Benefits of 360-Degree Reviews in an Academic Setting

A 360-Degree Review gathers input from multiple rater groups—peers, supervisors, collaborators, and self-reflection—to build a more complete picture of an individual's behaviours, strengths, and developmental needs. These reviews can be particularly valuable for academics, technicians, and professional services staff in leadership roles. Drawing on key literature, this resource outlines six key benefits of using 360-Degree Reviews in academic teams and provides examples for each.

1. Improves Self-Awareness and Insight

Multisource feedback helps individuals identify strengths and development areas that would not surface in single-source evaluations.

Example:

A faculty member believes they communicate clearly during lab meetings. Peer and student feedback reveals unclear expectations and inconsistent mentoring structure. The faculty member uses this insight to redesign lab onboarding and meeting agendas.

2. Enhances Team Functioning & Collegiality

Academic teams often work together using unspoken rules. Getting feedback from multiple people can reveal interaction patterns that influence how well the group works together.

Example:

A research team uses 360 feedback and finds that early-career members feel hesitant to contribute ideas because senior members dominate discussions. The team agrees to adopt rotating meeting chairs and idea-rounds to increase participation.

3. Strengthens Academic Leadership & Mentorship

Academic leaders (such as PIs, program directors, and heads of school) benefit from hearing different perspectives because their actions affect many different groups.

Example:

A department head receives consistent feedback that while strategic vision is strong, responsiveness to email and workload transparency are weak. They implement structured communication updates and shared workload dashboards.

4. Identifies Hidden Strengths That Can Be Leveraged

Many academics underestimate their strengths, especially in mentoring and collaboration. Strength-based development increases engagement and confidence.

Example:

A postdoc learns through peer feedback that they are widely seen as a go-to resource for methodological support—something they had not previously recognized. They begin offering short methods clinics, increasing both their visibility and leadership profile.

5. Supports Fairer and More Balanced Development Planning

Self-assessments alone are often biased. Multiple perspectives reduce blind spots and help set more realistic goals.

Example:

A mid-career academic plans to improve 'grant success' but multisource feedback reveals the real barrier is team organization and conflict avoidance. Their development plan shifts to skill-building in project management and difficult conversations—changes that ultimately improve collaborative grant success.

6. Builds a Culture of Feedback, Transparency & Continuous Learning

Departments that normalise regular, constructive multisource feedback see higher psychological safety and openness to improvement.

Example:

A faculty introduces annual multisource feedback for teaching and research leadership roles. Over two years, staff report increased willingness to ask for help, greater clarity of expectations, and better communication across units.

Recommendations to maximise benefits from 360-Degree Reviews:

- Use 360 feedback only for development, not promotion/pay decisions.
- Ensure anonymity—especially in small teams.
- Provide structured debriefing or coaching to turn insights into action.
- Adapt instruments to academic roles (teaching, research, mentoring, service).
- Follow up with specific goals and a 6–12 month review.