

Neil : The Kanban experiment. What have I learned?

Why did I start doing Kanban?

Nice week of work planned out.. Then BANG. Big problem popped up and I had to drop everything.

Resolved big problem, but was then way behind on things I needed to do that week.

Trying and failing to juggle lots of competing priorities.

Dashing between multiple systems to understand what needed doing.

No one place with a clear idea of what I'm working on as a whole.

What is Kanban?

Kanban is a method for managing knowledge work which balances demands for work with the available capacity for new work. Work items are visualized to give participants a view of progress and process, from task definition to customer delivery. Team members “pull” work as capacity permits, rather than work being “pushed” into the process when requested.

Visualises work

Keep everything in the same place.

Have an overview of what's to-do, what you're doing and what you've done.

More transparency and accountability for who's doing what.

Easier to pass tasks between team members.

How do you do Kanban?

Buy some post-it notes.

'Super Sticky' post-its are recommended for whiteboards. Normal ones don't stick.

Buy a Sharpie marker pen!

Three columns to start with...

To Do

Doing

Done



Some principles I established early on...

- Start the week by discussing what goes into the To-Do column.
- Try to have 1 owner for every task. Stick an initial on the Post-It note so everyone know who's dealing with it.
- Make whatever is on the Post-It note descriptive enough so that everyone understands what it is at a glance.
- Don't create a task that'll take longer than a week to complete. Try to break things down to make them more granular and achievable. This prevents the board from becoming static and thoroughly demotivational.
- Aim to move everything into 'Done' by Friday.
- If a task didn't make it to the 'Done' column, reflect on what happened. Remember—this isn't about blame! It's about learning and spotting opportunities adjust/improve.

Later stuck a 'New/Parked' column for new tasks that weren't yet ready to go on the board.



Some reflections..

- Good method for understanding what you've done & why you might be feeling a bit frazzled by the end of the week.
- Can easily identify when bottlenecks are building.

- Watch out for how many things mount up in the 'Doing' column (see below). Less is more! Time slicing makes you slower and is demotivational.



- A physical board can be more useful than a digital one! Tangible, always visible, people can interact with it & see what you're working on. Something oddly pleasing about moving a post-it note to the 'Done' column.
- It's more approachable for people who are not super comfortable (or have the time) with learning new digital tools & systems.
- Good method for emptying my head of work rather than carrying it around in my brain thinking 'Ooo! I have to remember to do that'.
- Caveat - this is not a magic bullet to help you do 70 hours work in a 35 hour week! But it will help you understand where your time is spent.