So far we have said a lot about negotiation, but relatively little about the negotiator himself. To complement Chapter 8, where we took a close look at behaviour before and after negotiations, we shall now examine the communication skills of the negotiator. We are particularly interested in the question of how he perceives himself and is perceived by others. It has repeatedly been found in the practice of conducting negotiations that over- or underestimation of one’s own capacities results in serious mistakes and even failure.

Personal characteristics

From the previous chapters we should now have a fair impression of the personal attributes required of a negotiator. He should be a good communicator, be able to grasp and relay information rapidly and effectively. He should get on well with other people, but nevertheless have the broadest possible repertoire of different behavioural patterns – not all of them necessarily pleasant. Obviously, each individual has his own personal style – one will be more communicative, another more reserved. Such personal inclinations or preferred behaviours will support certain strategic positions better than others, for example a cooperative approach rather than competition, accommodation rather than avoidance. But a really practised negotiator can ring the changes on his own inclinations to the point that, like a good actor, he can play every part competently. The choice of communication style will then depend solely on the situation at hand, and not on his personal limitations. This ensures a maximum coherence between intention and efficacy, given the multi-
plicity of the challenges involved. Figure 12-1 shows how by overcoming personal preferences the effectiveness of our behaviour can be enhanced. If for example I wish to exert pressure and take a dominant position towards my opponent, I must behave in a coherent manner, that is to say my words and my body language should be firm, assertive and evaluat-ing, and not weakened by too many ifs and buts. The same is true for lis-tening, which reinforces the position of collaboration and the joint devel-opment of innovative solutions. For this I need to put out my demands with firmness, while remaining attentive to the other through asking ques-tions, listening or reflecting. Only in this way can the needs of both sides be put squarely on the table, and an integrative solution achieved.

**Deficiencies of perception**

Quite independently of the personal qualities of a negotiator, it is vital that he know himself. Nothing is more dangerous than to have a mistak-en judgment of oneself. In this context we also speak of deficiencies and distortions in perception. Figure 12-2 opposite illustrates this, comparing self-assessment with assessment by others for each of the five strategic behaviours discussed in Chapter 5. The scale at the left ranges from 0 (hardly present) to 5 (strongly marked).

The negotiator in our example did indeed evaluate his inclination towards collaboration correctly, but in all the other positions he was quite far from the mark, in terms of what other people thought. His own