Supervisors as moderators
of survey feedback and change processes in teams

Ingela Jöns

Lehrstuhl für Wirtschafts- und Organisationspsychologie
Universität Mannheim, Schloß EO 248, D-68131 Mannheim
Telefon: +49 621 / 292 2576, Telefax: +49 621 / 292 5708
E-mail: ingela.joens@psychologie.uni-mannheim.de
Internet: www.psychologie.uni-mannheim.de/psycho1/psycho1.htm

Abstract
In the context of the necessity for cultural and leadership change employee surveys are being increasingly implemented in practice. This raises the question about the efficiency of the survey feedback technique when it is implemented regularly throughout the organization and when managers take over the moderator’s role.
First, influential factors and criteria of efficiency are discussed. Then, findings from the analysis of supervisor assessments in three companies (106 teams) and of a regularly implemented employee survey in one company (133 departments) are presented. The quality and efficiency of self-guided feedback processes (FBP) related to initial situations, in comparison with neutral guiding, considering the development and comparing both instruments are examined.
To sum up, the findings confirm the widespread notion that surveys should be followed by FBP to the employees to create improvements. The superiority of self-guided FBP is demonstrated particularly by the results on process quality and improvement in superior behavior. The findings on the development indicate that supervisors tend to improve in their moderation. Although self-guided FBP can certainly not be generally recommended on the basis of this study, the opposite claim that employing moderators has the greatest chance of success can also be no longer upheld.

Keywords
Supervisor Assessment, Employee Survey, Survey Feedback, Organizational Development, Change Management

1 Introduction
The survey feedback technique can look back on a long tradition in theoretical and practical organizational development in the course of which organizational development techniques have been mainly implemented within a specific project and with the support of an external change agent. The change agent not only undertook the data generation and analysis but also presented the results and guided the resulting discussions and deduction of management strategies and necessary measures for the future.
Today however the continual improvement of products, processes and structures is regarded as a central topic in all departments and groups within the organization. Change management has therefore become one of the leadership's central tasks. In the context of the necessity for cultural and leadership change employee surveys and upward appraisals are being increasingly implemented in practice in order to initiate and support decentralized change processes (vgl. Bungard and Jöns, 1997; Freimuth and Kiefer, 1995; Hofmann et al, 1995).

This entails two fundamental differences to classical survey feedback approaches: First of all the managers themselves are responsible for joint discussion of the results and for making conclusions about measures to be taken as well as for putting these into practice successfully. Secondly, the surveys, as regular feedback instruments, should contribute to continued improvement of work and change processes. This raises the question about the efficiency of the survey feedback technique when it is implemented regularly throughout the whole organization and when managers take over the moderator's role themselves.

The question of the quality and efficiency of feedback concepts and processes within supervisor assessments and employee surveys was examined on the basis of the evaluation of a number of practical projects (see also Jöns, 1998). Results of projects on self-guided feedback processes related to initial situations, in comparison with neutral guiding, considering the level of experience gained by repeated implementation and when both feedback instruments are implemented in parallel are the focus of this publication.

2 Survey Feedback and Change Processes in Teams
Before embarking on the studies carried out the current research status and the theoretical foundations of these studies will be explained starting with the sequence of survey feedback processes.

**Sequence of Survey Feedback Processes in Teams**
The sequence of survey feedback processes in teams followed in practice during survey projects throughout an organization can be described as follows (see figure 1).

![Figure 1 Concept for the evaluation of survey feedback processes in teams](image-url)
As a first step a questionnaire survey is carried out amongst company employees. In the majority of cases this is done via a written, mainly standardized questionnaire. In this paper we cover at this point supervisor assessments as well as employee surveys. Where employee surveys also include questions on leadership behavior, as is generally the case, and when in addition results are processed on the level of individual departments or teams then these two tools differ merely in the spectrum of topics covered. Both comprise upward appraisal of supervisors (for details see Jöns, 1997a). We distinguish two phases within the feedback process: feedback of the results to the supervisor (Feedback I) and to the employees (Feedback II). Based on the discussion of the results common goals and measures are developed, recorded in plans of action and then implemented and evaluated (for details see Jöns, 1997b).

Details of the sequence depend in each individual case on the project concept within the company: the tools implemented, information and preparation of those involved as well as support for decentralized processes (i.e. via the use of moderators). In addition it is necessary to consider the quality of the actual implementation when analyzing the efficiency with regard to individual teams as this can effect the acceptance of the tool and especially the competency and motivation of the supervisors in their function as change managers.

Before going into detail on the influencing factors and the criteria for efficiency, we shall first take a look at research to date. Available studies on survey feedback as a technique for intervention within organizational development emphasize their general efficiency (see the meta-analysis by Neuman et al, 1989). As these studies are aimed primarily at the level of the organization as a whole they are less interesting for examining individual teams with their supervisors.

Some Comments on the Research to Date on Supervisor Assessments
If we therefore take a closer look at the status of research on instruments for supervisor assessment in a narrower sense, we find numerous studies comparing the evaluations of various groups of appraisers (see the meta-analysis of Mabe and West, 1982; Harris and Schaubroeck, 1988), on the meaning and influencing factors of the concurrence between self and other ratings (e.g. Wohlers et al, 1993; Yammarino and Atwater, 1997). We also find surveys on prevalence, objectives and concepts within organizations (e.g. Bungard et al, 1997; Fecher, 1995; Voltz, 1988) as well as on acceptance of supervisor assessment methods, on necessary conditions and requirements from the point of view of management, of employee representatives, of supervisors and of employees (e.g. Reinecke, 1983; Ebner and Krell, 1991). While these studies certainly offer concrete tips on design their assumptions regarding the efficiency of the projects is based purely on the attitudes of the participants they questioned.

Over and above this some research studies have examined the attitudes of employees and especially of supervisors directly following supervisor assessment projects (e.g. Bernardin et al, 1993; London et al, 1990; Zeitz, 1998). While the results of these post-hoc opinion polls generally held several weeks after project completion support the assumption of mainly positive reactions and effects, they allow no conclusions to be made on actual change brought about by supervisor assessments. In addition these individual surveys are each based on specific project concepts so that it is almost impossible to compare alternative concepts or to generalize conclusions.
In summary we have to conclude that despite the increased popularity and usage in practice there have hardly been any scientific longitudinal studies on their effects (e.g. Hegarty, 1974; Leupold, 1983; Smither et al., 1995) nor systematic evaluation studies on the efficiency of alternative concepts (e.g. Hofmann et al., 1995; Bergmann and Krist, 1998). This situation is added to by the fact that a theoretical involvement with the topic, as has been undertaken on informal and formal feedback related to work behavior and to the performance evaluation of individual employees, (e.g. Farr, 1991) has up to now hardly been undertaken on upward and team feedback in organizations.

**Influential Factors and Criteria of Efficiency**

Given this status of research we were unable when planning this study to fall back on available models of survey feedback processes in teams. As well as the single variants of the projects as conditional factors in the comparative analysis, the quality of the project execution relating to the different phases must, as was stated above, also be considered as an influential factor on the team level.

Based on existing research results it is further assumed that individual attitudes towards the instrument are of importance for the way the feedback process is experienced and for behavior during the process. These attitudes will be influenced by previous and current experience with this or a similar feedback instrument (see Farr, 1991).

Whilst to date no, or only modest effects could be found regarding general surrounding conditions (e.g. job security, see Leupold, 1983) and structural characteristics (e.g. level within the hierarchy, see Smither et al., 1995), the initial situation in the teams proves to be a decisive influential factor. Initial situation refers primarily to the leadership culture, leadership behavior and cooperation between employees and supervisors – mainly as measured by the survey data (see figure 1).

The initial situation acquires its meaning first of all from the fact that the necessary and ascertained changes are not independent of the level observed at the start of the process. There is a tendency for the measures to show worse results for managers who on comparison were rated very well whilst managers who received an average or low rating show an improvement (see Leupold, 1983; Smither et al., 1995). Secondly, the initial rating is simultaneously that which is played back to supervisors and which significantly influences acceptance as has been universally demonstrated by research on interpersonal feedback (see Oberhoff, 1978). Thirdly, it can be assumed that there is a direct influence of leadership and cooperation in the past on behavior during the feedback process. This not only holds for the supervisors' behavior, which in addition to their competency and attitudes is also influenced by how they expect employees to behave during feedback discussions, but also for participation in the survey itself (see Jöns and Mataja, 1998) and openness and involvement of employees in discussions, all of which depend on the prevailing culture regarding dealing with mistakes and criticism as well as particularly the degree of trust in the supervisor (see Dyer, 1974).

In order to evaluate efficiency, effects or success of survey feedback processes, measured changes relating to supervisors' behavior mainly on the basis of self and other ratings are used (e.g. Smither et al., 1995). In employee surveys the measured aspects of satisfaction with the job and with the situation are examined additionally and can be complemented by objective criteria on change such as absenteeism (see Leupold, 1983).

Based on ideas taken from learning theory a distinction is made here between process efficiency and result efficiency (see figure 1). **Result efficiency** refers to (experienced) change, i.e. achieving set goals, as in the commonly understood sense of
the term. Process efficiency refers to the evaluation of the feedback process. Basically this involves, from the managers' point of view, Feedback Phase I (handing over of results and preparation) and from the point of view of all involved Feedback Phase II (discussion of results in the group and agreement on measures and their implementation).

This distinction does justice to learning theory insights which suggest that it not only counts whether something has been learned, but also how it has been learned. It is assumed that process efficiency represents a different dimension of learning which does not necessarily make itself visible directly or immediately in the results. During the feedback process participants become acquainted with the tool itself, they learn how to handle criticism and implement change. According to the concept of organizational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978) this process related kind of learning represents Deutero Learning, while result related learning can be regarded as being on the level of Single or Double Loop Learning.

3 Evaluation Studies: Objective and Method
Between 1995 and 1997 survey projects in various companies were evaluated on the basis of the concept outlined above. The objective of these single studies was to examine factors influencing the quality and efficiency of feedback processes when these are moderated by supervisors themselves. In this paper we present selected findings from a comparative analysis of supervisor assessments in three companies as well as the analysis of a regularly implemented employee survey in one company. Sequence of the projects, database and methodological aspects are only explained here as far as is necessary for understanding of the problem (for more detailed illustrations and further results on the individual projects see Feucht and Jöns, 1998; Hatzipoulidis and Jöns, 1998; Jöns 1997c; Jöns, 1998; Jöns and Mataja, 1998; Jöns and Schmitt, 1998; Mayer and Jöns, 1998).

On the methodology in all studies it must be stated that in addition to the data gained from the assessments and the survey we also had evaluative data on the feedback process which was collected about one year later in a supplementary survey or during repetition of the survey. The same instrument merely adapted somewhat to the specific project type was used in the evaluation. All questions were to be answered on a five-step scale from 1 = does not apply / unsatisfied through 3 = neither / nor to 5 = applies / satisfied. The analysis was based on averages per supervisor or team, with the condition here that only results from the point of view of the employees and only cases with at least three sets of data per wave were used. To take account of the initial situation the cases for each company were divided into three groups, i.e. supervisors with very good (1), good (2) and satisfactory (3) assessments. These terms were deliberately chosen as not even the lower third in the companies received really bad assessments.

Project and Problem Definition of the Comparative Analysis on Upward Appraisal
The projects on supervisor assessment (SA) in the three companies differed above all in the degrees of obligation, preparation and support of managers regarding feedback meetings (FBM) with their employees.

In one company the complete process was supported by neutral moderators who informed the teams in advance, handed over the result reports in private one-on-one meetings and moderated the feedback discussions. In the other two companies there was no support by neutral moderators. In one case supervisors received the result reports
with explanations and recommendations for running the feedback discussions either from the personnel department or simply by internal post. In the other case workshops were carried out with the managers during which they received the result reports and additional explanations and at the end of which they obliged "themselves" to run the feedback meetings. Overall not all supervisors (significantly less in the first case than in the second) carried out feedback meetings.

For the comparative analysis the cases with and without feedback meetings in both companies can be added together so that we have three different groups: teams without feedback meeting (without FBM, N= 28), with feedback meeting led by the supervisor (with FBM by supervisor, N= 36) and led by a neutral moderator (with FBM by moderator, N= 42). The results are shown for two problem definitions:

- How is the quality of the Feedback Phase II and process efficiency rated in the two varieties with FBM (by supervisor or moderator)?
- How is the result efficiency rated in the three varieties (without FBM, with FBM by supervisor, with FBM by moderator)?

In doing so it is assumed that for the result efficiency there would be no change without feedback whilst feedback meetings should lead to changes which should be more marked if the supervisor chaired the meetings himself. The assumption of the superiority of meetings led by the supervisor rests on the hypotheses regarding the quality of feedback processes.

Concerning the experienced quality of the feedback processes it is assumed that this differs with the moderation, i.e. that it will be differently experienced, rated and attributed. Regarding those aspects which are directly linked to the moderation itself we should see better results for neutral moderation, as it cannot be assumed that supervisors possess the necessary skills to the same extent. Where the supervisor moderates the meetings himself this should lead to a generally stronger (positive or negative) effect on the experience of aspects of the feedback situation which are specific to the supervisor whilst in the other cases the moderator has, so to speak, a compensatory influence.

This can be justified with recourse to attribution and role theory: employees will attribute to their supervisor a greater degree of willingness to change if he volunteers himself to face criticism whilst in the other case he is obliged to do so. Managers will identify more strongly with their role as change agents and with the objectives of the change process if they take on this role voluntarily or under self-obligation from the start than if they are only required to do so after a compulsory meeting led by an external moderator.

Finally the assumed superiority of self-moderated feedback processes in terms of result efficiency can be justified on the grounds of behavioral and learning theory. If managers already take on the role themselves during feedback meetings the transfer or implementation of agreed measures will be easier. In contrast, a moderated discussion is a learning situation organized by a third party the results of which must then be put into practice in every day life without the help of the moderator.

*Project and Problem Definition of the Analyses of the Employee Survey*

There is no discerning information on the individual phases available on the sequence of feedback processes relating to employee surveys as we were dealing with a large organization with over 10,000 employees and the specific sequence was organized differently in different areas. However, here too the managers received their written result reports as well as a guide to carrying out feedback meetings. These were required by top man-
agement as compulsory. The first employee survey carried out in the whole organization took place in 1995 and has been repeatedly annually since.

In addition supervisor assessments are compulsory for all managers in this company. However, these are organized by the individual teams themselves. There is a questionnaire and analysis program available on the intranet for assessments. According to the guide on supervisor assessment it is planned that the teams should elect a person of confidence who hands over the report to the supervisor who then runs the feedback meeting himself.

The data base comprises of the employee surveys (including evaluation questions on the feedback process and a question on satisfaction with the supervisor assessment) for three years (1995 –1997) which were analyzed at department level (N= 133). Only departments which took part in all three waves and which hadn't been seriously reorganized were included. We will discuss the findings on two questions:

• What influence does previous experience have, or how do ratings of the quality of the feedback process and satisfaction with changes develop with repeated implementation? As some departments (N= 42) had already carried out their own surveys previous to 1995 this experience was also taken account of. We were also interested in the relationship between development of process efficiency and result efficiency.

• What influence do the two tools – employee survey and supervisor assessment – have on result efficiency? As not all departments had carried out a supervisor assessment in the relevant time frame the analysis was run on 68 departments and the evaluation data from 1997.

Concerning the development of feedback and change processes it is generally assumed that previous experience has an effect on (experienced) quality and satisfaction. Depending on the initial situation both positive surprises and disappointments could be expected. Given the assumption that process efficiency, while not being quite independent, is still an autonomous dimension of learning, we can further assume that there is not a strong relationship between development of both these criteria. For example, the experienced quality of the feedback process can improve whilst at the same time satisfaction with changes is reduced (although implementation of change will certainly be limited in some teams by surrounding conditions).

Regarding the effects of both tools it is assumed that the quality of supervisor assessments affects leadership change but not the overall work situation as this is not the subject of this feedback instrument. The quality of the employee survey can lead to changes in the assessment of leadership as well as in satisfaction with the situation due to its wider spectrum of topics. As change processes regarding leadership are, so to speak, the most difficult aspect from the managers' point of view it can more readily be assumed that in the context of an employee survey comparatively easier topics (like workplace design, training etc.) will be approached.

4 Results: Quality and Efficiency of self managed Survey Feedback Processes

4.1 Comparison of the Quality of Feedback Processes moderated by Supervisors or Moderators concerning Supervisor Assessments

We will first look at the results on the comparison of the quality of the feedback process (FBP). We will do so based on a computed quality index (see figure 2) and on the individual aspects specific to the moderation and the supervisor (see figure 3 and figure 4).
The results shown are averages from which the relevant project specific and individual influences (e.g. project information, attitudes towards the instruments) have been removed (estimated marginal averages in the multifactorial analysis of covariance).

These figures clearly show the differences in the experience of the feedback process (FBP) depending on the initial situation and the moderation. The quality of moderated feedback meetings is rated somewhat lower especially when the supervisor belongs to the group with satisfactory supervisor assessment (SA) results. Where the supervisors led the feedback meetings themselves we see the opposite effect.

Figure 2  FBP-Quality by moderation and SA-result
(estimated marginal averages in the multifactorial analysis of covariance).
Within the moderation specific quality aspects it appeared that in the feedback meetings led by supervisors the detail with which the results were presented and the concrete measures agreed on scored on average higher when the rating was good or satisfactory. This tendency is repeated in the supervisor specific aspects. Supervisors with a satisfactory result are rated as the most open to criticism from their staff compared to the others. And it is more frequently assumed of these supervisors that they highly value implementation of measures. Independent of interpretations based on attribution theory, which can be especially assumed for openness and implementation, the moderation specific result is in keeping with an increased need for improvement given weaker ratings and therefore in keeping with the objectives of supervisor assessments.
In contrast the estimated marginal averages of the feedback meetings with moderation point generally in the opposite direction. This finding supports the assumption that moderators are responsible for having a leveling out effect on feedback meetings which are therefore unable to sufficiently cater to the variety of needs (depending on the specific initial situation). This becomes very clear in the context of concrete agreements which are all rated alike. The low rating for detail in group 3 could be a result of greater needs from the point of view of the employees. On the supervisor specific aspects the findings are in keeping with the assumption of varying degrees of role acceptance and attribution under neutral moderation.

To complete the picture we now come to the results on the two criteria for process efficiency. There are no significant differences between the cases with feedback meetings led by the supervisor (M= 3,12) and those led by a moderator (M= 3,24) regarding satisfaction with the generation of measures from the survey results. The results for satisfaction with the moderation itself however attracts attention. Here the question was framed according to the different variants (Looking back I found / would have found the support of a moderator helpful) and was therefore re-coded for comparison to comply with satisfaction with the moderation experienced. In cases with neutral moderation this is held on average to be helpful (M= 3,82), however the other teams are also on the whole satisfied with the moderation by their supervisor (M= 3,51), i.e. with hindsight they don't wish neutral moderation. This difference should be given even less weight when we consider that the neutral moderator also took over the preparation and information in advance, which was overall far better rated than for the other two projects.

4.2 Comparison of the Efficiency of Supervisor Assessments without or with Feedback Meetings by Supervisors or Moderators

The findings on result efficiency which were generated via two separate questions (improvement of supervisor's behavior and of cooperation) directly follow these results.
on process quality and efficiency. The results for the three variants considering also the initial situation are illustrated in figure 5.

Over all groups the results confirm the distinct superiority of supervisor assessment projects with feedback meetings. Without meetings improved behavior of supervisors rated on average 2.3 (compared to with FBM by supervisor M= 2.9; by moderator M= 2.8) and cooperation only 1.9 (compared to with FBM by supervisor M= 2.5; by moderator M= 2.9) which falls into the category "doesn't really apply". Particularly for the group with the satisfactory initial situation no improvement could be noticed (the possibility of a deterioration of the situation was not registered). In contrast the employees with feedback discussions at least gave a rating of "partly".

When comparing the cases with feedback meetings we noticed that improvements in behavior and cooperation are rated on average equally given neutral moderation while cases with feedback meetings led by the supervisor receive a higher rating for behavioral change. This uniform rating of neutral moderation compared to the more differentiated ratings of self-moderated feedback becomes even more apparent when the initial situation is considered.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5  Result efficiency by feedback process and SA-result**

Improvements in behavior and cooperation are much worse for group 3 given neutral moderation than for the other groups and are also worse than for feedback discussions led by the supervisor for which group 3 shows the highest positive results. To this extent the findings on result efficiency are in keeping with the experienced quality of the feedback processes.

The results illustrated in figure 5 are shown as absolute averages in order to be facilitate comparison of the overall efficiency of the variants. After removing project specific and individual influences the results on supervisor behavior roughly correspond to the results of the quality index (see figure 2), while the averages relating to cooperation do not differ appreciably.
Finally the results of the relationship between process and result efficiency are to be presented. Whilst in the cases with self-moderated feedback meetings there are significant correlations between all quality aspects and result efficiency, cases with neutral moderation show significant correlations only with both of the supervisor specific aspects. In both cases there is no significant relationship between the quality of the discussions and satisfaction with the moderation as experienced. In contrast to the cases with moderation by the supervisor, however, a significant relationship for feedback processes with neutral moderation between process and result efficiency was observed, i.e. between satisfaction with the moderation and improvements in supervisor behavior and cooperation. This result too is in favor of the importance of role-acceptance and attribution during the feedback process.

4.3 Development of the Quality of Feedback and Change Processes over time
The findings reported so far relate to supervisor assessments being carried out for the first time. In this section we will look at the importance of experience to successive survey feedback processes based on the results of the longitudinal study on employee surveys.

The quality index is used to define process efficiency which in this case was computed from three questions (feedback of results via the supervisor, participation in the generation of measures and information on measures and consequences). Instead of result efficiency based on measurements of change, satisfaction with change due to the employee survey is used as we are interested here in how employees subjectively rate the feedback and change processes. Furthermore, we should say in advance that the division into the three groups is based on the initial situation as portrayed in the 1996 data, as we are primarily interested in a comparison of 1996 to 1997. The employee surveys are evaluated a year after their implementation (i.e. the survey of 1996 is rated in 1997). As explained in section 3, we also consider the experience generated by "home made" employee surveys previous to 1995.

We first look at the findings on the development of the (experienced) quality of the feedback processes taking previous experience into account (see figure 6). According to these figures the quality of the feedback processes in the "home made" employee surveys in 1995 was equally badly rated by all groups. In contrast the feedback process was clearly more positively rated in 1996 in the course of increasing sophistication of the employee survey projects. The difference between teams with and without previous experience can be interpreted as positive surprises, i.e. teams with bad previous experience viewed the process far more positively than teams which had had no experience with employee surveys.

The development in the second and third years is particularly interesting as there are differences between the group with a very good leadership rating and the other two. The quality of the processes tends to stagnate in group 1, while without experience slight improvements can be booked. With experience we see a dramatic improvement in 1996 followed by a slight deterioration in 1997.
The next step involves examining the development of the quality of the processes in 1996 and 1997 (earlier previous experience is ignored) in comparison to satisfaction with changes (see figure 7). For a start we can already state that in all three groups changes were rated subjectively worse than feedback processes.

Taking both criteria into account we can interpret developments in the three groups as follows:

In the group with very good leadership ratings the feedback process connected with the first employee survey is received comparatively well and participants are at least partly satisfied with the changes. During the second survey expectancies are therefore high and these are more or less fulfilled by direct superiors during the feedback process. However, as these high expectancies regarding change have still not been fulfilled this dissatisfaction is mirrored in the evaluation of the feedback processes which tends to stagnate.
In the groups with good and satisfactory leadership ratings a learning effect on the part of the supervisors can be assumed with regard to the quality of the feedback processes. Despite improvement in the feedback processes, however, the still high expectancies regarding change are again unfulfilled in group 2 leading to even higher dissatisfaction. In group 3, on the other hand, the slightly greater satisfaction with changes could be an effect of the positive experience of the feedback processes. This satisfaction mirrors not only concrete changes in the situation but also changes in the relationship between supervisors and employees – and good feedback processes contribute to improved information and participation of employees.

To sum up, the findings support the assumption of partial independence from one another of process and result efficiency as well as the importance of previous experience. To what extent the experienced changes in leadership and situation can be traced back to the employee survey is the subject of the next section where we compare them to the supervisor assessment.

4.4 Comparison of the Effects of Supervisor Assessment and Employee Survey on Changes

The effects of the feedback instruments were compared on the following change data:

• The situation index, which sums up satisfaction over all aspects from information policy and employee participation to training and financial rewards.
• The leadership index, which was used to divide the groups according to the initial situation.
• Satisfaction with the direct superior, who is not always the same as the department head when analyzing employee surveys on a department level but can, in some cases, be a group head or someone similar.

First we are interested in the relationship between the experienced quality of the feedback processes connected with the supervisor assessment (SA) and employee survey (ES). The correlations for the three groups differ quite markedly (see table 1). Groups with satisfactory leadership (3) show no relationship which means for the further analysis that the effects on change can be regarded as independent of each other. The marginally significant relationship in the group with very good leadership (1) can also be ignored. In the middle group (2), however, there is a very significant relationship, however this is not so high as to allow the assumption that there are no unique effects. Overall these results support the argument that we are dealing with two separate instruments.

To compute the effects of these two instruments on changes a factorial analysis of covariance with repeated measures was carried out using the initial situation as the factor and the quality of the supervisor assessment and the employee survey as covariates. Table 1 shows the values for Eta-squared for both covariates which give the proportion of variance explained in the form of a measure of effect (i.e. 26.3% of the variance in situational change can be explained by the quality of the employee survey in group 3). The level of significance of the F-values is also included. Regarding the generally low levels of the effects it has to be said that due to the multitude of factors influencing change in an organization in the course of a year very high effects are not to be expected.
Table 1  Comparison of the Effects of the Quality of Supervisor Assessment and Employee Survey on the Results of the Change Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation SA * ES</td>
<td>.294*</td>
<td>.513**</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eta-Squared * SA * ES</td>
<td>*SA</td>
<td>*ES</td>
<td>*SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>.129*</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.097*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>.173*</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B.: Level of significance: + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; Correlations between the quality of both instruments; Eta-squared of the one-factor analysis of covariance with repeated measures with quality of the SA and the ES as covariates and the initial situation as factor

Overall the results support the assumption that the quality of the supervisor assessment expresses itself above all in experienced changes in leadership and in satisfaction with the direct supervisor while the quality of the employee survey tends to affect changes in the situation. The importance of both of these instruments becomes especially clear in the group with satisfactory leadership which achieved relatively high effects of 20% and more for the quality of the feedback processes. If we add the effects of both independent instruments together then they explain around 45% to 65% of change variance.

Finally there is one more remark to make on the comparison of effects: Over all three criteria and all three groups the absolute changes mean a general deterioration for group 1, no significant change in group 2 and a marked improvement in group 3, which complies with the demands on variance homogeneity. Of course the relationships shown between the quality of the feedback instruments and change are all positive. Good feedback processes can therefore alleviate experienced deterioration and amplify prompted improvements. However such longitudinal studies always bring with them the difficulties of determining exactly cause and effect, and in this case also the problem of the number and variety of potential factors influencing the many change processes within an organization.

5 Conclusions

To sum up the results of the evaluation study, we can state for a start that projects without feedback meetings do not create improvements. This finding confirms the widespread notion that surveys should always be followed by meetings or other discussions with the employees.

The superiority of self moderated feedback processes is demonstrated particularly by the adjusted results on quality, once the influence of advanced information and individual attitudes have been removed. Then all groups demonstrate a greater improvement in superior behavior compared to meetings with neutral moderation which only achieved greater efficiency in cooperation in the very good and good groups. A possible explanation for this is that it is easier for neutral moderators to get employees to "take on some responsibility". In contrast supervisors will tend to start with themselves in these discussions, simply in order to communicate plausibly their openness to criticism and willing-
ness to change, and are less inclined to make shared responsibility for cooperation with their employees an issue from the outset.

Based on the projects analyzed here, each of which represents a specific combination of preparation and moderation it is not possible to conclude that any one variant is generally superior. As workshops with managers also offer additional advantages (see Jöns, 1997c), which cannot be gone into detail here, individual coaching plus self moderated feedback meetings as support could certainly be an interesting variation.

The findings on the development of quality of feedback processes connected with employee surveys make the case that supervisors tend to improve in their moderation with repetition up to a saturation level which is reached in very good groups. This means that by taking on the role of moderator, managers are continually acquiring the necessary skills. However, the results on satisfaction with changes from the employee surveys demonstrate that good discussions and meetings alone are not sufficient. At the end of the day implementation of measures is what counts. Surveys and meetings arouse expectations, which if left unfulfilled, can lead to devaluation of the instruments themselves.

This comparison of the two instruments makes two things clear: First supervisor assessments and employee surveys make differing demands on the feedback processes, (there was no strong relationship between the evaluation of the two instruments). It follows that if supervisors lead good meetings on supervisor assessments this doesn't necessarily mean that they will also moderate feedback processes on employee surveys well. Secondly the two instruments support separate but complementary change processes as laid down in the main foci of attention – leadership on the one hand and situation on the other. Given less than good leadership in the initial situation both instruments can lead to a marked improvement if the feedback processes are well led by the supervisor.

Finally it must be said that these are the first evaluation studies of this kind, so that results can certainly not be generalized. On the other hand it is possible to generalize so far as to say that sweeping statements about efficiency as found in the literature do not do justice to the complexity of the effects and interactions in these kinds of feedback processes. The distinction between process and result efficiency appears to be a suitable starting point for further research to gain more subtle clues on how to design and support efficient survey feedback processes in teams.

Although self moderated feedback processes can certainly not be generally recommended on the basis of this study, the opposite claim, often heard, that feedback concepts employing moderators have the greatest chance of success can also be no longer upheld.

References


