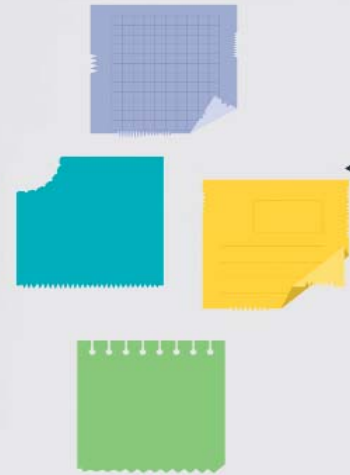


Kanban



Forget about multitasking; it simply does not work. While new tasks are constantly flooding our inbox, it is nearly impossible to stay focused and efficient. To deliver good results, time and peace of mind are essential. Kanban is a very useful approach for agile work in demanding projects.

by Stefan Posch



Dive into Kanban with these recommendations

»Agile Project Management with Kanban«
Eric Brechner; Microsoft Press; 2015

»Kanban Roadmap – How to Get Started in Five Steps«
www.leankit.com

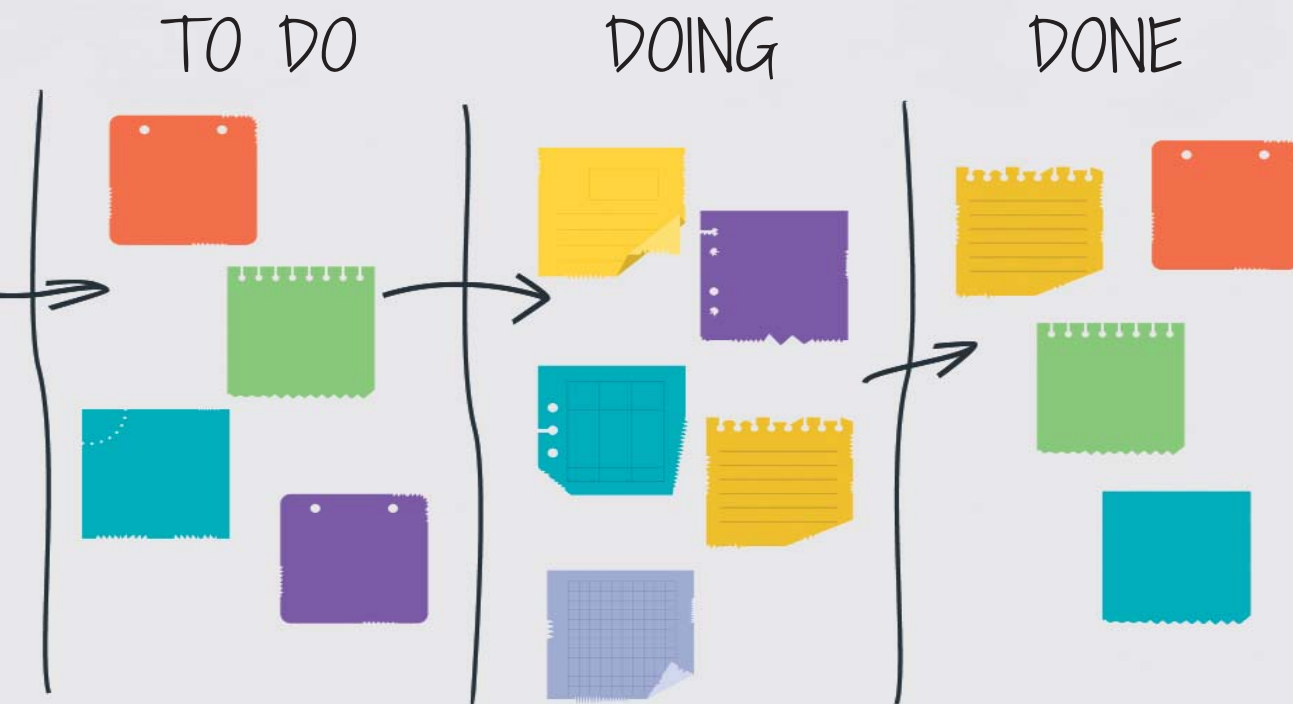
»Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great«
Esther Derby, Diana Larsen; O'Reilly UK Ltd.; 2006

If you are looking for a way to keep your energy high and your work in balance, Kanban provides you with a powerful tool. The core element is the Kanban board, visible to the team. From left to right, the four segments backlog, to do, doing and done provide all members with a quick overview. To set up your first board, you don't need much.

Start with the **backlog**. It collects all the items that are planned to do. Do not bother about size or priority of tasks and who is responsible for them. In a following activity called backlog grooming these items are broken down into chunks of tasks. Reasonable pieces are crucial; these tasks should typically be processable within a week or less.

The most urgent tasks are now sorted and moved into the **to do** section. Higher priorities move to the top. Kanban ensures that the team experiences a constant flow of tasks appropriate in size progressing over the board. Tasks are not pushed onto team members; everybody is responsible for picking tasks from the top of the to do pile. With this pull instead of a push principle, the team can handle the workload properly.

While working on the task, it is moved into the column **doing**. The team also sets an »adequate work in progress« (WIP) limit for the doing column. No more than a certain number of tasks may be handled at the same time. Once the WIP limit is reached, no new tasks may be pulled until one of the items currently being processed is finished. Sticking to the WIP limit helps the team stay focused while the outside world may completely change priorities; therefore, backlog and to do change as a consequence.



Finally, a finished item is moved into the **done** column and stays there for a certain while (for two weeks, for example). Making your team achievements visible distributes dopamine and keeps the energy and motivation of your team members high.

Starting with Kanban is easy

First of all, you have to define the objective of your Kanban board. Rule out which activities will be monitored within the board and which not. Never form a Kanban team without a clear purpose. Assigning the right team members to the board is also very relevant. Make the purpose clear for all participants during a kick-off meeting. Invite every team member to write down at least five tasks they think should be reflected on the board. Use Post-its and sort all the tasks into the right column afterwards. Now you have created your first Kanban board.

Make it work

To implement the Kanban board into your daily business seamlessly, it will be important to clarify some basic principles. Who will fill the backlog of your board? In a service or support organization, it may be filled by customers. It is also possible to entrust a product owner of a development project or all team members with the task. It is also necessary to agree on who is responsible for breaking backlog items into tasks and prioritizing them. Establish a regular short meeting. A typical stand-up takes 15 to 25 minutes

and is held in front of the board with the whole team. Check the Kanban board right to left during the meeting, starting with done and moving to backlog. Focus mainly on tasks that are stuck in the doing column. Quickly agree how the team can help the responsible member unfreeze the task right away. Never skip this meeting – it defines the rhythm of the team and may become its heartbeat.

Keep the pace

Kanban needs thorough and regular maintenance in order to develop its full potential in a team. The first retrospective meeting should take place four to six weeks after the kick-off. In this facilitated session (between one and two hours), the team reflects on the way it works together. All team members shape new rules for agility and high performance. For further improvement, monthly well-facilitated retrospectives in the first half year after the start help to develop its full potential in a team.

Your benefit

The framework itself offers some significant benefits. It is easily adaptable and can be used for any kind of work. It is appropriate for both temporary and permanent teams. It offers agile working with continuous delivery and does not need fixed sprints. It works with minimal overhead. It needs no dogmatic introduction of new roles or artefacts. And last, but definitely not least: You can start with it immediately. ●