

THE HARMONY PROJECT WITH P3.EXPRESS

A novel about minimalistic
project management

ALEXEI KUVSHINNIKOV

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project management**

Alexei Kuvshinnikov



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All characters and events in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

*I owe so much to so many.
For family, friends and colleagues, present and absent.*

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Project Initiation

- A01 — Appoint the sponsor
- A02 — Appoint the project manager
- A03 — Appoint the key team members
- A04 — Describe the project
- A05 — Identify and plan the deliverables
- A06 — Identify risks and plan responses
- A07 — Have project initiation peer-reviewed
- A08 — Take a go/no-go decision
- A09 — Kick off the project
- A10 — Conduct a focused communication

A01 - Appoint the sponsor

THE CLOCK AT the top of the Grand Bell Tower struck midnight. The bass rumble of the ancient bell resonated through the quiet streets. Standing at the top of the shallow steps, Didi took in the nightscape. The Grand Concourse that led from the Place Etoile with the belltower in the middle all the way to the Monteith Palace stretched across, all but empty of cars. Late spring air smelt fresh and frosty. It felt like nirvana after spending the day – another day – locked in the office.

Through the transparent trellis of leafless tree branches, Didi could observe a tight knot of people huddling at the stairs that descended to the underground entrance of the Metro station. All were wearing baggy hoodies that concealed their figures. Deep in the black ovals framed by the hoods, cigarettes glowed like a predators' eye.

Didi's mobile phone chimed announcing an incoming call. 'Hello, Didi, this is Rilke's Chief of Office. I apologise for such a late call but access records suggest that you are still somewhere rather close to the office.'

Rilke was the CEO of Artophyle Inc., and Didi, employed in a position that was as good as invisible to the upper management tiers. No wonder then that Didi felt surprised, annoyed and intrigued by the call, all at once. ‘You are right, Chief, - I’m standing on the steps just outside of the vestibule.’

Before proceeding to ask what the matter was, Didi had the presence of mind to bite the tongue. It made better sense not to show any interest in what was going on. Though whatever it was, it did seem to exude a whiff of adventure.

‘Right,’ the Chief continued in a mildly apologetic voice. ‘The boss would like to have a chat with you on the phone. Just a quickie of your goodness, if that’s not asking too much.’

‘Sure.’ Didi was getting a bit wary of all that small talk. True, Artophyle ran in a generally democratic way, but summons from the boss rarely included this kind of a prelude, regardless. After a moment’s silence, Didi heard Rilke’s voice speaking in familiar clipped sentences.

‘I hope you’re keeping well, Didi. It’s good that I could speak to you now. I’m on my way to the airport. Let’s talk on the way and my driver will then deliver you home.’

The Chief came back on line. ‘Just stay where you are Didi. Or better still, please go down to the driveway at the foot of the stairs. We’ll be right there in no time at all.’

Didi started descending the stairs. On the Grand Concourse, three police cruisers swept out of the shadows like night owls. In the time it took Didi to go down half a dozen steps, they glided to an abrupt stop in front of the huddled hoodies. Eight cops jumped out, guns drawn and lined up on

the group. Using red laser-sighting lines like virtual whips, the cops herded the hoodies even tighter together.

The Grand Concourse and central districts of Artopolis located north of the river had a dynamic police presence that held street crime mostly at bay. South of the river, where Didi rented a cubicle apartment in a high-rise cluster, was more like Gotham City. You had to watch where you trod or risk somebody putting the leather to you.

A police van arrived in a halo of flashing strobe lights accompanied by a siren wail. The hoodies climbed aboard, seemingly offering only token resistance. Didi reached the bottom of the stairs. Doors slammed, engines roared, lights flashed, sirens barked and howled and the police cavalcade took off. About five seconds later, the boss's sleek black limo glided to a stop right in front. Didi got momentarily mole-eyed, blinded by the glare from street lights reflected in its highly polished curves.

The middle door opened and the Chief beckoned Didi from the inside. Rilke sat on the divan in the back, looking a bit dwarfed by the opulence of the limousine's fittings. And tired. The Chief pointed to a rotating chair that faced the boss at an angle from a distance of some three metres. Didi sat and at once felt anchored to the cushions. The limo smoothly picked up speed. Fleeting stripes of illumination flickered across Rilke's face, leaving it most of the time in dusky shadow.

Rilke's gaze roamed the space inside the car and finally locked on Didi like twin cannons behind telescope-grade lenses. 'I wanted to speak to you, Didi, on a matter of pressing importance.'

Didi guessed that the circumstances promised more carrot than stick and ventured to move a bar forward in their verbal menuetto. ‘Is there any way I can be of help?’

Rilke nodded several times, with the cannons’ sights remaining locked on Didi. ‘I’ve just got the green light from Schwartz, you know, the Chairman of the Board of ArtoHolding, to embark on a project of strategic importance. No, that’s an understatement. You see, Schwartz told me in no uncertain terms what precisely we must deliver. As you’ll imagine, failure would yield deeply unpleasant outcomes.’

Didi felt strangely calm. Rilke represented the absolute boundary of Didi’s world. Anything and anyone beyond the boss existed in outer space.

Rilke seemed to wait for Didi’s reaction and observing none, chuckled in quiet delight. ‘You see, ArtoHolding submitted a bid to host the quadrennial Save the Planet Award ceremony. That’s the ultimate get-together of the world’s celebrities. And you know what?’ Rilke grinned and raised shoulders making a palms-up gesture. ‘ArtoHolding has been awarded the honour! And now Schwartz wants Artophyle to take the lead and build the new convention centre to serve as the ceremony’s venue, right here in Artopolis. Can you imagine that?’

Didi didn’t know for sure, so decided to adopt an elusive stance. ‘I suppose money is not an issue then?’

Rilke grinned again. ‘You are spot on, Didi. The Artopolis mayor has invested a large amount – 4,200 artopools to be exact - in preparing the city for this cosmic event. Part of this fund has been earmarked to cover a share of the costs of our construction project. By the way, I decided to call it the ‘Halls

of Harmony Project', or HAHAP for short. Though for company visibility purposes we'll call the convention centre Artophyle Halls of Harmony.' Rilke's face radiated an innocent smile. 'Or maybe we should abbreviate it to AHHA?'

Didi pretended to not notice the quip and instead decided to push a bit. 'I suppose then there are some strings attached, aren't there?'

Rilke seemed to hesitate on how to react but finally decided to offer another friendly grin. 'Ah, you are so sharp, Didi. Indeed, indeed, after hosting the award ceremony we'll occasionally make the convention centre available to the mayor at no charge for holding their own events. But that is fully in line with our broader policy aimed to support community interests.

'Most of the time we'll let artistic, cultural, and not-for-profit event organisers use it for free. And if any slots remain free, we could fill them with our own events. The latter will add to the promotion of our community focus and public image.

'And last but not least, we'll occasionally rent it out to other businesses to generate a bit of revenue and recover the project cost. All in all, I hope we'll get great visibility and spread our name in the market as a leading architectural firm.'

The limo sped along the Airport Expressway and Didi decided it was high time to go for the jugular. 'So, if you don't mind my asking, is there an overall idea of what the budget and project duration will actually look like?'

Rilke got a bit pensive and for a minute or so focused his gaze on the starlit sky above the limo's glass roof before

returning it to Didi. ‘The ceremony is scheduled to take place in twenty-eight months. Accordingly, we better aim to have it ready in twenty-four months, plus a two-month time tolerance on top of that. Regarding the cost, I’ll set the initial budget at some 1000 artopools. We can talk about cost tolerance during project initiation.’

Didi smelt a rat. ‘Sorry to interrupt, but could I ask you to clarify what you mean when you say -we-?’

Rilke stopped the flow of discourse in midsentence, looking a bit peeved by such a blatant display of insubordination. ‘I mean several things. The first of them being, I am in charge.’

A02 - Appoint the project manager

THE LIMO STOPPED at the checkpoint to get admission to the General Aviation part of the airport apron, where Rilke's executive jet stood under steam. Didi became acutely aware that the deep purpose of this hurriedly set up and largely chance conversation remained absolutely unclear. And only minutes remained to figure that out. 'So, how do I fit into your plans?'

Rilke seemed almost surprised by the fact the ride was nearly over. 'Oh, right - I am told you are a diligent project manager, reliable and capable. Accordingly, I appoint you as HAHAP's project manager.'

For a moment, Didi was struck speechless. 'Wow, thank you, that's a fantastic opportunity for me. I really appreciate your trust in my abilities.'

'Good. I'm counting on you, Didi. The Chief will see to it that your appointment is announced first thing in the morning.'

You'll report directly to me and I'll take all decisions. We are in the same boat now, Didi, with Schwartz holding the sword over our heads. It will be a job of a work, but we'll manage.'

The car pulled to a stop beside a late-model Gulfstream in a charcoal grey livery with emerald accents. Didi summoned up courage and spoke in a voice, coarse with anxiety. 'With all respect, that won't work.'

The flight attendant had already opened the limo door and Rilke had one foot planted on the tarmac, ready to step out. 'What was that? No, I mean, what do you mean? I told you how we'll work together and I am not interested in your opinions.'

Didi decided it was too late for backtracking, literally. It was going on two o'clock in the morning, the ride back would take another hour or so. The prospect of three hours' sleep before another gruelling commute and an exhausting day in the office made Didi lose the fear. In for a penny, in for a pound. 'You said, we were in the same boat. If we do like you say, the boat will surely sink and pull me under. I don't know how you'll feel about that but personally, I have no intention of letting it get that far. Thank you for the offer, but I'm climbing out. Out of the boat, I mean.'

Rilke remained frozen with one leg on the tarmac and the body unnaturally twisted on the seat. The Chief turned away, instantly mesmerised by the tableau of twinkling airport lights that could be observed through the limo's side window.

With as good as nothing to lose, Didi decided to up the stakes and unloaded another broadside. 'In Artophyle, we run projects using a method called P3.express. It sets down some clear rules and establishes a structure of roles and

responsibilities. That's one reason our projects are successful. Well, mostly, but that's not the point I'm trying to make. What you propose will violate that approach and reduce the chances of the project's success.'

Rilke completed the turn and planted the second foot on the tarmac. The head, however, not unlike a tank turret, remained facing in Didi's direction. 'Do you have any kind of ID on you?'

That threw Didi completely. 'Sure, my company ID and my police ID, too. Why?'

'Do you keep a pet?'

Didi's confusion only deepened. 'No.'

'Then you fly with me. We'll talk more in the air.' Rilke climbed out of the car and spoke across the limo roof to the Chief who got out a whole second earlier. 'Get Didi's passport shipped to our destination by overnight courier.'

As soon as their small party had climbed aboard and taken their seats, the steps were retracted, the door closed and engines started. Inside ten minutes the Gulfstream was airborne and climbing steeply to its initial cruising altitude of 45,000 feet.

* * *

After take-off, Rilke had declared a truce until the morning to rest and get ready for the day ahead, which carried a promise of tiring exploits. Rilke's sleeping quarters were up front. Didi was shown to a narrow but sufficiently comfortable berth aft. With engines humming right outside and stuff rattling and tinkling in the nearby galley, this was the

Gulfstream equivalent of economy class. Didi didn't mind at all.

Didi's head spun for a while from the snowballing of the night's events that seemed hardly real. Barely three hours back, Didi had been standing on the office steps trying to figure out how to slip into the Metro without drawing the hoodies' undue attention. And now, Didi was cruising high above the sleeping world to a still unknown destination in the executive jet, without as much as a tooth brush for baggage. Then sleep came like a wave.

When the attendant gently woke Didi, the cabin was already awash in brilliant sunlight. The sky was a deep, rich blue, the curvature of the earth being discernible in the bowl-like configuration of fluffy clouds stretching across the horizon. Below the clouds, the greenish calm seas glittered in the sun. After completing morning ablutions, only slightly truncated by the jet's spatial constraints, Didi rummaged through the galley, pouring a cup of freshly brewed coffee and happily attacking a plate of scrambled eggs and fried bacon.

The divider curtain parted in the middle and the Chief's head emerged, beckoning Didi with a nod. Up in the forward lounge, Rilke waited for them sipping coffee, already formally dressed in anticipation of their arrival. 'And a very good morning to you Didi. I hope you feel rested and energised with what the day has in store for you.'

Didi's heart missed a beat. 'And what would that be? I mean, broadly speaking?'

Rilke affected a fatherly mood. 'Oh, mostly adventure and discovery. Meeting highly talented people. Tasting some jolly

good food. Possibly even enjoying some top-grade entertainment. Welcome to the executive's life!

This time Rilke didn't only grin but burst into laughter with sincerity and abandon. The Chief quickly joined in and after a moment's hesitation, Didi felt swept away by such good spirits, too.

As quickly as erupting in laughter, Rilke regained composure and looked sternly at Didi from under a furrowed forehead. 'But before we land and the fun starts, let's sort out this thing with P3.express. I didn't understand from Adam what you said yesterday. Tell me more about it. I want to be educated.'

Didi sat upright, straightening the back to radiate more competence. 'P3.express is a minimalist project management system. It includes ten steps during project initiation, five steps in monthly initiation, four steps for weekly management, two steps for daily management, three steps for monthly closure, six steps for project closure and three steps in post-project management.'

Rilke interrupted by raising a hand. 'That's too much detail. Give it to me in broad brush.'

Didi regrouped. 'Before we can start project delivery, we need to find our way through project initiation. The go/no-go decision will depend on the feasibility of the project plan including a schedule. But before we can prepare a plan, we need to prepare the project description. And that will include also a detailed identification of deliverables.'

'The project manager can't be always expected to know enough about the technical aspects of the projects to identify

the complete breakdown structure of deliverables on their own. That's one reason for assembling the project team first, to ensure that the project manager has easy access to technical expertise.

'But assembling the cross-departmental project team requires organisational leverage and authority that the project manager won't have. As a consequence, the very first step will be the appointment of the project sponsor.'

With a pensive chew of the upper lip, Rilke stood the ground. 'But that's what I decided yesterday, didn't I? I'll take on the role of the sponsor. What's wrong with that?'

Didi didn't break stride. 'There's plenty wrong with that. The project manager leads a management team whose composition depends on the size and complexity of the project. The project manager is responsible for project delivery and reports to the internal sponsor. The latter is a senior manager accountable for the final outcome of the project by making high-level decisions and delegating the day-to-day running of the project to the project manager.

Rilke looked like working up a snit. 'That's precisely what I told you yesterday, or are you scheming to fob me off?'

Didi sighed and counted until five before continuing. 'Yesterday you told me that you'll tell me what to do and I'll be your eager beaver. That's not quite the same what I'm trying to explain to you now. The project manager should be allowed to do the day-to-day running of the project within the agreed limits of delegated authority without interference from the sponsor. No micro-management. It's the project manager who determines when to involve the sponsor in decision-taking.

‘The sponsor’s role is necessary because, on the one hand, the project manager has to focus on the day-to-day work and the outputs of the project, which won’t leave them enough time and mental energy to manage the high-level aspects of the project. And on the other, the project manager won’t have enough organisational clout to be able to get resources for the project, or to have access to strategic information to make sure that the project is aligned with other organisational endeavours.

‘The sponsor should be accessible to the project manager for providing guidance and advice at all times. There is no way the sponsor will tell the project manager “Hold on, I’ll get back to you when I have a spare moment”. And the sponsor is accountable for project success. Or failure.

‘If you care to listen to my humble opinion, you are too busy with your CEO responsibilities and I’m not sure you are ready to incur the wrath of Schwartz in case things don’t go quite as planned. And on such a project – as a matter of fact, on any project – they almost inevitably do.’

As if on cue, the plane’s wheels smoothly connected with the runway. When the plane slowed and veered off to the taxiway, Rilke looked at Didi with a gun-turret stare. ‘I appreciate your directness, Didi. That’s one reason why I believe you’re a good project manager and have a growing certainty that my choice of you was wise, indeed. Now, read my lips: I’ll be the project sponsor. Sorted.’

* * *

The plane taxied to the remote part of the airport apron reserved for general aviation. The attendant opened the door, and a gust of hot air heavily laced with the stench of aviation

kerosene and the pungent scent of jet exhaust gushed into the cabin.

Didi didn't have a clue where in the world they were. Knowing that it took them some six-seven hours of flying time from Artopolis didn't help much without knowing in which direction they had gone. Since neither Rilke nor the Chief had volunteered to reveal their destination, Didi decided it was prudent not to ask them questions to this end. May be, need-to-know applied.

A beige limousine with mirrored windows glided to a halt at the foot of the aircraft stair. A chase car - white square-looking SUV - followed it closely. Its intended menacing appearance was enhanced by a chrome-plated bullbar. The small convoy sped through the checkpoint in the airport fence without stopping. Didi's puny collection of IDs remained untouched.

They drove quickly along a cracked and patched two-way road mostly devoid of traffic going in either direction. Tall palms with lush fronds ran along both shoulders of the road. They skirted a medium-sized low-slung town with a mammoth water tank in the centre rising on its spindly legs like an alien war machine from *The War of the Worlds*.

Since the beige limousine was two sizes smaller than Rilke's own executive ride, Didi sat squeezed up front next to the driver. The seat was spartan, the legroom lacking and on top of that, the driver concentrated on the traffic and offered no conversation.

Still, Didi saw an opportunity to satisfy the itching curiosity and managed to land one question. 'Where in the world are we?'

The driver condescended and broke the code of silence. ‘We’re some fifteen miles away from Zourbagan, the capital city of the Republic of Sanriol, moving at an average speed of sixty-five miles per hour in a south-easterly direction. ETA at destination in twenty-three minutes.’

As that exhausting answer precluded any follow-on question, Didi focused instead on taking stock of the situation and planning the next moves.

Buying some clothes and a pair of sneakers took absolute priority. The charcoal business suit definitely looked out of place there. Next on the list was advancing project initiation.

Activity A01 focused on the appointment of the sponsor. That had been taken care of and the next days would show if it were for the better or the worse.

Activity A02 – appointment of the project manager – could also be ticked off.

Next in line was Activity A03 – appointment of key project team members.

A03 - Appoint the key team members

COMPOSITION OF the project team depended to a large degree on the project product. HAHAP aimed to produce a huge conference centre. Accordingly, Didi immediately thought of a marketing wizard to help with the business aspects of the project and a designer to lead the architectural aspects. Their handlers would be respectively Anan, director of the sales and marketing department, and Imani, director of the design department.

In Didi's experience, getting staff assigned to the project team proved inevitably an uphill struggle. Department heads used every trick they knew to avoid the actual secondment of their employees to project teams. They hated losing control over their workhorses.

The favourite ruse was to promise that department staff would be available to respond to any specific requests from the project manager, while at the same time remaining in the firm

grasp of department heads who kept the last say on what was the department's top priority and what wasn't. Predictably, project requirements were assigned the lowest priority, for which department specialists never had any time left. And the project manager had no means of challenging departmental heads about their decisions. They were on their home turf.

At that juncture, the sponsor's superior firepower came in very handy. The project sponsor thus had a key role in assembling the project team, negotiating with departments to appoint their staff to the team, bringing them under the project manager's line of command. That was one reason the sponsor was needed at all - to fight stratospheric battles of influences. Didi had little doubt that Rilke could decimate any managerial obstruction with absolute ease. The question was, rather, if the boss could be sufficiently impressed with the importance and urgency of engaging in what to Rilke were only petty skirmishes.

The cars left the main road at an unmarked exit, entering under a canopy formed by manicured palms, passing under an elaborate arch overgrown with flowering bougainvillea that welcomed them to paradise. The limo crunched over a gravel drive and pulled up in front of what looked like a hugely oversized Bahamian clapboard house. A small army of valets, bell boys and receptionists swarmed out to greet Rilke.

In the ensuing commotion, Didi succeeded in commandeering Rilke's attention. 'Boss, could you please tell Anan and Imani to assign a sales and marketing expert and a design expert to the project team to support me in the formulation of the project description. That's rather urgent, I'm afraid.'

Rilke waved Didi away like a midge. ‘Talk to the Chief to fix that. But there is no rush, this time zone is some five hours ahead of Artopolis, which plays into our hands. I’ve got a full day’s schedule of meetings and lunches. While I’m labouring through it, feel free to enjoy the amenities. This is a truly fabulous place. And in the evening, let’s meet in the terrace bar and have a chat.’

Three hours later, Didi sat munching on a bunch of small red bananas in an easy chair on the room’s balcony that overlooked a grove of palms. A sortie into a nearby town had yielded some basic stuff to wear and an equally basic notebook that was nevertheless perfectly fit for purpose. Living the high-life felt good.

Didi promptly set up the new project in a separate directory on a dedicated Artophyle cloud server hosted on a secure and privacy-aware platform, complemented by a team chat. Appointment of the initial project team members being still pending didn’t present an obstacle to starting the drafting of the project description.

In a nutshell, it included the project name, project purpose, expected cost and duration, requirements and quality expectations regarding the project product, a high-level description of in-scope and out-of-scope elements and a list of stakeholders.

A cornerstone of P3.express was the incremental approach to all project management activities, be it outputs or project documentation. Project initiation involved preparing, getting the sponsor’s approval and baselining of the first version of the project description.

It didn't prevent the project manager at all from revising and updating different elements of the project descriptions with new information obtained later, during project delivery. The project description, like any other document in P3.express, was a living document.

Concerning the project name, Rilke had already chosen it – The Halls of Harmony Project, or HAHAP. All in all, the higher level of management had the prerogative to decide on the project name to ensure they connected with the organisation's portfolio.

Description of the project purpose also included a review of its expected benefits or, in their absence, outcomes. This distinction described a subtle but important nuance. The responsibility for determining benefits corresponded to the higher-level organisational level, like programme management, rather than the project team. The latter could only propose project outcomes for the sponsor's consideration.

In the case of HAHAP, Rilke had expressed the corporate vision of benefits rather clearly.

- Promoting the company.
- Engaging with the mayor.
- Engaging with the community.
- Obtaining revenue from commercial leases.
- Having a convenient place for their own events.

Rilke's current estimate of cost and duration stood at respectively 1000 artopools and twenty-four months. Didi didn't have a clue how realistic that rough executive estimate was but, following the incremental approach, more precise

information would be gleaned in the later course of project initiation.

Project product requirements described the functionality expected from the sum of the deliverables. The project description also included quality expectations related to the project product. But, since both of these elements were expected to be highly technical, it was the project team and not solely the project manager who would define them.

The same criterion applied to the production of high-level description of in-scope and out-of-scope elements of the project product. These would be determined during workshops conducted with the participation of project team members and a broader selection of in-house experts.

The initial list of stakeholders included:

- Rilke: CEO, project sponsor
- Didi: project manager
- Schwartz: Chairman of the Board, ArtoHolding
- Anan: director of the sales and marketing department
- Imani: director of the design dep...

* * *

...Didi woke up with a jerk three hours later, slowly realising the mean joke played by the jetlag. One moment Didi was fully awake, and the next, sound asleep, knocked out cold for most of the afternoon.

The room phone gave a mellow ring. ‘Cheers, Didi, this is the Chief speaking. The boss is running late, I’m afraid, and besides our hosts decided to offer a social event tonight. So, don’t bet your paycheque on meeting Rilke tonight.’

Somehow, Didi wasn't particularly surprised. 'Chief, did you manage to speak to Anan and Imani regarding the appointment of their reps to the project team?'

In response, silence.

'Chief? Are you there?'

The Chief came back in a hurried voice. 'Sorry, Didi, Rilke is dragging me to yet another meeting. No, I couldn't call them as I spend the whole time live with the boss. But I've texted them.'

'Any response yet?'

'I'll let you know the moment I get any.'

It took quite some effort to believe that a texted request from the Chief would not be actioned immediately and the confirmation of action taken texted back. Which meant that, in all probability, the Chief was not fully sincere. And Didi had never been inclined to let anyone get away with a bald-faced lie.

'Hey Chief, it seems to me that in the last twenty-four hours office, discipline went into a nose-dive. When the cat's away, the mice will play.'

'Indeed, indeed. Trust me, they are up for a whipping when we get back. Sorry, need to end this call now. Cheers.' The Chief hung up, a tad too hurriedly in Didi's considered opinion.

In a flash of inspiration, Didi went to the digital edition of *The Sanriol Gazette*. Nothing of interest in the headlines but, scanning the business section, Didi noticed a piece titled 'Artophyle CEO arrives in own jet, receives a red-carpet welcome'.

Reading the article, Didi learned that Artophyle Inc. was one of the world's most renowned. in demand architectural design companies and prospective clients regarded joining the small club of its customers as a great honour. The piece further portrayed Rilke as a business guru and top-notch design visionary.

Rilke had arrived in response to the invitation from the local association of corporate bankers with the objective of discussing the envisaged attractions of taking on the designing and construction of a new financial district in the capital, Zourbagan. The government had reached a preliminary endorsement from the Global Development Bank on the subject of a loan to finance the cost of the eventual contract, estimated to be in the nine-digit league.

According to *The Sanriol Gazette*, Rilke's visit had started with an audience with the honourable prime minister of Sanriol. The board of governors of the local association of corporate bankers had him next. And for lunch, the star CEO had the local director of the above-mentioned Global Development Bank.

A tour of the capital city of Zourbagan filled the afternoon programme. At night, Rilke and the prime minister were awaited at a cocktail reception offered in their honour by corporate bankers, preceded by a jazz and reggae extravaganza by famous local performers.

Didi felt a pang of envy. Rubbing elbows with the prime minister and the banker cohort didn't seem like a particularly enticing way of passing the evening. But jazz and reggae were a different kettle of fish.

The article changed Didi's perception of the relative importance that HAHAP had for Artophyle. Sure, it could draw lots of visibility. Sure, it could conceivably do marvels for promoting Artophyle to the world. It absolutely would reinforce their relationship with the mayor of Artopolis and possibly allow a degree of access to the political influences enjoyed by the mayor's party. All good. But it remained more of a prestige project than a money-making one.

Whatever its expected benefits, they definitely paled before the prospect of signing a contract for the new Zourbagan financial district with a revenue expectation that dwarfed that of HAHAP. That was where Artophyle and ArtoHolding would focus their attention and resources.

A separate activity in the project initiation focused on risk identification. But it made sense to begin recording risks as they surfaced.

Didi knew from experience that revenue-generating projects funded by external clients inevitably got priority over internally funded ones. As Artophyle was hardly a big company, on most occasions it had to share its finite resources among multiple projects. Obviously enough, it spawned competition for the limited resources and projects set up to generate revenue from external financing and requiring only in-kind contributions from Artophyle without tying up its smallish capital reserves understandably got higher priority.

So, if HAHAP had to compete for resources with the financial district project, from the perspective of the former, there was a significant risk that preference would be given to the latter.

That observation led to another. HAHAP already suffered from competition for resources. The financial district project had commandeered all of Rilke's time while pushing Didi's own requirements to the back-burner.

Rilke's decision to become the project sponsor was flawed. That much seemed perfectly clear now. But Didi couldn't do anything much about it at the moment. Didi could only dare to confront Rilke and attempt the arm-twisting using damning evidence. And there was none.

The problem became clear, and the solution equally so. Didi started building a case.

* * *

Another attempt to get the Chief on the phone predictably brought no result. Didi then texted the Chief regarding the appointment of staff from Anan's and Imani's department to the project team, making it clear that it had become a pressing issue.

Didi pondered the situation a bit more. HAHAP was starting off on the wrong foot, no doubt about it. This realisation demanded a proactive approach. Didi set up the follow-up register and recorded the issues that had become evident in the last hour or so.

ID: I-001

Cause: CEO took on the role of the sponsor.

Effect: As HAHAP has lower priority than the financial district project, the sponsor does not address HAHAP requirements quickly enough.

Impact: High-level decisions are delayed causing knock-on delays in project initiation.

Response: Collecting evidence to present it to the sponsor.

Custodian: Didi

Status: Open

ID: I-002

Cause: the sponsor not responding to project manager's requests to achieve the appointment of staff from the sales/marketing and design departments to the project team.

Effect: Formulation of project description, identification and planning of deliverables, identification of risks and planning responses delayed.

Impact: Go/No-go decision delayed causing project slippage.

Response: Persistently sending reminders regarding pending decisions.

Custodian: Didi

Status: Open

Having checked if there were any messages from the Chief – there were none - Didi then went for a stroll in the palm grove. Following only the briefest twilight, a tropical night had already descended. The paths were rather poorly lit and impenetrable darkness shrouded most of the gardens. Palm fronds rustled in the light breeze, their movement occasionally making the invisible tree trunks bend and creak in the night.

A strong odour of packed dirt, dried vegetation and rotting fruit rose from the undergrowth. Some kind of small animals – or reptiles? – rustled in the brushwood. From the palm fronds, screeching bird cries pierced the night. Or maybe those were the fear-inspiring flying foxes?

Didi had anticipated a stroll in more romantic and peaceful surroundings and quickly got unnerved by the wild-sounding and evil-smelling jungle that enfolded the paths. For a city-dweller from another hemisphere, the overall atmosphere felt eerie and even a tad unsettling.

Back in the residence, Didi found a platter of club sandwiches and a small bowl with fruit placed on the room console. Nice! In improved spirits, Didi happily munched on the simple but tasty and obviously freshly-made fare. Didi then checked the phone (no calls or messages), took a long shower, checked the phone (nothing), fell onto the bed and was asleep before hitting the pillow. No dreams came.

* * *

The morning broke like the first morning. Still in bed, Didi checked the phone. Nothing. This kind of disregard called for a reaction.

Breakfast was served on the ground-floor terrace with steps leading onto a manicured lawn. At that hour of the morning, shortly after six, the terrace was deserted, which played perfectly into Didi's hands. Time passed slowly. The breakfast being modelled in the English tradition, Didi unhurriedly went through its numerous mandatory elements.

Rilke appeared shortly before eight, impeccably dressed and looking without a care in the world, dragging the slightly dishevelled-looking Chief in tow. Seeing Didi, Rilke momentarily slowed the brisk pace, as if surprised by such an encounter, but instantly recovered. 'Good morning, Didi. How are you doing today? Could I beg you to join me if not for breakfast - I can see that you've been toiling at it for quite a while - than at least for a chat.'

‘Good morning, boss.’ Didi was all warmth and smiles. ‘How did yesterday go?’

Rilke turned the opening tepid smile up a few degrees. ‘Oh, smashing, absolutely terrific. Fantastic reception all the way, an audience with the prime minister, a marvellous lunch and an amazing social event that lasted into the wee small hours. I’m positively feeling energised.’

Didi matched the warmth of Rilke’s smile and then raised the stakes some more. ‘Did you by any chance manage to address my request?’

Rilke’s smile cooled perceptibly. ‘I told you that the chief would take care of it, didn’t I?’

Didi nodded enthusiastically. ‘As a matter of fact, you did. But you see, boss, it’s you who are the sponsor of HAHAP, not the chief. You can delegate your responsibilities to a proxy, but not the accountability for the results.’

Rilke turned the guns on the Chief. ‘Can we get it sorted, now?’

The Chief fiddled with the starched napkin avoiding eye contact with Rilke. ‘It’s now 3:12 a.m. in Artopolis.’

‘Right,’ Rilke slowly worked his anger up, looking for the direction in which to blow the top off. ‘Why didn’t you talk to Anan and Imani yesterday?’

The Chief knew the boss. They went back together a long way. ‘You told me to stay by your side at all times, never leaving you alone, be it even for a moment. I had to ask your generous permission to go to the bloody bathroom. And your directive had a good reason, too. Because you have too much mouth, Boss. You needed me to feed you background, smooth out the

impact of the nonsense you babbled, put you back on tracks when you went off them and last but not least...’

Rilke raised both hands in mock surrender and merrily laughed. The anger was gone. ‘Getting brave’n’lippy, aren’t we, Chief? I know I’d be as good as lost without you. But don’t stretch it too much, eh?’

Rilke suddenly whipped around to face Didi. ‘Same goes for you, understood? I like directness, but only to a point. Don’t ever try to make me the villain of the piece. You’ll have to get used to my way of doing things and my pace. If I prefer to delegate or communicate with you through a proxy, that’s my conscious choice and it’s up to you to figure out how to make it work for you.’

Didi nodded without uttering a word. The prime minister’s aide de camp spilt onto the terrace in a flurry of motion. ‘Pardon me, sir, but the skipper would appreciate receiving you immediately.’

Rilke uttered a mild obscenity under the breath and rose from the table. The Chief scurried after, casting Didi a helpless and apologetic glance.

Didi remained unperturbed by all the theatrics and calmly finished the third cup of fragrant morning tea. ‘Now, now, in Hamlet’s words, something’s rotten in the State of Denmark, no offense to the Danes.’

Another person appeared on the terrace, moving with the unhurried and confident gait of an athlete. Or a bodyguard. ‘Morning Didi. My name’s Mo. I’m skipper’s junior minder. Since your boss will be tied up in meetings much of the day, I’ve been detailed as your host and guide. Our destination for

today is a range of extinct volcanoes that's truly a visiting card of Sanriol.'

Didi went back to the room to change and briefly surf the web for an update about the advance of Rilke's charm offensive. This time the choice fell on the blog of an opposition activist. It painted a somewhat bleaker picture of yesterday's events.

The fanfare surrounding the visit of the Artophyle CEO presumably attempted to obscure the gaping difference in the views of the ruling party, as expressed by the prime minister and the association of corporate bankers ruled by his cronies on the one hand, and the Global Development Bank on the other.

The former wanted the future financial district to rise as an architectural landmark of global impact to rank somewhere between the Burj Khalifa and the Warisan Merdeka Tower.

The latter insisted on a neutral carbon imprint, top-notch energy efficiency, use of renewable sources of energy, reduction of water waste and implementing climate-smart architecture in conjunction with nurturing forest landscapes. The last criterion produced a particularly nasty contradiction with the vision of a 680-metre tower.

The opposition gave full backing to the conditions imposed by the Global Development Bank, perhaps because of its sudden soft spot for fighting climate change, but mostly due to its natural desire to throw a spanner in the government's works at every opportunity.

Both camps appeared to have dug in, and the blogger predicted another day of tense and gruelling negotiations.