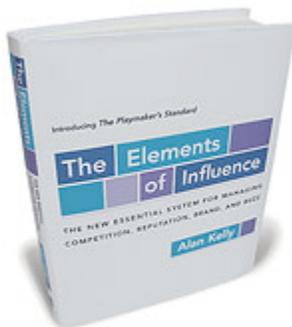


November 1, 2006

**BOOKS****The Plan Behind That Power Play**
 By **LYNNE D. JOHNSON**  
 November 1, 2006; Page D10

In the summer of 2005, troubled by declining sales, waning market share and bulging inventories, General Motors began offering its employee discount program -- traditionally reserved for employees, retirees and their family members -- to consumers. The tactic proved wildly popular with bargain-hunting car buyers: GM's sales increased 41% in June, making it the auto maker's best month in 19 years. Seeing this, Ford and DaimlerChrysler decided to get in on the action, making offers in July that mirrored GM's program. It was a prolific selling period for all three brands, but after several extensions of their respective programs sales eventually trailed off.



Patrick Conlon

The get-ahead maneuvers of business leaders, marketers, ad execs and even politicians.

In "**The Elements of Influence**," Alan Kelly says that Ford's and DaimlerChrysler's copying of GM's strategy is an example of what he calls "Crowd," which he defines as "an attempt by a player to match or adopt an opponent's position in a marketplace or to affiliate with a trend, idea, or issue." Mr. Kelly -- the chief executive of a consulting business called The Playmaker's Standard, which specializes in "strategy execution" -- has subtitled his book "The New Essential System for Managing Competition, Reputation, Brand, and Buzz." No surprise, then, that his explanation of how Crowd works within his system includes a table laying out the strategy's many "upsides" ("Holds rival in check") and "downsides" ("Limits a player's ability to drive distinction and build leadership into its brand and reputation").

"The Elements of Influence" is full of such acute distillations of Mr. Kelly's ideas, peppered with topical references to politics, the media, technology and pop culture. The concept he calls Crowd is one of 25 "plays" that Mr. Kelly has incorporated into a system that classifies the maneuvers used by business leaders, advertising executives, public-relations managers, politicians and others to achieve that elusive quality known as influence.

Mr. Kelly dubs one of his plays "Trial Balloon." He defines this as "the preview and testing of preliminary ideas or tentative plans" and illustrates it by discussing, among much else, Disney's decision in 2005 to ally itself with Apple Computer in order to test the marketplace for its content on the video iPod. Another play is the Filter ("The selective retransmission of information, where a player promotes and/or withholds information to build or defend its position"), as when "the microprocessor and computer memory maker AMD trumpeted that it had finally outsold Intel in the microprocessor

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segment." What was filtered out: the fact that AMD's overall revenues "were a mere fraction of their giant rival's, still a semiconductor juggernaut."

If all this sounds familiar, it is. For a long time now, MBA-toting professionals -- marketers, sales execs, PR specialists -- have been "managing the competition." Mr. Kelly knows this, of course, but he claims that his "is the first system to capture and organize the fundamental strategies and methods that practitioners of influence employ to assert and defend their positions in a marketplace."

Though "The Elements of Influence" often feels like a long brochure designed to recruit new clients -- Mr. Kelly's system bears the name of his business -- the book does have the merit of making us look at time-worn facets of the business world in a fresh and freshly ordered way.

#### DETAILS

##### THE ELEMENTS OF INFLUENCE

By Alan Kelly  
(Dutton, 340 pages, \$26.95)



Much space in the book is devoted to the Playmaker's Table, a variant of the periodic table that sorts Mr. Kelly's 25 strategic plays into three groups: Assess (plays of the Assess type are "characteristically subtle, typically passive, and are often used to monitor and profile other players and

marketplaces"); Condition (these are "moderate, often indirect, and are frequently used to encourage or suppress actions or to influence or reform the sentiments of other players"); and Engage ("active, usually overt strategies whose purposes are to destabilize players and marketplaces"). The Trial Balloon play falls into the Assess division, the Filter play into Condition and the Crowd play into Engage. The three groupings are further divided into subgroups, but in "The Elements of Influence" the play's the thing, so each one gets its own exhaustive chapter, complete with illustrations, charts, tips and case studies.

Though Mr. Kelly's goal seems to be simplification, he gets bogged down with explaining the minutiae of his system. Indeed, the "The Elements of Influence" might have been helped by a brush with "The Elements of Style"; it too often reads like a textbook. What is more, in trying to make a science out of an art, Mr. Kelly underestimates the role played by pure luck in such a subjective world -- and he removes the mysterious, alluring quality that draws so many to the influence industry in the first place.

***Ms. Johnson is the senior editor of FastCompany.com.***

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