



Some home truths for Fortescue

The Australian

February 5, 2025 Wednesday

Australian Edition

Copyright 2025 Nationwide News Pty Limited All Rights Reserved

Section: BUSINESS; Pg. 13

Length: 1202 words

Byline: YONI BASHAN & NICK EVANS, MARGIN CALL

Body

Fortescue asked, and boy did its executives receive.

The mining group led by Andrew Forrest has engaged in a cute little exercise with its workforce that it's calling "Ask Us Anything", in which employees can post anonymous questions to the leadership while even more employees - or even leaders themselves - can submit nameless replies. Well, actually, not all of them are nameless; the bland responses, the most banal and corporate, come with a name. But rest assured, this lark is completely consuming everyone at the organisation.

It's Frank Costanza's airing of grievances but on an enormous scale, a Festivus ritual open to more than 20,000 participants across the Forrest empire.

There's snark, there's banter. There's outrage over a tampon and sanitary pad dispenser that's gone missing from a bathroom.

There's righteous indignation over women who can swish around the office in skirts during the summer while poor, suffering dudes have to wilt in their neckties and suit jackets.

"Biscuits â€¦. We want biscuits in all kitchens â€¦. Nothing better than a cuppa and a biccy," said one employee, receiving 37 upvotes from their peers. Meanwhile, someone's idea for a masala chai machine in the kitchenette received only four upvotes. Philistines.

What better window into a company's culture?

Fortescue CEO Dino Otranto addressed the most pressing questions at a recent "team huddle", although it's hard to tell whether he took this all seriously. Otranto prefaced one response by saying, "this is probably the politically correct answer I need to give", and then he told everyone that he likes to sit back and brace himself for the questions "with a nice bottle of scotch".

No shade on knocking back a dram of whisky, which Dino can happily afford with his \$1.75m salary (not including performance rights, themselves worth a few dinero) but what of the **Fortescue** underclass? They're getting punted

Some home truths for Fortescue

because of Forrest's failing green energy vision. Remember the secret membrane, or the magic beans of green hydrogen? So much heat, yet so little light. Pretty soon we'll get an announcement of major advancements out of **Fortescue** HQ. Their newest secret weapon? Eye of newt.

Some 700 employees were let go in July, supposedly to lean up the business and not at all because of this flunking, expensive project that's subsidised by the long-suffering shareholders of **Fortescue**'s actual rainmaking business: mining. "Most of us can't afford a nice bottle of scotch," one staffer said.

Otranto's "huddle" mustn't have gone down a treat, which explains why chief operating officer Shelley Robertson, poached from the dum-dums at MinRes, fronted the second town hall instead to answer questions, one of which concerned **Fortescue**'s very cluttered organisational chart.

"Can someone explain the org structure? We have CEOs reporting to CEOs, directors to directors, and varying titles, despite being told it would be 'flattened'." Now who might have asked that except for someone clearly trying to Marie Kondo the place? Looking at you, Otranto.

Some insight, as well, into the workforce hardships that have followed the screw-tightening of July.

"Why is the budget so tight at the minute? Are we expected to deliver world class service on a shoestring budget? Recruitment restrictions are leaving departments short and the people picking up the slack are getting burned out," said one aggrieved **Fortescue** worker. Another sarcastically wrote: "Is there an opportunity in the future to expand on the CEO for a day initiative and participate if you are not a First Nations -employee?" And then this from a person who clearly hasn't kept an eye on iron ore prices: "Instead of a Christmas party, can you give each department \$150 per person to hold their own team party?" A popular idea with 211 upvotes, but hopelessly unrealistic, to be sure. Reminder: it's **Fortescue**, people, not Hancock. Don't hold your breath for a cash giveaway.

A spokeswoman said the whole point of the exercise was to promote transparent communication within the organisation.

"This is just one avenue we are using to ensure our staff can continue to engage and interact with the leadership team, getting answers to the topics that matter the most to our people," which apparently doesn't go much higher than biscuits and air conditioning.

Donations dry up Good retail politics, or a fundraising own goal?

The outrage over PwC's tax leaks scandal generated plenty of headlines for both major parties but their backroom operators might be ruing the point scoring as they tally up their respective election war chests. Not that many people outside of the party backrooms will be crying, but those inside the tent might be another victim of the PwC scandal.

The Australian Electoral Commission's annual release of political donation data suggests the major parties' coffers have been left with a \$700,000 black hole after the "big four" firms - PwC, KPMG, Deloitte and EY - dramatically pulled back their support last financial year.

They collectively donated almost \$1m to both major parties in 2022-23 before revelations emerged that PwC used its position inside the tax office tent to enrich itself and its clients, at the (probable) expense of taxpayers.

However, after politicians turned the screws on the bastardry, most of the firms shied away from making political donations.

PwC coughed up \$369,973 to the major political parties in 2022-23, but didn't make any political donations in 2023-24 after banning them entirely. KPMG donated just \$22,631, which was down 83 per cent on the previous year, while Deloitte donated \$47,497 - down 73 per cent.

Only EY is an outlier, seemingly unaffected by the scandal. EY donated \$180,172 in 2023-24, which was slightly down on the \$227,853 it donated the previous year.

Some home truths for Fortescue

All up, donations to the major parties from the big four in 2023-24 were down more than 73 per cent, which was a bit of a blow to the coffers of the major parties.

Another oddity stands out among the financial services sector, after banking major ANZ pulled its donations to the major parties. The bank kicked in \$90,000 to the major parties in 2022-23 but made only a single donation of \$5500 this current disclosure round.

Curiously enough, that was to the Nationals, traditionally the party of bashing the banks.

The donation appears to have been made just a few months after the bank appeared at a hearing as part of Nationals senator Matt Canavan's inquiry into branch closures in regional Australia. Purely a coincidence, no doubt.

Of course, the AEC disclosures don't tell the whole story; notoriously so. Only direct donations are recorded under the giver's name. Left off the disclosures are the names behind the millions of dollars raked in through business forums run by the major parties, which have annual membership rates of \$30,000 to \$120,000 and run dozens and dozens of breakfasts, lunches, dinners (and even the odd afternoon tea) to give access to ministers and their shadow counterparts for those able and prepared to pay. Margin Call would be shocked if the big four (banks or accounting firms) weren't booking in for the odd spot of lunch with a minister or three during the year, but you won't know it from the AEC disclosure list.

Load-Date: February 4, 2025

End of Document