

**Role Play**

**Tetromino**

Role of Bodana

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### This role play was written by Shawn Chan, INSEAD Predoctoral Research Associate and Terry Liu, visiting Wharton MBA student under the supervision of Professors Martin Schweinsberg, 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 advancement 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 Bodana Dovzhenko

Prior to joining VoiceTech Solutions, you were working at a rival company, where you had gained a reputation for your artistic and creative flair. Your work caught the attention of VoiceTech Solutions’ representatives at a tech convention, and they made you an offer, which you eagerly accepted. When you joined the Product Development Division at VoiceTech Solutions, you hoped to bring your creative visions to life, combining your talents with those of others to create innovative solutions in and outside the realm of speech recognition. You’ve always been passionate about the artistic side of technology, which is often overlooked in the tech industry. You were excited about the opportunity to contribute something more visually impactful to the products, but you quickly realized that this wasn’t going to be easy.

You pride yourself on your creative vision and technical skills, and you don’t hesitate to voice your ideas, even if it comes across a little too enthusiastically at times. Unfortunately, in your new role your outspoken passion has been met with indifference and sometimes outright hostility. Cyril, your immediate supervisor and the head of the Product Development Division, runs the team with an iron fist, obsessing over efficiency and a by-the-numbers approach at the expense of any form of innovation or creativity. To put it bluntly, you find Cyril’s leadership suffocating. His approach is not only outdated but completely detrimental to the company’s long-term success.

Compared to your bosses at your previous company, Cyril is an absolute joke. Back at your old job, even the lowest-level managers had more tact, creativity, and leadership ability than Cyril could ever dream of having. His incompetence is staggering, and the more you witness it, the more frustrated you become. You can’t fathom how someone as lacking in vision as Cyril could have ever risen to a leadership role. It’s painfully clear that his presence is holding back the company and its potential for growth.

Luckily, there is one bright spot: Anastasia, a younger member of your team, has become not only a close friend but also an invaluable ally. She’s a relatively recent college graduate, and while she’s more quiet and reserved than you, she shares your frustration with Cyril’s backward approach to leadership. Anastasia’s coding skills are outstanding, and her contributions to your joint projects have been instrumental. She also shares your desire to make a meaningful impact in the world of tech, and you value her as a teammate. Another added benefit which you enjoy has also been the access to top-tier hardware at VoiceTech Solutions which has given you the means to breathe life into your artistic vision and make projects more vibrant and impactful than ever before.

One day, Anastasia showed you a passion project she’d been working on in the late evenings after work hours: a dynamic computerized puzzle game. Although she was confident the core gameplay was solid, she felt it lacked the visual appeal to make it stand out. After testing it yourself, you realized just how addictive and fun it truly was, and you eagerly offered to help with the graphics and interface design. Together, you fine-tuned the game into a polished product, and you personally came up with the perfect name: Tetromino!

Tetromino quickly became an outlet for both you and Anastasia. Both of you worked tirelessly after work hours, often staying late at the office to use the top-tier hardware to develop and refine the game. There were even instances where you managed to sneak in a few hours during the workday to refine 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 you testing it and asked for copies to try it out themselves, you realized that the game had real potential. It spread through the office like wildfire, and soon everyone was playing it—often during work hours. You began to think that if Tetromino was as popular within the company as it had become, it could be a big hit in the wider market too.

With this realization, you proposed to Anastasia the idea of commercializing Tetromino. You convinced Anastasia to let you pitch the idea to Cyril, hoping he would see the value in diversifying the company’s portfolio and the benefits it could bring to VoiceTech Solutions. Given your poor personal relationship with Cyril, the weekly team meeting was the best available time to make your pitch. As you pointed out at the group meeting, Tetromino is far more unique than *NeuroVox*, which other companies are also pursuing, and hence more commercially viable. Unfortunately, Cyril’s response was typical of his inability to see the bigger picture. He dismissed your pitch outright and criticized both you and Anastasia for not focusing on your main tasks. This reaction was particularly infuriating given all the extra effort you both put into preparing for the pitch. You were seething with anger—how could someone so incompetent and out of touch with the industry be in charge of anything? His lack of foresight was appalling.

True to your nature, you didn’t take Cyril’s reprimand lying down. You voiced your displeasure openly, calling out his shortsightedness and lack of vision in the middle of the group meeting. As a result, Cyril called a 1-on-1 follow up meeting with you in which he issued a formal verbal warning and placed you on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). In a separate 1-on-1, he even threatened Anastasia with the same punishment if she continued pursuing Tetromino. The sheer audacity of his actions only further confirmed your belief that Cyril was absolutely toxic to the company’s culture and its future. After that incident, Cyril even started scheduling regular one-on-one meetings with the entire Product Development Division, 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 VoiceTech Solutions, and rumors even started circulating about bootleg copies of the game being distributed outside the company. While this was unsettling, you felt powerless to act since the game was never officially commercialized. Despite everything, you still wondered what could have been if Tetromino had been formally released to the public as you’d proposed.

Then, an unexpected twist: you received an invitation for a meeting titled “Re: Reversing Our Recent Drop in Performance”, initiated by CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov. You knew this was your opportunity. Dmitry had a reputation for being a creative leader, open to new ideas. You believe that Dmitry could not only provide the attention and backing Tetromino deserves, but that he could also be the one to remove Cyril permanently from the company, ending the suffocating grip his incompetence has had on the entire Product Development Division at VoiceTech Solutions. You see Dmitry as the key to unlocking both Tetromino’s potential and the future success of the company itself.

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 Anastasia developed it in your spare time, you recognize that Dmitry’s connections and the company’s resources would be useful for facilitating the game’s success. With bootleg copies already circulating, you know that Tetromino must be released as soon as possible to preserve its value. You believe that a team of 10, either new hires or internal transfers from the Product Development Division, should be enough to deliver a market-ready version of Tetromino within 3 months. With 5 employees, it would probably take you 6 months to finish the game.
* **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 Anastasia 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. You’re prepared to negotiate, but you want a fair share of the revenue for your contributorship.
* Although VoiceTech Solutions is a powerful corporation, either you, Anastasia, 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 ruining the game’s potential revenue for VoiceTech Solutions.
* **Start your own video game company as a backup plan.** In the likely event you cannot agree on a fair revenue split with the company, you plan to quit VoiceTech Solutions with Anastasia and start your own video game company. To be able to do this, it is critical that you keep Dmitry and Cyril from finding out you used company time and equipment to develop Tetromino. This is becauseunder the Republic of Minskova’s laws, the company could unilaterally seize ownership of Tetromino if it was developed even partly using their resources. It is critical that Anastasia keep her mouth shut about any of the development process for Tetromino occurring at the office.
* **Receive a fair share of Tetromino’s revenue as equal co-creator**: While you acknowledge that Anastasia programed the base code for Tetromino, you firmly believe that you deserve an equal share of the revenue. You were the one who brought the game to life visually, saw the commercial potential, and named it. Without your contributions, nobody but Anastasia would be playing the game. Your artistic direction and commercial vision are what turned Tetromino from an amusing individual side project into something more and more people are excited about. You know that in the video game industry more generally, programming and design are on equal footing and are remunerated the same.
* **Persuade Dmitry to fire Cyril**: You’re done playing nice. Cyril’s leadership has been a disaster from day one. His obsession with efficiency at the cost of creativity has been suffocating the team and the company. It's time Dmitry knows just how toxic Cyril's approach is. If VoiceTech Solutions is going to have any chance of turning things around, Cyril’s outdated, oppressive management style needs to go, and the best way to achieve this is to get rid of him entirely. You’ll make sure Dmitry understands just how damaging Cyril is, both to the team and to the company’s future, and do everything you can to get Cyril fired from the company.