

Impact studies

Productivity for Business Growth: Playdale Case Study





The opportunity

The Productivity for Business Growth course is delivered by Alliance Manchester Business School in partnership with The Productivity Institute.

Led by Professor Bart van Ark and supported by experts from across both organisations, the four-day course helps senior leaders understand the drivers of productivity and apply practical tools and strategies to improve their organisation's long-term performance.

This impact study explores how Playdale used insights from the course to support digital development, automate manual processes, encourage greater cross-functional collaboration and embed a culture of continuous improvement across the business.



The organisation

Playdale is a UK-based designer, manufacturer and installer of children's playground equipment. Working with schools, local authorities, housing developers and leisure organisations, the company delivers play spaces across the UK and internationally. Playdale combines manufacturing expertise with a focus on innovation, helping communities create engaging outdoor environments for children and young people.

This case study draws on the experiences of Barry Leahey, President, and Andrea Moorhouse, Finance and Commercial Director, who attended the Productivity for Business Growth course and shared how its insights helped shape Playdale's approach to digital development, collaboration and continuous improvement.



The impact

Why did you attend the course?

Barry: As a SME business leader I'm constantly looking for those leadership golden nuggets, those marginal gains within the business which can make a big difference. On this course I was really keen to hear some real-world examples from different types of companies about how they have improved productivity.

Productivity is not just about studying graphs but also about being curious about how productivity gains can be achieved. For me it was also a great opportunity to step outside the day-to-day business, and focus on the business while not being physically on the business premises. I recommend all business leaders should step outside their business from time to time and be open to new ideas.

Andrea: Finance has always been my area of expertise, but more recently I have begun heading up the HR function and support services for Playdale, so I was really keen to broaden my knowledge around productivity. Barry recommended the course to me and I found it a fabulous opportunity to work with other business leaders and hear their challenges around productivity.

“Productivity is not something you necessarily have day-to-day conversations around until you start opening your mind to the subject much more.”

Which elements of the course did you find most applicable?

Barry: The course underlined a lot of things for me in terms of the knowledge I was craving. What I really enjoyed was meeting a cohort of like-minded individuals with a similar craving for unearthing those productivity nuggets. I thought the lectures were fantastic, but it was the people and how course was structured that I enjoyed most.

Andrea: I agree that the speakers were excellent and really knowledgeable, while I also really liked the interaction which made one feel at ease to contribute to sessions and have open discussions. I would echo Barry's thoughts too in terms of the benefit of speaking to like-minded leaders facing similar challenges. The course also really broadened my thinking in that productivity is not just an output issue but a wider operational issue, whether that be leadership or attracting talent into your business.

Have you implemented specific changes to the business since going on the course?

Andrea: As a business we had dabbled with AI for a couple of years and during the course there was a specific session on AI and digital development which confirmed our thinking that we needed to create a digital development role in house at the business which we have now done.

In the past our productivity had been somewhat compromised by our staff having to constantly pull in manual data which can be extremely time consuming. Now we can automate a lot of those manual processes which we have found transformational. Rather than collating data themselves staff are now able to spend their time analysing it and taking lessons from it. As we speak, we are now looking at how we can make further software improvements across the business. Over the last year we have also really encouraged managers and staff as a whole to get on board with using AI because it can save so much time.

Alongside this digital improvement, we also encouraging our staff to work more collaboratively and upskilling them so that they can work across different areas of the business, and this was something else I picked up from the course. Engendering this spirit of collaboration is particularly important for us as our business is currently based across three different sites. Cross functional collaboration and getting departments to work together more and think about productivity across all areas of the business is crucial.

Barry: I would answer this question more broadly in terms of culture. We are an evolving culture and the course has definitely helped us in our work around aligning some of our cultures. It is about embedding a culture of continuous improvement. In this regard I thought the sessions around employee wellness and retention were particularly interesting and showed the importance of taking a holistic view.

Would you recommend this course to others?

Barry: Absolutely. If we as a business had the time and resources we would probably send everyone on the course! It recharged me, made me refocus, and I took some insights back into the business to help turbo-charge it.

Andrea: For me personally it definitely helped my thinking and I would recommend the course to anyone in my role. Productivity is not something you necessarily have day to day conversations around until you start opening your mind to the subject much more.





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The Productivity Institute is an organisation that works across academia, business and policy to better understand, measure and enable productivity across the UK. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. (grant number ES/V002740/1).

Find out more at productivity.ac.uk

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