AI-M FOUNDATION

AI and Employee Voice in Promotion Decisions

A practice-based case study on decision evidence, fairness and organisational accountability

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The case in brief. Work across organisations shows how a promotion challenge can expose a wider weakness: the reasoning behind a people decision may be spread across managers, HR records, interview notes and recruitment systems. AI can help an employee organise questions or help an employer review information, but it cannot supply missing evidence or take responsibility for the decision. The practical task is to make judgement visible, preserve its evidence and name the people accountable for acting on it.

Focus	A promotion decision that an employee wishes to understand or challenge.
Organisational issue	Decision criteria, evidence and ownership can sit across several people and systems.
AI relevance	AI may assist with drafting, summarising or organising information on either side of a workplace process.
Case status	Practice-based analysis drawing on work completed across organisations; no single employer or employee is identified.

The organisational situation

Promotion decisions are made through a chain of actions: a role is defined, criteria are set, candidates are assessed, evidence is interpreted, a decision is authorised and feedback is communicated. The employee sees the outcome and explanation; the organisation holds the records that should show how it reached that outcome. When those records are incomplete or dispersed, a later challenge can become a reconstruction exercise.

This is not evidence that a particular promotion decision was discriminatory. A disappointing outcome, a poorly phrased explanation or an AI-generated complaint does not establish unlawful treatment. The case instead examines whether an organisation can explain its process and the evidence behind its judgement.

How AI changes the process

An employee may use an AI tool to organise a timeline, summarise correspondence or draft questions for a manager. An employer may use AI to search records, summarise a complaint or prepare a response. These uses can reduce the effort required to work with information, but each introduces risks: a summary can omit context, a draft can state an inference as fact, and sensitive employment information can be exposed if it is entered into an unsuitable system.

The central governance question is therefore practical: can each important statement be traced back to its source, checked by a person with authority, and corrected when it is wrong? Speed of drafting does not demonstrate accuracy, fairness or resolution.

Tracing judgement and accountability

The PXB Judgement Spine™ provides a way to examine how evidence moves through an AI-influenced decision:

SIGNAL → AI INTERPRETATION → RECOMMENDATION → HUMAN JUDGEMENT → DECISION → ACTION → CONSEQUENCE → ACCOUNTABILITY

For a promotion process, the record should make visible who set the criteria, what evidence was considered, where any AI-supported summary or recommendation entered the process, who exercised decision authority, and how the reasons were communicated. A score without its basis is not a complete account of judgement.

What a defensible process should make visible

Stage	Organisational practice
Before assessment	Agree role criteria and decision authority. Keep the criteria accessible to assessors and candidates.
During assessment	Record evidence against each criterion, including relevant observations and any moderation or adjustment.
When AI is used	Record the system's role, the material it processed, the output relied on and the human checks made.
When communicating	Explain the decision in terms of the criteria and evidence. Keep a route for questions, review and correction.
When challenged	Preserve relevant records, investigate competing explanations fairly and separate allegations from findings.

What leaders can learn

- Treat a grievance as a request for an explainable process, not proof of wrongdoing and not merely a drafting task.
- Design decision records at the point of decision so HR is not left to reconstruct the rationale later.
- Make employee and employer use of AI subject to source checking, privacy controls and human review.
- Keep three outcomes distinct: an employee raises a concern; an employer investigates and reaches a finding; a tribunal determines whether the law was breached.
- Measure evidence quality, traceability, resolution time and perceived procedural fairness. Complaint volume alone cannot show whether fairness or AI impact has improved.

A research route for AIM

A next evidence phase could review anonymised promotion and grievance records across participating organisations, assess whether decisions can be reconstructed from contemporaneous evidence, and interview employees, managers and HR practitioners. A controlled exercise could compare how people identify facts, inferences and missing evidence with and without AI support. Any study should set its lawful basis, privacy safeguards, consent or other appropriate participation arrangements, retention controls and ethics review before collecting employee data. These are proposed research steps, not findings from this case study.

Legal and evidence note

The Equality Act 2010 protects people in Great Britain from discrimination because of protected characteristics, including age. The legal test depends on the type of claim and facts. This case study does not assess an individual claim and is not legal advice. At the time of publication, Acas states that for most employment tribunal claims arising on or after 1 October 2026 the time limit is six months minus one day; for most earlier events it is generally three months minus one day, with exceptions. An internal grievance does not itself change the tribunal deadline. Acas early-conciliation notification within the applicable time limit pauses the clock during conciliation. Readers should check current Acas guidance and seek case-specific advice where needed.

Sources and further guidance

- Acas, Employment tribunal time limits
- Acas, If you have been discriminated against at work
- Acas, How early conciliation works
- Equality and Human Rights Commission, Protected characteristics
- UK Government, Equality Act 2010 guidance

Ownership and use

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