

MERIT, PRIVILEGE & INEQUITY



The argument around merit in the workplace or the “best candidate for the job” appears to promote fairness, yet is often applied to legitimise and perpetuate privilege and entrench gender inequity and unfairness.

Women face bias, greater barriers, and less opportunity to lead, and here, a meritocracy becomes exclusionary and unfair.

Leaders across society need to recognise that:

- **Meritocracy can build on and perpetuate privilege**
- **Evidence-based strategies for equity do not undermine fairness, they build inclusion and dismantle privilege**

Lord Young in 1958 coined the term “meritocracy” when describing a future where merit, expertise and intelligence trumped social class assigned by birth.¹ However, his son subsequently highlighted that “meritocracy” is also exclusionary and is used “as a way of legitimising and perpetuating privileged status”² Contemporary sociological and economic research supports the interpretation that meritocracy can be applied to maintain the status quo and entrench inequity.