

**Role Play**

**Tetromino**

Role of Anastasia

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### This role play was written by Shawn Chan, Predoctoral Research Associate at INSEAD, and Terry Liu, Visiting Wharton MBA student, under the supervision of Martin Schweinsberg, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour at ESMT Berlin, Horacio Falcão, Professor of Management Practice of Decision Sciences at INSEAD, and Eric Uhlmann, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD. It is intended to be used as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

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General Information

VoiceTech Solutions is a mid-sized technology company specializing in cutting-edge speech recognition software, based in the Republic of Minskova. Since its founding over 20 years ago, under the leadership of CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov, the company has made its mark by providing innovative solutions to enhance communication across industries. However, despite early successes, the company has faced significant financial setbacks in recent years. Increased domestic and international competition, along with the rapid pace of technological advancements in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), has made it difficult to keep up.

Amid these challenges, a potentially groundbreaking technology has emerged in the industry: *NeuroVox*. This revolutionary technology uses deep neural networks to achieve human-like understanding and generation of speech, with an accuracy level far beyond anything currently available. Unlike traditional speech recognition systems, *NeuroVox* can adapt to various accents, handle overlapping conversations, and perform effectively in noisy environments. It also offers near-instantaneous real-time transcription, which makes it incredibly valuable for sectors like customer service, healthcare, and education. Industry insiders predict that the first company to successfully commercialize *NeuroVox* will dominate the market, reaping substantial financial rewards.

The entire 33-member Product Development Division has been tasked with bringing *NeuroVox* to market. The division is led by Cyril Volkov, who has 15 years of experience at the company working in the field of speech recognition technology. However, overall productivity at VoiceTech Solutions has been on a severe decline recently, especially in the Product Development Division. An internal review by an independent auditor revealed an ongoing issue: employees have become increasingly distracted by a highly addictive computerized puzzle game. This game, known as Tetromino, has gained great popularity within the company, with many employees secretly spending work hours playing it instead of focusing on their tasks. Fueling its popularity is the fact that the game was developed by two of the Product Development Division’s own – Anastasia Ivanov and Bodana Dovzhenko, both of whom joined the company just three years ago. The game’s popularity is said to have extended beyond the company’s walls, with rumors circulating that bootleg copies of Tetromino have started to be distributed outside of the company by third-party sellers and underground gaming communities.

In response to these ongoing issues, a meeting invite appeared on the calendars of Cyril, Anastasia, and Bodana, titled “Re: Reversing Our Recent Drop in Performance”, initiated by CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov.

Confidential Information for Anastasia Ivanov

You first joined VoiceTech Solutions as a college student and summer intern, driven by a lifelong passion for the technology industry. Throughout your internship, you demonstrated a strong intellect and an innovative mindset, earning the respect of your superiors and a full-time offer. You eagerly accepted the offer because you knew this was the perfect place to realize your dream of making an impact in an industry you’ve been passionate about since you were young. After graduation, you eagerly joined the Product Development Division to begin your full-time career.

Growing up, you were always fascinated by both the technical side of computing and the more consumer-facing aspects of technology. Video games, in particular, captured your imagination, offering a unique way to bridge the gap between logic and emotion. While you ultimately chose a career in speech recognition technology, your interest in gaming remained a hobby you always enjoyed. You hoped that by developing your skills at VoiceTech Solutions, you might one day have the opportunity to combine your passion for technology with your love for gaming to create something impactful.

When you joined the company, you were eager to make your mark on the world. Though quiet and reserved by nature, you didn’t shy away from voicing your ideas whenever you felt something could be done better. Most of your colleagues appreciated your fresh insights and considered you a valuable contributor. Unfortunately, you quickly realized that the dynamics within your current team were far from ideal. Cyril, your new supervisor and the head of VoiceTech Solutions’ Product Development Division, has a leadership style that clashes with your values. He runs the team with a command-and-control approach, focusing on maximizing efficiency and by-the-books processes at the expense of creativity and innovation. You feel that his approach is stifling, and you believe it’s not conducive to a healthy work environment, nor does it contribute to the future of the company. It’s a far cry from the pleasant experience you had during your internship, and you feel isolated and frustrated by this new reality.

The only positive aspects of your daily work experience are your relationships with Bodana, your teammate who joined from a competing firm around the same time as you, and your access to state-of-the-art computing hardware. Bodana shares your passion for computing, and she’s also assertive and outspoken, which makes her a perfect ally in your fight to make a real difference. You both bonded over your mutual frustration with Cyril and his outdated leadership style. Bodana’s artistic flair has also contributed greatly to the projects you’ve worked on together, which is something you admire about her.

The access to top-tier hardware has been beneficial for your personal projects as well. One such project—a dynamic puzzle game you’ve been developing in your free time—has become a source of pride for you. The game, which Bodana named Tetromino, quickly developed into something much more than just a hobby. The core gameplay is fun, addicting, and technically solid, but you felt it was missing an appealing visual design to make it truly captivating. That’s when you decided to share your crude initial version with Bodana. She was immediately fascinated by the idea and offered her help to improve the graphics and interface design. Together, you fine-tuned Tetromino into a presentable product.

Tetromino quickly became a creative outlet for both you and Bodana. Both of you worked tirelessly after hours, often staying late at the office to use the top-tier company hardware to develop and refine the game. There were even instances where you managed to sneak in a few hours during the workday to revise the program for the game. With this breakneck pace of development, the final build of Tetromino was completed after 3 months of intense but fulfilling work. Since Tetromino was a passion project, you didn’t think of the game as a commercially viable product initially. However, when a few of your colleagues saw her testing it and asked for copies to try it out themselves, Bodana realized that the game had real commercial potential. It spread through the office like wildfire, and soon everyone was playing it—often during work hours. Bodana convinced you that if Tetromino was this popular within the company, it could be a big hit in the wider market too.

With this realization, Bodana used the opportunity of your weekly team meeting to pitch the idea of commercializing Tetromino to Cyril. You both hoped he would see the value in diversifying the company’s portfolio and the benefits it could bring to VoiceTech Solutions. Unfortunately, Cyril dismissed the pitch and criticized not only Bodana but you as well for not focusing on your main tasks. This reaction was frustrating, especially given all the extra work you both put into preparing for the pitch.Bodana, true to her nature, didn’t take this well and voiced her displeasure openly in front of the whole team. As a result, Cyril scheduled a 1-on-1 follow up meeting with Bodana in which he issued her a formal verbal warning and placed her on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). In a separate 1-on-1, he even threatened to do the same to you if you continued to pursue Tetromino. He didn’t stop there, scheduling further 1-on-1 meetings with the entire Product Development Division staff, warning them of the consequences if they were caught playing Tetromino during working hours.

Despite Cyril’s attempt to squash Tetromino, the game’s popularity continued to grow within the company, and rumors even started circulating about bootleg copies of the game being distributed outside the company. Although this was unsettling, you felt powerless to act since the game was never officially commercialized. You wonder what might have been if Tetromino had been properly released to the public as a real product.

Then, an unexpected twist: you received an invitation for a meeting titled “Re: Reversing Our Recent Drop in Performance”, initiated by CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov. This was your opportunity and you knew it. Dmitry has a strong reputation as a creative leader who’s open to new ideas. You believe that he could be the key to getting Tetromino the attention and backing it deserves.

At this meeting, you hope to accomplish the following:

* **Convince Dmitry to commercialize Tetromino:** You want to convince Dmitry to release Tetromino as a commercial product. Although you and Bodana developed it in your spare time, you recognize that Dmitry’s connections and the company’s resources are necessary for the game’s success. With bootleg copies already circulating, you know that Tetromino must be formally released as soon as possible to preserve its value.
* **Negotiate a fair revenue split with the company**: If Tetromino is commercialized, you know the revenue split will need to be discussed. Although you used company equipment, 99% of the time you and Bodana spent developing the game was your personal time outside of work hours, and you believe that you two should receive the vast majority of the revenue. Based on the small proportion of workday hours you two spent programming and designing the game, you believe a 99-1 split between the creators and company would be fair. However, you realize that getting Dmitry to agree to this may not be realistic. This is because under a legal technicality in Minskova’s laws, the company could unilaterally seize ownership of Tetromino even if it was developed only partly on company time. You’re prepared to negotiate, but you want a fair share of the revenue for what you have created.

Although VoiceTech Solutions is a powerful corporation, either you, Bodana, or the two of you together have the option to sue the company to block the release of Tetromino. The court system in the Republic of Minskova is slow and inefficient, meaning a lawsuit could take up to 15 years to resolve, without the possibility of punitive damages. This delay would allow bootleg copies of Tetromino to flood the market, ultimately diminishing the game’s potential revenue for everyone involved.

* **Receive a fair share of Tetromino’s revenue as the primary creator**: While you appreciate Bodana’s contribution, you believe strongly that you should receive a proportionately larger share of the revenue. You were the one who wrote the base code for Tetromino. A 70-30 split your way is perfectly fair and acknowledges her contributions in visual design, recognizing the commercial potential of the game, and taking the lead in pitching it to management.
* **Secure your position at VoiceTech Solutions:** You’re aware that Cyril doesn’t think highly of you, in large part because of your friendship with Bodana, and you’re concerned about how this may affect your job. You need to maintain your position at the company, not only because it is vital for your continued presence in the industry you’re so passionate about, but also because it plays a critical role in ensuring your future career viability. Losing your job would significantly impact your future professional prospects and your ability to make an impact in the industry. It is critical that you manage impressions with Dmitry and keep Cyril from poisoning him against you, if he hasn’t already.
* **Highlight Cyril’s poor management**: Although it is risky to do so, you want to make sure that Dmitry is aware of Cyril’s management style and its negative impact on the team. You believe that if the company is ever going to turn things around, Cyril’s outdated approach needs to change—and that might mean he needs to leave the company or at least agree to radically change his leadership approach and treatment of you and Bodana.