

**Role Play**

**Tetromino**

Role of Dmitry

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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 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 Dmitry Aleksandrov

Having founded VoiceTech Solutions more than 20 years ago, you have been the driving force behind the company’s success and reputation. Under your leadership, VoiceTech Solutions grew into a significant player in the local technology industry. However, in the past three years, with rapid advancements in technology that even you find difficult to keep up with, coupled with increasing domestic and international competition, revenue has been in decline at an annualized rate of 6%. Furthermore, your market share has shrunk from 9% to 4%.

Although employees are generally aware that the company is struggling, only you know that bankruptcy is a real risk if VoiceTech Solutions cannot establish a new revenue stream within the next six months. In light of this financial distress, you are desperately searching for the next breakthrough product that can form a new revenue stream. *NeuroVox* seems to be a potential solution to the company’s challenges, but you aren’t as optimistic as some others. Despite its promise, you feel the product faces significant hurdles, including issues related to scalability and market adoption. Adding to the company’s struggles, VoiceTech Solutions is unable to make acquisitions or hire additional developers due to financial constraints. Instead, the company must rely on its existing employees and limited available resources to turn the company’s fate around.

You assigned Anastasia and Bodana to Cyril, one of the company’s most trusted and long-standing employees, in the hopes that these relative new hires would benefit from his mentorship. Cyril has been with VoiceTech Solutions for 15 years and has previously been a solid performer and dependable asset to the company. More recently, however, recent performance slumps in his division, Product Management, have caused your serious concern.

In an effort to save the company, you recently arranged for an independent auditor to conduct an internal review to uncover potential areas where VoiceTech Solutions could further optimize productivity. When reading the results of the review, you were intrigued by one finding in particular: the growing internal popularity of Tetromino. Wondering what could possibly be captivating employees during such a critical time for the company, you decided to play the game yourself to understand its appeal. After trying your hand at the game, you immediately recognized Tetromino’s commercial potential. While VoiceTech Solutions is not a video game company, you know several personal connections who would be interested in co-launching the game as a sub-division of VoiceTech Solutions. This could help diversify the company’s revenue stream and help get it back on track.

However, the review also revealed that bootleg copies of Tetromino were already circulating illegally outside the company. You realize that action needs to be taken immediately to begin the commercialization process for Tetromino. Thus, you send an invitation for a meeting titled “Re: Reversing Our Recent Decline in Performance”, to Anastasia and Bodana, the game’s creators, as well as Cyril, their immediate supervisor, to discuss your idea to pivot your collective efforts towards video games as a means of overcoming the company’s downward slide.

At this meeting, you hope to accomplish the following:

* **Propose to Anastasia and Bodana to commercialize Tetromino:** You want to launch Tetromino as a commercial product as soon as possible. Given the dire financial situation at VoiceTech Solutions, this pivoting your strategy that could save the company or at least buy time for more solutions. With bootleg copies already circulating, you know the game must be officially released quickly to preserve its value. Your current “win-win” plan is to split the current Product Development Division staff approximately in half, assigning 17 employees to work on Tetromino (including Anastasia and Bodana). Cyril would then be left with 15 employees for the final push for NeuroVox, which you believe can still be completed within 6 months.
* **Negotiate a reasonable revenue split between the creators and company:** Since Anastasia and Bodana created Tetromino without formal company approval, one of the key issues that needs to be resolved is the revenue split between VoiceTech Solutions and its creators for any future revenue generated from the game. The internal review showed that multiple versions of Tetromino and its source code were found on Anastasia and Bodana’s company desktop computers. The company had recently invested in top-tier hardware and software to monitor and record all applications accessed, which serves as evidence that at least some company resources and work hours were used in the development of the game.

Under Republic of Minskova’s laws, if any company time at all was spent on a personal project, the company has the right to claim 100% of the revenue generated from commercialization. Given this legal advantage, you aim to keep 80% of Tetromino’s revenue for VoiceTech Solutions, leaving Anastasia and Bodana 20% as a reward for their work and to incentivize other employees to innovate similarly. However, you are aware that Anastasia and Bodana have the option to sue VoiceTech Solutions in court to block the release of the game. Due to the inefficiency of Minskova’s court systems, such a lawsuit could take up to 15 years to reach a resolution, allowing bootleg copies of the game to flood the market and eliminate any potential revenue. By that time, VoiceTech Solutions may no longer even exist. You are not sure if Anastasia and Bodana are aware of the legal precedents but are wary that they could use the threat of a lawsuit as leverage in negotiations.

Further complicating the matter, your own projections suggest that VoiceTech Solutions would need to keep at least 60% of Tetromino's projected revenue to avoid bankruptcy. This limits how much you can even offer Anastasia and Bodana in theory. A 60-40 split of revenues favoring the company is the absolute most you can concede. At the same time, this would be highly undesirable as it could directly affect the long-term well-being of VoiceTech Solutions. You want the company to flourish, not just barely survive.

* **Retain Cyril at the company**. Cyril is one of your longest-serving and most loyal employees, with critical skills that are extremely difficult to find in the Republic of Minskova. In fact, he is absolutely essential to finishing NeuroVox on schedule – without his experience and expertise, there is no way to deliver a commercially viable NeuroVox product within 6 months. Thus, you are very keen to keep him at the firm. At the same time, you want to understand more about the recent performance slump in his division.
* **Mediate the conflicts between these three employees:** You were shocked to read in the internal report that the dynamics between Anastasia, Bodana, and Cyril were described by the independent auditor as “unprofessional and overly hostile.” The report further noted that Cyril is a respected and popular figure with his other 30 supervisees in the Product Development Division. Ideally, you hope to be able to mediate and ensure that Anastasia and Bodana agree to behave professionally and work well with their manager moving forward.
* **Fire any and all employees who behave inappropriately:** If you determine that any of your employees have behaved unprofessionally or dishonestly, either in the past or during this important negotiation, you prefer to fire them rather than let them pollute your company’s culture. Although you prefer not to do so, you can sign an agreement with Anastasia and Bodana to commercialize Tetromino and then fire them immediately afterward. Likewise, you retain the option to terminate Cyril if he behaves in a matter unbefitting a VoiceTech Solutions manager during the meeting.