It is sooo 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
Why is promotion so important to us?

- **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
• 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)
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.
Seven advantages of internal promotion (1)

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
• 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)
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 anecdotes 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)
Be positive, persistent & pro-active

• 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