



Titan's Tale

Erin's script

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Synopsis

Maxillion, a global technology supplier headquartered in the USA and boasting over 50k employees, has a European Business Unit (BU) of about 40 people responsible for Global Positioning System (GPS) software components. These are supplied to a variety of other departments that make, for example, navigation software, vehicle tracking systems and smartphone-based applications. The European BU is known as **Titan**.

Titan used to be an independent company and was acquired by Maxillion a few years ago. It has adapted quite well to the new situation and the number of staff has grown by about 30% under the new regime.

The Titan flagship product is **SwiftFix**, a sophisticated software component that must be configured by experts in order to integrate it into finished, merchandisable products.

To support Maxillion's global product strategy, Titan has recently produced a similar software component, **AutoFix**, which, thanks to automated configuration code, is easier to setup. It hopes to get the new component deployed in the Smartphone and Navigation BUs soon. Both these BUs are based in the USA.

Cast of characters

(names below are unisex)

1. Alfie : A Titan Team Leader

If you take this role, play it as yourself

2. Brennan : A Titan Snr Engineer

If you take this role, play it as yourself

3. Chris : A Titan Jnr Engineer

Curious and knowledgeable. Takes on too much work and is therefore constantly overloaded.

4. Drew : A Maxillion exec (oversees multiple BUs)

Results-oriented. Charming and persuasive. Has a tendency to push people into competitive positions (i.e. slightly manipulative).

5. Erin : A Smartphone BU manager (reports to Drew)

Conscientious. Holds strong views on *how* things should be done but is more flexible on *what* should be done.

6. Francis : A Smartphone BU Technical Lead (reports to Erin)

Technocratic, logical, organized. Can be impatient with others who do not see things as clearly.

7. Glen : A Smartphone BU Engineer (reports to Francis)

Friendly. Creative. Tends to avoid taking responsibility for things.

8. Haven : A Maxillion IT Manager (not in Drew's organisation)

Technically masterful. Tormented by conflicting desires for speed and perfection.

PLEASE NOTE: The list of scenes and the characters that play in them is given on the last page.

Scene 1: A fleeting chance to make a mark

Setting

The quarterly inter-BU operations review, chaired in a robust fashion by Drew.

One and a half hours into the 2-hour meeting and Alfie has not yet had a chance to say anything about the (good) progress that Titan has been making on the AutoFix component. This is frustrating, since other BUs seem to have written off Titan as a poor acquisition, largely because of the problems seen when SwiftFix was integrated into one of the Smartphone BU's products.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Drew and Erin

Passive: Other BU heads and senior staff

Dialog

... the meeting is already underway as we join it ...

Drew

Moving on then, I'd like to hear from Navigation about the update of Poseiden. Nolan, what do you have for us please?

Alfie

Drew, could I just interrupt for a moment to talk about our agenda today?

Drew

Sure, but please keep it quick as we only have half an hour left.

Erin: improvise from here please, using your imagination and the following information:

How can Titan support a new 'customer beta' when we are still sorting out the mess of the last one?

Need to understand any new features and benefits of AutoFix.

Scene 2a: Resistance

Setting

The operations meeting (scene 1) resulted in another meeting being scheduled to decide whether deployment of AutoFix to SmartPhone is really feasible and desirable.

The meeting gets off to a difficult start. The Smartphone guys are uncooperative.

Alfie's objectives are to understand fully Smartphone's position and, if possible, get them to agree to a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix. If not, then at least avoid a definitive 'no'.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Erin and Francis

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

... the meeting is already underway as we join it ...

Erin (*somewhat strained*)

Alfie, I can understand that you want to get AutoFix deployed, but we're short of resources right now.

Integrating new components takes time – there are processes to follow ...

Francis (*a bit impatient*)

And I'd add, Erin, that AutoFix seems to be a simple replacement for SwiftFix, which we now have integrated and working.

It seems to me that changing to AutoFix would not really enhance our products in any way.

Erin

Furthermore, Alfie, we're all still reeling from the problems we had integrating SwiftFix. You guys didn't do yourselves any favours there!

Erin: improvise from here please, using your imagination and the following information:

Being in the consumer market, Erin has to find ways to go fast while maintaining adequate quality standards - when they make a mistake, it can affect millions of users

Scene 2b: Too problem-oriented

Setting

Later in the meeting to decide whether deployment of AutoFix to SmartPhone is really feasible and desirable.

The Smartphone BU people are now engaged in the discussion, but they are tenaciously seeing more obstacles than opportunities.

Alfie's objectives are to understand fully Smartphone's position and, if possible, get them to agree to a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix. If not, then at least avoid a definitive 'no'.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Francis and Glen

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

... we rejoin the meeting later on ...

Glen

If we start working with AutoFix, we're going to have to update all our IT packages.

Francis (*worried tone*)

That would be a pain. We all know how long IT changes take ;-)

Glen

And our main problem is simply keeping track of Android and iOS changes. The only way to do that is dedicated resources. I'm not sure we've got time for anything else!

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 3a: Getting down to work

Setting

Alfie finally persuaded the Smartphone BU to undertake a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix.

This meeting takes place a week later in order to discuss how to do it.

The objectives of the Titan team are to establish the main points of the integration plan and to obtain some significant commitments from Smartphone. In doing so, Titan wants to simplify/lighten the normal product release procedures, in order to go faster, and to have face-to-face contact with the client, in order to get unfiltered feedback.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Francis and Glen

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

... the meeting is already underway as we join it ...

Glen

Francis, do you know if Haven is going to be able to support us for the IT update?

Francis

I think so, but he was very cagey about when he could start.

'Only saw him for a couple of minutes, at the coffee station, and he was with Indigo.

Glen

The infamous Indago. Well I just hope that Indago doesn't get put on the job!

Francis

Never mind that. What IT version are we running at the moment?

Glen

21.3f

Francis

F??

Glen

Yes. We were on C for a while but there were big issues with the new Python libraries.

Francis

Ok. So be it.

In any case, Brennan, which IT release will we need for the AutoFix work?

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene3b: Reaching an agreement

Setting

We are now in the heart of the meeting, looking for agreement on how to go forward. Haven, the IT manager is brought in, since his services are going to be key.

The objectives of the Titan team are to establish the main points of the integration plan and to obtain some significant commitments from Smartphone. In doing so, Titan wants to simplify/lighten the normal product release procedures, in order to go faster, and to have face-to-face contact with the client, in order to get unfiltered feedback.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Francis and Haven (Haven has been called in half way through the meeting)

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

... we rejoin the meeting later on ...

Francis

Haven, thanks for joining us on the call. I hope that we're not interrupting anything?

Haven

No problem Francis. How can I help?

Francis

Well, we're here with the Titan folk to plan the integration of their AutoFix component into future product releases.

The last time we tried something like this, there were a lot of configuration issues, many of them related to the tool chain and incompatible IT releases in the two BUs.

And so I think that it's important to get you involved in the action planning.

The project starts asap.

Haven

Ok. Well, first off, we need Titan to port its development flow to the latest IT release. Then it would be best, to minimize disruption, to stick to the same release for the whole project.

Francis

And we'd have to switch to that release too?

Haven

Yes, at least for this project. We could set up dedicated servers for you, if needs be.

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 4a: Heating up

Setting

The project is underway and, inevitably, there are problems.

This is a weekly meeting. It's routine, but Glen seems to be upset about something.

The Titan team's objectives are simply to report progress and sync up with the Smartphone BU.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Chris and Glen

Passive: Alfie, Haven

Dialog

Brennan

Hi Chris. Hi Glen. Sorry that I'm a bit late.

Glen (*taciturn*)

Hi Brennan. Glad that you've turned up.

You're late, for sure, but it's not just a couple of minutes that I'm worried about. Where's this release that you promised me? That's over a week now!

Brennan

There's no update since yesterday, and I think that you were copied on the mail?

Our best guess is the 17th.

Glen

BEST GUESS??! I've just about had enough of best guesses! Can't you guys do better than that?

This is a customer-facing project, I'd like to remind you. And it's our BU that's in the firing line!

Chris

Glen, that's not fair! We've been keeping you up to date. Like Brennan says, the expected date is the 17th.

Glen (*angry!*)

BUT IT'S NOT FRIGGING GOOD ENOUGH!

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 4b: Standing up for yourself

Setting

The meeting continues, with Glen in a calmer mood, but it gets difficult again towards the close, when actions are discussed. Glen has clearly come to the meeting with some pre-conceived ideas and demands.

The Titan team's objectives are simply to report progress and sync up with the Smartphone BU.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Glen, Haven

Passive: Chris

Dialog

... we rejoin the meeting later on ...

Glen

I'm afraid that, from now on, we're going to need daily updates and, once the next release is made, it's got to be the final one. No more until after the first product launch.

Haven

It would certainly be a good thing to reduce the number of releases. Fewer surprises that way!

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 5: Corrective feedback

Setting

Chris is working hard and fulfilling an important role in the project. However, there are still things to learn and his brief intervention in the meeting with Glen earlier today ('Glen, that's not fair! ') triggered an emotional reaction.

Alfie's objectives are to see if Chris was aware of the mistake and to discuss better ways of dealing with customer irritation and anger, to help avoid this sort of mistake in future.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Alfie

Hi Chris, I'd like to discuss the 'Glen situation' with you quickly.

Chris

Sure. The guy was way out of order in that meeting earlier. We've been bending over backwards for them recently – that rant was completely uncalled for!

Alfie

And did you notice what happened when you pointed that out? I think you said that it wasn't fair?

Chris

Yeah ! It got even worse! 'Not frigging good enough' indeed.

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 6: Delegation

Setting

Chris is spending a lot of time on site, in the USA, but that is not keeping him fully occupied. So Brennan has a call with him to discuss some additional work.

Brennan's objectives are to enable and inspire Chris to sort out any and all issues that come up with the IT releases, in so far as they affect the Titan toolchain.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Brennan

Hi Chris, how are you doing?

Chris

Fine thanks. What's up?

Brennan

I want to talk to you about a new assignment. You know how the Titan toolchain depends on IT releases?

Chris

Sure. The ball and chain.

Brennan

Right. Well, I would like you to manage the ball and chain for us.

Chris

How so?

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 7: A time-wasting meeting

Setting

A weekly videoconference to review common tool infrastructure.

Since Titan is supplying AutoFix to the SmartPhone BU, it is important that their development toolchains stay aligned. Following a couple of mess-ups, Erin insisted that weekly meetings be held to check that actions were properly identified, executed and closed.

Brennan checked with Haven that everything was aligned only yesterday, by email, and really has better things to do ...

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Erin and Haven

Passive: none

Dialog

Erin

Thanks both of you for turning up promptly today. How are you?

Brennan

Fine thanks!

Haven

A bit busy, but you know how it goes 😊

Erin

Great! Well let's get straight down to it then.

The Purpose of the meeting is, of course, to review the common tool infrastructure that's been setup for Smartphone and Titan.

I suggest that we follow the usual Agenda, using our master spreadsheet to go through each open item and review the associated actions.

By the end of the call, I would like to have a shiny new updated Excel that we can circulate to everyone.

Ok for you both?

Haven

I guess

Erin: improvise from here please, using your imagination and the following information:

You are afraid that if you don't have a regular meeting, then you will lose track of what is going on in the project

Scene 8: Receiving positive feedback

Setting

A chance meeting in the Maxillion cantine.

The customer beta project has turned out well for the Smartphone BU and Maxillion in general, and Drew takes the opportunity to let Alfie know it.

Characters present

Active: Alfie and Drew

Passive: none

Dialog

Drew (*cheery*)

Alfie! I'm glad I've bumped into you.

Alfie

Hello Drew, it's good to see you.

Drew

I've been meaning to call to congratulate you on the Smartphone project. You guys did a great, great job!

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

Scene 9: Giving thanks

Setting

Alfie is back from the USA and has arranged a celebration party for the team. Before it starts, he takes Chris aside.

Alfie wishes to thank Chris for the long hours put in, the sacrifices associated with multiple trips to the USA and his willingness to learn, both from experience and from his colleagues.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Alfie

Chris, As you know, Smartphone's customers are now running with the AutoFix software, which we delivered to them almost exactly according to schedule.

Smartphone are very happy and Drew went out of his way – when I met him last week – to say how appreciative he was.

Please observe your colleague's improvisation ...

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