



## **Balancing Performance and Employee Well-being across Distances: A New Tool to Distance Managers**

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**P1: Balancing Performance and Employee Well-being across Distances: A New Tool to Distance Managers** Christine Ipsen, Louise Nygaard, Andreas Aabo  
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In the global community it is common that corporate departments work across distances like time, geography and culture. One challenge that leaders in charge of such teams face is difficulties regarding employees' well-being and team performance. The aim of this study was to design a participatory tool to leaders within this field to support their development in distance management. The study applied a divergent and convergent approach (Parners, 1992) to examine the main challenges in distance management. The method consisted of three phases; each with a divergent and a convergent sub phase. In each divergent phase, a question was raised to explore the subject and potential solutions. In each convergent phase, the questions were answered based on theories and/or collected data. The three questions addressed in our study were as followed: 1) What are the central problems concerning distance management? 2) What would characterize a tool that could support and develop distance managers? 3) How could the tool be specified to benefit distance managers and employees? Distance management literature and data collected in five large Danish engineering companies provided the basis to identify the central problems. Three interviews were conducted with three managers and eight interviews with employees working on the distance. The outcome of clustering the data was three central problem areas: Rumors as a consequence of missing communication, employees' feeling of isolation and internal conflicts affecting the performance of employees. In the next phase, we examined possible solutions for making an educational tool through a variety of idea generation methods (Cross, 2000). We sorted ideas based on criteria like: the ability to knowledge share and to do team work. We decided that an educational strategic board game would have the best potential for success as an educational tool using active learning and co-creation. In the final phase of the study, the tool was specified using a program development approach. The final outcome of the study resulted in a game specification building on an epidemic board game where distance managers play as a team. The game has been tested with a distance management consultant. The results of the test lead to changes regarding the implementation of discussion elements. The game is played by three to six distance managers with duration of approximately two hours. The players are confronted with issues related to the previously identified central problem areas, and will be educated by self-reflection, knowledge sharing, and discussing possible solutions. The game can only be won if the distance managers are able to work as a team, which underlines an essential solution in distance management. The challenge of the tool is balancing education and entertainment during playing the game.