



Inside the 'unending chaos' at Forrest's Fortescue; Exclusive

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Byline: Primrose Riordan Associate editor

Body

Andrew Forrest uses terms of endearment freely. In interviews and around the office, he often calls people "darl", "babe", "digger". Those close to him say that's just how he communicates.

But for members of a small **Fortescue** chat group, one message that flashed across their phone screens a few years ago still came as a surprise.

Some of the group of executives and directors were in the iron ore company's Perth headquarters when they were alerted to a new message in their group on the Signal app. The **Fortescue** chairman was overseas and had clearly made a mistake. The message, directed to a female employee, was quickly deleted but not before it rang alarm bells, according to four people with knowledge of the incident.

"From what I remember it said 'Jessie [not her real name], love, we need to talk, Jessie where are you? You know I need to know where you are'," says a former executive who was part of the Signal group. "It was overly familiar, and the wrong tone for the conversation as it was a chat with a handful of senior people about business stuff."

Another person who saw it says: "It was cringeworthy. People were shaking their heads."

It was sent at the tail end of the 2020-21 world tour, which involved a team of enthusiastic **Fortescue** staffers flying around the globe on the hunt for renewable energy projects to power Forrest's dream of building **Fortescue** into a green hydrogen powerhouse.

The Australian Financial Review has interviewed 23 former executives and associates, as well as **Fortescue** analysts, who say Forrest's erratic and at times impulsive leadership style contributed to the company's dramatic and costly backdown from its hydrogen ambitions this year.

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Read an edited transcript of

The Australian Financial

Inside the 'unending chaos' at Forrest's Fortescue Exclusive

Review's interview at afr.com

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