

Pause!

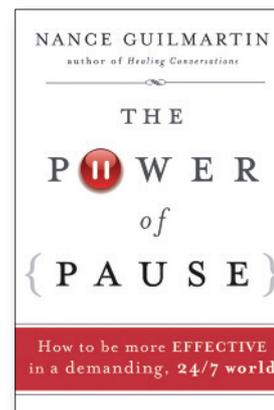
Take a Deep Breath
for Better Decision-Making



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POINT OF VIEW: *The Power of Pause*

Based on the book by **Nance GUILMARTIN**, Jossey-Bass, December 2009.



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INTERVIEW: The Virtuous Circle of the Pause Well Taken

Interview with **Jeffrey SAUNDERS**, CEO of the Saunders Hotel Group, Boston, June 2010.



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INTERVIEW: Pause for Creative Leadership Solutions

Interview with **Joyce J. ELAM**, executive dean of Florida International University (FIU) School of Business (Miami), June 2010.



In Brief

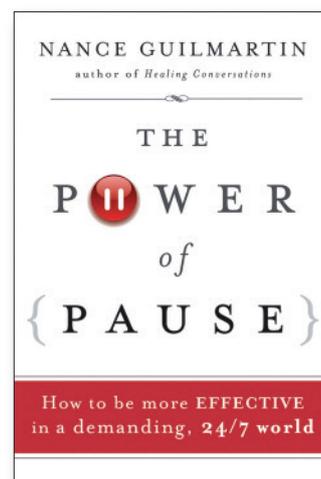
A moment's reflection before acting is never a moment wasted. Just the opposite according to Nance Guilmartin, who warns in fact that reactions absent careful reflection frequently engender conflicts! Checking your impulses, knowing when to stop, even for a few seconds, to reflect and ask yourself the right questions are indisputable sources of effectiveness.

The art of the "pause" is a precious ally for managers of complex businesses. Such was the case for example for University of Miami School of Business Director Joyce Elam, responsible for managing over 9,000 students, 150 teachers and 300 staff, who related how being able to check her impulses got her out of a number of tricky situations.

Mastering the art of the pause can be a source of calm, smooth leadership amidst the turbulences which have become a normal part of the daily lives of every decisionmaker, for whom a capacity to stop and think has become a hallmark of wisdom: The kind of wisdom exemplified by the Saunders Hotel Group's CEO Jeffrey Saunders, who successfully developed a genuine time-out culture with his employees.

The Power of Pause

Based on *The Power of Pause: How to Be More Effective in a Demanding 24/7 World* by **Nance GUILMARTIN**, Jossey-Bass, December 2009.



How can we be fully effective when time becomes a scarce resource and the non-stop flow of demands prevents us from taking a step back? Without distance there can be no discernment, and without discernment, how can good long-term decisions be made? Guilmartin offers a handbook for reconnecting overcharged circuits and uncovering new resources, making the right choices and avoiding going down the wrong paths.

If, like the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, you too feel like you are forever late with your planning, the time is definitely ripe for you to get to know the virtues of the pause. Once you do any number of everyday expressions start to assume their full significance, such as: “Keeping your head above water,” even the most ardent practitioners of the breaststroke at the office will have to acknowledge the value of being able to tread water a while in order to catch your breath, if you want to keep going. Or how about “Stopping to take a pulse,” a practice designed to ensure you are headed in the right direction and don’t steer off track! As these and other expressions attest, the pause is a key workplace survival tactic, a crucial halt for 15 seconds, an hour or even a whole day when operational energies have ground to a halt. To anyone who believes enabling downtime periods works against the fostering of a workplace culture based on an imperative of immediacy, Guilmartin replies with a resounding: “Dead wrong!” The methodology she proposes is designed to teach those who never seem to have time to take their time, to take it precisely in order to become capable of gaining it. A simple formula can be found at the core of her reflections: Pause + Curiosity + Humility = Professional Effectiveness and Personal Accomplishment.

A PAUSE ... BUT TO DO WHAT?

How is a pause defined? For Guilmartin, it is that “period of time which keeps your actions from being reactions. It’s a safety valve affording you the opportunity to make a different choice from the one you would have made if you had instead rushed headlong forward, driven by what you think you know, have seen or heard.”

■ Taking a Pause Is a Reflex that Can Be a Lifesaver.

Guilmartin urges us to switch out of autopilot mode in order to be able to act based on freely made decisions instead of forever reacting. She willingly acknowledges the paradoxical side to her ideas: “You will have more time and uncover new options if you can manage to take your foot off the accelerator for a moment.” Slowing down in order to go faster is indeed a tricky feat, especially for those who are convinced their reputations will be at stake if they don’t respond to things fast enough. Nevertheless the advantages of the downtime moment are numerous, including:

- **Being (physically) more intelligent:** The pause is similar to the “relaxation response” identified forty years ago by the researcher Herbert Benson, which regulates stress via a distraction and control release mechanism. When this process is given the opportunity to unfold, it institutes better communication between the hemispheres of the brain and optimizes the fueling of regions devoted to attention and decision-making.
- **Being able to rise above:** The idea is not to silence your instincts, but to challenge them by ensuring they are not being short-circuited by the pressing need fulfill the expectations of

Acting or Reacting

Choosing to react is choosing to:

- leap directly to the conclusion
- win the battle but lose the war
- be defensive, justify yourself and accuse others
- take things “for yourself”
- compromise your position
- ask yourself “how can they do that to me”
- believe “I know I’m right”

Choosing to pause is choosing to:

- take a few seconds to plan things out
- ask yourself if your initial assumption was incorrect
- ask yourself if someone has misunderstood you
- seek to understand what you’re missing
- gauge the reality of the situation
- ask yourself if someone has misinterpreted something for you

your interlocutor or simply to skip over to the next thing. The pause is an act of presence of mind that enables you to ask better questions: What’s really going on? What’s not working? What can I do to steer things in what I think is the right direction?

BE CURIOUS, NOT FURIOUS: THE CURIOSITY PAUSE

What should you do when unexpected situations threaten to leave you taken aback, or when you find yourself in conflict? The answer is obvious: regain control. But how to do so intelligently and without provoking a crisis? The time has come to explore the virtues of curiosity and questioning. According to Guilmartin, “Curiosity is a state of mind that opens the path to the intelligence of communication.” That is why she urges us to set aside our natural desire to be right, accept sometimes being wrong, and look beyond the immediate facts in order to learn and make use of an entire situation as a resource for steering our thoughts and actions in a different direction.”

■ Removing Your Filters

The desire to be reactive and instantly effective all too often permanently muffles this curiosity we receive as a gift from childhood, a capacity we adults frequently forget in favor of other perceptual filters, such as intuition, experience, intelligence and even anger. Nothing diminishes more any chance we might have to decode situations, hear what others are saying and ourselves be heard in turn. Guilmartin suggests several exercises for taking back the reins by revitalizing our curiosity:

- become more aware of the filters reducing your capacity to be fully attentive in communication situations (e.g. excessive certainty, hurry to finish, miscomprehension, etc.);

The Author

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Photo : Martha Everson

- give your interlocutors the benefit of the doubt and try to understand what is motivating their behavior;
- stop brooding and harboring resentments that prevent you from objectively analyzing what is happening or being expressed;
- repeat back what has been said to prove your desire to understand, as opposed to your will to prove you are right (see the “Repeating Back” box, an excellent 21st century risk management tool).

These exercises are especially helpful for non person-to-person dialogs, (e.g. by email, etc.), which are often harder than direct interpersonal communications, primarily for purely physical reasons: we reflexively hold our breath whilst typing harsh emails, causing a non-negligible impact on the central nervous system. This “Email Apnea” at least partially explains how online aggressiveness and misunderstandings so easily escalate.

■ Experience Traps

Being able to take split second decisions is generally considered a talent, especially when such aptitude is reinforced by genuine professional experience. This is an art cultivated by doctors for example, who are often required to marry analysis, diagnosis and prescription in under ten minutes time. However just like medical practitioners, the risk for managers is ...

An Alternative to the “Scud Response”

“JoAnne” is the Director of Marketing for a large consulting firm who wants to publish an article about Acme, one of her client firms. The text she has in mind would be extremely glowing about Acme in general and Joanne’s direct contact in particular, whose approval she sought to secure on the eve of its publication ... The response came quickly: No. This meant JoAnne had to decide to hold off on the email she was going to send in reply, and take the time to understand her client’s attitude. After a 24-hour pause she was able to realize that her client simply didn’t want to be put in the spotlight personally, and indeed once she rewrote the article deleting out any personal comments, it was approved and published without hesitation.

... letting themselves be guided by their experiences to select only for information items likely to fit their expectations, whilst overlooking details which might turn out to be pivotal. The inevitable result is responding to the wrong problem with bad solutions ... What's the right reflex to adopt? Take the time to reexamine each piece of the puzzle once more, even if in principle you think you know them by heart.

LET YOURSELF NOT KNOW: THE HUMILITY PAUSE

"Whenever they hear someone talking about humility most people think: 'Yeah OK, I'll make an effort not to take all the credit and recognize the work done by others.'" However the concept of humility goes well beyond such basic modesty, insofar as it also implies knowing, and recognizing, one's one limits. Given today's performance standards, where skillsets are becoming obsolete at an ever faster pace, such a capacity for perpetual self-doubt is a fundamental element of leadership! Furthermore, even though an aptitude for humility may not be innate in everyone, it is still easily acquired according to Guilmartin, who proposes a simple method consisting in asking ourselves: "What don't I know I don't know?" every time we are feeling pressured to act too quickly.

■ Not Knowing Implies Growing

Being simultaneously "humble" and "curious" is an attitude that successfully suspends the reflex to jump to the end despite the certainty of being right, and to gather sufficient data to prove you are instead. It also triggers a process of introspection that leads to an exploration of each situation in a different light. Reality has not changed, but your perception will have evolved and, en route, you will have learned new things about yourself which you can then nourish in order to adapt your behavior. The "humility pause" offers you the "chance to transform your response mode to events, not only by improving your focus on each situation, but also by getting you to wonder: 'What can I change starting now based on what I now know I didn't know?'" Once you've reached this stage, you are qualified as an expert in what Guilmartin categorizes as "Pause 2.0."

■ Not Knowing Equals Better Managing

Humility and curiosity are also at the heart of team success. Managers who are experts forever sure of their facts and on top of their employees' agendas are a dying breed. "The job of leader has changed: it's no longer about being a knowledge expert and more about enabling and encouraging others to learn." Leaders have to demonstrate they are capable of finding answer by publicly asking the right questions, even if that takes them out of their comfort zones. "Leaders need to be able to point out what they don't know right in front of their employees and customers, as a way of eliciting them to seek out new territories."

Repeating Back: An Essential 21st Century Risk Management Tool

- Repeating back can spur your interlocutor to say more than they might have, and clarify key points, e.g.: "Yes that's right, and furthermore ..."
- Repeating back gives your interlocutor the chance to relate his or her priorities.
- By giving others the ability to amend what they have heard you reformulate for them, you are reinforcing mutual trust.
- The goal of repeating back is not to make sure you are right, but to ensure you have understood what the other is expressing.
- It's not a chance to justify yourself, give advice or start therapy.

■ Not Knowing Equals Better Managing

For managers, humility may also consist in admitting they do not always know how every minute of their employees' days are being filled. Heightened competition, new technologies, budget restrictions ... all tend to overload schedules in a way that is even more insidious insofar as employees do not want to look overloaded, and frequently hesitate to be the one to approach their managers about it. Guilmartin suggests "Plate Breaks" to avoid widespread burnout. The concept is simple: hold regular short meetings where each employee has to answer the following questions:

- What's on your plate?
- Is it too much?
- What's keeping you from emptying it?
- Is it just right, or should I do something to make it better?

The idea is not to prioritize properly, but to help people find solutions to empty their plates. By hitting the pause button in this way, both teams and individuals can step out of reaction mode to overstressed environments and assume the reins of their own destinies, work through unexplored scenarios and forge a new way of working together.

"These days, who is aware they have a choice to prioritize, reconfigure and even partially empty their plates?" asks Guilmartin, who challenges organizations. How can they inculcate the art of the pause in their employees out of the Brownian motion that characterizes their current environment? Guilmartin even goes so far as to urge leaders to include the right to a break in their corporate charters. But even before the issue becomes institutionalized, each of us at our own pace and based on our own capacity for discernment is capable of taking the time to sensitize our teams about it. ■

The Trickle Down Impact of the Deliberate Pause

Interview with **Jeffrey SAUNDERS**, president and CEO of Saunders Hotel Group (Boston), June 2010.

President and CEO of Saunders Hotel Group (SHG), Jeffrey Saunders has been coached by Nance Guilmartin on several occasions over the past two decades. He has integrated many of her ideas into his leadership perspective, to the point where they have become second nature and he now passes them on to others. Saunders testifies to the benefits of the pause and explains how it has made him a more effective leader.

BIOGRAPHY



Jeffrey SAUNDERS is the third generation president & CEO of Saunders Hotel Group. He is responsible for management, operations and marketing for all company properties and is also managing partner of the company's investment branch. Launched in 1996, the latter is known for its free-flowing approach to real estate acquisition and development.

A middle child, Jeffrey Saunders feels he inherited a natural disposition for standing back and quietly reflecting on situations before responding. "The oldest in many families tends to dominate, and the youngest tends to avoid responsibility," he admittedly generalizes. "I like to make everyone feel good." But above and beyond any natural tendencies, Saunders has also given considerable thought to his role as a leader. He considers his most important job to be setting an example for his team and measures his success as a leader by the extent to which his values are visible all the way down the hotel company value chain. These values include respect, recognition, and collaboration, and Saunders

deploys the principles described in *The Power of Pause* to bring them to life.

Selective Leadership Strategy

As far as Saunders is concerned, good leadership involves healthy doses of patience, listening, and respect for individual idiosyncrasies. "I believe in getting to know and managing personalities, not in trying to get people to comply with my expectations." Making employees at all levels comfortable and content is good for business, he adds. "Happier hotel general managers mean happier line teams and happier, better-served hotel guests." The act of pausing is a means to initiate this virtuous flow, and Saunders leverages "pause time" to review and

then deliberately choose how to deal with a specific person or issue. For example, he relates a recent experience where a pause enabled him to diffuse a potentially explosive situation.

One of SHG's branded hotels had not been performing up to expectations, so the company asked the brand to conduct a detailed study of how it could better support reservations production delivery to the hotel. Saunders received the report and sent it on to the person most directly concerned by the matter, the hotel general manager. The manager, whom Saunders describes as having an intense but wholly committed personality, reacted strongly and voiced disagreement with a number of items in the ...

... report. The brand was effectively trying to defend their inaction by suggesting hotel management had not taken previously recommended steps to increase reservations production. Saunders did not want to contribute to creating an “us vs. them” situation, so instead of responding immediately to his general manager, he imposed a two-day pause. This was balanced out by a commitment to come and see the GM in person. During this time, some of the emotional charge automatically dissipated, and Saunders came up with a strategy.

Instead of starting the meeting by listening to the manager, Saunders took the floor and reminded the manager of the business issues at hand. Saunders Group pays consistently high monthly fees for the brand and needs value. Saunders knew the hotel GM knew the system better than he, and needed her to suggest ways of leveraging it to the Saunders Group’s advantage. Saunders thus facilitated her “curiosity” and “humility”, also telling her something that she did not know—that an additional third party study was being conducted to provide further insight into how to increase hotel value and production. Only then did Saunders allow the manager’s pause to end, listening to her views as they reviewed the details of the contentious report and giving her the benefit of the doubt due to her more intimate knowledge of the hotel.

FACTS AND FIGURES SAUNDERS HOTEL GROUP

Founded: 1962, based on the purchase of the firm’s first hotel by Irving Saunders in 1940.

Headquarters: Boston.

Businesses: Own and operate hotels, hotel investment and development projects.

Headcount: 350 employees.

2009 Annual Sales: 39 million USD from six hotels.

Blur Hierarchical Separations with Sensitivity and Humility

“I like to learn from others,” Saunders comments. “Some leaders isolate themselves, automatically sitting at the head of the meeting table instead of beside another participant, but I have found it more enriching to mix with my teams.” For instance, Saunders refers to priceless lessons he has learned during “pauses” for occasional cocktails with the manager of a SHG hotel in Boston. “This person has shown me the power of caring for people, and of treating employees like family. For instance, he unhesitatingly got on a plane to attend an employee’s relative’s funeral. I would have hesitated, questioning whether such a trip were appropriate.” But Saunders says that when a hotel GM goes the extra mile for his team, hotel staff does the same for

guests. It is no wonder that the manager’s hotel ranks #1 in Boston on *Trip Advisor* and is on Travel & Leisure’s list of the world’s top 500 hotels.

Another deliberate pause that Saunders makes is to attend new employee orientation events, even though there is a corporate welcome video for this purpose, where he, his brother (currently chairman of the company), and his father “speak” to new employees. But “a smile on video is not comparable to one directed toward a specific person,” he says simply. “My taking the time to attend such an event is my way to convey my value of leadership as a bona fide member of the team.” In addition, this initiative enables Saunders to find out who is working for SHG. “Despite difference in personality or background, it is essential that all of our employees share our attitudes. We want people who pause and ask questions—not “yes” people.”

In conclusion, Saunders comments that he has not been coached in a while but finds himself advising and coaching his co-workers on Guilmartin’s concepts. Still, he believes his leadership would benefit from better “rephrasing” reflexes. “Rephrasing is a means to double the information you are getting. When you repeat, the other person repeats, generally adding detail. Also, people love to know they have been heard, especially in our age of Blackberries in meeting rooms.” Whether a situation is good or bad, Saunders advocates “hands-on” leadership. Congratulate the members of the hotel staff for helping a then-satisfied guest; get on a plane to announce a problem face-to-face, not by e-mail. Saunders’ curiosity and humility-tinted strategy is clearly successful. In an industry with an acknowledged average employee turnover rate of close to 35%*, Saunders Hotel Group’s tracked rate is 11.25%, and many members of the Saunders Group have been part of the family for twenty years and more. ■

* According to Bureau of Labor statistics for the period May 2009 to April 2010.

Lead Out of Conflict

Pause:

- To not throw oil on an emotional fire
- To develop a strong, targeted response

Answer unasked questions:

- To refocus on business issues
- To validate the other party’s expertise
- To contribute new elements

Listen:

- To what you do not/cannot know
- To show support and foster collaboration

Tip:

- When there is an emotional component to an exchange, pause for a longer time.

Pause for Creative Leadership Solutions

Interview with **Joyce J. ELAM**, executive dean of Florida International University (FIU) School of Business (Miami), June 2010.

Improving leadership effectiveness has been a longtime focus of Joyce Elam, who has recently co-developed a women's leadership development program at FIU. Looked up to for guidance by the business school's 9000 students, 150 faculty, and 300 staff, Elam been drawing on the Power of Pause (PoP) method to enhance her own leadership, and more specifically, her relational skills for the past five years.

BIOGRAPHY



Joyce J. ELAM is executive dean of the Florida International University (FIU) College of Business Administration in Miami, Florida. She is an expert in the strategic use of information technology and holds a prominent role in the study of women in leadership. In 2008, she was named the AXA Advisors 2008 International Business Woman of the Year by the Coral Gables (Florida) Chamber of Commerce, and in 2007, she was elected international dean of the year by the Academy of International Business Fellows. She holds a PhD in operations research and a BA in mathematics from the University of Texas.

In 2005, a reorganization scheme was launched at Florida International University's School of Business. Interested in taking advantage of the upheaval to boost her leadership team, Executive Dean Joyce Elam solicited Nance Guilmartin to run a workshop to help leadership teams work together more effectively. "One of the most challenging parts of my job is to ensure the support and collaboration of other college deans," Elam explains, adding that she was aware that "fighting" for resources or control over a university-wide program was hardly beneficial to the organization. For Elam, the encounter with Nance Guilmartin provided answers to her needs, and her leadership has not been the same ever since!

Relationship Management and Enhancement

"My ability to lead my organization depends on my capacity to build good working relationships with other people," Elam explains. She has used the principles described in "The Power of Pause" (PoP) to learn to put herself in the other person's shoes and to try to understand their position. "A lot of conflict is due to miscommunication and misunderstanding that often stems from simply not taking the time to find out what is really going on. PoP has taught me to ask more questions and jump to fewer conclusions."

For example, Elam tells a story of seemingly irreconcilable differences that nonetheless has a happy ending. A fight

for space, an increasingly rare resource at the growing university, led Elam to test the power of pause. A somewhat abrupt e-mail from the FIU provost instructed Elam to move one of her business school programs to make way for a new program from the school of arts and sciences (A&S). "My fingers were itching to type back, 'No Way!'", but instead, I paused.

1. A pause to allow questions to take shape. What was really going on? Was one program really more important than the other? Was there a way for the business school to give up the space and still satisfy its own students' needs?

➔ Elam realized she could give up the given computer lab space on weekdays, provided her students have full access on Saturdays. ●●●

...

2. An exploratory phone call to the “rival”. Prolonging the pause, Elam called the dean of A&S to ask about his needs and put forward her idea for space-sharing.

➤ The reward for this effort was a positive response from the person directly concerned by the issue. Elam stresses, “One of the most important things I learned from Guilmartin is to pick up the phone.”

3. End the pause by acting (vs. reacting) on the issue. The tone of the response to the e-mail was not angry, but rather calm and assured.

➤ Instead of a refusal or an argument, Elam presented a pre-arranged, win-win counterproposal to the provost’s demand which was both accepted and welcomed. “If I had not paused to reflect on the issue, formulate questions, and get additional information, this situation would

In 2010, Elam commissioned a service provider for a new online MBA program that would have 5 start dates per year, however three weeks prior to the first starting date, there was trouble.

1. Contract discrepancy. Of the 100-student minimum per start stipulated in the contract to be recruited by the service provider, there were only 85 enrollments.

➤ Time to pause and ask which is the lesser of two “evils”? Cancelling this program start, or going ahead with only 85 students?

2. Re-negotiations. Elam decided to play it straight and present her dilemma to her service provider.

➤ Here, the key here was “humility” and “curiosity”. Contrary to standard negotiation behavior, these precepts led Elam to offer information and ask for more of the same. Did the provider

enrollments in one could thus be compensated for by more in another.

➤ Beyond a solution to the given problem, this process successfully laid the foundation of a genuine partnership between Elam and the service provider. The triad pause + humility + curiosity enabled both parties to broaden their perspectives and realize the value of investing in their shared future.

Smarter Instinct

What if there is truly no time to pause? Elam admits that sometimes you do have no have time to pause and have to listen to your gut. Yet like Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *Blink*, she believes instinct can be trained to be trustworthy “It is difficult to actually ignore emotions, but you can learn not to let them hijack your behavior. Especially because negative emotions feel terrible, waste energy, and poison the work environment. Leaders have to set the example, because their behavior influences everyone else’s.” What type of leadership example does Elam now set and expect her leadership team to also convey?

- **Awareness.** Leaders must get into the habit of putting themselves into another person’s shoes. What is he or she trying to achieve?

- **The anti-arrogance principle.** Do not assume you know everything you need to. Good leaders ask questions.

- **Talk and patterns.** The more you talk to people, the more you find out, the more you learn to see patterns, and the stronger the foundation for trustworthy instinct.

- **The eternal “why”.** People look to leaders for answers, but they need to develop their reflexes to ask questions and banish exclamations. Instead of “No way!” say “How come?”

“The ideas in PoP are simple, but they are not always easy to apply,” Elam concludes. “Still, the method has made me a better leader, because it has enabled me to build better relationships.” As far as she is concerned, there are no negative or dangerous sides to the process. On the contrary, it is a fantastic source of unsuspected solutions. ■

* Little, Brown and Company, January 2005.

“There is always time to pause. Even when you are pressed, you do not have to allow yourself to be pushed.”

inevitably have damaged my relationships with both the provost and the other dean, and I probably would not have retained the space I needed for my students.”

A New Form of Negotiation

“There is always time to pause,” Elam affirms. “Even when you are pressed, you do not have to allow yourself to be pushed.” Because pressure, like disagreement, triggers negative emotions, Elam says that one of the greatest benefits of the pause is to allow emotional charges to dissipate. A ‘Let me think for a minute’ generally suffices to sooth the atmosphere and open a door to greater cooperation. Nowhere is this more critical than in negotiations. Elam has found that the PoP techniques have led her to break traditional rules of negotiation, with winning results.

understand that her reputation was at stake, because she had assured the faculty that the program would have 100 students per start? Did he know that faculty was skeptical about the program’s potential, but Elam has pushed it? What were the provider’s objectives in their deal? Was he interested in providing additional services?

3. Revelation of shared interests. Open discussion revealed that both parties had an interest in reinterpreting the terms of the contract. Elam’s success with the program launch and associated credibility at the university was important for the service provider, because she was in a position to order additional programs from him.

4. A win-win gamble. Contract terms were reinterpreted to mean an average of 100-person participation over a series of starts for the MBA program. Fewer