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**Role Play**

**Tetromino**

Role of Cyril

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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 Cyril Volkov

With 15 years of experience at VoiceTech Solutions, you are one of the company’s longest-tenured employees, rising from the bottom to become the head of the Product Development Division. Having devoted your entire professional life to VoiceTech Solutions, you consider yourself a loyal employee. While disheartened by the company’s recent financial struggles, you firmly believe that your division has the capability to revive top-line growth by creating commercially viable products with *NeuroVox*.

With the company’s best interests at heart, you recently adopted a stricter approach, not only with your immediate supervisees but with the entire Product Development Division. You’ve directed everyone to maintain focus, put in more hours, and maximize productivity on the job. You are determined to bring in results and reinvigorate VoiceTech Solutions’ financials. A majority of your team members respect your approach, and you have excellent relations with almost all of them.

However, it is extremely unfortunate that the two most problematic employees in the entire company work directly under you: Anastasia and Bodana. You feel that they focus too much on lofty, unrealistic goals rather than actually putting in the hours needed to achieve tangible results. They seem more interested in talking about vague, airy concepts instead of rolling up their sleeves and working hard to deliver. They are not willing to put in the effort to get results, and you can’t tolerate their lack of seriousness.

Additionally, neither of them shows respect for authority. Anastasia is less obnoxious, but only because she does not speak as much. Bodana is the absolute worst—always speaking her mind much too freely and casually, completely disregarding your authority and the need for structure. Neither of them appear willing to listen to those with more experience than themselves. This is completely opposite to the philosophy and values you desperately want to instill in your division. Your disdain for them only grew stronger after you discovered that they were the ones who developed Tetromino, a computerized puzzle game that has become a source of addiction for your employees, siphoning away valuable work time.

You were outraged when at a weekly team meeting Bodana actually had the gall to pitch Tetromino as a commercial product for VoiceTech Solutions, claiming it should be prioritized over *NeuroVox*! You were appalled—Tetromino is an abject waste of time. You firmly believe that *NeuroVox* is the next big thing and the company’s only chance at survival. You also believe that you can deliver *NeuroVox* within the next 5 months. Tetromino is a distraction, and instead of focusing on the real product that could save the company, your employees are wasting time designing and playing games. You immediately rejected their pitch and reinforced the importance of focusing on their actual work. You made it clear that the company’s interests should always come before personal hobbies and side projects.

To your horror, Bodana reacted extremely badly. She flared up and raised her voice, openly challenging your authority in front of the whole team. This behavior was unacceptable, and you had no choice but to schedule a 1-on-1 follow up meeting to issue Bodana a verbal warning and place her on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). You also arranged a separate 1-on-1 meeting with Anastasia and told her that the same would apply to her if she continued to promote Tetromino, which was distracting employees from the main goal: getting *NeuroVox* products to market. Additionally, you started to schedule regular 1-on-1 meetings with everyone in the Product Development Division, warning them about the consequences if they were caught playing Tetromino during work hours. You made it clear that such distractions were unacceptable and that there would be repercussions for anyone found undermining the team’s focus on *NeuroVox*.

Despite your best efforts to squash Tetromino, the game’s popularity continued to grow within VoiceTech Solutions. Rumors even started circulating about bootleg copies of Tetromino being distributed outside the company. You know you have to put a stop to your two rebellious employees, and quickly, before they derail the NeuroVox effort entirely.

Then, an unexpected twist: you received an invitation for a meeting titled “Re: Reversing Our Recent Decline in Performance”, initiated by CEO Dmitry Aleksandrov and including not only yourself but also Anastasia and Bodana. You had mixed feelings. On one hand, you knew this was your opportunity to get Dmitry involved, someone who had the authority to put an end to this Tetromino nonsense once and for all. On the other hand, you also knew that as the head of the Product Development Division, you would ultimately be held accountable for the recent slump in productivity and whether NeuroVox successfully made it to market or not. You see complete backing from Dmitry as the key to getting rid of these distractions and getting the company back on track. But you also want to show him that you’ve been working tirelessly to get the team performing at a high level.

At this meeting, you hope to accomplish the following:

* **Decide on your future at VoiceTech Solutions:** You have been a loyal employee for the last 15 years and are committed to delivering *NeuroVox* within the next 5 months. At the same time, your regularly receive outside offers from other companies with a significant improvement in pay, which you have always turned down in the past out of loyalty. One such offer arrived earlier this week, and you have yet to respond. You would much prefer to remain at the company you have invested the last 15 years of your life in and see *NeuroVox* through to its completion. You know that your expertise is hard to find in the Republic of Minskova, and that the *NeuroVox* initiative at VoiceTech Solutions would certainly die without you. However, if you unable to resolve your ongoing frustrations with Bodana, Anastasia, and Tetromino, you may need to reconsider your employment at VoiceTech Solutions entirely.
* **Convince Dmitry to fire Bodana and Anastasia:** You must convince Dmitry that Tetromino and its creators Anastasia and Bodana are the root cause of the low productivity of your division. To support your position, you’ve compiled a log of system reports showing that employees in your division have spent 40% of their work hours playing Tetromino during the preceding quarter. Even without the conflict surrounding Tetromino, neither Anastasia nor Bodana are aligned with the culture you are trying to instill in the division and do not exhibit the values or behavior that are expected from VoiceTech Solutions employees. Furthermore, Bodana is already on a PIP due to her outburst at the earlier team meeting. You want to convince Dmitry to support you in firing both Anastasia and Bodana and severing any ties with them permanently. If this isn’t feasible, then at least Bodana should be fired since she is already on a PIP, and Anastasia can be placed on a PIP in preparation for a future termination.
* **Make new hires for the Product Development Division.** You currently have 30 useful employees in your division – after excluding Bodana and Anastasia, who are worse than useless. You are worried about whether or not you have enough staff to deliver *NeuroVox* on schedule. Therefore, you plan to negotiate with Dmitry to hire more personnel. Other than Bodana and Anastasia of course, you certainly cannot afford to lose any further division members. For every employee you lose, you estimate this adds another 2 days to the planned 5-month timeline for *NeuroVox*. For every new hire you believe you can accelerate your timeline by 1 day.
* **Ban Tetromino from the company:** Tetromino is an extremely negative influence on VoiceTech Solutions and should be banned internally as soon as possible. You want to solicit Dmitry’s support to devote more resources to catching employees who are playing Tetromino during work hours and implement stricter punishments for violators (ideally, automatic dismissal).
* **Make sure the creators profit as little as possible from Tetromino.** You have never believed in rewarding bad behavior, and know that doing so is toxic to company culture. If Tetromino is ever monetized, you intend to make sure Anastasia and especially Bodana profit as little as possible. You personally witnessed them abusing company hardware in the middle of a workday to make their video game, which renders it VoiceTech Solutions’ intellectual property under national law. At most, they should receive a token 5% between them of any revenues their game manages to generate. Rewarding renegade employees with handsome financial benefits could destroy the culture in the Product Development Division that you’ve worked so hard to build over the last 15 years.
* **Provoke Bodana into revealing her true nature.** If 15 years of loyal service and your testimony about everything that’s happened are not enough to sway Dmitry to do the right thing, you have another plan of attack. You know that your CEO cares deeply about professionalism, and can use this meeting to showcase that fact that Bodana has none. You believe that if subtly provoked, for example with negotiation offers she considers too low or comments that prick her ego, she will predictably lash out and behave inappropriately yet again. Such a display may be just what it takes to convince Dmitry to fire her.