Chapter 1

Count Von Bismarck and His Soldiers' Multi-Dimensionality

Count Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian war strategist who conquered Paris in 1870, is the unlikely inspiration for this book. I had been an aspiring aeronautical engineer before World War Two, an electronics engineer afterwards, the designer of oscilloscopes and other innovative patent-worthy instruments for Tektronix, a founder of Floating Point Systems, Inc. and a couple of other businesses, all of which were taken public. But no matter where I went and no matter what I did, problems and arguments were part of my daily work life. Most often, difficulties began because people had already made up their minds, without hearing the facts.

At first, I believed there was a straight line between *"I'm right"* and *"you're wrong"* and that *"if you just got your facts in order, you would see my truth.*" I assumed the truth would be found somewhere along that unwavering line between the sparring factions and the best course was to negotiate along that line until an acceptable solution could be found. I thought many intractable problems could be solved the same way—that is, if all the options between the extremes were examined, the best solution would be found.

Back in 1962, when I was employed by Tektronix in Beaverton, Oregon, William Pemberton, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and general semanticist from Mill Valley, California came to the company and presented a seminar where he mentioned Count von Bismarck's strategy to determine a soldier's most likely behavior on the battlefield. Pemberton explained that von Bismarck visualized two important measures when assessing his troops: a soldier's *propensity to take action*, and their *intelligence*.

We will now consider how the *pre-Bismarck realization* discussion would go. Imagine sitting at a table, with your hands formed into fists, and your elbows and forearms resting on the table. Align your arms so a straight line goes from your left elbow, through opposing fists, and on to the right elbow. Symbolically, the left fist represents the attribute *Propensity to Take Action*, and the right fist, *Intelligence*.

Regarding the argument as to which is most important for a soldier—taking action or being intelligent—imagine the fists representing the two people arguing, pushing along the line of the arms, so that the fists shift left and right, as each party to the argument makes points in favor of their position. The person arguing in favor of taking action would point out that in many battles, the cavalry should charge earlier than originally planned, if the enemy unexpectedly breaks ranks. And that is certainly true, so the fists push to the left.

But the person in favor of intelligence might retort that there are also cases where an ambush is given away by some person taking action too early and firing prematurely. That is also true, so the fists shift back to the right. Then, the intelligence advocate says that if the battle is properly planned, you maximize the probability of winning. That is certainly true, and the fists move to the right. But the Action advocate points out that battles seldom go as planned and it is frequently necessary to take an unplanned common-sense action in order to save the day, so you do not have to be a rocket scientist to do the right thing at the right time. Therefore, the fists shift back left.

Now note that both parties were correct under certain circumstance, and both were wrong under certain circumstances. Neither party was getting anywhere, since they would only look at where they themselves were correct, and where their opponent was wrong. This is what I label "co-linear arguing." The parties are imagining they are arguing back and forth, trying to find which end (elbow) of the line is the "correct" end, or at least, where along a line between the two parties the truth lays.

Sometimes co-linear arguments are correct and properly used to resolve a conflict. In this present case however, the reason for the lack of resolution is that the participants do not recognize that the attributes of Intelligence and Propensity to Take Action do *not* map on top of each other. The attributes are independent of each other. Thus, they should not be plotted along a line, but rather shown as being at right angles to each other. Such orthogonal arrangements of the attributes suddenly open up the solutions

available.

Pemberton explained that von Bismarck, using the character traits of *intelligence* and *propensity to take action*, created a simple graph of two lines intersecting in the center and forming four quadrants. Intelligence was the vertical axis; propensity for action was the horizontal axis.

The top of the vertical axis of *intelligence* was labeled **Smart;** the bottom was labeled **Stupid**. The far right end of the horizontal axis, *propensity for action*, was labeled **Active**, the far left end was labeled **Lazy.** Figure 1.1 shows this configuration:

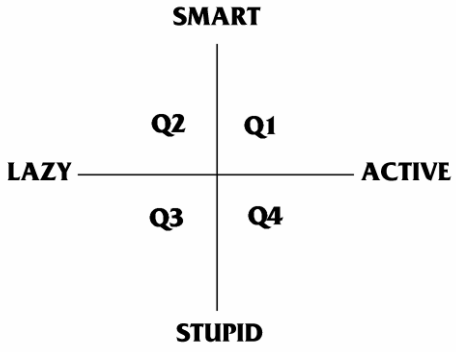

Figure 1.1

Most people are not at the extreme of any quadrant; the bulk of humanity clusters near the center where axes cross. In the case of intelligence, for instance, a person's IQ score can be plotted on the vertical scale and their numerical ranking will be found somewhere along the axis line between **Smart** and **Stupid**. "Stupid" in this context, means slow to learn or understand. Few people are truly brilliant; fewer are imbeciles.

The figure shows that in quadrant Q1 the soldiers are both **Smart** and **Active**. These soldiers, von Bismarck reasoned, make perfect field officers because they are men who will take the initiative if the battle plan changes and will make things right. If, for example, the enemy breaks ranks earlier than expected, the field officers in quadrant Q1 will order the cavalry to charge earlier than originally planned. Or, if there is a shortage of ammunition, the field officer will make a midnight requisition. Whatever it takes, these are the men who will figure out what will work best, and they will do it.

In quadrant Q2 are **Smart** and **Lazy** soldiers. These people make the best staff officers. They will figure out the best way to pull off the operation required—with the least effort. Count on them to plan correctly.

In quadrant Q3 are **Stupid** and **Lazy** soldiers. Count von Bismarck knew he could rely on these men to do what they were told because that path caused them the least trouble and required the lowest expenditure of energy. Soldiers in quadrant Q3 are the perfect enlisted men. You do not have to worry about them causing problems. They are determined to follow the orders of the smarter field officers since obeying orders will keep them out of trouble.

In quadrant Q4 are **Active and Stupid** soldiers. Count von Bismarck correctly realized he needed to keep them out of his army. These impetuous men tend to mess up battle plans. They will see the enemy and fire early, thus destroying the surprise attack. They will grow restless and vary their routine, but not be smart enough to recognize the trouble they may cause. These men should be classified "4F," and be exempt from serving military duty (in the US military, 4F is the designation for "unfit for military service.")

Count von Bismarck's view as presented was an exaggeration for clarity. Certainly in our modern armed forces there is a need for very smart enlisted men and women to handle the new high-technology weapons and techniques that are prevalent in today's services. But on that fateful day in 1962 when I heard Doctor Pemberton's talk, I learned absolutely clearly that people should not be judged or classified on only one isolated attribute. People are complex creatures and the situations they find themselves in require more than one defining characteristic.

I experimented with von Bismarck's theory to see how his concept worked with sellers and customers, entrepreneurs and underwriters, engineers and marketers, children and parents, tech-weenies and liberal arts graduates. I tried it out in situations where arguments developed, in personal dilemmas and even when instrument panels needed to be designed… in other words, in all areas where a solution to a

problem with conflicting attributes would be beneficial. I found that von Bismarck's graph of intersecting axes forced me out of thinking that answers could only be found somewhere in the that nebulous gray scale between the two extremes of one straight line.

Count von Bismarck's theory of analysis clarified for me the idea that a whole universe of solutions exists surrounding what I thought was a simple line of contention between parties to an argument. This lead to the mantra, *Get off the line, get into the Area of Enlightenment!* With the expanded information, I found I could better appreciate all sides of dilemmas, unlock barriers to resolving problems, differences of opinion and prejudices. I realized myriad solutions were possible when I stepped into the multi-dimensional *Area of Enlightenment.*