

360-degree Feedback Mechanism for Performance Appraisal of Library Workforce in Academic Libraries

Chinmay Mukhopadhyay

Librarian, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: mukhochinmay@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Performance Appraisal (PA) is a systematic method for evaluating staff performance in any organizations whether profit-making or non-profit-making concerns. Among the various methods used for PA, 360-degree feedback method is very much useful not only for employer but employees also. It is a process where employees receive confidential and anonymous feedback from the employees who work around them. This process assists the employers in making human resource decisions e.g. pay adjustment, promotion/demotion or even termination etc. at the same time employees can derive benefits from this method of PA. These include development of their workplace competencies. For Library and Information Science (LIS) field this method can also be used as an effective tool for the professional development of library staff. PA is a crucial professional issue in LIS sector which helps the organization to fulfill its objectives as envisaged by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan in his five laws of library science in which he stressed on the skills and competencies of library staff to satisfy the needs of the library user. The present paper highlights on the use of 360-degree feedback mechanism for library workforce engaged in academic libraries in their performance appraisal. Methodology followed in writing this paper includes theoretical exploration of existing literature in this context. This paper will help library sector employers for appraising their manpower in formulating human resource decision. It will also help other stakeholders in LIS sector to understand the human resource management aspects.

Keywords: performance appraisal, 360-degree feedback mechanism, library workforce, academic libraries

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisal is a systematic evaluation of an individual employee's job-related performance which is conducted periodically. It assesses strengths, weaknesses and areas for growth, aligning individual goals with organisational objectives. This process fosters feedback, development, and informed decision-making for promotion, training or rewards. Performance appraisal embraces a variety of techniques which are used to determine whether the amount and quality of the person's effort in terms of units produced or services rendered have met organizational needs. It measures the quality which are compared with some preset standards. The qualitative performance results have to be measured through some accepted yardstick of personnel qualities and behavior pattern.

360-degree feedback assessment is one type of appraisal method commonly observed in corporate world. It is a process in which employees receive confidential and anonymous feedback from the employees who work around them. It can be useful for pooling information which provides inputs for designing organizational strategies in respect of motivation, leadership and conflict management.

Performance appraisal is an essential part of personnel development process in a library and information center (LIC). It is the systematic evaluation of an individual employee's job-related strengths and weaknesses where 360-degree feedback assessment can be used effectively to throw light on various management issues. The assessment of performance against standards is identified by various terminologies like performance measurement, evaluation, appraisal, assessment, review, etc. 360-degree feedback assessment can be used effectively to throw light on various management issues.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) advocates for quality and excellence in higher education where capacity building is a vital aspect. 360-degree feedback assessment can be analysed and interpreted in this respect. In library and information science field this assessment method can be used as an effective tool for the professional development of library personnel.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kanaslan and Iyem (2016) opined that 360-degree feedback is an effective method for rating employee performance due to its superiority over traditional methods and advantages over disadvantages.

Baroda, Sharma and Bhatt (2012) expressed that 360-degree feedback systems can enhance performance appraisal and organisational development, benefiting diverse organisations in a changing world.

Brett and Atwater (2001) said that negative feedback and discrepancies in 360-degree feedback may not motivate positive change, challenging the assumption that negative feedback motivates positive change.

Humera (2020) stressed that 360-degree feedback performance review is an increasing trend in organisations, promoting continuous learning and providing more global feedback, leading to improved performance.

Abdolhossein, Fatemeh and Maryam (2013) emphasized that 360-degree feedback approach shows that self-evaluation of public librarians in Guilan Province, Iran, differ significantly from those of superiors, colleagues, and Library users, while performance appraisal and general appraisal show no significant difference.

Bracken, Rose and Church (2016) showed that 360-degree feedback has undergone both positive and negative changes over the years with some positive developments and others less so.

Sahija (2022) opined that appraising employee performance positively impacts job satisfaction and work performance, ultimately leading to improved business success. He examined 360-degree feedback method in his research.

London and Beatty (1993) showed that 360-degree feedback can provide a competitive advantage in organisations when effectively designed and, finally, implemented. Here, one should consider content, employee involvement, relevant implementation and managers self-assessment.

Obholzer (2020) expressed that 360-degree feedback provides comprehensive feedback on a participant's strengths and areas for development, enabling development planning and ongoing feedback.

Luthans and Peterson (2003) examined that 360-degree feedback when combined with systematic coaching improves manager and employee satisfaction and commitment in a small manufacturer.

Literature in this respect deals with the significance of the 360-degree feedback mechanism, and its advantages and disadvantages at workplace. Academic libraries can also take benefit from this appraisal method depending upon its long-term objectives to satisfy the clientele.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This present paper deals with the basic aspects of 360-degree feedback mechanism and its application in academic libraries for appraising the library personnel.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper is prepared with consulting literature appeared in the primary sources of information. It is a theoretical pursuit to deal with the present topic.

V. 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT – ITS MEANING

360-degree feedback has been defined by Ward (1995) as: 'The systematic collection and feedback of performance data on an individual or group derived from a number of the stakeholders on their performance.'

The data is usually fed back in the form of ratings against various performance dimensions like team work, leadership, etc. 360-degree feedback is also known as multi-source assessment or multi-rater feedback. Performance data in a 360-degree feedback process, as shown in Figure 1 below, can be generated for individuals from the person to whom they report, their direct reports, their peers (who could be team members and/or colleagues in other parts of the organization) and their external and internal customers. In LIS field of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) the internal customers include librarians and library staff, and college and/or university administration whereas the external customers include students, faculty members, alumni and external library users.

360-degree feedback assessment is a system or a process in which personnel receive confidential and anonymous feedback from members of their immediate work circle i.e. from the employees who work around them. Employees giving feedback are called respondents or raters and employees receiving feedback are participants or feedback recipients. The respondents include sub-ordinates, peers and bosses. The raters remain anonymous throughout the feedback process. The raters must know the participant well. Raters should be people who interact with the participant on a frequent basis and whose feedback is wanted and valued by the participant. In other words, every participant who is willing to take part in the feedback process is surrounded by feedback from employees above, below and at the same functional or hierarchical level. It is much interesting that every participant assesses himself as well. Sometimes, feedback is sought from internal and external customers. So, the other names of this assessment are Full-Cycle Assessment, Multi-Criteria Feedback, Multi-Rater Feedback, etc.

Braken (1994) pointed out that organizations are embracing 360-degree feedback because it:

- Supports team initiatives, decreases hierarchies, and promotes streamlining.
- Assesses development needs.

Areas where feedback is sought include the participant's workplace competences. Competence is the capacity or potential existing within a person to perform a task well. It is the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors which determine the performance as effective or outstanding. These are mainly subjective areas such as intellect and creativity, teamwork, leadership effectiveness, motivation, communication, conflict management and other skill assessment areas like listening, planning and goal setting. The raters or the respondents give feedback on how they perceive an individual employee i.e. the participant in the feedback process.

VI. OBJECTIVES OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT

- In respect of individual employee, it aims to enhance job performance and self-development by identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- It aims to support leadership development and managerial effectiveness.
- It aims to identify training needs.
- It aims to reduce traditional appraisal errors like leniency, halo (a cognitive bias where one positive trait or quality influences the perception of other unrelated aspects), etc.
- It aims to drive organisational culture change.
- It aims to improve team effectiveness, employees' participation and communication at all levels of organization.

Thus, 360-degree feedback aims to develop people, improve decisions, and support a fair learning-oriented culture when well designed and implemented.

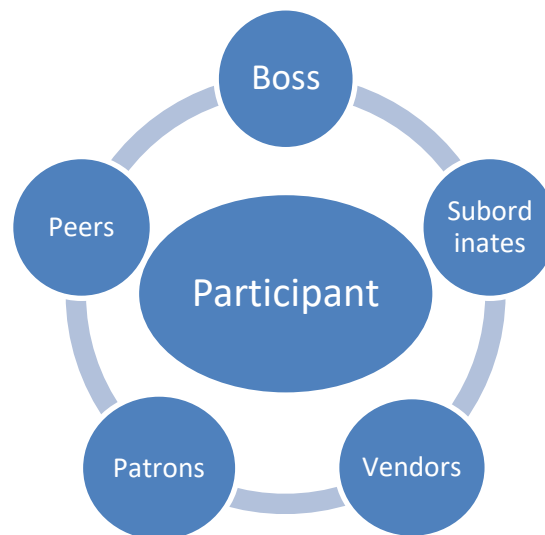


Figure 1: Respondents of 360-degree Feedback Assessment Method

VII. ADVANTAGES OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT METHOD

According to Fleener & Prince (1997), the advantages are as follows:

7.1. Supplements Traditional Appraisals:

360-degree feedback alleviates some recognized deficiencies of top-down traditional appraisals. Supervisor-only performance appraisals or top-down appraisals rely heavily on the judgement of one person, and as a result, this feedback can suffer from (Edwards & Ewen, 1996):

- * Individual bias
- * Politics and favoritism
- * Insufficient observation of personnel performance
- * Unwillingness to delineate poor performance
- * Different supervisors having different degrees of rigor or inflexibility

A single-source performance appraisal may not truly reflect the individual's actual job performance and/or potential. In the context of team environment traditional appraisal systems have shortcomings. Leadership development programs give importance on teamwork. Traditional appraisal system does not emphasize on the multi-dimensional aspects of teamwork. 360-degree feedback discourages supervisor-only allegiance. It develops relational commitment involving the members of all levels of management.

However, regardless of whether the appraisal is traditional or multi-dimensional, the supervisor has an important role in interpreting the feedback and shaping employee development (Cronshaw & Lord, 1987).

7.2. 360-Degree Feedback Offers New Perspectives

360-degree feedback gathers input from multiple stakeholders – supervisors, peers, subordinates, and sometimes clients – to provide a comprehensive view of an employee's performance. This multi-faceted approach fosters self-awareness, and identifies development areas, leading to more effective growth and leadership development. Thus, 360-degree feedback offers new perspectives.

7.3. Individual Library Staff Can Rate Themselves

In a 360-degree feedback process, individual library staff can indeed rate themselves as part of the self-assessment component. This self-rating helps identify gaps between self-perception and others' perception that fosters self-awareness and personal growth. Library staff evaluate their own performance, skill, and behaviour. Self-ratings are compared with others' ratings where areas of alignment and discrepancy are emphasized.

7.4. Strengthens Organizational Values

360-degree feedback can be used to strengthen the organizational values and vision. 360-degree feedback highlights on a future focus on an individual's potential with respect to desired competencies and values, whereas a traditional appraisal is used primarily to document past performance only. It can also be a powerful cultural change tool in the midst of ever-changing library environment. Libraries that adopt 360-degree feedback want better performance information and seek to motivate behavior change. Also, the shift in paradigms from the Industrial Age mindset to the Information Age mindset necessitates other paradigm shifts: from manager to leader; from dependency to self-responsibility in career planning; and from traditional hierarchy to culture-focused organizational change (Pasmore, 1998).

VIII. USE OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT METHOD FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS

The 360-degree feedback assessment method in academic libraries provides a holistic view of professional performance by gathering anonymous input from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and library users (patrons). Unlike traditional top-down appraisals, this multi-rater approach focuses on developmental growth, self-awareness, and a wide array of workplace competencies essential for library service.

Core Benefits for Library Professionals

Implementing this method can lead to significant improvements in professional and organizational effectiveness:

- **Enhanced Self-Awareness:** Librarians gain insight into how their behaviours—such as communication and information literacy—are perceived by colleagues and students.
- **Better Instructional Outcomes:** For library instructors, combining peer observation, self-reflection, and student evaluations allows for rapid, iterative improvements in teaching methods.
- **Holistic Competency Assessment:** It evaluates diverse skills including professional knowledge, moral-value skills, functional skills, and communication abilities.
- **Reduction of Bias:** Aggregating feedback from multiple sources balances individual supervisor biases and provides a more objective picture of performance.
- **Professional Development:** Identifying specific weakness helps create targeted training and development plans.

Challenges and Critical Success Factors

While powerful, the 360-degree feedback method requires careful management to be effective:

Anonymity and Trust: Respondents must believe their feedback is kept confidential to ensure honesty.

- **Rater Training:** Without proper training, feedback may be vague, biased, or focused on personality rather than objective behaviours.
- **Actionable Follow-up:** Feedback is only valuable if it is followed by structured meetings and concrete development goals.

Common Evaluation Categories for Library Professionals

Competency Area	Example Assessment Focus
Instructional Skills	Clarity of presentation, student engagement, and adapting to student needs.
Interpersonal/Soft Skills	Teamwork, collaboration, and emotional intelligence in high-pressure situations.
Functional/Professional	Mastery of library systems, subject knowledge, and research support.
Communication	Effectiveness of interactions with diverse groups including students, faculty, and vendors.

This assessment method provides a comprehensive view of the competences of an individual as a manager or as a leader like librarian in an academic library. The individual library staff gets feedback on how other people perceive and assess him as an employee of the library which is essential component of any educational institution. 360-degree feedback is beneficial to both an individual library staff and a library as a whole. Library is said to be an open system; so, it needs the feedback from the stakeholders belonging to the outside environment of the library as an organization. It leads to pooling of information between an individual employee and other members in the organization. Information derived from the feedback process can be a vital input to the formulation of the organizational policies in respect of motivation, leadership and conflict management in an academic library environment.

The information gathered with 360-degree feedback taps the collective wisdom of people from within a library professional's own circle of influence. It is simply more reliable, honest, and valid than traditional appraisals. Research suggests that feedback from multiple sources has a more powerful impact on people than information from a single source does. In fact, no organizational action has more power for motivating employee behavior change than feedback from credible work associates (Edwards & Ewen 1996).

IX. CONCLUSION

Sustainability is a very vital aspect for any profession as every professional environment is regarded as an open system. Library and information profession should not be an exception to it. Capacity building is emphasized to usher quality and excellence in Higher Education. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) advocate this aspect of capacity building in practice. It is worthy to mention that the assessment of individual library professional by other people is subjective. 360-degree feedback system is as challenging, promoting and analytical in nature. It should not be regarded as ultimate and concluding. It is a beginning point. Self-assessment is an ongoing process. The feedback must be kept confidential so as to ensure its reliability. The derived feedback must be taken with a sense of positivity and an open-minded attitude. The effectiveness of the feedback must be evaluated and analyzed on a regular basis. Formal and informal discussions are always welcome among the library professionals in an LIC. It is a means of establishing how successful individuals are in all their work relationships. The emphasis is on skills, competences and behavior. The feedback should be directed at describing behavior rather than judging it. The usual approach is to use structured questionnaires to get information. It is desirable to provide some form of counseling which enables individuals to interpret the feedback and prepare action plans for self-development of library professionals which helps the LIC to fulfill its objectives as envisaged by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan in his five laws of library science.

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