

PASSIVE INCOME

Project Mirror - Behavioural Playtest Analysis

Game	Passive Income
Designer	Jerome Brown - Spotlight Games
Session Date	28 March 2026
Session Length	3 hours 15 minutes
Players	4
Session Type	Guided Gameplay

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This session revealed a decisive split between a player who built toward long-term asset value and a player who accumulated volume - and the gap between their final scores shows how differently those two strategies resolved. Dele won not by owning the most but by ensuring what he owned was worth more. Kemi built the widest portfolio, but her score trailed by over £3,000, suggesting her resource allocation weakened the value of what she held. The session also exposed two significant design insights: one player disengaged entirely when unable to participate in the early game, and the game's pacing was disrupted repeatedly by a single player's deliberation - not from confusion, but from the weight of decisions the game creates. Passive Income rewards strategic clarity, but it does not yet signal clearly enough what strategic clarity looks like to a first-time player.

2. KEY TAKEAWAY

Dele won by prioritising value over volume - but the game currently offers no signal that this distinction matters. Most players defaulted to accumulation, and only the outcome revealed the difference.

3. SESSION OVERVIEW

Game	Passive Income
Client	Spotlight Games
Date	28 March 2026
Duration	3 hours 15 minutes
Players	4
Format	In-person - Guided Gameplay
Rule Explainer	Jerome Brown (facilitator)
Rules Clarity	Moderate - objective misunderstood early; clarification requested throughout

4. OUTCOME

#	Player	Final Score	Businesses
1st	Dele	£15,150	5
2nd	Kemi	£12,050	7
3rd	Gabriel	£3,680	1
4th	Getrude	£2,510	1

The £12,640 gap between first and last place is significant. Dele and Kemi separated themselves clearly from Gabriel and Getrude, but the contrast between Dele's 5 businesses and Kemi's 7 is the most telling detail - Dele's fewer, higher-value assets outscored Kemi's larger portfolio by over £3,000. Gabriel finished with a single business after losing several across the session. Getrude never recovered from an early inability to participate.

5. PLAYER BEHAVIOUR INSIGHTS

Dele: Winner - £15,150 - 5 businesses

Emerging Strategist | Calm Decision Maker | Risk-Averse

Self-Selected Personality: **Strategist**

Behavioural Match: **Confirmed**

Dele played with a patience that frustrated other players but ultimately proved decisive. His decisions were slow - he consistently sought clarification before acting, not because he misunderstood the game but because he was thinking through consequences others hadn't yet considered. He completed his side objective early and bought assets with clear intentionality, prioritising quality over speed. The most revealing moment was his choice not to take his wife Kemi's business despite having both the opportunity and the resource advantage to do so. This was not hesitation - it was a deliberate read of the table. He understood that eliminating Kemi's position would change the social dynamic in a way that didn't serve him. He later executed a hostage takeover on Gabriel's Hotel West London, a business that had already changed hands twice, and kept it. Dele's win was built on restraint and selective aggression - a combination that doesn't announce itself until the final score. Personality match - Confirmed. Dele's self-selection as Strategist was the most accurate in the session. His shadow side showed clearly: the deliberation that defines a Strategist slowed the entire table and eventually provoked a public challenge from Gabriel. The cost of his thinking style was carried by everyone else at the table.

Kemi: 2nd Place - £12,050 - 7 businesses

Competitive Aggressor | Volume Builder | Moderate Influence

Self-Selected Personality: **Instinctive**

Behavioural Match: **Confirmed**

Kemi was the most active player at the table - engaged, competitive, and consistently pressing for acquisition. She ended the game with 7 businesses, more than anyone else, and her aggressive style kept her in contention throughout. However, her resource management became a vulnerability. She overcommitted tokens on a challenge that didn't pay off, leaving herself exposed and unable to act in the turns that followed. She also had two opportunities to negotiate with Gabriel that went nowhere - not through lack of effort, but because Gabriel's default was to reject. Kemi's frustration at these missed deals was visible. Her score tells the story clearly: she built the widest portfolio, but the assets didn't convert at the rate her activity deserved. The gap between her score and Dele's suggests she was winning the wrong metric - businesses owned rather than businesses valued. Personality match - Confirmed. Kemi's self-selection as Instinctive was well-

evidenced throughout. She used what she understood and moved fast with it. The shadow appeared precisely when instinct needed to give way to calculation: overcommitting tokens felt right in the moment and cost her the turns that followed. Her instinct told her to secure the business. It didn't tell her what she'd be unable to do next.

Gabriel: 3rd Place - £3,680 - 1 business

Rigid Negotiator | Reactive Player | Isolated Position

Self-Selected Personality: **Competitor**

Behavioural Match: **Partial**

Gabriel's session was defined by a series of losses he never recovered from. He rejected two deal proposals early - both categorised as aggressive bargaining - and that pattern of refusal closed off alliances that might have protected him later. Getrude's hostage takeover of his Hotel West London was the turning point: he responded with a revenge move to take it back, which he succeeded at, but then lost it again to Dele's more calculated takeover. He also had a business removed by the Eliminate the Competition square - an intentional play by another player - and failed to build any meaningful deal with Kemi across two opportunities. By the end of the session, he held a single business and a score that reflected how exposed his position had become. Gabriel was not disengaged - he was vocal, reactive, and present - but his strategy never evolved beyond responding to what was happening to him. Personality match - Partial. Gabriel selected Competitor, and he was competitive - but in the wrong direction. His energy went into protecting what he had and reacting to threats rather than building a position worth protecting. He finished last among the engaged players. The session suggests that competitive drive without strategic direction is not enough for this game - and may actively work against a player who channels it reactively.

Getrude: 4th Place - £2,510 - 1 business

Bold Opening Move | Early Disengagement | Incomplete Participation

Self-Selected Personality: **Steady Hand**

Behavioural Match: **Mismatch**

Getrude's session fell into two distinct halves. In the early game she made the session's most aggressive individual move - a hostage takeover of Gabriel's Hotel West London - which marked her as a competitive presence at the table. But that momentum didn't hold. She arrived at an early turn with no money and no ability to act, and from that point her engagement dropped sharply. She shifted her attention to the baby

who had woken up during the session, but the timing of that disengagement - coinciding precisely with her inability to participate - suggests the game itself had lost her before the baby became the reason. By the end of the session, she held one business and the lowest score. Her profile tag of Strong Table Influence reflects her early energy, not the session as a whole. The contrast between her opening move and her final position raises a real design question: what does the game offer players who fall behind early? Personality match - Mismatch. Getrude selected Steady Hand - someone calm, consistent, and resilient under pressure. Her opening move told a different story entirely: a bold hostage takeover is not the action of someone playing steadily. The mismatch suggests her self-selection was aspirational rather than accurate. More importantly for the designer: the game's early mechanics produced aggressive behaviour even in a player who didn't see herself as aggressive. When circumstances turned against her, the Steady Hand identity she'd claimed had no foundation to stand on - and she withdrew.

6. KEY MOMENTS

The Hotel West London Exchange

What happened: Getrude executed a hostage takeover of Gabriel's Hotel West London. Gabriel responded immediately with a revenge move to reclaim it. Dele later took it from Gabriel and kept it.

What it revealed: A single property changed hands three times, and each transfer revealed something different. Getrude's move showed early aggression but no follow-through. Gabriel's revenge move was purely reactive - he reclaimed the business not because it was strategically critical but because it had been taken from him. Dele's takeover was the only calculated one: he identified the business as contested, waited, and moved when he could hold it. The same asset produced three entirely different decision-making profiles.

Dele Does Not Take His Wife's Business

What happened: Dele had the opportunity and the resources to execute a hostage takeover on Kemi's business. He chose not to.

What it revealed: This was the most behaviourally significant moment in the session. Dele was not the highest scorer at this point and Kemi was accumulating businesses aggressively. Taking her asset would have been a sound competitive move. His decision not to do so suggests he was reading the table socially as well as strategically - the relationship cost of that move outweighed the game benefit in his calculation. It also raises a design question: the game currently has no mechanism for acknowledging or rewarding restraint. This kind of decision is invisible to the scoring system.

Gabriel Calls Out Dele for Slow Play

What happened: Gabriel publicly called out Dele for taking too long on his turn, creating visible tension at the table.

What it revealed: This moment mattered beyond the individual frustration it expressed. It made the pacing problem a social problem - what had been an inconvenience became a confrontation. Dele's

deliberation was a pattern, not an incident, and the game offered no structure to manage it. Other players absorbed the waiting without comment until Gabriel named it. The tension that followed briefly disrupted the social dynamic. The game needs a mechanism - whether a turn timer or a visible turn prompt - that normalises pace without requiring a player to police it.

Kemi Spends All Influence Tokens

What happened: Kemi overcommitted her influence tokens on a challenge, leaving herself with no resource to act in subsequent turns.

What it revealed: This was not a reckless move - Kemi was attempting to secure a business she genuinely wanted. But the game does not adequately signal the downstream consequences of resource depletion in the moment of spending. She over-invested without knowing how exposed it would leave her. The turns that followed, where she watched others act while she had no tokens to respond with, were the turns that cost her the gap between second and first place. The game would benefit from a clearer visual or mechanical reminder of how influence tokens translate into future turns.

Getrude Disengages

What happened: After arriving at a turn with no money and no ability to participate, Getrude shifted her attention to the baby who had woken up and was largely absent from the game from that point.

What it revealed: The disengagement itself was understandable, but its cause was the game. A player who cannot afford to act has nothing to do but watch, and watching a 3-hour game is not compelling. The game currently has no safety net for players who fall behind early - no catch-up mechanic, no consolation opportunity, no role for a player who is financially unable to compete. Getrude's exit from active play was quiet, but it is the clearest signal in the session that the game needs to address what happens to players who lose momentum.

7. GAME FLOW

The session opened with immediate misalignment - the game's objective was misunderstood in the early turns, which meant players were not all playing toward the same goal from the start. This is a significant friction point: players who don't understand what winning looks like will make decisions that feel correct in the moment but don't compound toward victory.

The early game was defined by contrast. Dele moved slowly and methodically; Kemi moved quickly and aggressively; Gabriel rejected two deal opportunities and began building in isolation; Getrude made her boldest move of the session with the Hotel West London takeover before running out of capital. By the time the mid-game arrived, the positions were already diverging sharply. The hostage takeover sequence - Getrude takes, Gabriel retakes, Dele takes and keeps - compressed a significant amount of drama into what felt like a short window, and it produced the session's most memorable moment.

The mid-game was where pacing became a visible problem. Dele's deliberation, which was always present, became increasingly noticeable as the stakes grew. Gabriel's public challenge of Dele's pace introduced a tension that didn't fully resolve. Kemi's token depletion left her passive during turns where she had previously been the most active voice. Getrude had by this point effectively withdrawn. The game continued but it was carrying fewer active participants than it had started with.

The late game was a formality. Dele's asset value had separated him from the field, and Kemi's volume couldn't close the gap. Gabriel held one business. Getrude held one business. The final standings were not a surprise to anyone paying attention - but that clarity arrived earlier than the game officially ended.

8. BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

Personality Self-Selection Reveals Aspiration, Not Always Behaviour

All four players selected a personality type before the session. Two selections were confirmed by their behaviour (Dele as Strategist, Kemi as Instinctive), one was partial (Gabriel as Competitor), and one was a clear mismatch (Getrude as Steady Hand). The mismatch is the most valuable finding: Getrude's opening hostage takeover contradicted her self-image entirely, and the game's mechanics produced that aggression in a player who didn't see herself as aggressive. Across future sessions, the gap between self-selection and observed behaviour will become one of Mirror's most distinctive data points - a direct measure of the distance between how players see themselves and how they actually play.

Volume Over Value as Default Strategy

Three of the four players accumulated businesses without clear consideration of their long-term value. Kemi built the most, Gabriel attempted to build before losing most of what he had, and Getrude made one strong acquisition before stalling. Only Dele appeared to consciously prioritise asset quality. This pattern suggests the game does not yet make the value-versus-volume distinction legible during play - players only discover its importance at the final scoring.

Reactive Decision-Making Under Social Pressure

Gabriel's revenge takeover, Kemi's token overcommitment, and Getrude's initial aggression were all reactive moves - responses to what had just happened rather than parts of a longer plan. The game's design encourages reactive play through its hostage takeover mechanics and elimination squares, which is not a flaw, but the absence of any reward for restraint or strategic patience means that reactive play and strategic play look identical from the outside until the scores are revealed.

Negotiation Failure as Isolation

There were only two negotiation attempts in the session, both unsuccessful. Gabriel's rejection of early deal proposals left him without allies when he most needed support. Kemi's failed negotiations with Gabriel had the same isolating effect. The game contains negotiation mechanics, but the session suggests players do not yet understand what successful negotiation is supposed to produce - the incentive to deal is not clear enough in the early game to overcome the instinct to compete.

Disengagement When Unable to Compete

Getrude's withdrawal from active play at the point where she could no longer afford to act is a pattern that will repeat with any player who falls behind early. It is not a personality trait - it is a game design signal. The current rules offer nothing to a player in that position: no partial action, no observational role, no catch-up route. Any player who hits a financial floor in this game effectively stops playing while continuing to take turns.

9. DESIGN OBSERVATIONS

The Win Condition Is Not Legible During Play

The game ends on total cash plus Market Value, but players spend most of the session focused on cash and business count - the visible metrics. Market Value is abstract until the end. This means players are optimising for the wrong things in real time, and the game doesn't correct them. The winning strategy only becomes clear in retrospect.

Pacing Has No Internal Mechanism

Dele's slow play disrupted the session significantly. The game has no turn timer, no nudge, no structure that manages deliberation. In a game that rewards careful thinking, this creates a genuine design tension: you want players to think, but unlimited thinking time breaks the social experience for everyone else. The current design asks the table to self-manage this, which - as this session showed - eventually produces a confrontation rather than a solution.

The Early Game Can Eliminate Players Without Ending the Game

Getrude was effectively out of the game by the mid-session but continued taking turns for the remainder. This is the most urgent design problem the session surfaced. A player who cannot act is not a participant - they are an observer in their own seat. The game needs either a catch-up mechanism or a structural acknowledgement that a player in that position should have a different experience to what the current rules provide.

Relationship Dynamics Affect Strategic Decisions in Ways the Game Doesn't Account For

Dele's decision not to take Kemi's business was driven by their real-world relationship. This is not a design flaw - it is a feature of in-person social games. But it is worth noting for designers: the game creates situations where social dynamics will override game logic. That can produce memorable moments, as it did here, or it can produce invisible advantages and disadvantages that skew outcomes in ways players don't acknowledge.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Make Market Value Visible Throughout the Game

Problem: Players default to counting businesses and cash because those are the visible metrics. Market Value - the deciding factor - is invisible until the end.

Recommendation: Introduce a running MV tracker - a scoreboard, an app display, or a reference card that players can see at any point during the game. This alone would change how players approach mid-game decisions.

Expected outcome: Players who currently accumulate by volume will begin to factor in asset value during acquisition decisions, producing more varied and strategic play.

Introduce a Turn Timer or Turn Prompt

Problem: Deliberation by one player disrupts the experience for all other players, and the current rules offer no mechanism to manage this.

Recommendation: Introduce a soft turn timer - not a hard clock, but a visible prompt (a sand timer, a card, or an in-app nudge) that signals when a turn is running long. The player can still override it, but the prompt normalises pace.

Expected outcome: Reduce average turn length without pressuring players. Remove the social burden of managing pace from the table.

Create a Catch-Up or Consolation Mechanic for Financially Exposed Players

Problem: A player who runs out of capital has nothing to do. They stop participating while still occupying a seat at the table.

Recommendation: Introduce a mechanic for players below a certain cash threshold - a one-time grace loan from the bank, a risk card with outsized upside, or a simplified action set that keeps them in the game at a reduced level.

Expected outcome: Retain participation across all players for the full session length. Reduce the likelihood of mid-game disengagement.

Redesign the Beginner Ruleset to Front-Load the Win Condition

Problem: Players misunderstood the objective early in the session. In a game where the win condition is non-

obvious, this creates misaligned play from the first turn.

Recommendation: The beginner ruleset should open with a single, prominent explanation of what winning actually requires - cash plus MV, not cash alone. Consider a visual example on the first page that shows two players, one with more cash but less MV, and makes clear who wins.

Expected outcome: Players enter the game understanding the actual target, which changes how they evaluate every acquisition decision.

11. FINAL REFLECTION

Passive Income is a game with genuine strategic depth - this session proved it. The difference between Dele's approach and everyone else's was not luck or experience; it was a clearer read of what the game was actually rewarding. That is a strong foundation. The problem is that the game keeps that insight hidden until the end, which means most players spend three hours making decisions they don't fully understand the consequences of.

The session also surfaced two design challenges that sit above mechanics: pacing and participation. A game that allows one player to slow the table without consequence and offers nothing to a player who can no longer afford to act, will consistently produce the kind of fragmented experience this session had in its second half. These are solvable problems - and solving them would not change what makes the game interesting. It would make more of the session feel like the early game did: engaged, contested, and alive.

The most important next step is not mechanical revision. It is making the game's logic visible - so that every player, from the first turn, understands what they are actually competing for.