Taking our own advice on gender equality in the workplace

Allana Coulon

MartinJenkins' Managing Partner Allana Coulon explains what her firm has been doing to shrink its gender pay gap, and why she's looking forward to seeing the new standard way of calculating the gender pay gap being widely adopted across the country.

At MartinJenkins we're often advising clients on gender pay equity and employment issues, and so for us, understanding and addressing our own gender pay gap is important not just to keep faith with our own values, but also to make sure we're taking our own advice.

In 2023 we did a full "Pay and Employment Equity Review" that, among other important things, told us what was happening with our gender pay gap and led to some adjustments to address it. This was the second time we had reviewed our gender pay gap, and it built upon some process changes we had made to keep pay equity front of mind for our people leaders.

The right direction – but more to be done

Our review told us our gender pay gap had shrunk slightly since when we measured it in 2018, and also that we needed to make some changes to ensure that we kept the pressure on the pay gap and that all our processes were transparent and fair. Although the review found no systemic inequities in rates of pay and advancement at our firm, it found we needed to do some things to prevent inequities arising the future.

In comparing pay for men and women we segmented the comparisons by level to help us see any problem areas. We saw a small but encouraging decrease for all the key segments, telling us we were moving in the right direction.

We found that the gender pay gap for the whole firm was 10% (down from 12% in 2018), but that the gap was a lot smaller – 4%, down from 6% – if the comparison excluded our Partners. For our consulting workforce – that is, excluding Partners and also our Corporate Services team – the pay gap was zero, down from 2%. This highlights the challenge of closing pay gaps when comparing corporate support functions in a company like ours, with consulting support.

One of the most encouraging results from the review was a marked increase in representation of women at senior levels in the firm. In particular, there's now a 50/50 gender split among our Managers and Practice Leads, whereas in 2018 this layer were 62% male.

The make-up of our Executive Partner group also looks a lot different from the all-male affair of 2018. Now, two out of our current five Executive Partners are women – including me as our Managing Partner (and one of our two independent board members is also a woman). We have zero pay gap at the Partner level.

Keeping the pressure on

We wanted to make sure we didn't just take a "measure and forget" approach to our gender pay gap, and that all our ongoing processes were set up the right way to minimise any pay gap or other gender inequities.

So we've been introducing more formal standards and guidance for decisions to do with pay and promotions. We also realised we've now outgrown the informal mechanisms we'd been using to prepare new managers for their roles, so again we're formalising this more, for example with formal induction and training, including on pay and employment issues.

Finally, we realised our decisions needed to be more transparent, so that our own people, and also people outside the firm like potential staff and clients, would have the information they need to be confident our firm is fair and transparent in our pay decisions. So we started publishing more information about our pay gap both internally and externally (on our website and on paygapinsightshub.nz).

Making meaningful comparisons

But one of our concerns about our gender pay gap in the wake of our 2023 review was not being sure we could make meaningful comparisons with other firms.

We know there are pros and cons to exactly how you measure pay gaps. For that reason, we're very encouraged that the Ministry of Women worked together with a range of New Zealand businesses to develop and make easily available a standard method for calculating gender pay gaps. We're going to adopt this approach ourselves and we're eager to see it widely used across all sectors in Aotearoa, so we can be confident that comparisons with other firms are meaningful and accurate.

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