Almost 1 month under my belt

With almost one month down and I am happy to say that I feel less like I am on another planet. I am being kept up at night though with ideas (who knows if they are good or bad – time will tell) of the ways I could potentially impact this company.

After talking with an amazing array of engineers about their work on a daily basis I am starting to notice a few trends that my weird organizational mind and my uncanny ability to observe behavior will hopefully sort and tackle.

It occurred to me that I’m very much like Spock from Star Trek, because my brain mostly works in a very logical systematic manner, and I think things out based on this is what makes sense and is the most functional way to do things. That is the Vulcan side of me. Fortunately, I have the other part of my brain, the human side that knows we are not machines and decisions and behaviors have a real effect on emotions, reactions and our physical being.

These are the things that I have noticed. These topics are keeping my head spinning at night trying to figure out the best way to solve.

1. High Load of priority tickets: Always working on tasks that are urgent or top priority will cause employee burnout and that is ultimately not good for any company. Also, if majority of tickets are always high/highest priority – the point of assigning priority to tickets becomes worthless.

2. Interruptions: Interruptions to work & trains of thought are killers to ideas, productivity, and are very time costly to completing tasks.

3. Task variety: variety in what task is being done is necessary. Hence the saying “Variety is the spice of life.” For weeks at a time one cannot be working on top priority tasks, the continual pressure is not healthy for the person, the company or the product.

4. Passion Projects: Employees should have time every month to work on personal projects. These projects are great ways for companies to come up with unique original ideas and employees feel heard & appreciated in the process.   
<https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2015/11/24/heres-why-everyone-needs-a-passion-project-at-work>

5. Housekeeping: taking care of the little things one day a month is important to the sum of the whole. E.g. Bug Bash days or Clean up days allocated to completing the quick 5 – 10 min low priority tasks. These days will instill a sense of accomplished, as well as paying some technical debt and removing annoying tickets from the backlog.

6. Stop Multi-tasking: We need to stay on task. Humans are generally terrible at multi-tasking. Thus, having more than a few ticket items open at one time actually impedes productivity.   
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2017/02/06/want-to-be-more-productive-stop-multi-tasking/#66ede82555a6>

7. Jumping the Line: When new tickets are not being added to the backlog for the next sprint but are rather interrupting current work in the current sprint this ultimately puts teams in a time pressure crunch or panic situation. Tasks are not being worked on in a systematic manner for the current sprint, but rather tasks are being worked on in a way that is chaotic.

8. Ticket importance: Planning Sprints and what tickets will be worked on in a sprint should be how the work flows. But sometimes this is not ultimately how it works out. Rather, it goes something like this: ticket importance is determined by whom says they are important. E.g. if a ‘high enough titled person in the company’ shouts loudly or a ‘lots of money paying customer’ asks - their needs trump the Sprint plan. This adjustment can be done every once in a while, but should not be the standard.

9. Standardization: Teams need to know exactly what is meant by certain terms used at work. E.g. What is meant by the term ‘done’ when completing work tickets. One person’s done is very different to another person’s done. E.g. “Versions” across teams are different and that can be confusing.

10. Team retrospectives: Team retrospectives empower the team to control their own destiny. They use them to solve problems that the team consider to be the biggest hurdles. They can improve at their own pace. It is up to the team what they improve and what they decide not to improve. The team should make clear what they expect and why, and how the things they need to have done help the team. It is important to know what is possible and to have that done, and prevent any false expectations. In an uncertain, constantly changing environment, we must continuously learn and adapt.

What I have learnt so far about Kanban vs Scrum:

Kanban vs Scrum  
I think in a company where both methods are being used amongst the variety of teams, it is tough to not have the two melt and become one – ‘Scrumban’.   
Since office spaces are shared and teams overlap greatly in completing tasks it will be difficult to keep the two approaches separate and this is okay.

Kanban as I understand it is a tool used to organize work efficiently. Kanban encourages work to be broken down into manageable chunks and uses a Board to visualize work as it progresses through the work flow. Kanban limits the amount of work allowed in any one condition. Only so many tasks can be ongoing and on the to-do list. Except the backlog tends to get overwhelmed which is a big weakness on the Kanban board.

Areas in which Scrum & Kanban the same:  
They both allow for large complex tasks to be broken down and completed efficiently. They both place a high value on continual improvement, optimization of the work and the process and both share the very similar focus on a highly visible work flow that keeps all team members in the loop on WIP and what’s to come.

Areas where Scrum and Kanban are different:  
Scrum processes place heavy emphasis on the sprint schedule, is project oriented and a continually prioritizes the backlog. The team decides how many tasks they feel can be completed within one sprint. Anything outside of this must wait for the next sprint.   
While on a Kanban team, there are no required time boxes or iterations. The limitations placed on the work flow will be regulated by the use of Kanban.

Putting a company or a team in a certain box of being either Kanban or Scrum is not necessary and limiting. Just like Ice cream there can be many varieties of agile. I feel that Contrast can take the pros from Scrum and Kanban and use them uniquely as they fit into how work is done on a day to day basis.

Retrospective is defined as ‘an exhibition or compilation showing the development of work of a particular person or task over a period of time.’ Feedback is very important for learning and knowing next time how to do something better and not repeat the same mistakes. Retrospectives is where the real learning from each other and the team really occurs. But it only truly works if at the next/future retrospective the team looks at the past retrospective to see if they truly did learn and change to make a difference on their future work. Retrospectives should start by checking the status of the actions from the previous retrospective to see if they are finished, and to take action if they are not finished and still needed. The actions coming out of a retrospective are communicated and performed in the next iteration.

<https://medium.com/@MarutiTech/what-are-the-benefits-of-agile-retrospective-meetings-8826baf8aabd>

Final thought: What creates value for the business is actually executing the project.