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**Introducing Kanban through its values**

Posted on [January 3, 2013](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/)

[[German translation](http://www.software-kanban.de/2013/01/kanban-durch-seine-werte-einfuhren.html)]

Introductions to the Kanban method tend to start with a description of the kanban card wall (a tool) and lead on to a description of its core practices. If you’re lucky, you’ll get to hear about Kanban’s foundational principles too.

Here, I’m attempting a different approach, one that gives equal weight both to the principles (which I believe should come first – they’re not called “foundational” for nothing) and the core practices by identifying the values that underpin them. In doing so we’ll cover most of the main elements of the method, so perhaps this works as a teaching framework too?

Regardless, the result is holistic (the values are widely applicable at multiple levels), remains true to Kanban’s purpose of driving evolutionary organisational change, and helps to address three misconceptions:

i.         that Kanban is somehow a software development process

ii.         that Kanban doesn’t have at its heart the kind of values that will both challenge an organization and guide its agents of change, and

iii.         that Kanban is only for number-crunching tool-heads in control-driven organisations (I exaggerate this last misconception only slightly)

Moreover, I hope to demonstrate also that a values-based description is useful for other, more constructive reasons.

**My starting point**

From Kanban’s Foundational Principles in their usual sequence I identify four values: [**understanding**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/understanding), [**agreement**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/agreement),  [**respect**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/respect) and [**leadership**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/leadership). The first of these requires a little justification but the other three can be read directly into the principles as they are typically worded.

The values behind Kanban’s six Core Practices are a little trickier, not because the they aren’t there but because the correspondence isn’t exactly one-to-one. I chose another four (that’s eight so far): [**transparency**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/transparency), [**balance**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/balance), [**flow**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/flow) and [**collaboration**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/collaboration). However, I found it helpful to depart from the this obvious sequence and was compelled to add an additional one – [**customer focus**](https://www.meldstrong.com/sites/kanban/categories/values/topics/customer-focus) – making nine in total.

As I expand on each of these we’ll uncover a few more candidates for inclusion – I’ll highlight in bold anything that looks like a value (abstract nouns, basically). These however are less important, less axiomatic, less “core”.

**Nine core values of Kanban**

**1.    Understanding**

**Understanding** is one of the less obvious values of Kanban. I read it into the first foundational principle,  “*Start with what you do now*”. Understand the thing you’re changing, whether it’s the nitty-gritty details of a process, the way a process performs under conditions of stress, or something as abstract as your organisation’s overall approach to change.

*Insist on understanding because a healthy process that can’t defend itself is a sign that you’ve forgotten what you believe.*  
[The Process Myth](http://www.randsinrepose.com/archives/2013/01/01/the_process_myth.html), Rands in Repose

In our Kanban training we teach a Systems Thinking approach that places understanding very high on our list of priorities. It’s right there in our early introductions to the method, the basis of the very first class exercise. Where does work come from? What characterizes different kinds of work? What approaches to the problems of change and improvement tend to succeed or fail, both generally and in your organisation specifically? Why might that be?

By definition, the absence of understanding is what characterises [*cargo cult*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo_cult#Metaphorical_uses_of_the_term) implementations. Even with good intentions there’s a likelihood that understanding will be lost when change is driven top-down, justified weakly (over-relying on appeals to [*best practice*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_practice#Critique) for example) and passed unthinkingly between organisational layers.  It’s no small surprise therefore that change projects have a tendency to disappoint. Unfortunately for the lazy or unskilled manager, **understanding** and its allied values of **learning** and **alignment** take effort.

**2.    Agreement**

**Agreement** is right there in the second foundational principle, “*Agree to pursue incremental, evolutionary change*”. I like to turn this around: would you reasonably expect to be successful in implementing change without it? Could it be that it’s lack of agreement that’s limiting your progress? Or perhaps there is some agreement but it’s not deep enough – you’re agreed on the existence of a problem but not on its impact or causes (see **understanding**)?

This principle might seem to suggest another value, that of **incrementalism**. I would however shy away from describing this this as a core value, for the reason that we promote incremental, evolutionary change because it has a high chance of success, not because its alternatives in **radicalism** or **conservatism** are never better alternatives. And if **pragmatism** is a value, it is a rather slippery one.

**3.    Respect**

“*Respect for people*” is a pillar of Lean. Kanban applies this to the problem of organisational change in its third principle, “*Initially, respect current roles, responsibilities & job titles*”.

As in life, **respect** is a good guide when implementing change. Will it increase your chances of success if you start by implying that people are doing a bad job, or their roles are worthless? Probably not. Is it helpful to assume bad motives? Again, probably not. But does respect just mean “be nice”? Again no:

*Showing respect for people does not mean you have to like them, agree with their views, and fail to challenge any half baked reasoning.*  
[Stephen Parry](https://twitter.com/LeanVoices/status/284970927433850880)

That kind of respect takes **courage**, taking us to our next value.

**4.    Leadership**

**Leadership** features in most stories of success but it was only in 2012 that it was added as a foundational principle, in the form “*Encourage acts of leadership at all levels in your organization – from individual contributor to senior management*”.

Much has been written on leadership and I won’t add to it here except to make a few quick observations:

i.         You might wish for an autocrat – a Steve Jobs (or a Steve Ballmer) perhaps – but the “*at every level*” kind of leadership is something different.

ii.         Not only is leadership something to value, management isn’t inherently something to despise either (remember **respect**?).

iii.         Furthermore, neither leadership nor management precludes **self organisation**, where individuals, teams and systems have the capacity to adapt without central or senior direction. Rather, good leadership and good management create the conditions in which self organisation thrives.

iv.         Good leadership involves **challenge** (we’ve used this word already). As agents of change we must be prepared both to challenge and to be challenged.

**5.    Flow**

Turning to the practices, we start with the third one, “*Manage flow*”.

The management part of this practice speaks of tactical organisation and decision-making aimed at progressing work for optimal outcomes (**effectiveness**). At some level – though with widely varying degrees of success – this is universal.

**Flow** adds something much less common, a sense of **smoothness** and **predictability**; addressing impediments to these systematically is a powerful improvement approach, exemplified in Lean.

We also value flow in [Csikszentmihalyi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihaly_Csikszentmihalyi#Flow)’s sense, that very positive state of complete absorption in what we’re doing. This kind of flow is hard to find when distraction, interruption and constantly changing priorities dominate the work environment.

**6.    Customer Focus**

We haven’t finished with “*Manage flow*” yet! An expanded version of this practice might read something like

*Manage to timely completion the smooth flow of customer-recognised value over a range of timescales*

**Value** is meant in the sense of **purpose** (understanding the customer’s “*why*”) as much as in any monetary sense (taking care not to confuse **utility** with mere cost). A customer-focussed concern for **completion** means going beyond an activity-centric “*task complete*” or a product-centric “*potentially shippable product*”. In my experience, this is a surprisingly challenging concept whose impact can be dramatic.

Work done but not yet benefiting the customer is just sunk cost. We’ll return to this issue and address the “*over a range of timescales*” phrase when we look at the value of **balance**.

**7.    Transparency**

**Transparency** underpins three of Kanban’s core practices: the first, “*Visualise [work]*”, the fourth, “*Make policies explicit*”, and the fifth (another 2012 addition), “*Implement feedback loops*”.

Kanban creates transparency at multiple levels:

i.         In making work visible

ii.         In making visible the workflows that work items go through and the states that actual work items occupy at any given time

iii.         In making visible the parameters, policies and constraints that guide decision-making and ultimately drive the overall performance of the system

iv.         In making visible the impact of all the above in customer-focussed measures of performance

The first two types of visibility flow naturally from the kanban systems after which the Kanban method is named. The first three together create *leverage points* – points in our systems at which significant change can be effected for relatively little cost or effort. The fourth (a feedback loop) tells us that change is taking us in the right direction.

Kanban then is a way to evolve systems that learn and adapt, a strategy for organisations to find greater *fitness* relative to the competitive ecosystems they inhabit.

**8.    Balance**

The second core practice is “*Limit work-in-progress (WIP)*”. Limiting WIP across a process has multiple benefits:

* Thanks to [*Little’s law*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little), lead times (and therefore feedback cycles) tend to shorten; the customer is satisfied sooner and learning accelerates.
* Work gets started only when capacity becomes available. This creates **flow** from the work item’s perspective and keeps supply and demand in **balance** from the team or worker’s perspective (**respect**!).
* With just a little extra sophistication we can easily find **balance** between different kinds of operational work and between operational work and improvement work.

This last point suggests another principle, “*Embrace variety*”. Systems that behave well in the face of variety can be described as having a **resilience** that is good for customer, organization and worker alike, another example of **balance**. Kanban’s help in evolving resilient systems that can deliver predictability for a variety of work item types with a range of performance expectations (timescales perhaps ranging from hours or days to months or more) really is a killer feature.

For more on the role of balance in Kanban see David Anderson’s talk *When is Kanban not appropriate* [[video](http://vimeo.com/30637740)] [[slides](http://agilemanagement.net/images/uploads/KanbanWhenIsItNotAppropriate.pdf)]. My talk *Kanban the hard way* [[video](http://vimeo.com/52228737)] [[slides](http://www.slideshare.net/asplake/kanban-the-hard-way)] includes an exploration of variety and resilience.

**9.    Collaboration**

**Collaboration** features in the sixth (and last) core practice, “*Improve collaboratively, evolve experimentally [using models [and the scientific method]]*”.

Building on **agreement**, **respect** and **customer focus**, **collaboration** creates the expectation that we will look beyond our own team’s boundaries in addressing impediments to **flow**.

The full version of this practice (with the two optional parts included) speaks of working systematically in a way that improves **understanding** through observation, model-building, experimentation and measurement (**empiricism**).

“*Using models*” has a second sense that suggests values of **curiosity** and even **generosity**. Kanban actively encourages its practitioners to look outside the method to a growing body of knowledge. Kanban acknowledges roots in Lean, Theory of Constraints and Agile, foundations in queuing theory and complexity science, influences as diverse as Lean Startup and [family therapy](http://www.shino.de/2013/01/09/the-satir-change-model-and-kaizen/). Individual practitioners have their own personal favourite models – I for example draw on A3, GROW, and Influencer.

**Why stop at nine?**

It bothered me that the Lean value of **customer focus** can’t be inferred in any obvious way from the standard wordings of Kanban’s foundational principles and core practices – you could say that I had to cheat! I think though it fully deserves its place.

Less so these others that I’ve identified:

* **Learning** and **alignment** have strong associations with **understanding**. I fully recognise that a strong case can be made for each of these but I’ve gone with the one that I think best reflects Kanban’s roots in System Thinking. My [most-referenced article](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2010/06/learning-together-kanban-and-the-twelve-principles-of-agile-software/) emphasises learning, so this was a tough one!
* **Challenge** (also **vision**) and **courage** overlap sufficiently with **leadership** that I don’t regard them as axiomatic. See related post [Dole out the 3C’s](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2012/11/dole-out-the-3cs/).
* **Self organisation** would rank high as an organisational design value but **respect** seems to be an adequate guide for the change agent. All else being equal, **respect** would prefer a solution allowing or building on **self organisation** over one that doesn’t.
* **Resilience** features strongly in my thinking but it describes outcome more than approach. **Smoothness** and **predictability** similarly.

**Putting values to work**

Let’s see our nine values together then:

**Understanding, Agreement, Respect,  
Leadership, Flow, Customer Focus,  
Transparency, Balance, Collaboration**

Admittedly, that’s quite a long list – longer than the initial three or four that I have quoted at every opportunity for some time – but not so long that we’re incapable of debating, remembering and referring to them.

Do any of these resonate with you more strongly than others?  What does that say to you?  I might explore that one at a leadership retreat – the differences between practitioners might be revealing!

Do any seem to be missing in your current environment? Again, what does that say to you? Does that suggest to you some things that really need to be put right?

For example, I can look back at times where lack of the right kind of **agreement** either slowed the pace of change or resulted in change that could revert too easily. From what I read, I don’t believe I’m unique in this.

**Reflection**

I’ve made values explicit – this is **transparency** at work – creating an opportunity for **challenge** (namely that I want to see **customer focus** feature more explicitly in the core method), and increasing my **understanding** of at least one source of ineffectiveness. In an eat-your-own-dog-food kind of way, the system works! I like that.

Whether you or the wider community would choose the same values is an interesting question worthy of group exploration. How else might you go about it? I’d love to see some alternative attempts. Could the values I’ve chosen benefit from some additional structure or from being sequenced differently? Or are values so fragile that they’re better left unsaid?

Continuing a line of thought started a couple of months ago in my post [*How Deep is “How is Your Kanban”*](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2012/10/how-deep-is-how-deep-is-your-kanban/), could values provide a better foundation for a second-generation Kanban assessment tool? Does the current tool’s emphasis on practices hide the method’s true purpose? I really think that it might.

As to whether this is a good way to introduce Kanban, this can only be answered by testing it. I intend to!

[**Update**: I've written some stronger conclusions in a followup post, [Values, understanding & purpose](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/values-understanding-and-purpose/)]

This entry was posted in [Kanban](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/category/kanban/), [leadership](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/category/leadership/), [lean](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/category/lean/), [Values](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/category/values/) and tagged [A3](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/a3/), [agile](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/agile/), [change](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/change/), [complexity](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/complexity/), [Kanban](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/kanban/), [leadership](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/leadership/), [lean](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/lean/), [learning](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/learning/), [respect](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/respect/), [systems thinking](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/systems-thinking/), [values](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/tag/values-2/) by [Mike](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/author/admin/). Bookmark the [permalink](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/).

**20 thoughts on “Introducing Kanban through its values”**

1. Pingback: [Sticky notes do not make Kanban | scalable ravings](http://blog.mjouan.fr/sticky-notes-do-not-make-kanban/)
2. [Matthias Jouan](http://blog.mjouan.fr) on [January 4, 2013 at 12:37 am](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18431) said:

Very good article with which I completely agree. I’m so glad to read an article that does not describe Kanban with sticky notes and a card wall ;)

1. [Bernd Schiffer](http://berndschiffer.com) on [January 4, 2013 at 12:54 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18518) said:

Great post! There are so many posts out there with practices and principles, but only so few with the values behind Kanban. If people ask me about Kanban’s values, I’ll refer them to this great article. Thanks, Mike!

1. Pingback: [Kanban digest #1 | Morisseau Consulting](http://www.morisseauconsulting.com/index.php/2013/01/04/kanban-digest-1/)
2. [Arne Roock](http://www.software-kanban.de) on [January 4, 2013 at 4:18 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18541) said:

Great Post, Mike!  
For me the value “Respect” is also deeply incorporated in the 1st principle “Start with what you do know”. When coming to a new client, this principle means to me that I acknowledge the fact that the organization is doing a lot of things right! They must have made many good decisions in the past – otherwise they already would have been gone.  
Cheers,  
Arne

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/75b6377ab4f763c411acd4a3815f7dbb?s=39&d=http%3A%2F%2F1.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D39&r=GMike on [January 4, 2013 at 4:47 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18545) said:

Hi Arne, completely agree. There’s some overlap between the principles but they each contain good advice so I don’t mind too much! Naturally that makes overlap hard to avoid in the values also, but again, I think it’s ok. Each one resonates with different people in different ways, and that’s ok too.

1. [Dimitar Bakardzhiev](http://dimiterbak.blogspot.com/) on [January 4, 2013 at 5:49 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18553) said:

I think instead of “Agreement” from “Agree to pursue incremental, evolutionary change” we can extract “Evolutionary”. Of course “Evolution” is not a value but is the real meaning, because you can have Agreement to start a Revolution. Evolution implies that one Respects the present state. I would say Evolution implies all of Understanding, Agreement, Respect… English is not my native language so I am not able to come with a word for “Evolution” as a value…

1. Mike on [January 4, 2013 at 6:01 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18554) said:

Hi Dimitar, you have reminded me to make a small fix, clarifying the purpose of Kanban which is to drive evolutionary organisational change.

1. Greg Brougham on [January 6, 2013 at 9:19 am](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-18708) said:

Mike, your comments on understanding reminds of one of Myron Tribus’s quotes – “You can manage what you do not understand; but you cannot lead it.”

Greg

1. [Chris Chan](http://c2reflexions.com) on [January 9, 2013 at 1:23 am](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19044) said:

Mike, nice article. Thanks.

For Understanding, individuals may have their own understanding. So I think it is important that this is a ‘shared understanding’. This understanding will become transparent as the team models the flow of work through the value chain.

Chris

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/75b6377ab4f763c411acd4a3815f7dbb?s=39&d=http%3A%2F%2F1.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D39&r=GMike on [January 9, 2013 at 11:03 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19199) said:

Hi Chris, that’s a good point, and it shows how the values reinforce each other, understanding + agreement for example.

Reflecting again, there have definitely been times when I’ve been guilty of keeping my understanding or my models to myself. That’s ok when they’re not much more than a hypothesis, but there comes a point where it’s disrespectful (there goes another!) not to share. I hope I make that mistake less often now.

I polled my audience at LKCE12 in Vienna to find out how many people had managers who shared with them an understanding of Little’s law. Just two or three hands went up. That’s quite scary, at several levels…

See also my [followup post](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/values-understanding-and-purpose/) and the remarks on “Agreement in practice”. The kind of agreement that’s entered “eyes open” is more likely to be based on understanding I think.

1. [Zsolt](http://zsoltfabok.com/) on [January 10, 2013 at 10:45 am](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19285) said:

Hi Mike,

I think you wrote a very important post, but I have some concerns about it. I don’t want to criticise your thoughts, and I don’t want to be a troll either. I’m sure that it will be referenced in the future and therefore I think it is important to talk about it thoroughly.

Definition of Value

When I first read you post I was unsure which definition of value you were referring to. The most two common ones I’ve found:

(1) “An amount, as of goods, services, or money, considered to be a fair and suitable equivalent for something else; a fair price or return.” (1st definition in <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/value>)

(2) “(plural) the moral principles and beliefs or accepted standards of a person or social group a person with old-fashioned values.” (5th definition in the second section in <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/value>)

According to definition (1) the post summaries those things which I’ll get if I’m using the Kanban Method. These things (values) are “generated” by using the core principles. Definition (2) is more like a philosophical one (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory/>): the values you were writing about helps us decide what is good and what is bad in an organisation where the Kanban Method is applied. In other words: those are the things we live by. I assume that you were referring to values according to definition (1) and they were generated from the core principles.

Values we Get and Don’t Get

Based on my experience after applying the Kanban Method we really get understanding, agreement, transparency, balance and collaboration, but I wasn’t able to find a way to get the leadership, flow, customer focus and respect from the core principles.

Although I favour and support leadership and respect, but I simply doesn’t see them as something I’ll get if I introduce Kanban in my organisation. They are something I need to do in order to deliver the mentioned values, so they are more like an input than an output to me. From another aspect, they feel into definition (2): we value respect, we value leadership…

Besides that the phrase customer focus is misused, I don’t see it as a value. If you ask an executive of any organization, she won’t say that they aren’t customer focused. On the contrary, all the organizations are customer focused, because that’s why there were created: serving the customers (it is true even for the public sector). The problem is that the level of awareness differs in an organization. So, if the customer focus is always there, there is no way that any method can add it as a value. Additionally, you cannot get customer focus from any of the core principles ((1) definition). At the moment the only thing I can think of is to remove the word “customer” from the value, and use only the word “Focus”. It is cleaner and although you cannot get focus from the core principles, the practice shows that the organizations who have applied are more focused on what (and how) they are doing, and you can have focus on all the levels of an organization.

I don’t see flow as a value either. It is present – however without understanding you may not see it -, it is something which generates value, or it is a mental state. Therefore I like the effectiveness and predictability instead.

What do you think?

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/75b6377ab4f763c411acd4a3815f7dbb?s=39&d=http%3A%2F%2F1.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D39&r=GMike on [January 11, 2013 at 2:22 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19457) said:

Hi Zsolt,

I think you wrote a very important post, but I have some concerns about it. I don’t want to criticise your thoughts, and I don’t want to be a troll either. I’m sure that it will be referenced in the future and therefore I think it is important to talk about it thoroughly.

I thank you and others both for the encouragement and for helping me by their feedback to express myself better :-)

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You’re right, I didn’t define “values”. Another definition from the same site that’s closer to what I had in mind is this one:

4. A principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable

but your “those are the things we live by” is spot on. We might go on to ask whether we live by them unconsciously (not noticing them until confronted by something in ourselves or others that does’t fit), or whether we make the effort to reflect on them and let this process modify our behaviour.

**Aside**: I’m currently readying Dan Mezick’s book The Culture Game. One of his named patterns is *Pay explicit attention*, using the example of Kanban as “paying explicit attention to flow”. Reflecting on Kanban’s values is an internalised form of paying attention to our roles as change agents, and I’ve made it more explicit by writing about it. The conversations we’re having as a result are a loosely-structured way of paying attention as a community. It would be very cool if we could somehow turn this interaction into a repeatable practice (or “culture game”). Revisiting the “How deep is my Kanban” assessment tool with both values and Dan’s ideas in mind might achieve that, or perhaps it’s enough simply that we’ve added to our vocabulary.

Values we Get and Don’t Get

Based on my experience after applying the Kanban Method we really get understanding, agreement, transparency, balance and collaboration, but I wasn’t able to find a way to get the leadership, flow, customer focus and respect from the core principles.

I presume you mean “get” in the sense of “derive as a benefit” rather than “read into” the foundational principles or core practices.

Before answering these next points in detail, it should be clear now that the values underlying Kanban and the value derived from Kanban are two meaningful but very different concepts. In the first of my two articles (ie this one) I really had the former concept in mind; in the second ([followup](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/values-understanding-and-purpose/)) article I was still thinking mostly the former but got into the latter as I made an attempt at identifying Kanban’s purpose.

Although I favour and support leadership and respect, but I simply doesn’t see them as something I’ll get if I introduce Kanban in my organisation. They are something I need to do in order to deliver the mentioned values, so they are more like an input than an output to me. From another aspect, they feel into definition (2): we value respect, we value leadership…

**Leadership** is actually pretty straightforward. “Encourage acts of leadership at every level in the organisation” is the fourth foundational principle; if you’re deeply enough into the method, you’ll be finding ways to do that. Admittedly the core method definition doesn’t say how but it’s no accident that David’s 3-day class used to be called a “Leadership workshop”. Referring again to Dan’s book, if leadership is *influencing others in a social context*, it’s hard to see how organisational/process change of any kind can happen without it. Putting up a board can be one small act of leadership from which many others will follow.

Like leadership, **respect** is something we’re called upon to value by the foundational principles. We show respect (all the time, not just initially). Making it explicit when we explain that this is how Kanban approaches the problem of change encourages others to do the same. The process continues with disrespectful organisational behaviour getting called out or by displacing disrespectful practices with more respectful ones.

Besides that the phrase customer focus is misused, I don’t see it as a value. If you ask an executive of any organization, she won’t say that they aren’t customer focused. On the contrary, all the organizations are customer focused, because that’s why there were created: serving the customers (it is true even for the public sector). The problem is that the level of awareness differs in an organization. So, if the customer focus is always there, there is no way that any method can add it as a value. Additionally, you cannot get customer focus from any of the core principles ((1) definition). At the moment the only thing I can think of is to remove the word “customer” from the value, and use only the word “Focus”. It is cleaner and although you cannot get focus from the core principles, the practice shows that the organizations who have applied are more focused on what (and how) they are doing, and you can have focus on all the levels of an organization.

As I admitted in my first article, **customer focus** is hard to “read into” the foundational principles or core practices and I cheated a little by expanding the core practice *Manage flow*. However, when you look at the impact of properly understanding demand, getting end-to-end feedback on the process, collaborating outside our immediate span of control, applying the increasingly common practice of building validation (in the Lean Startup sense) into our process designs, it seems to be an almost inevitable result. Making it an explicit value makes that result all the more likely.

I understand that focus is a Scrum value and it’s easy to see that it’s a good fit – no problem with that at all. Kanban has the very specific practice *Limit work-in-progress* and I chose **balance** as the underlying value because it allowed me to say so much more than I could have done with **focus**, taking in some of the more advanced aspects and outcomes of the method. Choosing focus would have made it harder to avoid perpetuating the myth that limiting WIP is mostly about multi-tasking, and I had the opportunity to cover the mental side of focus as part of **flow**.

I don’t see flow as a value either. It is present – however without understanding you may not see it -, it is something which generates value, or it is a mental state. Therefore I like the effectiveness and predictability instead.

**Flow** is interesting because by valuing it we get it! We pay explicit attention to it, address impediments to it. Most frameworks would claim to deliver effectiveness; Lean and Kanban make flow a constant strategic priority from which learning, effectiveness and predictability follow.

Does that help?

Mike

1. [Zsolt](http://zsoltfabok.com/) on [January 11, 2013 at 8:40 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19490) said:

> I presume you mean “get” in the sense of “derive as a benefit” rather than “read into” the foundational principles or core practices.  
Exactly. This is what I had in my mind.

> Does that help?  
I would say partially. ;-)Judging a trilogy by its first piece might not be a good idea, so I’ll take my time, wait and see where this initiative is going.

Thank you for answering my long comment, and if you would like to discuss the topic further you know where to find me.

1. Alex on [January 14, 2013 at 2:29 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19670) said:

Very interesting article / approach!  
We just started with implementing kanban and never came across following principles:

“Encourage acts of leadership at all levels in your organization – from individual contributor to senior management”.  
“Implement feedback loops”.

How can I keep on track with further changes of the kanban principles?  
I do not find a source like the scrum guide.

Thank you in advance!  
Alex

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/75b6377ab4f763c411acd4a3815f7dbb?s=39&d=http%3A%2F%2F1.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D39&r=GMike on [January 14, 2013 at 3:09 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19672) said:

Hi Alex, good question.

There is as yet no guide, but one is in the works, probably to be released by [Lean-Kanban University](http://leankanbanuniversity.com/). For now we have the [kanbandev homepage](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/kanbandev/) – not very detailed but what’s there is definitive.

David first floated the idea on his blog [here](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/kanbandev/message/15429) then solicited feedback on kanbandev here. Subsequently, speakers spread the message at a number of conferences and the LKU-accredited training community incorporated the new principle in their materials or will do so very soon.

Short answer: kanbandev is the place where anything like this will get announced and discussed (in fact this article and its followup are currently under discussion there).

Regards,  
Mike

1. Alex on [January 16, 2013 at 4:48 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-19873) said:

Thanks for the reply

1. Pingback: [99 Second Presentation: Kanban Values or How I Almost Attacked a Manager With Hot Coffee » Agile Trail](http://agiletrail.com/2013/01/22/99-second-presentation-kanban-values-or-how-i-almost-attacked-a-manager-with-hot-coffee/)
2. [Mattias Skarin](http://www.crisp.se) on [January 23, 2013 at 10:28 pm](http://positiveincline.com/index.php/2013/01/introducing-kanban-through-its-values/comment-page-1/#comment-20739) said:

Great post Mike. I like how you framed a number of key ideas that has been discussed. Especially nailing Understanding. Thanks!

1. Pingback: [20. Treffen der Limited WIP Society Cologne | Limited WIP Society Cologne](http://lwscologne.wordpress.com/2013/01/25/20-treffen-der-limited-wip-society-cologne/)

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