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**Teaching Note**

**Tetromino**

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Overview

Tetromino is a four-party, team-on-team conflict resolution case inspired by the real-life story of the classic 1980s video game Tetris. The case features four distinct roles, each reflecting key players in the historical context of the real-life dispute over Tetris (see Table 1 below). Anastasia is really Alexey Pajitnov and Bodana is really Vladimir Pokhilko, the programmer and designer for Tetris respectively. In the early 1980s Alexey and Vladimir were colleagues at the Russian Academy of Sciences and created the game together as a side project. In real life, Cyril and Dmitry were entities rather than people. Cyril represents the Russian Academy of Sciences, who were furious that their employees were spending all day playing Tetris instead of doing their jobs. Dmitry represents ELORG, state-owned enterprise responsible for all computing imports and exports in the then Soviet Union, who recognized the potential in Tetris and wanted to monetize it.

Table 1: Role Play Characters and their Inspirations from the Real-Life Tetris Story

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Tetromino Role** | **Inspiration from Tetris** |
| Anastasia Ivanov | Alexey Pajitnov: programmer of Tetris) |
| Bodana Dovzhenko | Vladimir Pokhilko: designer of Tetris |
| Cyril Volkov | Russian Academy of Sciences: Scientific research institute of the Soviet Union |
| Dmitry Aleksandrov | Elektronorgtechnica (ELORG); State-owned enterprise of the Soviet Union responsible for all computing imports and exports |

About the Case

2.1. General Storyline

VoiceTech Solutions, a mid-sized tech company based in the Republic of Minskova, has specialized in speech recognition software for over 20 years under CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov. Despite early success, recent financial struggles have arisen due to intense competition and the rapid advancements in AI technology. A breakthrough technology, NeuroVox, has emerged in the industry. It is predicted that the first company to successfully commercialize NeuroVox will dominate the market, making it a key focus for VoiceTech Solution's Product Development Division. The 33-member Product Development Division, led by Cyril Volkov, has been tasked with bringing NeuroVox to market. However, productivity has sharply declined due to an internal distraction: a popular, addictive puzzle game called Tetromino, developed by two employees, Anastasia Ivanov and Bodana Dovzhenko. These two junior employees have ongoing interpersonal conflicts with Dmitry, who has placed Bodana on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and warned both to stop working on Tetromino. CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov has called a meeting with Cyril, Anastasia, and Bodana to address their ongoing issues and reverse the performance drop in their division.

2.2. Anastasia Ivanov

Anastasia joined VoiceTech Solutions as a fresh graduate and works in the Product Development Division under Cyril’s leadership and shares a passion for both technology and video games. However, she disagrees with Cyril’s leadership style which she feels is too controlling and stifles creativity. Her main sources of fulfillment are her close collaboration Bodana and the access to high-quality hardware, which she uses for both work and personal projects. One such project was Tetromino, a dynamic puzzle game, which she created the base code for and for which Bodana designed the visual elements. As the game gained popularity within the company, Anastasia and Bodana decided to pitch commercializing it to Cyril who dismissed the idea, placed Bodana on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), and threatened to do the same to Anastasia. The joint meeting called for by CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov is thus her opportunity to pitch Tetromino to the company’s top leader and get the backing it needs to become a commercial success. She also wants to secure her job at VoiceTech and complain about Cyril’s management style to Dmitry. Despite her shared interests with Bodana in commercializing Tetromino, she disagrees on the proportion of revenue that should be shared between the two creators. Specifically, Anastasia believes she should get 70% of the revenue split between them since she came up with the idea and base code, which could be a point of contention with Bodana.

2.3. Bodana Dovzhenko

Bodana joined VoiceTech Solutions 3 years ago from a rival company and works in the Product Development Division under Cyril's leadership. She is highly creative and enjoys using her artistic skills to bring design visions to life. She holds Cyril in great disdain and expresses it much more openly than Anastasia, leading to a more intense conflict between herself and her manager. Being placed on the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) only served to fuel her contempt for Cyril. Her main source of fulfillment at the company is her close collaboration with Anastasia. At the meeting, she also wants to pitch Tetromino to the company’s leadership and get the backing it needs to become a commercial success. Unlike Anastasia, she knows the resources she requires to bring this vision to fruition due to her greater seniority in the industry: with a team of 10 new employees or transfers from the Product Development Division, Tetromino could be completed in 3 months. In contrast to Anastasia, she is impartial to losing her job, and more focused on getting Cyril fired. Also, she feels that the revenue share between her and Anastasia should be 50-50 as there are equal partners and contributors to Tetromino.

2.4. Cyril Volkov

With 15 years of experience at VoiceTech Solution, Cyril is a loyal and experienced manager who has risen to head the Product Development Division. In response to the firm’s recent financial struggles, Cyril has adopted a stricter approach, emphasizing efficiency, increased work hours, and productivity. Additionally, he firmly believes that the division can revive growth by focusing on the commercialization of NeuroVox. While most of his subordinates respect his focus on results, Cyril’s leadership style has faced significant resistance from Anastasia and Bodana. Cyril views them as problem employees, feeling that they lack the discipline to deliver results. He perceives their interest in Tetromino, a game they created, as a distraction from the company’s true mission—developing NeuroVox. While his company loyalty has always resulted in him rejecting outside job offers with better remuneration, recent frustrations with Anastasia and Bodana have made him wonder if staying is truly worth it. He currently has an outside offer on the table and may leave if unhappy with the process or outcome of this negotiation; in addition, his potential threat to quit gives him leverage over Dmitry. Cyril wants to get Anastasia and Bodana fired, ban Tetromino from the company entirely, get additional hires for his division, and focus on getting NeuroVox to market as soon as possible. In the event that Tetromino is commercialized, he wants Anastasia and especially Bodana to profit as little as possible given what he sees as their disruptive behavior as employees.

2.5. Dmitry Aleksandrov

Dmitry is the founder of VoiceTech Solutions and has personally overseen the success of the company over the past 20 years. Concerned about the company’s performance slump, he arranged for an internal review and is intrigued by the game that has been a source of distraction for many employeesTetromino. She is less optimistic than Cyril about the potential of NeuroVox due to scalability and market adoption concerns and is keen to explore Tetromino as a potential solution to the company’s financial struggles. At the meeting, she wants to convince Anastasia and Bodana to commercialize Tetromino while securing a favorable revenue split between the creators and the company of ideally 80-20 and at least 60-40. She also wants to understand and mediate the tension between Cyril and his two subordinates as noted in the internal review. She also hopes to prevent Cyril from quitting. At the same time, due to her strong feelings about professionalism and honesty, he is inclined to fire whoever he perceives to be an inappropriate fit with the company’s culture.

Key Issues and Interests

The four individuals have both shared and distinct interests regarding the key issues to be negotiated. Below is a list of the key issues and underlying interests, along with a summary table for teaching purposes (Appendix 1).

3.1. Tetromino Commercialization

Anastasia, Bodana, and Dmitry all want to commercialize Tetromino. Cyril is the only one who is technically indifferent to the commercialization of Tetromino persay but is frustrated with the game being a source of distraction to his division and would prefer the game to be banned from the company entirely.

3.2. Tetromino Revenue Split (Creators vs. Company)

Anastasia and Bodana believe that by rights they should get 99% of revenues since only 1% of the time they spent developing Tetromino was during work hours. Dmitry’s ideal is an 80-20 split the company’s way, with 20% going to the creators for their contribution and to incentivize innovation among employees. The absolute most he can concede, at least in the short run, is 40% since the company must capture value from new revenue streams soon to avoid bankruptcy. Cyril does not want to incentivize employees going rogue and prefers to give them much less, especially Bodana due to what he perceives as her bad behavior.

Due to secret tracking software, Dmitry knows that Anastasia and Bodana used some company time and equipment to develop Tetromino, and under national law could therefore seize the IP unilaterally. However, one or both of the creators could file a lawsuit to block the commercial release of the game for 15 years, by which time Dmitry knows the company will likely have gone bankrupt.

3.3. Tetromino Revenue Split (Between Creators)

Since she came up with the idea and did the programming, Anastasia wants to split whatever revenues they are able to get from the company 70-30 between herself. In contrast, Bodana sees them as equal partners and prefers a 50-50 split. Bodana’s legitimacy is that design and programming are on fairly even footing in the gaming industry, and she came up with the name of the game and saw the commercial potential.

3.4. Employment Status

Anastasia is keen to keep her job but is also willing to risk calling Cyril out for what she sees as his poor leadership. Bodana does not care that much about keeping her job, and is wants Cyril to lose his. On his side, Cyril has received an attractive outside offer with a higher salary and may quit outright if unhappy with the process or outcome of this negotiation. This gives him leverage over Dmitry, who knows that Cyril’s premature departure would sink the NeuroVox project, which he also wants to see to market. Cyril wants Anastasia and especially Bodana fired, and may try to provoke Bodana to discredit her with Dmitry who he knows cares a great deal about professionalism and honesty. If Bodana and Anastasia lie about using company time and equipment to make Tetromino, this may discredit them with Cyril. Dmitry hopes to mediate the conflicts on the product development team and retain Cyril as bringing NeuroVox to market would be impossible without him. However, Dmitry is also willing to fire any employees who behave unprofessionally to avoid staining the company culture. Dmitry is not adverse to signing contracts to secure Tetromino and NeuroVox and firing Anastasia, Bodana, and/or Cyril some months from now after the product are delivered.

3.5. Staffing

Bodana knows that with 10 employees she could bring Tetromino to market within 3 months, and in six months with 5. Cyril is confident of bringing NeuroVox to market on schedule based on the status quo (30 employees in the Product Development Division excluding Anastasia and Bodana who he wants to get rid of). However, at the outset of the negotiation Cyril plans to request additional manpower from Dmitry to be absolutely certain. Making this difficult, Dmitry is unable to hire additional staff due to financial constraints and can only redistribute existing employees. Initially, Dmitry prefers to split the Product Development Division into approximately half15 to work on Tetromino team under Anastasia and Bodana, and 15 to continue working on NeuroVox under Cyril. This plan, or even Bodana’s lesser requirement of 10 employees to be transferred out from Cyril’s team could anger Cyril and lead him to quit the company entirely.

Possible Win-Win Outcome

A lawsuit does not happen, which is a poor option for most characters (with the exception of Cyril, since Bodana and Anastasia will both be fired and he can keep all of the remaining 30 employees in his Product Development Division). Cyril does not quit or get fired, and Anastasia and Bodana both keep their jobs as well.

A revenue split favoring the company is necessary for a deal, since Dmitry cannot concede more than 40% of Tetromino revenues maximum, at least in the short run. It would arguably be value creating to have early revenues favor the company more than later revenues, since the company is heading towards bankruptcy. Anastasia and Bodana could capture long-run value by building in a contingency agreement that their percentage goes up over time if the game is a huge hit.

Anastasia and Bodana are no longer supervised by Cyril and are promoted to leaders of a new video game sub-division, addressing the respective employees’ underlying interests not to have to work with each other. Both the existing NeuroVox and new Tetromino teams retain enough members to finish their respective products within 6 months. Tetromino requires less people and can be finished faster than NeuroVox; thus, negotiators might agree that if Tetromino is successful, the money could be used to restaff and if possible expand Cyril’s division.

As per Cyril’s strong preference, playing Tetromino during work hours is banned at the company with Dmitry’s support.

Teaching Points for Debrief

5.1. Negotiating in Teams

Negotiations often involve teams rather than individual negotiators. Teams generally have an advantage over individual negotiators, as they can better grasp the full scope of the issues and are more likely to achieve higher joint gains — value that benefits both parties. Teams also outperform solo negotiators in value claiming, because they are able to exert social pressure.

That being said, team-based negotiations also come with their own set of challenges. The team advantage in negotiation only emerges if teammates adopt a coordinated strategy; when poorly coordinated, teams underperform solo negotiators. This makes it even more important for teams to prepare effectively both before and during negotiations.

5.2. Mixed Incentives in Teams

Teams often operate in mixed-motive situations, where members face both a collective incentive to achieve team goals and a personal incentive to pursue individual goals, which may not always align with the team's objectives. Research indicates that in such situations, individuals are more likely to prioritize their personal goals over those of the team. One effective way to address this is through awareness. Take the time to understand what drives your individual teammates’, as this can help you anticipate actions or goals that might undermine the team’s efforts. Use the preparation phase before the negotiation as an opportunity to identify any differing interests and align the team's goals and strategies for a more cohesive approach during the negotiation.

5.3. Interests, Legitimacy, Power in Disputes

There are three main approaches to resolving disputes: power, legitimacy, and interests. Power refers to the ability to coerce someone into doing something, often based on stronger alternatives. This can be through force, authority, or influence. However, relying solely on power can backfire, as it typically increases resistance and creates a sense of injustice, which can escalate the conflict. Legitimacy involves independent standards that guide right and wrong behavior, often grounded in laws, rules, or commonly accepted principles. While legitimacy can be a strong tool, it can also lead to protracted and costly arguments if both sides adhere strongly to differing or incompatible standards of legitimacy. Interests are the underlying goals or needs that each party hopes to meet through the negotiation.

In dispute situations, it is crucial to remain focused on interests. Relying too much on power and alternatives usually leads to resistance and escalates conflict. Focusing too much on legitimacy can quickly devolve into an unresolvable argument about who is right. Unlike other negotiations, where legitimacy is a powerful tool to persuade, clashing standards of legitimacy are often the root cause of disputes. Instead, your best approach is to briefly acknowledge power and legitimacy but quickly pivot back to discussing interests—what each party wants and needs—and working together to find a solution that satisfies everyone as best as possible.

Administration and Timeline

This advanced case is designed to occupy a full class meeting of approximately 3 hours and 15 minutes (see Table 2 below).

There are four roles: Anastasia, Bodana, Cyril, and Dmitry. The four roles are split into two teams representing the creators (Anastasia and Bodana) and the company (Cyril and Dmitry). The ideal negotiation group has four participants, one for each character. Participants can double up a role, for example have two Cyrils, if they are in a group of 5. However, they cannot have less than 4 participants, since all of the roles are essential for the case. Participants may share (or not share) whatever they choose to verbally but are not to show their physical information sheet to others at any point of time.

First, everyone is given 50 minutes to read their role materials and plan a strategy with their teammate: Anastasia with Bodana, and Cyril with Dmitry. Then, all four parties have 1 hour for the team-on-team negotiation will all four roles. Side meetings are allowed at any point of the negotiation, provided the parties involved agree. Text messages, either to one’s own their teammate or someone on the other team, are allowed at any time, but the other party is not obligated to read them. After coming to an agreement (or an impasse), all participants should be given a 15-minute break before returning to class for approximately 1 hour of debriefing and discussion.

During the negotiations, the instructor should walk around and take mental or written notes on some of the negotiations, highlighting tactics and reactions that can be brought up later during the debriefs when participants are asked to share their experiences or when key teaching points are made.

Table 2: Recommended Timeline

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Time Allocated** |
| Set-up in class | 10 minutes |
| Read roles team preparation (Anastasia and Bodana together, Cyril and Dmitry together) | 50 minutes |
| Team-on-team negotiation with all four characters | 1 hour |
| Break | 15 minutes |
| Debriefing and Discussion | 1 hour |

Real-Life Aftermath

After a failed negotiation with Aleksey and Vladimir, the Soviet government (ELORG) unilaterally seized the rights to Tetris. From 1984 to 1986, there was an intense dispute over Tetris licensing rights between the game’s creators, the Soviet Union, and third-party licensors. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and ELORG was privatized. In 1996, Alexey Pajitnov (Anastasia) finally received his first royalty from Tetris after its IP rights were awarded to him, eventually making $20m USD. In 2005 Aleksey’s Tetris company bought ELORG. Aleksey moved to the U.S. where his son died in a tragic ski accident in 2017. Vladimir Pokhilko (Bodana) received nothing from the legal settlement for Tetris. Struggling financially, Vladimir murdered his wife and son and committed suicide in 1998, leaving a note stating “I’ve been eaten alive”. A day later a Japanese company offered Vladimir $200,000 for his services helping design video games. Tetris has sold over 500 million units and is widely regarded as one of the greatest video games ever made.

Appendix 1

Summary of Key Issues and Interests

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Anastasia** | **Bodana** | **Cyril** | **Dmitry** |
| **Tetromino****Commercialization** | Yes | Indifferent; Wants game to be banned internally within the company | Yes |
| **Tetromino Revenue Split****(Creators vs. Company)** | Unrealistic IdealCreators: 99%Company: 1%*Legitimacy: Only 1% of work was done on company time.**Power: Can file lawsuit to block commercial release of game for 15 years.* | AspirationCreators: 5% or lessCompany: 95% or more*Legitimacy: Knows Anastasia and Bodana used company hardware and time**Power:* *Company has legal claim to 100% of game under national law* | AspirationCreators: 20%Company: 80%Bottom LineCreators: 40%Company: 60%*Legitimacy: Knows Anastasia and Bodana used company hardware and time**Power:* *Company has legal claim to 100% of game under national law* |
| **Tetromino Revenue Split****(Between Creators)** | 70-30 her way*Legitimacy: Came up with idea and base code* | 50-50*Legitimacy: Did the visual designs, named the game, and saw the commercial potential* | Prefers that Bodana benefits less than Anastasia due to the former’s behavior | Indifferent |
| **Employment Status** | Save own job and report Cyril’s behavior to Dmitry | Get Cyril fired | Decide on outside offerGet Dmitry to fire Anastasia and BodanaProvoke Bodana (e.g., with extreme offers and insulting comments)Monitor and fine employees who play Tetromino | Mediate conflicts between Anastasia, Bodana, and CyrilRetain Cyril (vital to delivering *NeuroVox*)Fire employees who behave unprofessionally (potentially after obtaining Tetromino and/or *NeuroVox*) |
| **Staffing** | Does not know what is required to deliver Tetromino | Transfer 10 Product Development Division employees to the Tetromino team | Hire more staff for Product Development Division, or at least prevent attritiion | Split Product Development Division, with about half the staff working on Tetromino and the other half on NeuroVox |

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