

Documentation Management Manual

After having worked for three years, Bogdanov became aware that everything around him in the staff community was his unfriendly environment and the people around him were almost his enemies. Not a single person would come and say, "Serega, here's the text for your report," or "Take new figures on the factories, mate"... No one would rush to run messages with him, even if their name was in the list of providers. Everyone would soon realize that the person responsible for any problem would be the one whose name was first on the list, the rest of them were there just for convenience.

He could expect only the worst from everyone. He expected another letter from a caller, another complaint from neighbours, competition from his colleague, a lot of work from his boss, loads of mistakes from the secretary of the party organization and a letter from the district KGB about him preventing counter intelligence measures from the company directors.

So the first things formed in Bogdanov's mind were subtle senses of danger and ability to feel it by the slightest shades of people's behaviour, their mimics, smells and sounds, everything that could move and change. And the main thing was not to interfere and cross the street the other way.

"Don't stand out!" Sokolov, the head of department, would shout at the slow-witted newcomers. "Don't ever stick out! If you make a mistake, you've got to become "transparent" immediately! Otherwise it's being "impudent". Well, who are you?" the boss would ask, imitating Chapayev. "You are not a communist leader, just an instructor. You have no power. You cannot order or decide anything. You can only advise or control. Advise and control, nothing else. But do you know what the amusing thing is? What the mystery and joy of our existence are? The mystery is that this very power is born out of nothing as soon as your paper is signed by someone who has this power. This is the moment of truth! And another question is whether you will be able to keep your human qualities when you are in this environment or not."

To be able to understand that, it took people different amounts of time. Some were taking their time, some were quick. Retardation was compensated quickly – the person was fired quickly, like a cork out of a bottle of champagne. The responsible people from the Organizing department would hold it with their hands to reduce the sound of it, they didn't want their personnel mistakes to be identified. But the unpleasant and muffled pop would remain in the memory of those who were nearby.

Who, when and what will become? It is known almost immediately. Not to everyone, only to the authorities. It depends on the set of personal qualities, biography and lack of records. Take Sokolov, for instance. He could have become the member of the Political Bureau. But he is wearing the wrong shirts.

"Clearness is worth everything," the boss used to say because nearly everyone always wanted to know everything about everyone, especially about yourself. "At the moment you shouldn't know anything about it!" Sokolov used to say, finalizing the subject about the future. "Apart from the fact that you shouldn't know anything!" He

liked to quote Weiss – Belov from the film “The Shield and The Sword”.

Not to have screw ups, you shouldn’t fuss but should fulfil an assignment, just what was requested, at any post. You get a new post only to realize the idea of “distribution”. Wherever the “distribution” took place, it was important to become “isotropic”, which meant being versatile and quick to learn. Then you could be built in the complicated configuration of the next level of the hierarchy line.

In each step of your growth there are ever present ideological and organizational departments. They record and analyse your actions and mistakes, display anything unusual and strange. Their job doesn’t look difficult, but how can you guess, for instance, how wide a black mourning ribbon on a crystal chandelier should be, or how small the white letters on a red billboard sized one by three metres can be. What if the billboard is two by eight metres? A narrow ribbon shows disrespect towards an eminent figure. Even if he is not outstanding, but just eminent. It doesn’t matter! Letters which are too small are a nightmare. They mean disrespect because no one would be able to read them, they mean indirect acknowledgement of the communist party leadership lack, they also mean detraction of the latest Plenary session decrees.

Later Bogdanov would understand that all this seemliness worked only in the centre. How it worked in provinces, he had not seen or even guessed yet.

In the gigantic live system called State its own game was being played. An outstanding figure had left, a new one, being just eminent, had appeared.

The new one started with the discipline, particularly with the party enrolment into the KGB. As it happened ages ago, after Lenin’s death, communists from towns, from factories were sent to the countryside. Now it was happening again.

They sent a job quota to district committees. They were taking Bogdanov. Firstly, because he was an assistant manager. It was more difficult to find someone from another level, they would have to look for a post in apparatus relevant to the job list. Secondly, he had an MPhil, and his first speciality was connected to nuclear science and radiochemistry. What was more, he knew a foreign language.

But as it always happens, there is always a weak point in security ministries, when one little thing can change everything.

"Do you agree to come and work for us?" a chubby man in uniform with shoulder boards asked Bogdanov.

"Yes! Of course! It's a great honour and... trust."

"Do you realize it's a different type of work and you'll have to learn?"

"Yes, I understand. I am ready!"

"How is your health?"

"Yes!.. I mean, it's fine..."

The general lifted his eyes at last and looked closely at the member of the district committee, then at the Captain who was standing next to him and said, "Show him the way to our doctors."

One of Serega's eyes was a little bit weaker than the other. Just a bit, half a dioptré. But it must have been the eye he needed to aim. That was it! All the plans for jobs and posts cracked. They had to send a request to Moscow asking if they could break the instruction on the eyes of their future agents.

While they were sending a request and waiting for the answer, life couldn't wait. Bogdanov was sent on a duty journey.

To Afghanistan. As a Counsellor party assistant.

It was a three-month trip. Three weeks training in Moscow and two months in Afghanistan. In Kabul the authority was not too soft. The mushaver-advisers held

an interview with him, instructed him, explained the safety rules. In the Central Committee of the People's Democratic party of Afghanistan, Sergey was introduced to his boss, a former first secretary of a Moscow district committee and shown the documents. He was handed a "kalashnikov", a "makarov", loads of propaganda literature in Russian. And, of course, they set high-priority tasks...

Then they put him, his boss and his luggage into an air stream propeller and two or three hours later they were in a local airport thirty kilometres from Kandahar. In the outskirts of that town they were supposed to spend two whole months in one of the houses.

Mujahidins were hardly at war there, they just wasted American money. In the day they would work in the fields, raising the earth around poppy flowers, and at night they would start shooting. Sometimes they would shoot in the day, but not spitefully, without aiming to kill everyone, otherwise they wouldn't get their wages.

The counsellor and his assistant were lucky. Where they lived, they could only stop a bullet or get a shell through the window from "their friends" - extreme radical representatives of another group of the People's Democratic party - "Halk" (Pashtuns). That happened every time when the local committee made the wrong decision. In the committee most people were from another group - "Parcham".

Sergey and his boss lived in a small plain stone house with only one room, one exit and two windows. That was the counsellor's decision. "The key is not to live in a hotel. We don't want to be quickly found by everyone who wants or doesn't want us." The house door was nailed up and covered with sand sacks from the inside. The windows were sheltered with iron sheets. Only one window could open. The counsellor would burn some documents on the floor once a week. While he was doing this, they

would carefully open the window. The stale rotten smell would be mixed with the hot air bursting from the outside. Bogdanov then would look through the crack in the door if anyone could see the plume of smoke from under the roof of their plain house.

The window was also used for the counsellor to come out, straight into an armoured car coming to grips with the window. Bogdanov would stay inside to type his documents on the typewriter “Aurika” and to draw a nonsense. They had a small supply of paper. The counsellor would renew it every day. The paper sheets were very thin, nearly transparent, and they also had a lot of carbon paper. He could make five or six copies at a time. He had never wasted so much paper in all his life. For Sergey it meant only one thing – his papers were meant to make other people live a new way.

Not far away there were extremely challenging areas. There were cases of heroism, how could you do without it? The most difficult thing for Bogdanov and his boss was daily life. The toilet was inside the house – it was a hole in the floor. There was no escape from the heat or the smell. The counsellor had a chance of getting into big rooms with air-conditioning, but in the house it was impossible to live. They hardly had any clean water. Just enough to drink. The water for a wash was different, the colour of khaki. They also had lice and fleas... Drinking vodka didn’t help on the inside or outside.

The new life in a new place for Sergey started when he was told, “Don’t go outside. You don’t need that!” He needed to work for a few months here and help the counsellor to prepare his presentations and speeches for the local leader of the party, to fill in the forms, to draw the structure of the party organization in the local centre, to write instructions and to send reports back to Russia. He was only allowed to communicate with the interpreter, the party organization leader and his assistant.

It was better not to meet any Soviet army officers. They didn't like counsellors and they didn't really distinguish between military and political counsellors.

Late in the evening the counsellor would return home and enter the house the same way – through the window. He would bring food, paper and drinking water. They were the main things. They would look through the documents Bogdanov had prepared. The counsellor would put them into his iron briefcase. Then they would have dinner. Before he went to bed, gradually trying to relax, his boss would be telling Sergey about the tricks of their work.

As far as Bogdanov understood from their night conversations, the problem was that there was not really a communist party in Afghanistan. It had never really existed. After it had been founded in the sixties, it was split up into two, except that neither of the groups managed to build up the foundation among the Muslim population.

"When our troops entered here, there appeared a lot of different counsellors," the former district committee secretary told him. "And recently specialists in party building have been coming to Kabul, kind of helping to make the party."

"Our first secretary was transferred to Uzbekistan. We thought, he would take all his staff with him, but he just took the judge, prosecutor and military commissar."

"It is hard there as well. It will last long and there is a risk of being killed," the counsellor answered and continued, "Well, at least there you have your own people. In here they have never even had any regulations. Some party! No rules, no instructions, no principles. By the way, don't forget to give me the documentation management manual before I go tomorrow."

"Of course, I will do it!" Sergey understood the polite order to work all night.

"All I know," the counsellor went on, "is that we can't establish power in here. We might do in the cen-

tre. But in the provinces there is a mess," the counsellor shook his head and mumbled something. Sergey thought he heard him swear.

The tired and wound up district committee secretary was telling Bogdanov about all pain points he had come across while he was here, on the other side of the Amu-Darya. He was really frank with Sergey. His everyday dangers must have made him less cautious, unlike all the politicians from his country. After the counsellor dropped off, Bogdanov was thinking a lot about his words before he started working on his manual.

Behind the house wall there was a sound of the thud of hoofs and dim voices in the pushtu. Sergey immediately covered the stool and the oil lamp on it with a cloth. He jumped up and rushed to the window. He moved the iron sheet away a bit and looked outside through the little crack. It was dark, but by the loud breath of the horses and a clank of weapons he understood there were mujahidins a hundred metres from their house, about forty of them. They were near a hotel where local party organization heads, a few military counsellors and guests from the capital lived. Bogdanov could see bright shot flashes and later he heard gun shots. The counsellor was already standing next to him. As soon as he heard the shots he woke up and took his place by the window, near Sergey. Here they kept two guns and four shells.

"Well, have you written the manual?" the boss asked unexpectedly watching the people through the crack in the window. The mujahidins were still shooting the hotel windows but didn't dare go inside.

"What manual?"

"The documentation management manual..."

The counsellor laughed and started searching for his iron briefcase on the floor. At last he found it, opened it and took out a space communications telephone and an aerial.

"Is that the Consulate? Duty operator? This is number fifteen. We've got an attack on the hotel here... We are fine... Yes... No, they didn't... Waiting." The counsellor folded up the telephone and left it near the briefcase.

"That's why it is iron," Sergey grasped, "I thought it was for my papers not to burn..." They were lying on the floor and waiting. They were completely wet. Wet from the heat or fear. Even though Bogdanov had been psychologically preparing himself for similar situations, he didn't take them seriously.

He just couldn't believe it was happening in real life. To him! He had not left the house, as he was ordered, had not shot anyone and he had only seen the war in films.

They were lying with their heads on the guns and waiting for what was going to happen. There could be a fight or the mujahidins could fire for a while and leave. They were waiting for their people and tried not to think they could be spotted or their "fortress" could be already known. The mujahidins could just finish with the hotel and move over to them... What is two guns against the pack of armed and gowed up warriors?

But the fight started. The firing increased. The left part of the hotel was already burning. The lodgers of the hotel were jumping out of the windows. The people were running in different directions, about five of them fell and didn't get up.

The mujahidins began shooting from a machine-gun. They must have enjoyed it. To the left of the wall of a nearby house lit up by the fire, Bogdanov could see two shadows pass. Two people were running towards their house bending low and not shooting. A shell flash illuminated them.

Bogdanov thought they were Russians, without hats and wearing the same dark jackets. "Why are the jackets the same?" Sergey thought. He concentrated on those two coming nearer.

Without asking his boss, Bogdanov moved away the iron sheet from the window and shouted into the darkness, "Come here! Quick!

"Don't even think of shooting," said the counsellor and put his hand on Serega's gun. A second later the two people found themselves inside their hiding-place.

"It stinks in here!" these were the first words Bogdanov and his boss heard in Russian, and then, "Who are you?"

"And who are you?" the counsellor asked.

"We are from the hotel," said one of the visitors pompously, he was taller than the other one and had a moustache. He seemed to be in charge. As soon as he came inside, he lay on the ground to the left from the window, ran an eye over the humble habitation, saw packs of paper on the crooked table, a typewriter and now he was staring at the hosts of their accidental hiding-place. He didn't have any weapons, neither did the second man.

"You must be political people," the man in charge summed up. "I always feel the dear party breathe behind my back." Then he remembered something important and sharply turned his head towards his mate, "Sanya, keep looking. They should give it a rest soon."

The one who was called Sanya was lying on the other side of the window, next to Bogdanov. He was looking at the square in front of the hotel anyway and he let his boss do the talking with the hosts.

The boss saw the communication device and reached out to get it...

"Come off it, comrade!" the counsellor uttered at last.

"I've got to inform," the man with a moustache made an excuse.

Without saying a word, Bogdanov was exchanging glances with the counsellor and thinking to himself, "In terms of habits, impudent behaviour and confidence they look like military men. They probably didn't have time

to put their uniform on... But they did put their suits on... They don't belong to us, that's for sure. The counsellor would have known them. Fancy that - they have no weapons... Maybe, they are secret agents from the station. Or visiting. All the same - KGB men."

It didn't take them long to figure out each other. Experience. And a burning sense of danger. Unlike anything else, it pushes the idea along all the curves of the brain and gives the result.

"We have already informed them. Waiting," Bogdanov butted in. He got up and made a move towards the impudent visitor. The counsellor decided to put the telephone into the briefcase. The partner of the man with a moustache, having listened to their conversation and staring through the crack in the window, understood they were their friends.

The only thing that he couldn't understand was why it smelt of crap and rot in that accidental fortress, and he was wrinkling his nose and twisting his head as if he were trying to look away...

After five minutes, even though it felt like at least half an hour had passed, the fight behind the iron sheet had died away. Through the crack, they could see the mujahidins leaving and going away.

They had done what they needed to do, they had earned their money and they had worked with a good result. Now they could relax.

The man near the window turned to the oil lamp, stretched and even yawned. He was probably nervous. The dim lamp covered with a cloth beamed at Sergey, approaching the main visitor.

"Hang on a second. Let me guess," the man with a moustache fixed his eyes on Bogdanov and was watching him closely now. The sides of his moustache raised up and his immaculate white teeth shone in the dark room.

"You are Serega, for instance... I even know your surname..."

"Lisa! You idiot!" now Sergey remembered where he had seen that moustache. Not on Hussein, surely!

"Why idiot?"

"Because you hang about where you shouldn't."

"On the contrary! Where I should! Hang on a minute. How do you say it? If people are walking along the highway and not lurking paths..."

"...they will definitely meet... Hey, you!" Serega said and they embraced each other. Then they laughed quietly and in a moment suddenly whistled the famous tune from the film "Volunteers".

"Ok, friends," the counsellor suddenly remembered he was the first secretary of the district party committee, and not just a serviceman or a chief of the KGB district administration. "As far as I understand, they have finished it outside. So you can have five minutes for a chat and then we go our different ways." He got up and authoritatively picked up the gun. "We haven't seen you, you haven't seen us. We've got our instructions. And yours... They are even worse... The help will arrive any time now... We'll be in trouble."

Lisochkin looked at the counsellor with understanding, then turned to his friend Sanya, raised his forefinger and shook it with a smile. Something like, the party is always right. It's true!

Yurka and Serega were squatting like Afghans and were taking a trip down memory lane without seeing anything. They were talking at the same time but were able to hear and understand each other. Second nature. They remembered everyone, quickly, without emotions, as if they were doing a job. It took them exactly five minutes.

Five minutes later the unexpected visitors got up, said goodbye reservedly and shook the hosts' hands.

Sashka moved the iron sheet and they both disappeared into the dark.

"Well, isn't my first secretary clever? Brainy! He didn't listen to anyone and was always saying in Kabul we wouldn't live in a hotel, we would live separately, in an old abandoned house, even in the rubbish skip."

"Why did you mention the manual?" thought Sergey suddenly when he was praising his boss in his mind.

"Well, just in case... It is our dear party weapon of war. They've done so much with the paper. They thought of doing things quicker, but they forgot the main thing – when you put preparations and control together, then you can expect small interruptions first, then corruption and a crisis in the end. What can you do? Since the twenties everything has been turned upside down in the party code." The counsellor could be talking of that for ages but he stopped, pointed at the window and asked, "Did you go to school with him? He is quite impudent."

"The same playground. The same form," Bogdanov answered. "But our destinies..." he remembered what Yurka had just told him about Vovka Spivak and shut his mouth.

Help didn't come that night. The hotel burned. The local police picked up the bodies. In the morning the servicemen from the station came in a Jeep. Two people got out of the car, had a look around, didn't say anything and left. In the place where the hotel used to be, the local children were hanging around for a long time.