

It is soooo unfair!

Internal vs external promotion and tips for effective applications

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- Why is promotion so central to our academic discourse and identity?
- Internal vs external promotion
 - General reflections
 - Seven reasons why external promotion is generally easier to achieve
 - I don't claim any of these seven reasons are rational, justified, or morally right; I am just observing reality
- The gender context: yes bias does play some role
- Seven advantages of internal promotion
- Tips for promotion applications
 - Some personal reflections

Presentation outline

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- Type of job
 - Academic salaries are relatively low and rejection is a constant feature of academic lives
 - Promotion is one of the few big positive reinforcements we get in our careers
 - It is not about the (marginally) higher salary, it is about the recognition and change in academic identity
 - Failed promotion applications evoke strong emotions
 - They can feel like a dozen rejections all in one go
 - Rejection for an internal promotion can feel like a rejection from someone close to you
 - It is hurting both your feelings and pride

Why is promotion so important to us?

- Internal promotion
 - Needs a substantive case to argue you are already operating at the level you apply for
 - E.g. for research you have to show
 - “Leadership in the academic discipline”, having (several) coherent research programs that have made a difference both academically and societally
- External promotion
 - Just send in your CV + short letter or even be headhunted; at worst address selection criteria
 - For research, your CV tells them all they want to know, i.e. level of publications, citations and research funding
- So... Take the external route and come back with an offer to be matched?
 - Might work, but be prepared to walk away or “eat humble pie”
 - Few of us are really indispensable and it might just annoy your manager

Internal vs external promotion

1. Different incentive structures

- External: university has vacancy they **NEED** to fill at that time, even if the candidate is not 100% adequate
- Internal: university doesn't **GAIN** anything, they just need to pay you more

2. Two vs a dozen criteria

- External: Mostly based on publication and grant record
- Internal: Even for teaching alone you need to show:
 - you have "transformed students' lives"
 - taught according to the 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 or even 20 "principles of effective teaching"
 - embodied the "values of the university" through your teaching

Seven reasons why external promotion is easier (1)

3. Strengths and weaknesses

- External: Selection committee composed of semi-experts appreciates your strengths; weaknesses are not as easy to spot from a CV or interview
- Internal: Promotion committee has fewer experts in the discipline so your strengths might be less appreciated; weaknesses are more apparent through years of interactions

4. Different set of comparators

- External: comparison only against other applicants in the same round [+ limited comparison to internals]
- Internal: internal comparison against current applicants who all will meet the minimum criteria [limited places] + not wanting to “set a precedent” for future applicants

Seven reasons why external promotion is easier (2)

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5. Internal relationships, both routes supported by external referees, but:
 - External: unless they know you well it is unlikely that internal panel members have strong opinions about you personally
 - Internal: everyone has made some enemies in their own institution; remember it is also your HoD or even discipline that is evaluated
 6. A hierarchy of levels
 - External: selection committee takes decision, approval by higher level usually a formality
 - Internal:
 - 3-4 levels create as many hurdles to cross
 - Chances of internal competition increase
 7. A self-perpetuating rite of passage for internal promotions
 - Why should this applicant get an easy run?, I/my friend suffered, so they should too
 - It is character building to reject you first time around

Seven reasons why external promotion is easier (3)

- All seven reasons are more important if you perform at 100% of the required level rather than 150%
- But, there is a definite gender bias here
 - **Both** men and women underestimate female applicants and discount their performance
 - Excellent women get promoted at the same rate as excellent men
 - Average men still have a chance, average women rarely do
 - Men are more likely to “boast” about achievements than women
 - The same “objective” academic record might “look” better for men
 - Even if women do the same it might not be as effective as they might be seen as too pushy [not conform gender stereotype]
- So should I apply externally?
 - Yes, if the job, university or country suits you better or you would just like a change and a chance to start afresh
 - No, if your primary aim is to be promoted 1-2 years earlier
 - Remember the gender context is still there in external promotions

The gender context

- 1. Rewards a balanced academic record
 - Thus might be easier for all-rounders who do not excel in research
 - Proportionally women are more likely to be all-rounders
- 2. Improves persuasion skills
 - An argued promotion case teaches you how to “make your case” early in your career
 - You can reuse your materials in many ways
- 3. Strengths and weaknesses
 - Your new employer presents only their strengths and has plenty of hidden weaknesses too
- 4. More productivity, less stress
 - No need to move home/countries and learn new systems
 - Might be even more important for women than for men

Seven advantages of internal promotion (1)

- 5. Avoids being dumped upon
 - New recruits often get unpopular jobs
 - As a newbie it is not as easy to recognise them
- 6. Avoids resentment from new colleagues
 - If you are not a stellar candidate, but are appointed through external promotion those rejected for internal promotion might well avoid you
- 7. Maintains good relationships
 - Especially important if you left unexpectedly, with short notice or after short tenure
 - Remember: your old colleagues might still be evaluating your grant applications, papers etc.

Seven advantages of internal promotion (2)

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1. Promotion requirements differ
 - By university, country, rank, and over time
 - The past is another country... they do things differently there
 - Performance criteria change over time
 - But so do resources and access to them
 - And so do career systems [fixed places vs. open competition]
 2. Don't let university politics ruin your sanity
 - Yes sometimes decisions are political
 - But try not to let this rule your life, you cannot change others, you can change yourself
 3. Apply early rather than late
 - Women often wait far too long [though we understand why]
 - You are often evaluated based on performance since last promotion
 - You usually get feedback about what you need to improve

Tips for promotion applications (1)

4. Use your experience in journal submissions

- a) Gather as much information as possible about formal and informal rules
 - But beware of anecdotal data and Chinese whispers
- b) Get a friendly reader before you submit, ask/bribe/beg colleagues to look at your application and get a female mentor
- c) Treat an unsuccessful application as an R&R, not a rejection
- d) Realise that some things will always be beyond your control
- e) Just because one article (applicant) that you think is at a similar level to yours was published (promoted) doesn't mean your article (you) should be

Tips for promotion applications (2)

- We are all subject to human cognitive flaws and tend to:
 - Take our current situation for granted, the grass is greener effect...
 - Compare ourselves to others who have done less and get promoted, not to others who have done more and didn't
 - Have a biased view of our own relative performance, partially caused by a lack of knowledge of others' real records
 - See intent where there is none: never attribute to malice what can be attributed to incompetence or plain "negligence"
- Don't let rejections get you down
 - Be persistent and pro-active and you **will** get there
 - An academic career is a **long-term** game, a year's delay is nothing
 - Setbacks can often be points of reflection leading to change for the better if you pick yourself up (7 personal setbacks and the positives)
- Realise that this long-desired promotion doesn't necessarily bring you joy and happiness for more than a few weeks
 - We get used to things pretty quickly
 - It is a cliché, but it really **is** better to enjoy the journey

Be positive, persistent & pro-active
