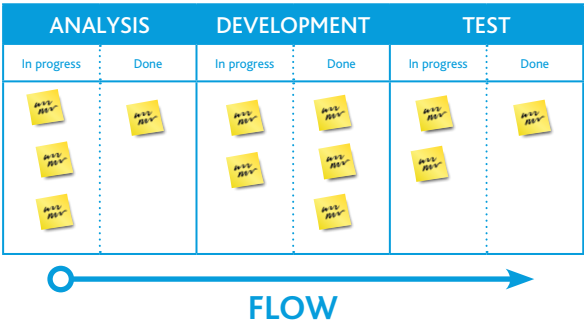# KANBAN BOARD

A Kanban board is a way to visualise your workflow.

If your team deals with 'knowledge work' (such as writing software), a lot of what you do is effectively invisible. It is therefore difficult for everyone to have a good understanding of the work's status and spot work piling up. By visualising workflow, a Kanban board can provide insight into your current position and identify problems in your process. This helps you make informed choices about adapting your process.

The board itself is made up of cards and columns. The cards are known as 'Kanban' cards. Each one represents a work item at a specific step in your workflow (process). Each column is a step in the workflow, from left to right. In software development, this might include analysis, development, testing and so on. Team members move the cards back and forth across the board's columns as they carry out the necessary activities.

Implementation

Before setting up the board, do the following:

1. In a small team, sketch or model your workflow in order to confirm what your current process steps are – check this with others to be sure you agree the point at which work comes in or out.

2. Work with the team to pull together a list of all your current work. Bear in mind that it is more than likely to be a first attempt because, as soon as your team starts working with the board, you may find hidden work items and process steps.

3. Get hold of the following:

   • A whiteboard (and somewhere to put it) or some paper and space on the wall. Whichever you opt for, make sure your team will be able to see the board and there is enough room to gather around it.

   • Marker pens.

   • Some index cards or Post-it notes.

   • Something to stick your Kanban cards to the wall (such as little magnets or blu-tack).

Outcome

Function

Benefit

Who

Scaling Factors

Difficulty

To set up the board, do the following:

1. Draw an initial column to represent either your input queue or backlog.

2. Draw a column to represent each of your process steps and label these accordingly:

   • Split process steps in two: the first labelled 'in progress' and the other 'done'. This helps to signal work for which the next activity can be started. If you do not have space to split columns, assign different colours to the cards or use small colourful stickers to represent the states 'in progress' and 'done'.

3. If you have defined work-in-progress (WIP) limits, indicate them on the board.

4. Write a card for each work item. Do not try to formalise your cards at this point. For each one, just write a title and any other necessary identifying information.

5. Put each card in its appropriate column, based on its current position in the workflow.

Once the board has been set up, it is each team member's responsibility to keep it up-to-date as they work on an item and it moves along the workflow.

If you are running daily stand-ups, start incorporating the board (and the information it is making visible) into them.

To help increase the visibility of your work you can also:

• Add coloured Post-it notes to cards to highlight important information such as a blocked piece of work, dependencies or high priority items.

• Add 'avatars' or small name tags to cards to show what team members are actively working on.

• Date stamp important changes to track cycle time.

Potential pitfalls

• **The board is not kept up-to-date -** if this happens, you lose the ability to visualise your workflow. Encourage all team members to refresh the board themselves or to make sure someone else does when they are working remotely.

• **The board is used as a 'task' board -** Kanban board should be used to track work items, each of which (represented on a card) should have some potential business value. If you break these down unreasonably into a 'to do' style list, the board can quickly become messy and actually obscure work rather than making it more visible.

If you want to learn more, consider reading:
Kanban by David Anderson
Kanban and Scrum - Making the Most of Both by Henrik Kniberg and Mattias Skarin