



OUTSIDE, LOOKING IN

Dr. Alex Bavelas, Psychologist, Business Consultant, Views Tektronix

(Dr. Alex Bavelas, psychologist on the staff of Stanford university Graduate School of Business, visited Tektronix in December as a resource person on organization and interpersonal relationships. He consulted here with Bob Davis and his corporate managers.

Dr. Bavelas, a student of famous Gestalt psychologist Dr. Kurt Lewin, has been a consultant to many firms, including Lockheed and Ampex. He conducted research at MIT on communications models, organization models and group operations, and worked at Bell Labs studying the psychology of men operating equipment. He has a doctorate from MIT.

Unlike many Tektronix visitors who are (a) impressed, (b) dismayed, (c) confused, (d) astounded or (e) none of these—Dr. Bavelas left behind him some graphic comments about the Tektronix he saw: First, in this interview for Tek Talk; second—and more intensively—in a two-hour session with Bob and his group. This meeting followed two days of conferences with individual managers and staff.

In his confidential session with the group, he analyzed company organization. In the interview below, his comments are more general, but center largely on communications systems.)

"Tektronix is lousy with romance," said Dr. Alex Bavelas.

"You admit you're young—and fallible—but you have pride in what you're

doing, and there's a feeling throughout that something's about to happen.

"It's an exciting company."

Looking at Tek, he saw high motivation, optimism, modesty, enthusiasm, confidence in the wisdom of management and a willingness to use ability whatever its source.

Rose-colored glasses? Not his.

He also observed smugness, feeble communications practices and more than a little confusion.

"People here are intensely motivated," he commented. "Each one talks like a member of the original family."

The feeling that "things are about to happen" is not typical of all companies, nor is the Tek awareness that the company's success is due to the result of general effort, nor is the individual feeling of directly participating in that success.

"Here there seems to be a view that the person is evaluated in terms of what he can do and not where he was educated; a willingness to use ability wherever you find it, and a feeling that the individual is in a way important to the excellence of your product. I think maybe you'd find some people who might have a hard time getting hired elsewhere doing good, inventive things here.

Sees No Politics Here

"You have an impressive absence of politics. In most other companies you

see complicated political maneuvering. Here your disagreements tend to be on the basis of technical problems, for example.

"I'd say you're well above average in your freedom to vary—to depart from conventional ideas. And you prize this asset highly.

"Not that freedom is always an easy situation. It may cause frustrations—yet it must be exciting . . . To have able people in regimented jobs **without** freedom, and have apathy set in—that is the far worse situation. In general, a person will become apathetic when he sees little chance to do anything different.

Pay with Confusion

"Yet at Tektronix you buy this freedom with confusion—and you do have confusion. And so you pay the price. Myself, I think it's probably a good bargain."

And then he warmed to his specialty, communications systems in an organization.

"I don't think you shine much here in effective communicating," he commented. "Maybe you're buying something in terms of free operations—but there are large areas of ignorance about what's going on someplace else in the company . . . I see no thought-out process to make the necessary information available. When a person needs to know information, there should be some way for him to get it."

Outside, Looking In

Lower echelons typically demand information, he said, and if they don't get it they'll assume it's being held back.

"A manager doesn't have the alternative not to respond to a question. There is no alternative. When he keeps silent, he's giving an answer. When you say nothing, you give the questioner permission to conjecture.

"The demand for information is not a function of how much a person knows, but I think he could operate better if he knew more.

"Employees want to know more about what the boss is thinking—or they're insecure about what's going on. Managers need the confidence and respect of their employees. You can make a bad decision from time to time and survive, but once you lose credibility in employees' eyes you're in trouble. It's a tough thing to get back, if—even once—you violate their trust."

Wife Has Same Problem

Some persons see communications problems as the result of largeness. Dr. Bavelas says there is no necessary correlation. Take the family—a small unit—as a typical example. What is the wife's common complaint? "My husband doesn't talk to me."

The solution to any organization's communications problems is not a matter of information **packaging**, but one of basic **communicativeness**, he said. It is true that the larger a system becomes, the more difficult its mechanical aspect.

In a company, a basic minimum of information is necessary. Without this first stage, an employee doesn't know enough to determine what else he needs to know.

"How much first-stage information is available reflects in how fast an employee feels at home. It's surprising how easy it is to miss this point . . .

"I look on management as an information-processing and decision-making mechanism. An organizational system is like a nervous system; I'm interested not in what messages are transmitted but in what systems operate; in converting energy and intelligence into some product; in making the most effective use of human effort."

At Tek he saw that effort and energy operate in an atmosphere with a maximum of freedom and—maybe necessarily—a husky share of confusion.

"It's easy," he observed, "to draw up rules of operation if you have a lot of them. But if you want a minimum number of general rules, you must plan like mad and pick the right ones.

"Never make a virtue of confusion . . . You may only be kidding yourselves."