

Message

From: Helen MacNamara [helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
on behalf of Helen MacNamara <helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk> [helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
Sent: 08/05/2020 1:12:41 PM
To: Martin Reynolds [MReynolds@no10.gov.uk]
CC: Owen, John - CO - (OFF-SEN) [john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
Subject: Re: personal: draft. [OFFICIAL]

agree: sending through a revised version in 20. Martin - John and I agreed we should share in outline with Mark so he can start to think about it given it's lots of change to his structures. But that you and I need to see Lee and Dom. And then we should test findings with Ben G and Ed L, before testing again with Dom, and then you and I should probably put to Mark and Dom to discuss and agree? If they aren't happy then anything we are recommend isn't going to work.

		<p>Helen MacNamara Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet E: Helen.MacNamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk T: I&S Private Office: PSHelenMacNamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk</p>
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On Fri, 8 May 2020 at 11:53, Martin Reynolds <MReynolds@no10.gov.uk> wrote:

Tried to call – not entirely sure I agree on the remote working (but many of your arguments are totally correct). Equally I don't think we should make that the focus of this note so maybe best to leave the issue out since I can see there are strong views in each direction and it would be easiest to get bogged down on that rather than sorting everything else out.

Martin

From: John Owen <john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>
Sent: 08 May 2020 10:49
To: Martin Reynolds <MReynolds@no10.gov.uk>
Cc: Helen MacNamara <helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: personal: draft. [OFFICIAL]

This is great. And has actually cheered me up no end to read. Some comments in red below:

How can No 10 and the CO better support the PM in this next phase?

We spoke to 45+ people over 3 days: predominantly people working closely in No 10 and the CO secretariat but we also had some perspective from departments. We asked open questions about what the problems were and what could be better. This wasn't a perfect or comprehensive exercise. It was very striking how similar the problem diagnosis was whether we were talking to political advisers or people who work either side of the link door. Also how frank and open they were (but without any individual criticism) and how committed everyone was to sorting it out.

The universal themes were:

PM meetings aren't working

There are far too many meetings: they are poorly structured and prepared; we are repeatedly having policy discussions about operational problems which is never going to resolve them (plus without the right expertise in the room); there isn't enough time to prepare good papers and have the necessary pre-meets and gather the right expertise. There are too many people in the room and people aren't disciplined about their contributions. "Decisions are never final". "We are trying to do too much and nothing is focused" "We have a hundred actions and no plan" "The top two tiers of leadership spend all their time in the same meetings"

The culture isn't getting the best from people

Not working as one team between the CO & No 10 - not one team in the CO. Fights over ownership. "Lots of senior people negotiating with each other rather than doing stuff". Not sustainable. People are exhausted and stressed. Don't feel confident or empowered to take decisions (almost universal sense of powerlessness to direct or fix any of these problems). Trying to do too much so nothing is done well. "no one listens to anyone else". Views ignored. Bad behaviours from senior leaders tolerated. Too much politics (small p). "Elbowy". Focus on grip at expense of collective leadership. Too many people behaving as if they have been parachuted in to save the day. "Explosions of new people causing chaos". Divide between people in the office and at home. Incentives to hoard information not share. No 10 always at war with someone. Everyone wants to be in the room with the PM. Not enough trust.

The Cabinet Office team is too big to be effective & roles and responsibilities in the CO and No 10 and between the two are not clear (Cabinet Office has lost its way- explain what CO is here to do i.e. make the Whitehall machine work for No 10. A super-hero culture in CO has led to CO believing it can fix all problems itself and that it is cleverer than the experts; No 10 is strong but not pulling in the same direction- make the point really clearly that there is not a single voice coming from No 10, different competing agendas are being pursued and it needs to use the Whitehall machine more effectively instead

of raging a war with it. The current modus operandi is breaking the machine. Campaign mode versus governing.)

Fallen out of shape. This has compounded some pre-existing problems about ways of working between CO secretariat teams and Private Office in No 10. Too many CO senior leaders which means they can't take decisions without consulting others. CO not synthesising departments for No 10 or bringing Whitehall into advice. Don't understand who is doing what and who is supposed to be doing what. This is true for political and official advisors. "No 10 are flooding the system with [unprioritised] demands causing it to spasm"

The work isn't good enough

*Unnecessarily short deadlines producing the same bad work repeatedly rather than taking proper time to prepare. Not clear who is calling out; scrutinising or refereeing discussions to get to a factual position rather than gloss from Ministers. "We need to call out bullshit or deceit when we see it" **Emperor's new clothes.....** Senior team in No 10 and CO chasing the ball. Not clear what we are trying to achieve. Sometimes it seems everyone knows something is wrong or not true but that's not brought to a head. Too narrow a field of vision.*

The quality of the individuals is good- good but not excellent? The CO side arguably should be stronger at working grades; everyone is trying; people were kind, supportive and understanding about how difficult this all is. Want to make it better. "This can all be fixed given the quality of the people working on this" "The Government is working together in a way it has never before had to do before"

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have suggested some quick fixes; some structural changes and questions to think about.

Quick fixes

1. Agree our collective mission- **they have never set out a plan for five years of governing. Were just about to do this when Covid struck. We need to go back to that work fast and have a five year plan in light of Covid. The government mentality has been one campaign after another- Brexit, election, Covid. They simply haven't started. They need a serious strategy for the country that takes them through the whole Parliament.**
2. Set out respective roles of No 10 Private Office; Policy Unit; Delivery team; CO secretariat; CO C-19 function; political team (who is covering what) **I think some basic training is needed for both officials and spads about how each role works and what they are there to do. Nothing long but basic 'this is what a PO does; this is what the Secretariat will do for you; this is how a Chief of Staff works; this is the role of the Cab Sec'.**

3. Commissions out of No 10 channelled by Private Office
4. Discipline around meetings (what for; when; time for producing proper papers; interrogated by whole team; everyone inputs). Stop having policy meetings about operational problems. Fewer people in meetings: include experts rather than multiple commentators/synthesizers (“far too many people operating at level one of the detail”). Make conscious choices about how we are spending people's time (“we are taking 30-40 of senior people who should be focussed on solving the problem and spending that in meetings”)
5. Make conscious decisions about which tool to use for solving which problem (PM meeting; deep dive; desk work)
6. Abolish MIGs and use normal Cabinet governance where necessary (but CDL should still carry on having the meetings he’s having if they’re useful).
7. (Possible) Encourage more people to work in the office (remote working less effective) **I fundamentally disagree with this. When we are telling the country to socially distance it shows utter contempt to the electorate to openly flout those rules. Plus when we are going on about how tech and data will save the day for absolutely everything to admit that we can't use it is not acceptable. Finally, one of the cultural problems we face is that there is presenteeism in both CO and No 10 instead of people actually getting on with their jobs. This is precisely why we all have problems with meeting attendance. People basically wanging on in meetings endlessly instead of making stuff happen. We need to clamp down on that culture. It is corrosive and leads to ineffective government. There are certain people for whom it is necessary to be in the office (PPS to PM, Cab Sec etc) but we need to be clear who those people are. This is about creating a modern culture of organised collaboration not superhero bunfight.**

Structural changes

6. Set up a new PM DU [Tom Shinnner to design - his team is this nascent function] **Good idea.**
7. NHS futures Unit led by (Ed Whiting?) [cement improvements made during C-19 response and identify future opportunities for change: blueprint for rest of the Parliament]
8. C-19 “department” in the CO with right resources (particularly strategic analytical capability) and leadership [Aus Commission model? External leader?]
9. Smaller & more focussed secretariat; clearer and more confident about its purpose. Streamline C-19 work into either of these.
10. Something about need to organise ourselves properly for non Covid work.

New cultural norms

10. More listening - and creating space for people to speak

11. Genuine sense of partnership & collective leadership (we will hang together - we have to be invested in each other's success and the success of the team)

12. Calling out bad behaviours: e.g. crowding the ball - showboating in meetings - belittling others contributions -

13. Direct & straightforward with each other: open about disagreement

14. Get some rest. No one is too busy to lead well.



John Owen
Principal Private Secretary to the Cabinet
Secretary
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I&S
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On Fri, 8 May 2020 at 08:16, Martin Reynolds <MReynolds@no10.gov.uk> wrote:

This is excellent – a few thoughts from me (including various quotes which might add some colour).

Martin

From: Helen MacNamara <helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>

Sent: 07 May 2020 23:33

To: Martin Reynolds <MReynolds@no10.gov.uk>; Owen, John - CO - (OFF-SEN) <john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>

Subject: personal: draft.

Thoughts welcome. It's quite punchy. John - we need more detail on the secretariat. But main thing is now is not the time to pull punches. Let's fix this once and well. Plan is to tidy this up and annex it to a note from Mark (if that's what he wants). Am going to have a go at writing up the bigger conv in the morning. But don't feel that 23:20 is good time to try to start reimagining the British State.

Martin - you may want to add more colour from the conversations.

STARTS

How can No 10 and the CO better support the PM in this next phase?

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ENDS

		<p>Helen MacNamara Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet E: Helen.MacNamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk T: I&S</p>
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