

[03/04/2020, 21:39:55] Simon Case: Have just been looking through various papers I have been bombarded with this afternoon. Christ, we seem to be making everything more complicated!

[03/04/2020, 21:41:14] Helen: Er yes. As you know that is a key CS skill. So complex that it's not really anyone's fault or responsibility. You are much needed...

[03/04/2020, 21:43:19] Simon Case: Some of the most amazing slides I've seen. But they don't really seem to say anything about how we are actually fixing the various problems. Everyone I have heard from in last few days is very down on Mark and how he is leading this. Is that fair, or is this just tired/grumpy/bitchy ministers and officials?

[03/04/2020, 21:51:29] Helen: I don't know actually know much about what's been happening. But my guess is not fair - and far too much ego and bitching going on and not enough focussing on actually doing stuff as opposed to commentating/arse covering. Lots of people saying I wouldn't start from here or x should do y better and not enough staying in lane and doing own day job well. This sort of thing sorts sheep and goats am afraid. And we don't exactly have a cabinet of giants. Plus people are scared and that impacts on everyone's behaviour.

But am trying to work out if there is an actual problem or not...

[03/04/2020, 21:54:07] Simon Case: Sounds likely to be very good analysis. Crisis + pygmies = toxic behaviours. When I heard earlier that there was some minor tussle going on about who I reported to, alarm bells went off. That really shouldn't be important in the middle of a mega-crisis.

[05/04/2020, 22:36:01] Simon Case: Blimey - we started this crisis desperately worried about the health of key constitutional figures at our end of the park. No-one was talking then about the serious consequences of political figures getting sick! Poor old BJ. Hope he is going to be okay!

[05/04/2020, 22:41:56] Helen: Is grim. Am glad he's gone in though - he really wasn't well. **PD**

PD

[06/04/2020, 17:50:39] Simon Case: How are you?

[08/04/2020, 07:46:29] Simon Case: Well, that took no time at all. Have just had a big row with Mark! He's really pissed off we need about some email I have sent to Gove. He's so aggressive and defensive. Kinda makes it hard to like/defend him

[08/04/2020, 07:46:34] Simon Case: 🙄

[08/04/2020, 08:09:07] Helen: Even by your own over achieving standards that is impressive! Are you in this morning? Let's have a proper chat - would be v grateful for your help in working out what I should try and focus on fixing. And don't worry too much about Mark. I'm sure your not! In any case he is v direct so he tells you when you've annoyed him rather than keeping silent ledger. And then gets over it.

I&S

[08/04/2020, 08:09:28] Helen: *hangs head in shame*

[08/04/2020, 08:11:07] Simon Case: I will be in this morning. Am running late coz I have been arguing with Mark for the last hour, rather than getting ready. I'd really welcome your second opinion on this. I thought I was sending MG an email about getting back in his box, but Mark has taken it precisely the other way!

[08/04/2020, 08:11:34] Simon Case: Will expose you to the row in a bit!

[08/04/2020, 08:12:20] Helen: Good times! Come and find me when you have a minute

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[25/04/2020, 11:36:39] Simon Case: Have you been consulted on this issue of putting someone in overall charge of vulnerable people (shielded, non-shielded, volunteering as a solution etc)? Mark thinks we need to put a Minister in charge

[25/04/2020, 13:06:01] Helen: I was forwarded some odd thing where one of the SpAds seemed to be shocked to discover that different departments and ministers had different responsibilities. And a suggestion if we just put one SRO in place it would be fine. It is utterly maddening the proportion of time spent on process and orgograms vs actual work.

[25/04/2020, 13:06:22] Helen: What is the problem that needs fixing by appointing some new?

[25/04/2020, 13:06:51] Helen: Although tbh am delighted that suggestion is a minister! That at least is a step on.

[25/04/2020, 13:13:42] Simon Case: Long answer to all this. There is a reality and then there is the problem Shinner et al have. On the reality, it is chaos. Too many programmes - overlapping, in tension, no way to resolve issues because the MIGs are being run as comms fora not decision-taking things. But overall, in the space I am in, there is no direction. The No 10 problem is that that depts won't do what they say. Some of what they say is reasonable, some isn't. The real frustration is that Mark keeps telling everyone that SROs are the answer and they have full authority etc. But, of course, they haven't, for well-established constitutional reasons. But No 10 people cross that it isn't happening like Mark told them it would. I have been talking to Mark Sw and saying what we are really after is common vision/strategy. That is a legitimate function for someone, which then allows depts to get on with delivering against that strategy - and being held accountable for delivery (or not)

[25/04/2020, 13:15:41] Helen: This is useful thank you. It is chaos. I agree and I also agree on MIGs as you know.

[25/04/2020, 13:15:53] Helen: Am hopeful we can sort latter if PM agrees

[25/04/2020, 13:17:38] Simon Case: The thing that's made this issue I am trying to sort difficult is that Shinner (aides by Oliver L) went straight to Mark (using an incomplete and inaccurate draft of a note my team was working on), undercutting the evidence-based work I was trying to do. I will send you the stuff I have sent to Sweeney

[25/04/2020, 13:18:46] Simon Case: This is all happening because this is hard. Decisions in Whitehall doesn't equal facts on the ground. Not enough people at the centre know this - nor do they have the vision and patience to realise how we have to work

[25/04/2020, 13:20:15] Simon Case: Nearly everything I need done is going to be done by some in the VCS, an LA or an individual police officer/GP/supermarket worker etc. People don't get that they are a long way from a No 10 press conference

[25/04/2020, 13:25:28] Helen: V happy to help if I can. I wouldn't worry about Mark - he went on TS's thing as an example of him being non collegiate. If you are crystallising problem and working out what you want to get fixed (my v superficial view was this was I) need for some central setting of objectives/strategy to define who and what ii) the ability to get to customers - has to involve existing chains to some extent - iii) make sure supply side is coherent and what you're promising is possible!

And having a Minister who can make some decisions and choices is a good idea. Can obvs use collective machinery where necessary but in this environment the less endless shared talking about the problem the better.

[25/04/2020, 13:25:48] Helen: Totally agree with this. And they are designing overall strategy with same ignorance

[25/04/2020, 13:27:02] Helen: E.g. SD/compliance will be LA competence and delivered. And no one doing any of this understands the first thing about business compliance in an LA.

[25/04/2020, 13:27:10] Helen: Or what tools we have

[25/04/2020, 13:27:46] Helen: I'd like to help - tell me what you need.

[25/04/2020, 13:28:48] Simon Case: Oh, it is awful. Sat in our little room, **NR** and **NR** made up the proposals on education and options for getting schools back. Genuinely shocking that this is how strategy advice is being developed - not a single expert involved in the conversation. Not their fault - they were given a few hours to do it - but just an appalling sight of you vaguely believe in evidence-based government

[25/04/2020, 13:34:23] Helen: I am so horrified by it. The arrogance and the waste. And the contempt for cabinet. I've started putting some witches warnings on the record in a way I don't really like doing: e.g. that the Cabinet have to be properly briefed on "the science" or we are in **I&S** but actually 100x worse given what this means for our country and how many people are dying.

[25/04/2020, 13:34:39] Helen: I am really worried.

[25/04/2020, 13:35:23] Helen: Let's talk through what you think I should do at the beginning of the week? Would welcome your perspective!

[25/04/2020, 13:35:27] Helen: And advice...

[25/04/2020, 13:35:36] Simon Case: Me too. Real lives being played with here.

[25/04/2020, 13:36:49] Helen: There is a genuine suggestion that we secretly do different things with schools in places to see the impact that has. Which was last straw for me.

[25/04/2020, 13:36:58] Helen: The secretly bit

[25/04/2020, 13:37:15] Helen: Not that we shouldn't do some different things and carefully monitor impact

[25/04/2020, 13:38:14] Helen: But that we should experiment with people's lives

[25/04/2020, 13:38:18] Simon Case: Nicola Sturgeon showing them how to do it. Honestly need to start being transparent about the issues and choices

[06/05/2020, 22:10:02] Helen: Thanks that would be really helpful. Had a good day listening to lots of people telling us what they were unhappy about!

[08/05/2020, 13:25:52] Simon Case: Am being asked to comment on task forces that No 10 want to set up - which sound like shadow depts to me. I like the radicalism, but can I just check that this is all going via you/Mark?

[09/05/2020, 12:45:03] Simon Case: More briefing against Mark here, I'd say. Looks to me like various people trying to paint him as one of the architects of the "kill thousands" approach to exit strategy.

<https://twitter.com/alexwickham/status/1259045346564587522?s=12>

[10/05/2020, 07:52:15] Simon Case: Same briefing into Sunday Times. Mark and the civil service system pushing for early reopening, with PM and Dom pushing back on the plan

[10/05/2020, 09:38:26] Simon Case: Just had the following from [NR] (after yesterday agreeing to come on board with this NHS task force):

[10/05/2020, 09:38:39] Simon Case: Been thinking about [NR] ideas overnight. Separate to q about my job, I don't think they work- timing and positioning (entirely outside CO and HMT, let alone DHSC) will kill anything produced dead on arrival and pathway for delivery needs to be much clearer. Impetus to shape a proper strategy for the Parliament is right though- will go back to [NR] with some thoughts about how we could achieve this through rest of year as we emerge from this phase.

[10/05/2020, 09:38:39] Simon Case: Really worry about isolation of no10 from rest of govt and civil service too- third time I've seen it over last couple of months. Who is doing what jjh used to do to take political impetus and shape into deliverable policy/ programmes?

[10/05/2020, 09:43:29] Helen: I don't know how fixable latter is - it's not ignorance it's deliberate: PM doesn't believe in cabinet govt and departments, neither does DC. PM wants to be Mayor. So q is whether they will carry on shouting into the wind/create presidential style exec authority or do the Blair2 thing and realise that you actually get things done through machine.

[10/05/2020, 09:43:49] Helen: They would have done latter eventually given a 10 year term

[10/05/2020, 09:44:04] Helen: I'm not even sure he'll get 5 years now

[10/05/2020, 09:49:11] Simon Case: I hope they can be brought back from the edge. Things like a delivery unit would help them get the right combo (a la Blair 2, as you say). They won't get anything done if they don't find the balance between strong centre (for strategy and priority) and effective delivery through the machine

[10/05/2020, 09:59:57] Helen: I hope so too - but that's going to have to be demonstrated by doing not telling. They are also v bad at recognising the brilliant things govt does. Is a cottage industry mentality. I had to explain y'day that government had expertise in large scale operations including call centres.

[10/05/2020, 10:01:54] Helen: So we need to fix this too. I'm going to give it one heave and then if I can't make it better I will do something else.

[10/05/2020, 10:03:12] Helen: At the moment I am failing to convince mark that he should acknowledge and lean into q of government perhaps not being perfect and that this is a seismic event.

[10/05/2020, 10:04:04] Simon Case: Then he is toast and no-one will mourn his passing...

need some actual time with the PM if you're going to do this. Plus we have to have cab sec and PM having genuine 1:1 time.

[17/05/2020, 18:46:11] Simon Case: How was M when you spoke to him? Are we going to be alright?

[17/05/2020, 19:32:44] Helen: Provided PM is sensible I think it's salvageable. But M is v pissed off. In pretty calm way. And unlike a lot of his colleagues he actually has lines and a proper sense of what is ok that means he doesn't actually care about his own position in the job that much. It has been quite a 2 years. And there is only so much he can be asked to walk up the duty mountain again.

[17/05/2020, 19:32:49] Helen: There is personal cost.

[17/05/2020, 19:33:14] Helen: And if he does go his perm sec colleagues might like to ask themselves what they did to support

[17/05/2020, 19:34:09] Helen: I know he has faults! But he's got a better sense of the bigger and more important Qs than most of them. And at least stands up for something and has the balls to be direct.

[17/05/2020, 19:35:22] Simon Case: Poor Mark.

[17/05/2020, 22:15:36] Helen: Think we're ok. Phew. Another "none of this happened" weekend. Have no clue what this means for any of us other than immediate crisis averted. Which is main thing. Will endeavour to find out in the am and let you know.

[18/05/2020, 07:22:57] Simon Case: PM just called me. Breathless from his run. If I am honest, I don't actually know what he was trying to say. But seemed to be that he and Mark had thrashed out how it should all work, but it needed more detail done over the next 24 hours. He said Mark would be in touch. I interpret this as a sign that we are going ahead with the compromise approach, but I assume Mark can shed actual useful light on this.

[18/05/2020, 07:24:10] Helen: That would be useful! I think John is trying to pin him down and is planning to be in touch.

[18/05/2020, 09:03:45] Simon Case: Will you let know when you are in?

I&S

[18/05/2020, 20:14:40] Helen: Did you speak to Dom?

[18/05/2020, 20:24:37] Simon Case: Speaking now - I think we are going to be okay on the EDS point now.

[18/05/2020, 21:22:55] Helen: Where did you get to?

[18/05/2020, 21:34:38] Simon Case: Can you send all in 5 mins?

[18/05/2020, 22:20:52] Helen: **Irrelevant & Sensitive** Will give more of background on HMT thing tomorrow - is madness though on every dimension that there are better papers that are not being used for decisions. What have we become??

Irrelevant & Sensitive

[18/05/2020, 23:03:39] Simon Case: Have spoken to Mark. I think we are okay.

[18/05/2020, 23:21:19] Simon Case: Martin has also spoken to him. He agrees with above assessment

[19/05/2020, 07:55:38] Helen: We should sit down and talk about the full gear Martin and I got back in our review. One of things ringing in my head though is your comment about **Irrelevant & Sensitive**

Irrelevant & Sensitive This has been the most actively sexist environment I have ever worked in. I don't know quite why - but the storied I've had from women are shocking and they have experienced this stuff for the first time.

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