

Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Legitimacy of Organizational Decision-Making: A Sociological Study of Shifts in Epistemic Authority within the Organization

Dr. Kelthoum Zaatout

Lecturer (B), University of Kasdi Merbah, Ouargla, Algeria
kelthoum.zaatout@univ-ouargla.dz

Abstract

This article examines how generative artificial intelligence reshapes the legitimacy of organisational decision-making—understood as a social judgment that extends beyond the technical accuracy of a decision to encompass the acceptability of its sources, procedures, and justifications, as well as accountability for the decision. The study proceeds from the premise that integrating generative models into the preparation of alternatives, the interpretation of data, the formulation of recommendations, and the evaluation of options does not merely add a neutral tool to the organisation; it redistributes epistemic authority among management, experts, employees, and the algorithmic system. The study adopts a theoretical-analytical approach that brings together institutional legitimacy theory, organisational justice literature, algorithmic research, and recent studies on human-AI decision-making. It concludes that the legitimacy of AI-supported organisational decisions comprises four interrelated dimensions: procedural legitimacy, epistemic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and institutional legitimacy. Generative AI may strengthen legitimacy by broadening the information base, rendering alternatives more comparable, and reducing certain forms of human selectivity; however, it may also weaken it when the fluency of outputs becomes a substitute for verification, when the algorithm becomes an unaccountable source, or when the human actor disappears behind an automated recommendation. The study proposes a sociological model grounded in bounded use of the tool, disclosure of its role, contestability, documentation, and the retention of a clearly identified human decision-maker responsible for the final decision. It also offers a set of propositions testable in Arab or Algerian organisational settings, thereby allowing the concept of legitimacy to be transformed from a general normative idea into a measurable analytical framework.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; legitimacy of organisational decision-making; epistemic authority; algorithms; organisational justice; trust; human-AI decision-making.

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence is no longer present in organisations merely as a tool for producing texts or summarising documents. It has begun to enter gradually into the very processes that precede organisational decision-making: gathering information, formulating alternatives, selecting scenarios, constructing arguments, reordering priorities, and evaluating strategic options. Recent empirical studies reveal that generative models can enhance productivity in certain knowledge-based tasks and

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offer useful assessments of strategic alternatives, yet problems of variability, bias, and inconsistency persist. This means that the sociological question is no longer whether the tool can be used, but rather what position it will occupy within the decision structure and the extent of authority that will be granted to it.

From a sociological perspective, organisational decision-making is not a purely calculative outcome. It is an act situated within a system of roles, rules, expectations, and interests, and it carries distributive effects because it grants or withholds opportunities, allocates resources, and establishes certain definitions of a problem at the expense of others. The effectiveness of an organisational decision therefore does not depend solely on its objective quality; it also requires that relevant actors recognise it as a legitimate decision—one issued by a body entitled to decide, in accordance with acceptable procedures, and supported by justifications that can be defended. The literature on legitimacy has shown that organisations and decisions do not derive acceptance from efficiency alone, but from their alignment with broader social and institutional norms.

The distinctiveness of generative artificial intelligence lies in the fact that it does not merely execute specific instructions; it produces language that appears interpretive and argumentative. It can present a reason, compare alternatives, propose a policy, and reformulate an administrative position in a confident tone. This linguistic capacity lends it an appearance close to that of a cognitive expert, even when the relationship between output and sources remains unstable, or when sound reasoning is entangled with the generation of unreliable content. Research on language models has cautioned that fluency does not signify understanding and does not guarantee the accuracy of information, which renders the 'rhetoric of the answer' a potential source of false legitimacy where independent verification mechanisms are absent.

A central paradox thus emerges: management may use artificial intelligence to reduce personal bias and increase consistency and speed, yet it may simultaneously transfer part of the organisational decision-making to a system whose logic employees find difficult to understand or contest. In the literature on algorithmic management, the issue is not confined to automation; it extends to new forms of surveillance, evaluation, and the distribution of opportunities, such that algorithms become part of a field of negotiation and struggle over control, knowledge, and the right to define acceptable performance. The significance of this shift is compounded in the context of generative artificial intelligence, because the boundaries between suggestion and decision, and between cognitive support and effective authority, become increasingly blurred.

Research Problem and Questions

The research problem arises from the gap between the growing technical capacity of generative models and the incomplete set of social rules governing the legitimacy of their use within the organisation. An organisation may be technically capable of generating a recommendation in seconds, yet it does not necessarily possess an institutional answer to questions such as: May this recommendation be relied upon in a decision that affects employees? How much explanation is required? Should the role of artificial intelligence be disclosed? And who bears responsibility for harm if the recommendation is unsound? The absence of such answers may render technical efficiency itself a source of organisational tension rather than a source of acceptance.

Accordingly, the principal question is: How does generative artificial intelligence reshape the legitimacy of organisational decision-making from a sociological perspective? This gives rise to the following subsidiary questions:

- What is its effect on the distribution of epistemic authority within the organisation?

- What conditions make an AI-supported decision recognised as legitimate?
- How do procedural justice, explanation, trust, and contestability influence this acceptance?
- And what mechanisms prevent the generative system from shifting from a supporting tool into a source of invisible authority?

Significance and Objectives

The theoretical significance of this research lies in its attempt to bridge two fields that are often studied in isolation: the sociology of legitimacy and institutions on the one hand, and studies of artificial intelligence and organisational decision-making on the other. Legitimacy explains why groups accept an arrangement or a decision even before its consequences are fully examined, while studies of artificial intelligence reveal how the epistemic structure of the decision itself is changing. Bringing the two fields together allows us to understand that the introduction of artificial intelligence is not merely an update to the tool, but a reordering of who is entitled to know, to propose, and to justify.

The research aims to:

- Define the concept of the legitimacy of organisational decision-making within the context of generative artificial intelligence.
- Analyse the transformations of epistemic authority arising from the use of generative models.
- Interpret the influence of procedural justice, trust, transparency, and contestability on the acceptance of decisions.
- Distinguish the procedural, epistemic, moral, and institutional dimensions of legitimacy.
- And propose an analytical model and testable propositions for empirical research in organisations.

Methodology and Scope

The study adopts a theoretical-analytical approach, synthesising the literature on institutional legitimacy, social judgments of legitimacy, and organisational justice with contemporary scholarship on algorithmic management and artificial intelligence in decision-making. The study does not claim to offer empirical or causal findings; rather, it constructs an interpretive framework that can subsequently be tested through surveys, interviews, or case studies. It focuses on administrative, professional, and strategic organisational decisions, and does not address judicial or medical decisions except as examples of high-stakes decisions where relevant.

1. The First Axis: Sociological Framework of Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Legitimacy of Organisational Decision-Making

1.1. Generative Artificial Intelligence as an Epistemic Actor within the Organisation

Historically, authority within the organisation has been bound to control over resources, information, and expertise. The employee who possesses rare knowledge or the capacity to interpret an ambiguous situation commands a wider space of influence, because others rely on their judgment. With the introduction of generative models, part of this capacity becomes available through a single interface capable of summarising documents, formulating scenarios, proposing questions, and simulating multiple perspectives. The tool does not necessarily replace the expert, but it lowers the cost of access to certain forms of knowledge and redistributes the capacity to produce expert discourse within the organisation (Faraj et al., 2018).

This shift does not render artificial intelligence an 'actor' in the legal or moral sense, but it does make it a mediating actor in the production of organisational knowledge. An employee may build a memorandum on a generative analysis; a manager may ask the model to compare investment alternatives; and a team may use it to test opposing arguments before a meeting. In such cases, the system enters the chain of action from which the decision emerges, and an understanding of the

decision itself becomes incomplete if it is treated as an external tool with no bearing on how the problem is defined or how alternatives are ordered.

Recent research on the actual adoption of generative artificial intelligence tools in innovation management indicates that their use is shaped by sound leadership, the organisation's orientation towards innovation, and individual creativity. Their value, in other words, is not an independent technical property but the outcome of a process of social and organisational appropriation. This aligns with the sociological perspective that rejects the reduction of technology to its functional properties, and holds that the meaning of a tool is constituted in practice, in the rules of the institution, and in the power relations within it (Cimino et al., 2025, pp. 3431-3453).

Granting the system an epistemic position, however, does not equate it with the human expert. The generative model probabilistically assembles linguistic patterns and may present inaccurate information with high confidence; it may also reflect biases embedded in the data on which it was trained. A distinction must therefore be drawn between the capacity to produce a persuasive answer and the capacity to produce reliable knowledge. This distinction is the point of departure for the epistemic legitimacy of the decision: it is not enough for a justification to appear coherent; the organisation must also be able to demonstrate why its sources and its verification processes merit trust (Bender et al., 2021, pp. 610-623; Weidinger et al., 2022, pp. 214-229).

1.2. The Concept of Legitimacy of Organisational Decision-Making between Social Acceptance and Justice

Legitimacy theory provides a useful basis for understanding the acceptance of decisions. For Suchman, legitimacy is a generalised perception that the actions of an entity are desirable or appropriate within a social system of values, beliefs, and definitions. If this meaning is transferred from the organisation as an entity to the decision as an organisational act, the legitimacy of a decision becomes the social recognition that the body which issued it, the procedure it followed, the reasons on which it relied, and the outcome it reached all fall within the range of what actors consider acceptable and justifiable (Suchman, 1995, pp. 571-610).

Legitimacy does not coincide with satisfaction. An employee may oppose a decision because it harms them, yet acknowledge that it was taken in accordance with a fair procedure and by a competent body. Conversely, a person may benefit from a decision yet doubt its fairness or the manner of its issuance. It is for this reason that the literature on social judgments distinguishes between individual assessments of legitimacy and their transformation into shared beliefs at the collective level. This point becomes particularly significant when artificial intelligence is used, because the acceptance of the tool may vary across professional groups and organisational ranks, and may gradually transform into an institutional standard or a source of collective resistance.

Legitimacy is strongly linked to organisational justice, and particularly to procedural justice. Meta-analytic studies show that employees' judgments are shaped not only by what they receive, but also by the manner in which the decision is made, the consistency of the procedure, bias, the accuracy of information, the possibility of correcting error, and the opportunity to be heard. When artificial intelligence enters the decision, these criteria become direct instruments for assessing its legitimacy: Was the system applied in the same way to everyone? Were the data relevant? Can an error in the model be corrected? And can the output be contested? (Colquitt et al., 2001, pp. 425-445)

Tost's model likewise demonstrates that legitimacy is not a static judgment: actors may move from routine acceptance to active evaluation when a disturbance occurs or an unexpected outcome emerges. This is useful for understanding generative artificial intelligence: its use may become familiar in low-stakes tasks, but a major error or a controversial decision can reopen the question of the legitimacy of the entire system. Legitimacy is thus open to construction, erosion, and reconstruction according to accumulated organisational experiences (Tost, 2011, pp. 686-710).

1.3. From Bureaucratic to Algorithmic Authority

In traditional bureaucratic organisation, the legitimacy of a decision rests on formal position, rules, specialisation, and the chain of responsibility. The algorithmic environment, by contrast, introduces a new source of authority: the computational capacity to process large volumes of data and to offer a prediction or recommendation that appears neutral. This authority does not abolish bureaucracy; it interweaves with it. A manager may use an algorithmic recommendation to reinforce their decision; an organisation may invoke 'the objectivity of the system' to strengthen its position against objections; and the technical expert may become an indispensable intermediary between the decision and those affected by it (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021, pp. 213-237).

Algorithmic authority, however, is not necessarily transparent. Burrell distinguishes between different sources of opacity, including deliberate secrecy, the technical inability of users to read the system, and the complexity inherent in certain machine-learning models. With generative models, another kind of opacity is added: the output is readable, but the mechanism of its production and the sources of its input may not be easily reconstructable. The interface may therefore be 'linguistically transparent' while the epistemic basis of the decision remains unclear (Burrell, 2016, pp. 1-12).

Studies of algorithmic management likewise reveal that systems do not operate in a vacuum; they enter into contention over who holds the right to evaluate and to control. Employees and managers may develop strategies of adaptation, resistance, or circumvention, while management attempts to establish the system as an objective reference. This renders the legitimacy of generative decision-making a politico-organisational question as much as a technical one: technology redraws the boundaries of authority, but it does not abolish the social negotiation surrounding those boundaries (Kellogg et al., 2020, pp. 366-410).

2. The Second Axis: Transformations of the Decision Structure in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence

2.1. Redistribution of Knowledge and Expertise within the Organisation

The first direct sociological effect of generative artificial intelligence is the reduction of the monopoly that certain units of expertise have held over primary information and analytical formulation. A non-specialist employee can now request an explanation of a financial report, the drafting of a legal memorandum, or the summarising of technical research—thereby expanding their capacity to participate in discussions that previously required a specialised intermediary. This may permit a form of internal knowledge democracy, provided it is accompanied by a capacity for verification; yet it may equally create an illusion of epistemic equality if the user conflates access to a well-crafted formulation with possession of the expertise required to judge its soundness.

Jarrahi proposes the concept of symbiosis between humans and artificial intelligence in decision-making: the machine excels at processing, calculation, and pattern detection, while the human retains context, judgment, values, and the handling of social ambiguity. With generative artificial intelligence, this relationship expands further because the system also enters the domain of language and interpretation. The organisational challenge thus becomes that of preventing integration from turning into epistemic dependence, and of preserving the capacity of employees to interrogate the output rather than merely receive it (Jarrahi, 2018, pp. 577-586).

Empirical evidence on productivity confirms that generative artificial intelligence may benefit less experienced workers or accelerate the production of knowledge outputs in certain tasks. This effect, however, should not be interpreted as an erasure of professional distinctions; the distinctions may simply shift from 'Who can produce the text?' to 'Who can evaluate the text?' The skill of verification, context, and risk assessment thereby becomes a new form of professional capital, and the value of deep expertise may increase rather than decline, because it becomes indispensable for monitoring the rapid production of content (Noy & Zhang, 2023, pp. 187-192).

These shifts raise a question about recognition within the organisation. If success is attributed to performance and the value of accumulated expertise declines, experts may experience a symbolic

threat to their standing. And if senior managers monopolise access to more powerful systems or richer data, inequality may be reproduced in a new digital form. The effect of artificial intelligence on epistemic authority therefore depends on access policy, the quality of training, usage rights, and who holds the authority to certify outputs as official knowledge.

2.2. The Hybrid Decision between Human Judgment and Algorithmic Suggestion

No single optimal structure exists for combining human and artificial intelligence. The literature distinguishes between full delegation to the system, hybrid sequencing in which one party provides input to the other, and aggregation that integrates human and algorithmic judgments. This distinction becomes increasingly important with generative models because the system may intervene at multiple stages: defining the problem, generating alternatives, ranking them, or drafting the final justification. The closer one moves towards the point of obligation, the greater the need for legitimacy safeguards (Shrestha et al., 2019, pp. 66-83).

Recent studies on strategic decisions indicate that evaluations produced by generative models may be variable and biased at the level of individual assessment, while their performance improves when a number of evaluations are aggregated. This finding carries an important organisational implication: legitimate use should not assume that a single output constitutes 'the opinion of the artificial expert'. Instead, use can be designed so as to generate multiple readings, which are then examined and compared against independent human expertise. The system thereby shifts from a final authority into one source among several in a field of epistemic plurality (Doshi et al., 2025, pp. 583-610).

The automation-augmentation dichotomy likewise raises a paradox that cannot be resolved by a simple rule. Even when an organisation declares that artificial intelligence merely 'assists' humans, routine reliance on its recommendations may produce a de facto automation of judgment. The reverse is equally true: some automation may remain beneficial because it frees human time for tasks that require interpretation or communication. The hybrid structure must therefore be assessed through actual behaviour rather than through the formal description of the tool (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021, pp. 192-210).

The legitimacy of hybrid decisions also requires calibrated trust—neither absolute trust nor absolute rejection. Reviews of trust in artificial intelligence show that the characteristics of the system, the human, and the context all influence reliance upon it. The organisational objective is therefore not to persuade employees that the system is always reliable, but to enable them to know when it is reliable, when verification is required, and what signals should prompt them to override its recommendation. Calibrated trust makes the acceptance of a decision contingent on knowing its limits rather than on technological overreliance (Glikson & Woolley, 2020, pp. 627-660).

2.3. Responsibility and Accountability in the Generative Decision Chain

Whenever the decision process is distributed across multiple people and systems, the problem of diffused responsibility emerges. A manager may claim that the tool provided the recommendation; the technical team may claim that the system was merely a tool; the vendor may point to the terms of use; and the person affected by the decision is left without a clear actor to hold to account. From the standpoint of legitimacy, this outcome is dangerous even if the decision was correct; because the recognition of a decision requires a human or institutional body willing to bear its consequences and able to explain what occurred.

Technical opacity increases the likelihood of such dispersal. When a user of the system cannot explain the reason for the output, 'the system said so' may become the end of the discussion. Yet full technical transparency is not a realistic solution in every case, as Ananny and Crawford demonstrate; the mere disclosure of more information does not guarantee an understanding of authority or the ability to hold it to account, and may reduce transparency to an empty ritual. What is required is functional transparency tied to the rights of those affected: What is the role of the system? What primary

information was used? What is the degree of uncertainty? Who reviewed the output? And how can one contest it? (Ananny & Crawford, 2018, pp. 973-989; Burrell, 2016, pp. 1-12)

Responsibility must therefore be 'designed in' before use, not extracted after an error has occurred. An organisation can designate a human owner of the decision, an independent reviewer of inputs and outputs in sensitive decisions, and a record indicating when the system was used, which version and instructions were employed, and the limits of the circumstances in which reliance on the output is permitted. Such regulation does not eliminate errors, but it prevents the hybrid structure from becoming a zone without responsibility.

3. The Third Axis: Determinants of the Legitimacy of AI-Supported Decision-Making

3.1. Procedural Justice, Explanation, and Contestability

Procedural justice constitutes the most direct entry point to the legitimacy of a decision, because it answers the question: Was the decision taken in a manner that can be accepted even when interests diverge over its outcome? In the context of artificial intelligence, procedural justice encompasses the consistency of usage rules, the suitability of the data, the absence of discrimination between equivalent cases, the existence of genuine human review, and the right of those affected to submit information that the system may not capture. The problem is not that the decision is 'algorithmic' as such, but that automation may eliminate the opportunity to correct an exceptional case or an error in the data (Colquitt et al., 2001, pp. 425-445).

Lee's study on the perception of algorithmic decisions showed that people do not judge automation on accuracy alone, but also on justice, trust, and the emotions associated with the manner of the decision; and that the acceptance of an algorithm varies according to the type of task. This means that an organisation cannot transfer a single system from a routine decision to a decision affecting promotion, evaluation, or dismissal, and expect the same level of legitimacy. The higher the social impact of the decision, the greater the need for a clear human presence, for explanation, and for contestability (Lee, 2018, pp. 1-16).

Explanation, moreover, should be understood as a social practice rather than a mere technical output. An employee does not necessarily need the model's equations, but rather a reason that can be linked to the rules they know: What criteria influenced the decision? What could have changed the outcome? Was inappropriate information used? And what are the limits of the system's reliability? A functional explanation may therefore be more useful than comprehensive technical disclosure, provided that it does not turn into an automatically generated narrative that does not reflect the reality of the decision.

Explanation is linked to contestability. An explanation that permits no review may serve a public-relations function more than a function of justice. Conversely, the existence of an independent channel of contestation enhances the legitimacy of the decision because it acknowledges the possibility of error and grants the individual a role in the procedure. Here procedural justice meets institutional legitimacy: an organisation that establishes a clear path for correction signals that technology is subject to rules and not above them.

3.2. Trust, Perceived Objectivity, and Bias

Trust constitutes a decisive mediator between the quality of the system and the acceptance of the decision. Trust may arise from prior performance, from the reputation of the vendor, or from the user's belief that the algorithm is less biased than humans. These grounds, however, are not equivalent. Reliance on the 'halo of objectivity' may be dangerous if it obscures the fact that the system is built on data, design choices, and human orientations. A distinction should therefore be drawn between objectivity as a demonstrable property and objectivity as a social impression (Glikson & Woolley, 2020, pp. 627-660).

Legitimacy is also affected by whether the system reproduces discriminatory patterns or produces divergent or biased information. The risks of language models include discrimination, misleading

information, overreliance, and the reproduction of harmful patterns present in the data. When one of these failures appears in a decision affecting a person or a group, the harm extends beyond the individual outcome to trust in the institution itself, because the system has been used under its name and its authority (Weidinger et al., 2022, pp. 214-229).

On the other hand, an organisation may benefit from artificial intelligence to reduce certain forms of human selectivity if it is used in a controlled manner to compare arguments, detect contradictions, or examine alternative scenarios. This benefit, however, is not automatic, because the model may introduce a different bias rather than eliminate bias. Legitimacy must therefore be measured through a system of oversight that includes testing, review, and comparison, not through the assumption that an algorithmic decision is more impartial merely because it is algorithmic.

Judgments of legitimacy are formed at two levels: the individual's judgment of the decision, and the transmission of that judgment through interaction into a collective reputation of the algorithm. If positive experiences recur with a documented and reviewable system, its use may become routine. If errors recur or if a perception spreads that management uses it to evade responsibility, collective resistance may form. Legitimacy is therefore not managed by a single official announcement, but through accumulated experience and the organisation's capacity to respond to events that shake trust (Bitektine & Haack, 2015, pp. 49-75).

3.3. Organisational Culture and Institutional Pressures

Artificial intelligence technologies do not enter organisations in a normative vacuum. Organisations pursue efficiency, but they also seek to appear modern, professional, and aligned with what their environment expects. Meyer and Rowan showed that formal structures may derive their legitimacy from adopting recognised institutional models, even when the relationship between these structures and direct efficiency is unclear. In this context, 'adopting artificial intelligence' may become a marker of institutional modernisation before the rules of its actual use are clarified.

Organisations do not adopt artificial intelligence solely under pressure from competitors, professional bodies, or regulators, or because of an independent assessment of need. Mimetic pressure emerges when an organisation adopts a tool because leading organisations use it; normative pressure comes from experts and professions; and coercive pressure may come from governmental or market requirements. These motives may grant external legitimacy to the use, but they do not guarantee internal legitimacy among employees (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, pp. 147-160).

Organisational culture therefore shapes the meaning of the tool. In a participatory culture, the system may be used to broaden discussion and test alternatives; in an authoritarian culture, it may be used to entrench a prior decision under a technical cover. In an organisation that encourages the acknowledgement of error, an employee may object to an algorithmic recommendation; in a punitive culture, they may prefer to follow it even when they doubt it, because opposing it makes them individually responsible. The legitimacy of artificial intelligence cannot therefore be assessed in isolation from existing relations of authority, trust, and organisational voice.

Legitimacy is also linked to the type of profession. Some professions build their identity on expert judgment and personal responsibility, and may perceive broad delegation to artificial intelligence as a threat to the essence of the role. In other professions, the system may be understood as a natural extension of analytical tools. Adoption must therefore be sensitive to professional norms, and must distinguish between cognitive support and the replacement of judgment in domains where the legitimacy of the profession rests on personal accountability.

4. The Fourth Axis: A Proposed Sociological Model of the Legitimacy of Generative Decision-Making

4.1. The Four Dimensions of the Legitimacy of Organisational Decision-Making

The study proposes that the legitimacy of organisational decision-making supported by generative artificial intelligence cannot be reduced to a single dimension such as accuracy or transparency. It is more accurately analysed across four interrelated dimensions: procedural, epistemic, moral, and institutional. This division draws on the literature on legitimacy that distinguishes between modes of acceptance, and on models of legitimacy judgments that link individual judgment to social context, but it reformulates them to suit the specificity of generative decisions (Suchman, 1995, pp. 571-610; Tost, 2011, pp. 686-710).

Table (1): Dimensions of the legitimacy of organisational decision-making supported by generative artificial intelligence

Dimension	Sociological question	Indicators strengthening legitimacy	Threats to legitimacy
Procedural	Was the decision taken in a fair and correctable manner?	Consistency of rules, hearing those affected, review, channel of contestation, documentation of use	Closed procedure, algorithmic delegation, absence of appeal, inconsistent treatment
Epistemic	Why does knowledge produced or supported algorithmically merit reliance?	Verification, plurality of sources, comparison of outputs, statement of the limits of trust and uncertainty	Hallucination, false certainty, untraceable source, reliance on a single output
Moral	Does the decision respect rights, values, and human responsibility?	Non-discrimination, proportionality, clear human responsibility, protection of privacy and dignity	Bias, dehumanisation, concealment of responsibility, disproportionate use
Institutional	Is the use compatible with legitimate professional and regulatory rules?	Written policy, oversight, clear mandates, legal and professional alignment	Trend-driven adoption, absence of governance, conflict with professional norms

Procedural legitimacy concerns the manner:

even if the model's recommendation is correct, the decision remains weakly legitimate if the case was not given an opportunity for review, or if different rules were applied to equivalent persons. Epistemic legitimacy concerns the source of the claim: Are there good reasons to rely on the analysis? Can the user distinguish between fact and probabilistic output? Moral legitimacy concerns the limits of what an organisation may delegate, as well as responsibility, non-discrimination, and dignity. Finally, institutional legitimacy refers to the extent to which the use is embedded in written rules, clear roles, and professional and legal requirements.

The principal advantage of this model is that it allows us to understand cases in which a decision may be strong in one dimension and weak in another. A system may be epistemically accurate yet used within a procedure that does not permit contestation; conversely, a procedure may be fair yet its use in a highly sensitive decision may conflict with professional norms. Comprehensive legitimacy does not require perfection in every dimension, but it does require that weakness in one dimension does not reach the point of undermining trust in the decision as a whole.

4.2. Mechanisms of Legitimacy Production and Erosion

Legitimacy is produced, **first**, through participation in the design of usage rules. When employees, experts, and professional representatives participate in determining the cases in which artificial intelligence may be used and the limits of its role, technology shifts from an imposed decision into a negotiated arrangement. Participation does not mean that every user holds a right of veto, but it increases mutual awareness of risks and gives actors a sense that the system reflects their expertise rather than being designed against them.

Second, legitimacy is produced through 'giving reasons'. A decision that states clearly that the system was used to prepare alternatives and that the manager reviewed them according to specified criteria is socially stronger than a decision that merely reports that the algorithmic analysis produced the outcome. Giving reasons links the decision to rules that can be discussed and prevents artificial intelligence from being converted into an argument from authority. Explanation thereby becomes a process of mutual accountability: the organisation explains, and the person affected can test the explanation or contest it.

Third, legitimacy is produced through balancing automation and augmentation. The higher the impact of a decision and the less reversible it is, the more appropriate it becomes to keep artificial intelligence in a supporting or second-opinion position, with clear human responsibility. Routine and correctable tasks, by contrast, may permit a higher degree of automation. This graduated approach aligns with the automation-augmentation paradox and prevents the application of a single rule to all decisions (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021, pp. 192-210).

Conversely, legitimacy erodes along three paths. **The first** is opacity, which prevents actors from knowing the basis of the decision. **The second** is the transfer of responsibility, when management uses the system to justify a decision whose consequences it does not wish to own. **The third** is the mismatch between discourse and practice: the organisation declares that the human is in the loop, while employees in practice rely on the output without review. This gap between formal structure and practice may turn into a form of institutional decoupling, in which rules exist on paper but actual use follows a different logic (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, pp. 340-363).

Legitimacy also erodes when the speed of production becomes a criterion that overrides the quality of judgment. Artificial intelligence makes the generation of documents and alternatives low-cost, and this may drive organisations to increase the number of analyses without increasing the time allocated to verification. The likely outcome is a symbolic inflation of organisational knowledge: more reports, more arguments, but a weaker capacity to distinguish the significant from the misleading. The 'abundance of knowledge' must therefore be managed as a new organisational risk, not as an absolute advantage.

4.3. Testable Research Propositions

The proposed model can be transformed into a field research programme within organisations. The study proposes the following issues as testable hypotheses or expected relationships, subject to adaptation according to the type of decision, the sector, and the cultural context:

- The legitimacy of a decision increases when artificial intelligence is presented as an advisory tool with a clearly defined role, and decreases when employees believe it is the final decision-maker in high-impact decisions.
- The influence of explanation and contestability on legitimacy increases with the gravity of the decision and the difficulty of reversing its outcomes (Lee, 2018, pp. 1-16).
- Procedural justice mediates the relationship between disclosure of AI use and acceptance of the decision; disclosure alone does not guarantee acceptance if the procedure remains closed.
- Acceptance of a generative recommendation increases when it intersects with an independent human expert assessment or with the aggregation of multiple outputs, rather than reliance on a single response (Doshi et al., 2025, pp. 583-610).

- Opacity reduces moral legitimacy more strongly when employees perceive that opacity is used to distribute or conceal responsibility.
- The legitimacy of use is higher in organisational cultures that permit voice, contestation, and learning from error, compared with highly centralised cultures.
- A 'disclosure paradox' may emerge: disclosure of AI use raises trust among some groups owing to the perception of objectivity, but lowers it among other groups if the decision requires empathy or personal professional judgment.
- With repeated successful use, artificial intelligence may become a familiar source of epistemic legitimacy, increasing the risk of uncritical reliance and blurring the boundaries between support and decision.

The dependent variable, 'decision legitimacy', can be measured through items addressing acceptance of the decision-maker's authority to decide, fairness of procedure, plausibility of justification, willingness to comply, and trust in the decision-making body. Independent variables include the degree of AI intervention, the type of decision, the level of disclosure, the presence of explanation, contestability, prior trust in the system, and digital experience. The mediating effect of procedural justice and trust, and the moderating effect of decision severity and organisational culture, can also be tested.

Discussion

The preceding analysis reveals that the relationship between generative artificial intelligence and decision legitimacy is not linear. An improvement in the quality of information may increase legitimacy, but it may fail to do so if the manner of use is unjust or if the organisation is unable to identify who is responsible. Likewise, a slightly less accurate decision that is comprehensible and reviewable may enjoy greater social acceptance than a highly accurate decision issued by a closed mechanism. This finding does not imply a preference for popularity over quality; it means that the organisation requires both, because decision-making within an organisation cannot operate through computational power alone.

Nor is 'the human in the loop' a sufficient guarantee of legitimacy. If the human presence is merely formal and the reviewer lacks the time, information, or authority to override the system's recommendation, human review becomes an institutional ritual. The effectiveness of human oversight must therefore be measured by the reviewer's actual capacity to detect and alter error, by the clarity of their responsibility, and by the absence of informal sanctions against those who oppose the system when they have a professional reason to do so.

This discussion supports the idea that the future of organisational decision-making will not be a simple conflict between humans and machines, but a redistribution of roles. Artificial intelligence may assume preliminary research, the generation of scenarios, and the detection of contradictions, while the human remains responsible for interpreting context, weighing values, and bearing the consequences. This division of labour, however, does not occur automatically; it requires institutional design that specifies which tasks may be delegated and which must remain bound to human judgment (Jarrahi, 2018, pp. 577-586).

From the standpoint of institutional legitimacy, the use of artificial intelligence may succeed externally and fail internally. An organisation may appear modern before the market and regulators, while employees feel that the tool diminishes their voice or converts management decisions into non-negotiable commands. A distinction must therefore be drawn between the legitimacy of adoption and the legitimacy of use. The former asks why the introduction of the technology appears appropriate; the latter asks how it is actually used and who bears its consequences.

Finally, generative artificial intelligence raises a new epistemic problem: the ease with which 'post hoc justifications' can be produced. The system can formulate a persuasive argument for almost any option if the request is appropriately framed. This renders subsequent explanation less valuable if it is not tied

to a genuine record of the decision process. Hence the importance of chronologically documenting inputs, outputs, and evaluation criteria, so that explanation does not become a justificatory narrative written after the decision has been taken.

Findings

- The legitimacy of organisational decision-making is a social concept partially independent of the accuracy of a decision or its technical utility, and encompasses recognition of the decision's source, procedures, justifications, and accountability.
- Generative artificial intelligence redistributes epistemic authority within the organisation because it lowers the cost of producing analysis and expert language, but it does not eliminate the need for specialised expertise in verification and context.
- The linguistic fluency of models may generate false epistemic legitimacy if the quality of formulation is conflated with the soundness of knowledge.
- Hybrid decisions are more amenable to legitimation when the role of the system is defined and disclosed, and when human review genuinely capable of overriding the recommendation exists.
- Procedural justice, particularly the possibility of correction and contestation, constitutes a pivotal element in the acceptance of AI-supported decisions.
- Useful transparency is functional transparency tied to the rights of those affected, not comprehensive technical disclosure that non-specialists cannot use.
- Opacity becomes more damaging to legitimacy when it is accompanied by diffused responsibility or by the use of technology as a pretext to avoid accountability.
- Trust in artificial intelligence must be calibrated according to task, risk, and context, not a general trust in technology.
- Organisational culture determines to a large extent whether artificial intelligence will be used to broaden participation or to reinforce centralisation under a technical cover.
- The legitimacy of generative decisions can be analysed across four dimensions: procedural, epistemic, moral, and institutional, all of which are convertible into field measurement instruments.

Recommendations

- Establishing a written institutional policy specifying the types of decisions in which generative artificial intelligence may be used, and those in which core elements may not be delegated to the system.
- Designating a human official or organisational unit bearing final responsibility for every high-impact decision, and prohibiting the use of 'the system decided' as a sufficient justification.
- Recording the role of artificial intelligence in sensitive decisions: the version used, the nature of inputs, the relevant outputs, who reviewed them, and what modifications were made.
- Creating a practical right to explanation and contestation for employees or stakeholders affected by important decisions in whose preparation artificial intelligence participated.
- Training employees to verify outputs, to understand the risks of hallucination and bias, and to know when to seek independent expert review, rather than merely training them to write prompts.
- In strategic decisions, using multiple generative outputs or perspectives and comparing them against human expertise, rather than relying on a single confidently worded response.
- Conducting periodic reviews of organisational justice, trust, and the effects of use on professional groups, and not limiting audit to technical accuracy indicators.

- Involving employees, experts, and unions or professional representatives-where applicable-in designing usage rules, because participation itself is a resource for legitimacy.
- Applying the principle of graduated response according to risk: the greater the impact of the decision on rights, career trajectory, or resources, the greater the requirements for human review, documentation, and explanation.
- Conducting field studies in Arab and Algerian organisations to test the proposed model, comparing public and private sectors and professions with high expert authority.

Conclusion

The study concludes that generative artificial intelligence does not merely alter organisational decision-making by increasing speed or the volume of information; it reshapes the conditions of its legitimacy. When the system becomes part of the production of alternatives, arguments, and evaluations, it enters the structure of epistemic authority and changes who holds the capacity to say that one option is preferable. It is therefore insufficient to assess it by the criterion of accuracy; one must also assess the manner in which it distributes knowledge, responsibility, and voice within the organisation.

The analysis confirms that legitimacy in the generative environment is multidimensional. The procedure must be fair, the use must respect rights and human responsibility, and it must be embedded in clear institutional rules. If one of these dimensions fails fundamentally, the technology may become a source of eroding trust even when it yields gains in efficiency.

The proposed model is that of 'responsible hybrid decision-making': artificial intelligence is used to expand analytical capacity rather than to abolish judgment; it discloses its role rather than concealing it; it grants those affected a reasonable right to understanding and contestation; and it retains a specific person or body responsible for the final decision. This model does not resolve all problems of legitimacy, but it prevents the most dangerous of them: that the tool becomes an invisible authority, and that organisational decision-making becomes a computational outcome without responsibility.

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