The Kanban Game

Kanban, Pull and Team-based Change Management



# Introducing The Game

The purpose of the game is to teach the mechanics of a pull system, the benefits of limited WIP and getting things done, the importance of managing queues correctly, the metrics that should be captured in a pull system, how to use those metrics to enact effective change, and how a team can effectively self-organize to accomplish the goals

# Setting Up The Game

## The Facilitator

The job of the facilitator is to keep the game going, help the participants see and understand the principles and practices of a Kanban system, and offer insight through questions and comments about the current state of the game in relation to the goals of the participants.

The facilitator should have a strong understanding of Kanban and Pull systems, the metrics being captured, and how those metrics should facilitate improvements in the system. The facilitator should also have some experience as a team coach and engaging team members in Socratic dialogue to enable learning.

## The Participants

To keep the game moving and prevent interest from waning, I recommend no more than 5 to 7 participants in addition to the facilitator. As the team grows in size, it takes more and more time to complete a round, which may cause interest to drop over time.

Prior to playing the game, the participants should have a least a cursory understanding of what a Kanban system is – how to visualize a process and identify queues, why limited WIP is important, and the basic mechanics of a pull system. This can be done just prior to the game being played, or can be done via other presentations and discussions at an earlier time. Once the participants have such an understanding, you can set up the basic playing area for the game.

## The Game Board

A very large whiteboard is the optimal playing area for the game. I recommend at least 8 to 10 feet wide and 3 to 4 feet tall. If you can get a larger area, you should. If no whiteboard of sufficient size is available, a large sheet of paper should suffice.

The game play area should be set up to represent a simple system that work will flow through, as a visual task board with queues and areas to notate the work in process limits. The steps in the process that will be drawn onto the game play area should include:

* **Ideation**: the area where work items first appear in the game. Represents some initial ideas about what the system may need to do. This is a queue of items that are ready to be worked through the system
* **Problem Definition**: the first ‘work’ step of the game. Represents anything from requirements gathering to analysis, and any other task that may be involved in understanding the problem to be solved. There should be a ‘Done’ queue attached to this step, to hold work that has been completed and is ready for the next step
* **Solution Definition**: the second ‘work’ step of the game. Represents the design and implementation of a solution to the problem, including UI design, software development, and any other tasks involved in creating a solution for the defined problems. There should be a ‘Done’ queue attached to this step, to hold work that has been completed and is ready for the next step
* **Demo and Delivery**: the final ‘work’ step of the game. Represents the process of demoing the working solution to the customer, obtaining any needed feedback, and making final delivery of the solution into the production environment
* **Delivered**: the ‘output’ of the game. All work items should eventually end up in this holding tank. Final metrics for work items will be calculated when work items reach this step.

I recommend that no more than three ‘work’ steps be included in the process, once again to facilitate the continued movement of the game and keep interest of the participants.

The Kanban board, when drawn on the game play area, should resemble the following:

## Tracking Round And Roll Order

Beside the Kanban board, an area should be marked off to keep track of the round number and the order of dice rolls for the participants. The purpose of the round # and dice roll order will be explained later, in **The Rules Of The Game**.

## Tracking Metrics

An area should also be marked off to track to the metrics for the game, including average lead time, average time in queues, process cycle efficiency, etc. The list of metrics that should be captured and why, will be detailed later in **Playing The Game**.

# The Rules Of The Game

# Playing The Game