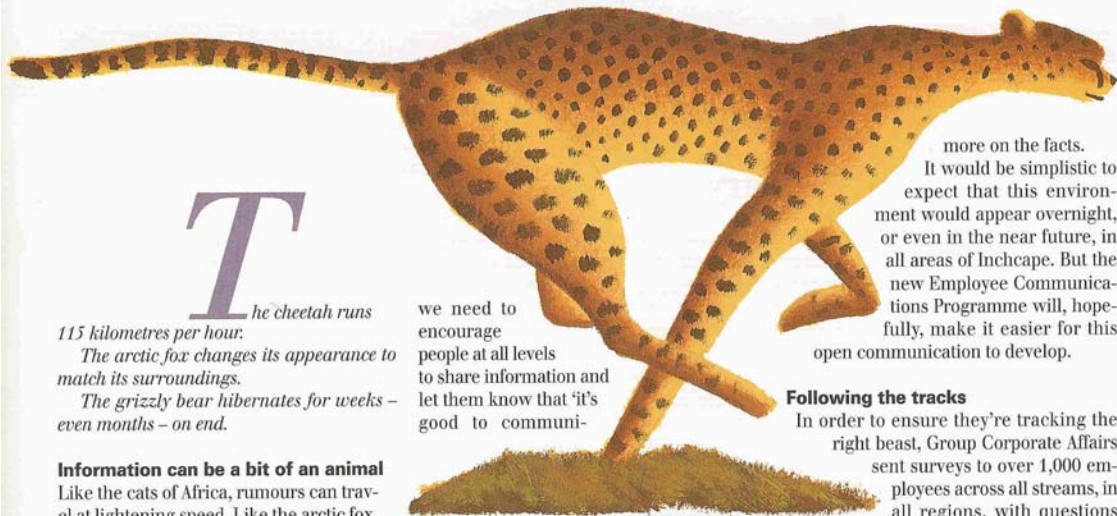


# The hunt is on for better employee communications

**Nanci Tangeman, employee communications consultant, is working with Inchcape to develop our new Employee Communications Programme. Here she takes us on a trail through the communications jungle.**



**T**he cheetah runs 115 kilometres per hour. The arctic fox changes its appearance to match its surroundings. The grizzly bear hibernates for weeks – even months – on end.

**Information can be a bit of an animal**  
Like the cats of Africa, rumours can travel at lightening speed. Like the arctic fox, a story can change drastically by the time it hits the ears of employees far from Group Head Office. And, to take the metaphor dangerously close to the edge, sometimes important information crawls into a hole and hides.

The Group Corporate Affairs department is out to tame the information animal. With the full support and encouragement of the Group Management Board, they have embarked on a project to re-style employee communications throughout the company. The process began with an extensive review of the existing employee communications processes, across all streams worldwide, and will culminate with the introduction of a new multi-faceted communications programme in the autumn.

“The efforts are two-fold,” says Paul Barber, Group Corporate Affairs manager. “First,

we need to encourage people at all levels to share information and let them know that it’s good to communi-

cate’. Secondly, it is our job to make it as simple as possible for people to communicate, by providing managers and supervisors with the right tools for the job.”

#### **Leader of the pack**

It’s an ambitious goal, but one that will reap benefits for the entire company if successful. As an example, when the new Inchcape strategy was announced, information was available to managers for team briefings as soon as it was released to the financial community. Hopefully, where possible, employees had the new strategy and reorganisation explained to them, face-to-face, by their managers, within hours of the public announcement. And with the new communication programme, information will continue to flow to employees as it is available. Therefore they can rely less on the rumour mill and

more on the facts. It would be simplistic to expect that this environment would appear overnight, or even in the near future, in all areas of Inchcape. But the new Employee Communications Programme will, hopefully, make it easier for this open communication to develop.

#### **Following the tracks**

In order to ensure they’re tracking the right beast, Group Corporate Affairs sent surveys to over 1,000 employees across all streams, in all regions, with questions translated into Mandarin, Spanish, Japanese, Thai and Russian. They talked to senior management, including Sir Colin Marshall and the executive directors, as well as all business stream and regional heads. They also interviewed Human Resources and Corporate Affairs staff from around the world. And now all Inchcape World readers, around 40,000 of you, are being asked to share your ideas through the enclosed questionnaire. The information gathered will be communicated back to you once it has been analysed.

This exhaustive research should help Corporate Affairs tailor the programme to the needs of employees across the board – no small feat with an organisation as diverse and wide-reaching as Inchcape. An employee inspecting crude oil in the North Sea may have very different information needs from

a marketing analyst working on a proposal for a new principal in Singapore. Or what about an employee bottling Coca-Cola in Chile or a mechanic servicing a Jaguar in Helsinki - what do they have in common?

Philip Cushing, Group chief executive, has an opinion on what the common thread may be: "No matter where they're working, every one of our employees benefits from a working environment where communication is valued. There is also a lot to be said about the feeling of the Inchcape "community", or knowing there is a major international company backing your activities - however large or small the unit or area you are in. It is the responsibility of the Group to see that employees have the opportunity to receive the information they need and want to do their jobs effectively, no matter where they work or what their function."

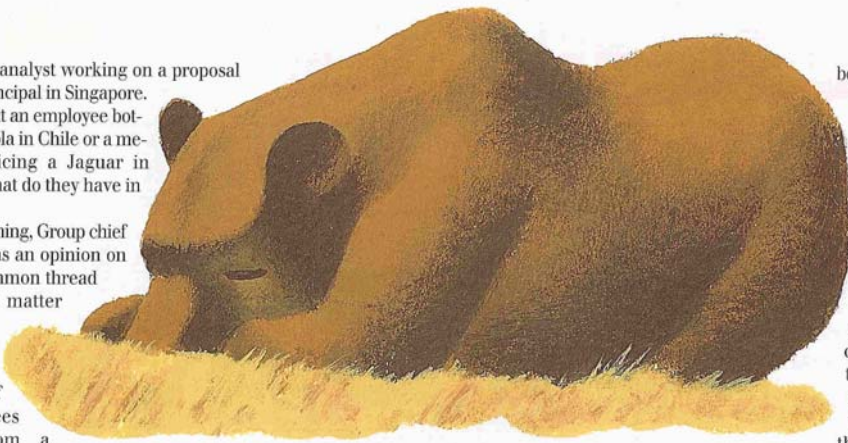
#### Several breeds of communicators

You don't have to look far to find examples of excellent communication at Inchcape. Many areas of the company have already fostered a culture of open communication. Team Briefings have been in place in some regions for a decade. Many streams have sophisticated programmes for communicating information to their employees, as well as for gaining feedback on important issues:

- Inchcape Marketing in Hong Kong holds bi-monthly Team Briefings in Mandarin covering Group, stream and local business news. Employees have the opportunity to ask questions to senior management, anonymously if preferred. Answers are researched and communicated back to employees.

- Bain Hogg offers an E-mail magazine to all employees needing information about their desktop computer capabilities.

- Shipping Services in America shows new employees a video that includes Inchcape's businesses around the world and explains how each local office fits into the larger, international picture.



boards and 47 per cent for employee feedback. This is up from only 10 per cent of companies using electronic media just four years ago! One of the most exciting communication tools to emerge from this electronic boom is the electronic

magazine - a graphics screen, sent over the E-mail system, which offers E-mail users different "pages" of information. The pages could contain anything from the latest Group financial information to job openings around the world; from important news releases to specific business stream information. Already there are people within Inchcape who are using electronic magazines. In addition to the Bain Hogg publication noted earlier, Inchcape Marketing Services sends an electronic newsletter, including charts and graphs, to 140 managers around the world.

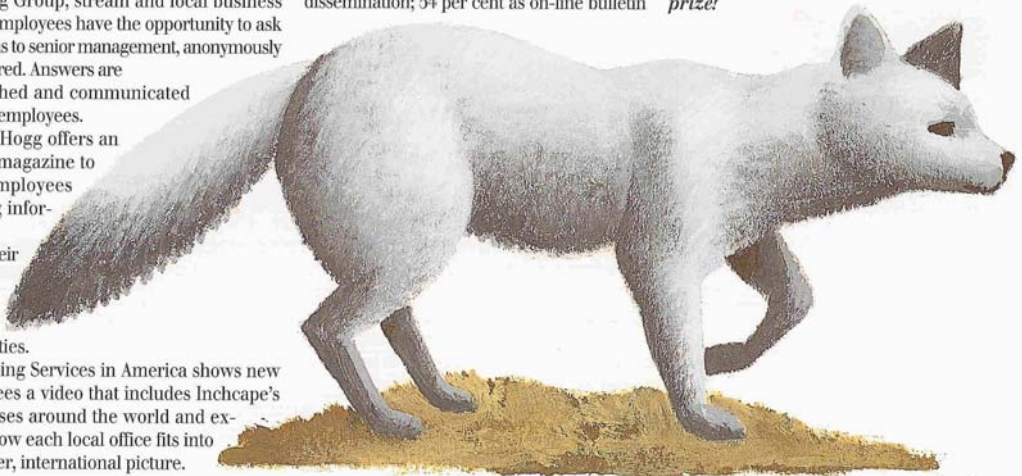
Sharing these practices, as well as good ideas from other corporations, including our principals, will add to the programme's success. Nevertheless, the employee communication programme that emerges from the review may not resemble anything employees have previously experienced. One thing is certain - employees will receive information in a variety of ways to suit their tastes: printed magazines, E-mailed bulletins, face-to-face meetings, and management walk-arounds are only a few of those being considered. Employee feedback will be an especially important component of the new programme.

#### New species of communications

One area which will be carefully explored is the use of electronic communications. Inchcape is not alone in its E-mail venture. Last year a study among the top 100 companies in the United States showed that 87 per cent used electronic mail for person-to-person communications; 67 per cent used it for information dissemination; 54 per cent as on-line bulletin

What exact form the employees communications creature will take is not yet known, but it must harness the speed of the cheetah and the many guises of the fox in order to meet the needs of every species of Inchcape employee around the world.

- *Don't hibernate like a grizzly bear and miss out on the opportunity to give the Group Corporate Affairs team your views: fill in and return the enclosed questionnaire NOW - and you could win a great prize!*



**From Inchcape World, April 1996, London, England  
In-house magazine for 40,000 employees of Inchcape plc subsidiaries worldwide  
Introduce new employee communications program to employees**