cut research and development during recessions (p.129).

However, organizations change their recipe only when necessary. For example, Intel left the memory chip business because competition made it unprofitable. Leaders Andy Grove and Gordon Moore decided to focus on microprocessors instead. However, Intel kept most of its other practices the same (pp.139-140).

There are two ways to improve a SMaC recipe: (1) Empirical creativity, test new ideas with small experiments. (2) Productive paranoia, watch the environment carefully and adjust when necessary. For example, Microsoft changed its strategy when it realized the importance of the Internet (p.143).

Return on Luck

Collins and Hansen (2011) opened this chapter with a quote from Marshall Bruce Mathers III: Look, if you had one shot, or one opportunity to seize everything you ever wanted in one moment. Would you capture it? Or just let it slip? This quote is a great introduction to luck as an uncontrollable factor; in addition, if the opportunity exists, is the organization ready to take advantage of it? Collins and Hansen (2011) highlight the return on luck as an uncontrollable factor and argue that people need preparation and discipline to take advantage of this opportunity by narrating the story of climber Malcolm Daly's ascent of Thunder Mountain with his partner, Jim Donini. Daly fell while climbing. His legs were badly broken, and he almost died. Only two strands of the rope stopped his fall. Then many lucky things happened. After Donini descended 3,000 feet to seek help, a pilot, Paul Roderick, happened to be flying over the valley at that exact

moment, allowing rescue plans to begin immediately. Daly was lifted by helicopter just hours before a massive storm hit the mountain for 12 days.

Collins and Hansen (2011) defined luck as an event that (1) happens mostly outside the control of people, (2) has important good or bad consequences, and (3) the event is unpredictable. Therefore, Daly's and Donini's training, skills, teamwork and collaboration are not luck. The luck is the out-of-control event and unpredictable event, which is the appearance of the helicopter that has a good impact on saving Daly.

Collins and Hansen (2011) studied 230 luck events in the 10X and comparison cases and found that all companies had good luck and bad luck (158). Moreover, successful companies did not receive more good luck than others; they also did not receive less bad luck. Since both successful and less successful companies experienced similar amounts of luck. Then the critical question is not "Are you lucky?" but "Do you get a high return on luck?" (p.160).

Collins and Hansen (2011) explained the notion of return on luck not by how much luck the person receives, but by how well the person uses the luck. They argue that Bill Gates had some lucky opportunities, like many people who were born in the mid-1950s; he grew up in an upper-middle-class American family, he had access to computer resources in the mid-1970s, he went to Harvard, read the Popular Electronics article, and he knew how to program in BASIC (p.162). Many people had the same opportunities; moreover, there are some who got more opportunities. These are the master's and PhD students in electrical engineering and computer science, who had even more computer expertise than Gates. The difference is that Gates worked extremely hard and acted quickly, creating a high return on luck (p.163).

On the other hand, Collins and Hansen (2011) discussed "Squandering Good Luck", they found that some companies receive good luck but fail to use it well. For example, Advanced

Micro Devices (AMD) had several lucky opportunities in the 1990s, including legal victories against Intel and high demand for computer chips. However, AMD failed to execute well and lost many opportunities because they were not able to met the demand requirement (p.167).

Collins and Hansen (2011) found that 10X companies manage bad luck better. For example, Progressive Corporation was able to respond to challenges when California passed Proposition 103 in 1988, insurance companies had to lower prices. The CEO Peter Lewis used this challenge to improve customer service. Instead of complaining about the situation, he used the crisis as an opportunity to improve the company. Focused on better customer service. Created 24/7 “Immediate Response” claims service. Many customers received payments within 24 hours. Progressive improved its reputation and market position, moving from #13 to #4 in the U.S. auto-insurance market (p.169).

Collins and Hansen (2011) found that bad luck can end a company completely. For example, both Southwest Airlines and Pacific Southwest Airlines faced similar bad-luck events in the late 1970s and early 1980s: (1) Rising fuel prices after oil shocks. (2) An air-traffic-controller strike. (3) Economic recession and inflation. (4) High interest rates and leadership changes. Southwest survived and remained disciplined, while PSA reacted poorly: (1) Raised prices instead of controlling costs. (2) Experienced labour conflicts and layoffs. (3) Increased debt and unstable leadership. As a result, PSA declined while Southwest continued to grow.

Collins and Hansen (2011) concluded that life is uncertain, but leaders can manage how they respond to luck. Thus, managing luck involves four main abilities: (1) Recognize luck when it happens. (2) Know when to change plans because of luck. (3) Be prepared to survive bad luck. (4) Create a positive return on luck (ROL) from both good and bad events.

Epilogue

Collins and Hansen (2011) concluded this book by discussing how modern culture perceives luck. People today believe that success depends mostly on luck or circumstances. This makes managing an organization depend on chance, such as a lottery or roulette. However, the authors believe this idea is dangerous for society, because it makes people think that their actions do not matter.

Collins and Hansen (2011) research shows that companies that worked in similar situations and had similar levels of luck. Some companies became great, while others did not. This means that circumstances alone cannot explain success. Thus, Greatness is not mainly about circumstances. Greatness comes from conscious choices and discipline. People create success by what they do and how well they do it. However, success is never guaranteed; unexpected events can happen, such as disease, accident, brain injury, earthquake, tsunami, financial calamity, civil war, or any of a thousand other possible events. The greatest leaders who studied throughout this research cared as much about values as about victory, as much about purpose as about profit, as much about being useful as about being successful. Even strong organizations cannot control everything. But people must continue to act and make responsible choices (pp.182-183).

Great by Choice Reflection

1. Success Comes from Discipline, Not Just Innovation

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “greatness is not primarily a matter of circumstance; greatness is first and foremost a matter of conscious choice and discipline” (p.182).

Discipline and consistent effort are important factors besides talent, luck and opportunities for success. In my own teaching practice as a constructivist, in my statement of beliefs, I believe that I should provide feedback to students through formative assessments to help them construct knowledge and prevent disengagement, so I extensively use formative assessments and to ensure that students are receiving the fair needed feedback I conduct more assessments on DegiExam (Online testing platform that locked the student computer to the test tab and prevent student from opening other tabs), instead of paper based which will provide the feedback to students immediately, and help them gradually construct knowledge, The ability to provide students with immediate feedback enabled me to enhance their learning and achievement. However, I still rarely face a few underachievers due to high rates of absenteeism. By consistently posting lesson materials, classwork activities, and online homework links on Edsby (the school learning management system), I believe these students could still learn and evaluate their mistakes even when they're not present. And then I follow up with them and their parents later and invite them to an extra help session to turn their failure into success. Anyway, their absence is another example of this takeaway: if they attend regularly and show greater discipline in their work, they can achieve excellent results like their peers.

2. The Concept of the 20 Mile March

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “The 20 Mile March creates two types of self-imposed discomfort: (1) the discomfort of unwavering commitment to high performance in difficult conditions, and (2) the discomfort of holding back in good conditions.” (p.45)

Consistent performance could be maintained by adopting the 20 Mile March regardless of external conditions; consistent performance creates discomfort because of the upper and lower bounds that employees should not cross. This idea is especially relevant in education, where teachers are accountable for classroom averages. If the class average falls below 70%, it raises concerns from the administration, but if it is too high, it may also be questioned. This creates pressure on teachers to maintain a balanced, consistent level of student achievement.

3. Fire Bullets, Then Cannonballs

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “If you knew ahead of time which bullets would merit cannonballs, you'd fire only those. But of course, you don't know, so you need to fire bullets, knowing full well that a number of them will never hit anything. Eventually, however, there comes a time for commitment, when you have enough validation to fire the cannonball” (p.91).

This concept explains that organizations should test ideas through small, low-risk experiments before utilizing huge resources. Then, when they examine what works, they can invest huge resources in that strategy. This idea helps reduce risk and improve decision-making in uncertain environments. I see this concept clearly in Turkish TV series production. Producers often create the first episodes by hiring writers and actors, then wait for weekly episode ratings and audience feedback before continuing. They evaluate the show week by week, making adjustments as needed. New actors may be introduced, while others leave, depending on performance and audience response. In this way, producers shoot “bullets” by testing actors,

writers, and certain scenarios in a few episodes before committing to them long-term (the "cannonball").

4. Productive Paranoia

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: "When it comes to building financial buffers and shock absorbers, the 10X cases were paranoid, neurotic freaks!" (p.104).

Productive paranoia means that effective leaders always prepare for unexpected challenges by building reserves, managing risks, and paying attention even during stable times. This idea is important an organization can fail when potential risk is ignored. During my tenure as Head of the Business Analysis Unit at First National Bank, I applied this concept. Our team carefully assessed the feasibility of approving commercial, retail, and housing loans. We ensured that clients had sufficient guarantees and collateral, and we focused on lending to customers with profitable businesses and stable income. We were always anxious to have an excellent bank reputation to prevent bank runs, by paying attention to the economic and political stability to ensure that our investment portfolio is always balanced in the best profitable safe way.

5. The Importance of the SMaC Recipe

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: "A SMaC recipe is a set of durable operating practices that create a replicable and consistent success formula. The word SMaC stands for Specific, Methodical, and Consistent" (p.128).

A SMaC recipe is a set of rules and practices that help an organization work in a consistent way. These practices include: What to do. What not to do. In order to help organizations perform well. In my teaching practice, I apply this concept from day one. I clearly communicate the syllabus, classroom rules, routines, expectations, and what students should and should not do. I ensure these expectations are simple, structured, and consistently reinforced

throughout the course. For example, students know how lessons begin, how activities are completed, how assessments are conducted, and how behaviour is managed. This consistency reduces confusion and creates a structured learning environment. In addition, my school uses Edsby as learning management system, so I utilize it to support this consistency. I post all lesson materials, resources, and daily agendas on Edsby, so even if a student is absent (unexpected), they can still access the content and stay on track.

6. Return on Luck (ROL)

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “Everyone gets luck, good and bad, but 10X winners make more of the luck they get.” (p.165)

Luck alone does not determine success; what matters is how individuals and organizations respond to both good and bad luck. This concept is important because opportunities and challenges happen to everyone, but success depends on how effectively we act on them. A clear example is the rise of Zoom compared to Skype. Although Skype had been well known since 2003, Zoom, launched later in 2013, was not widely recognized by many people, including myself, before 2019. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom took advantage of the sudden global need for online communication. It offered a more user-friendly experience, allowing users to join meetings through a simple link without needing an account, which made it highly accessible for schools and organizations.

7. The Genius of the AND

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “In the words of 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” (p.190).

The Genius of the AND refers to the ability to combine two seemingly opposite ideas instead of choosing one over the other. This concept is important because effective leadership often requires balance rather than extremes. In my classroom, I apply this idea by combining discipline AND fun. At first, these may seem contradictory, but I use both together to create a productive learning environment. I clearly implement classroom rules and routines to manage behaviour and address disruptive students. However, my goal is not to control students' natural behaviour or punish unintended mistakes. I understand that students make errors, and I often overlook minor issues while guiding them toward improvement. At the same time, I make learning engaging and enjoyable by incorporating interactive activities such as Kahoot! classroom discussions, and moments of humour.

8. Thriving in Uncertainty and Chaos

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: "The premise behind this work is that instability is chronic, uncertainty is permanent, change is accelerating, disruption is common, and we can neither predict nor govern events. We believe there will be no new normal. There will only be a continuous series of not normal times" (p.193).

Uncertainty is not temporary; it is constant. Instead of trying to avoid it, leaders must learn how to operate and succeed within it. Personally, this idea strongly reflects my life journey. I have always been alert to unexpected circumstances and acted early when I sensed risk. In 2009, I left the banking sector in Lebanon and shifted my career to business education in the United Arab Emirates because I anticipated instability in the financial system. I was concerned about government pressure on banks to lend in USD, and when BLOM Bank refused, a bombing targeted its head office, confirming the level of risk. In 2016, I returned to Lebanon as a Head of School, but as I observed political stability declining again, I made another proactive decision by

applying for immigration to Canada. I landed in 2020 and have been teaching business in independent schools in Toronto since then. These experiences, along with my constant concern about unexpected events, pushed me to strengthen my position professionally. I pursued a Master of Education and am currently working toward a PhD in leadership at Niagara University.

9. Leadership Responsibility in Difficult Environments

Collins and Hansen (2011) wrote: “Whether we prevail or fail depends more upon what we do than on what the world does to us” (p.197).

This concept emphasizes that leaders are responsible for how they respond to challenges, even when external conditions are difficult. Instead of blaming circumstances, effective leaders take ownership of their decisions and actions. In my personal journey, I experienced this directly. In 2016, I decided to return to Lebanon despite anticipating that the political and economic situation might deteriorate. Although conditions seemed stable at the time, this decision turned out to be a mistake. However, I took responsibility for correcting it. Recognizing the increasing risks, I did not blame the circumstances; I made a strategic decision to move to Canada, especially as I am responsible for my wife and four children.

Great by Choice Application

1. To promote progressive school improvement, I will use the "20 Mile March."

As a principal, I will not try to change everything immediately. However, I will break it down into small pieces, consistent annual goals for improving student achievement, teacher development, and school culture. For example: (1) The goal is to improve student results and retention by a realistic percentage every year, increase the university transition by 20% every year, and improve student behaviour and attendance by 10% every year. (2) The goal is to promote gamification; therefore, the transition from paper-based materials to digital resources will be completed in five years, so lessons, homework, classwork, assignments, quizzes, and exams will be converted to digital resources by 20% every year, so students can receive immediate feedback.

2. To promote new programs, I will "Fire Bullets, then Cannonballs."

As a principal, before making big changes, I will first test small ideas (bullets). For example: (1) I will test gamification by testing the transition from paper-based quizzes to conducting quizzes using the DigiExam platform, then test the transition for other assessments, such as exams, homework, and classwork. (2) I will try a new technology tool, such as Magic School (AI platform for schools) or interactive books, with a small group of teachers. Then monitor the results if they are successful, then I will expand the program across the school (cannonball).

3. To be prepared for unexpected problems, I will practice "Productive Paranoia."

As a principal, I will always try to be ready for unexpected circumstances. For example: (1) Have backup plans for teacher absences and emergency coverage. (2) Be ready for a pandemic or lockdowns by using online learning, such as Zoom, and clear communication with

stakeholders, teachers, students, and parents. (3) Prepare for fire drills and other safety emergencies. (4) Keep a financial buffer (cash or investments in precious metals) to handle economic changes, especially since private schools do not receive government funding. (6) Regularly check student safety, attendance, and performance.

4. To promote general discipline and consistency, I will establish a clear "SMaC recipe".

As a principal, I will establish clear rules and practices for everyone in the school to follow. For example: (1) Set clear expected class average upper and lower bounds for excellent education. (2) Consistent discipline policies, booking weekly quizzes and tests to prevent student overwhelming, scheduling teacher absence and sharing lesson plans and materials for supply teachers. (3) Standard routines for transition between periods, attending school events, and participating in extracurricular activities. (4) Communication with parents, teachers must inform parents about any student's mark less then 70%. I will ensure these practices are simple, specific, and consistent.

5. To promote discipline and creativity, I will adopt the concept "Genius of the AND."

As a principal, I will not choose between being strict or flexible; I will do both. For example: (1) Maintain high standards for teachers (discipline). (2) Encourage new teaching ideas and innovation (creativity).

References

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