

Everything You Need to Know About Kanban Boards

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With its roots in Japan, Kanban is an increasingly popular way for teams and individuals to manage their work. This visual methodology has enabled top-performing companies as diverse as SAP, Pixar, Spotify, BBC, and Zara to increase productivity, efficiency, and rates of completion. The Kanban board sits at the heart of this system.

In this article, we will explore everything you need to know to reap the benefits of Kanban boards, including how they function, use cases, examples, samples, and tips for choosing online tools. We also hear from several Kanban experts, who offer best practices and their real-world knowledge on how to get the most out of this strategy.

What Is a Kanban Board?

The Japanese term *Kanban* roughly translates into “card you can see” or “visual board,” and as such, Kanban methodology places a high value on the simplicity and visual nature of project management boards to optimize workflow and delivery. The human brain processes visual information much more quickly and with greater accuracy than it does with text, so it makes sense that a streamlined visual representation of workflow will be more effective than even the simplest to-do list.

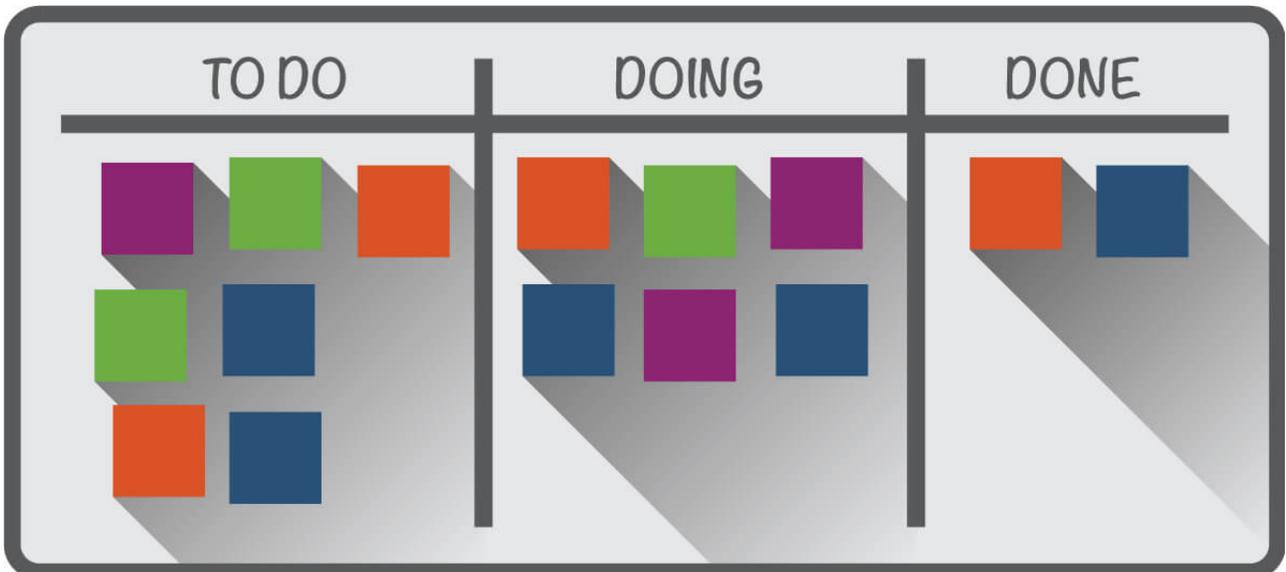
Kanban is one of many management techniques that rely on visual control or the recognition that visual signals and simple graphics are better than text for communicating straightforward information. First used in manufacturing, the Kanban process is based on team members pulling work from a backlog, then completing work items one at a time and only as needed — a concept known as *just in time*. Kanban is a highly flexible, loosely structured process that focuses on work in progress (WIP).

The Kanban board is the physical representation of the Kanban process. A basic Kanban board uses three columns, *aka lanes*: To Do, Doing, and Done. Your team may elect to add more columns if needed. A team of software developers, for example, might use five columns (Next, In Development, Done, Customer Acceptance, and Live). Use as many columns as necessary so that the board depicts each stage in work-item processing.

Team members move a physical Kanban card representing one task or work unit horizontally across the board from left to right to reflect the status of that task. Cards are usually color-coded to indicate priority, assignees, or any other information relevant to the project. Kanban cards must be easily movable; Post-it notes on a whiteboard or index cards on a bulletin board are ideal for teams using physical boards. If your team has members in multiple locations, digital boards are easier to update and share among the group.

KANBAN CARD

PART VISUAL	
PART NO	
PART DESCRIPTION	
PRODUCT LINE	
WORK STATION NO	
LINE SIDE RACK NO	
LINE SIDE LOAD NO	
REPLENISHMENT TRIGGER QTY	
REPLENISHMENT FROM LOCATION	
REPLENISHMENT QTY	



How to Organize a Kanban Board

When creating a Kanban board, the customer or product owner assembles and prioritizes a backlog of work items to be accomplished. This can be user stories, features, bug fixes, or any measurable unit that can be tracked through the *Kanban cycle* — the amount of time it takes for a single item to be completed.

You'll post backlog items in the To Do column on your Kanban board. Team members pull from the backlog at any time to begin work, at which point the task enters the WIP (Doing) state. Unlike in the Scrum method, which is focused around accomplishing a defined amount of work in a sprint over a set time period, the product owner in Kanban has the flexibility to reprioritize the backlog at any time without affecting work already underway.

Note that no tasks are assigned. Team members pull tasks from To Do column when they have available capacity, usually after they have finished their previous task.

The Doing column drives the Kanban process. The only constraints in Kanban are WIP limits placed on the number of tasks in this column at any one time. WIP limits mandate that the team can't enter any new work into this column until they complete the current assignment. Set by the team, WIP limits should be realistic and not result in work overload for any team member. This ensures that the team is always addressing the highest-priority projects and does not deviate to other tasks.

Unlike Scrum, Kanban focuses on completing an entire project, rather than breaking down work into sprints. Therefore, you may want to separate projects using horizontal swim lanes.

Because workflow is continuous in Kanban with no fixed-time iterations, the team never clears and resets a Kanban board (unlike a Scrum board). Instead, they constantly add new stories or tasks, with a designated priority, which are then pulled into the Doing column after a previous task is completed.

Jim Benson, Owner of Modis Cooperandi and a Personal Kanban guru, explains why Kanban boards work so effectively: "Visualizing tasks when prioritizing requires less energy than holding options in your head."

In summary, your Kanban board should help you do the following:

- Visualize your work
- Limit your WIP
- Adapt, monitor, and improve your process

The History of Kanban

Kanban got its start in manufacturing when Toyota decided to overhaul its assembly and production system in the early 1950s. Taiichi Ohno, father of the Toyota Production System (TPS), drew inspiration for the early Kanban system when he noticed that grocery

stores would only stock enough items on their shelves to meet customer demand. Ohno applied this concept to Toyota's production plant.

In the TPS, assemblers pulled parts on an as-needed, just-in-time basis. This meant there were no large stockpiles of pieces and no expensive storage — only a continuous process of drawing upon a small inventory and completing the work.

As part of the process, Toyota introduced a simple production instruction card called a Kanban to track movement of inventory through assembly. The card included product-related information and indicated which parts had been used and when inventory needed to be replenished.

With automakers, Kanban is associated with *continuous-flow manufacturing*, an industrial paradigm that centers on using pull production techniques with small batch sizes and decreasing the time before processing for product units. In its ideal state, continuous-flow manufacturing results in single product units flowing from process to process with no waiting time (one of the seven wastes of manufacturing, according to Toyota). Not only time efficient, continuous-flow manufacturing helps manufacturers better respond to customer demand, which lets them focus on adding value for clients.

Although Kanban started as a coordination system for manufacturing, it would later spread to knowledge work. The legendary Agile methodologists Tom and Mary Poppendieck in 2003 described the Agile task board as a Kanban system for software, and in 2004, management consultant David Anderson introduced a streamlined “pull” system for Microsoft engineers to track and resolve software issues, thus bringing Kanban to development.

In Anderson's framework, developers pulled an issue from a to-do pile to troubleshoot and resolve. Once they resolved the issue, the developer sent the software to the next stage. Microsoft's Kanban process remained strictly virtual until 2007, when Corbis (at the time, Bill Gates' image licensing company) introduced a visual whiteboard for tracking IT request tickets using Post-it notes.

Also in 2007, the influential Kanbandev online user group formed and became a place where members could argue and refine Kanban's role in Agile development. In 2009, the Lean Software and Systems Consortium was formed to tackle business issues associated with Lean; meanwhile, the Limited WIP Society sought to build a name for the Lean movement.

Kanban Spreads to Sales, Human Resources, and More

Today, a Kanban system refers to both the overarching methodology and the visual board itself, and it's moved beyond the development team. As Kanban boards became virtual and remotely accessible, Kanban systems gained a foothold in business areas that did not involve saleable products and services.

Business managers realized that Kanban could help them coordinate any repeatable process with multiple work items. Sales teams, for example, began to use Kanban to track progress on leads and made Kanban cards with checklists to track their groundwork prior to making a sales pitch.

Kanban and Human Resources

Human resources departments at small companies can make Kanban cards for each applicant, then track the applicant's progress through the reference, interview, testing, and onboarding processes. This can speed up the hiring cycle.

Mark Noneman, an Enterprise Agilist and Kanban Teacher at [Agility Software](#), cites the example of a client, the HR department of a global technology company. The manager faced several challenges. She needed to understand the work done by the benefits team, including projects (such as open enrollment) and transactions (such as employee requests for benefits changes). The manager also wanted greater insight into demand for HR's services, their monthly workload, and their overall performance. She also had to convey this information to higher levels of management.



The HR team began using Kanban “simply to visualize all the work they had: what was being demanded, what was being serviced, and what has been delivered and when,” Noneman explains. “Eventually, the team began limiting the number of items worked at any one time (initially just the number of items per person and eventually, the number of items across the whole team). We know that limiting the work in process smooths the flow of work and, in fact, delivers more value, faster.

“Finally, her team began to see opportunities for eliminating waste simply because they better understood what was really happening. For example, almost everyone on the team had been developing benefits policies on their intranet. By having fewer people focus on this area, those individuals got a lot better at doing it, freeing others to focus on other things,” he recalls.

“It wasn't that hard to get started with Kanban, but it did require learning some new ideas and some new skills, then practicing them every day. By following that simple formula, any knowledge worker team can begin to leverage Kanban to improve (and demonstrate) their value to the organization,” Noneman concludes.

Kanban Across the Enterprise

For marketers who coordinate complex marketing portfolios for multiple products, Kanban boards can help track progress on internal procedures and marketing activities.

Marketing teams can also use Kanban boards to build an editorial calendar for the different types of content they produce.

With auditors, their collective efforts typically involve distilling and synthesizing information from several separate audits, which they can present in a succinct report to the board. They use Kanban boards to track progress and salient findings from each lower-level audit, thus improving coordination.

Publishers, both digital and traditional, use Kanban boards to track content as it moves through the publishing process, from writers to editors to designers and layout specialists to proofreaders and so on. The Kanban system makes it easy to answer one of the oldest editorial questions: When will a piece be ready to run?

Even executive teams have turned to Kanban to keep track of organization-level issues. While the work of an executive team hardly seems easy to repeat, the visual nature of Kanban can help here too. Arif Harbott, formerly CIO of Britain's Ministry of Justice and now a digital transformation adviser, helped the ministry adopt Kanban. He says in "[The Executive Kanban Experiment](#)" that Kanban gives leadership teams the chance to visualize action and progress on the many wide-ranging issues they must tackle, which is preferable to "having our work buried in emails."

In another example of a diverse application of Kanban, developers at the shared inbox app Front several years ago created a "[public roadmap](#)" using Kanban cards. They created a public board that showed features in development and allowed people to vote on the ones they thought should be prioritized. It was a big hit — CEO Mathilde Collin said that users' reactions exceeded expectations and made customers happy while increasing the product's value faster.

The Benefits of Kanban: Continuous Improvement, Happier Teams

Using Kanban allows you to deliver greater value in less time, shortening your workflow cycle. This translates into reduced risk, higher customer satisfaction, greater transparency for your team, and increased empowerment, allowing teams to manage themselves.

[Anthony Register](#), a business agility coach in Charlotte, North Carolina, has incorporated Kanban in an initiative to help an enterprise in the highly regulated utility and energy sector become more responsive and nimble. Software delivery is only part of the effort. He and the company have applied Kanban in several non-IT areas, such as helpdesk support, HR, field operations, and infrastructure.

Prior to implementing Kanban as part of the Agile transformation, the company's teams were siloed and had little visibility into the workflow. Customer focus and transparency were lacking. Kanban unlocked productivity and cost-savings benefits, Register says.

“True visibility into the knowledge work unveiled continuous improvement opportunities that were implemented by the individual teams to improve workflow. Flow issues were identified and better understood through the simple visibility of the work on the Kanban board,” Register explains.

“The teams were able to better understand the value of WIP limits to improve getting things done (not a bunch of stuff being worked on). On a more personal note, I observed the formation of team chemistry, team happiness, and team engagement on the more successful teams,” he notes.



How to Use Kanban to Identify and Reduce Waste

One reason Kanban is so effective is that it reduces waste. In physical production, waste is obvious when it involves leftover materials. But in both manufacturing and knowledge work, waste can take the form of waiting, excess movement, underutilized manpower, and redundant processes.

Taiichi Ohno helped develop the idea of the seven wastes, or *muda*, that would later be popularized in bestselling books by James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones of MIT. In brief, each of the seven wastes causes more resources to be consumed than is necessary. Toyota used the value-stream mapping technique to track the events that took a product from raw material to customer-ready. This helped identify where waste was created.

Project Management Boards: Agile vs. Scrum vs. Kanban

The terms *Agile*, *Scrum*, and *Kanban* are often used interchangeably, which can cause confusion. Agile refers to an iterative approach to building software or managing workflow by accomplishing tasks incrementally. The concept of Agile was introduced in 2001 by independent software developers as an alternative to the traditional Waterfall approach of completing software projects all at once.

Both Scrum and Kanban fall under the Agile umbrella of incremental project management processes; they are the frameworks that put Agile methodology into practice. Scrum is a formal, structured process that breaks down projects into fixed-length increments (usually lasting one to two weeks) called *sprints*. At the end of each sprint, the team is able to potentially ship a deliverable piece of software or product.

Kanban, on the other hand, is more simplified and streamlined than Scrum. Kanban does not focus on fixed sprints, but rather on how much work is in progress at any given time. Flexible, scalable, and adaptable, Kanban is easy to apply to existing projects, including complex work underway in an Agile environment, where a team may need more structure and columns to fully represent their projects.

Kanban and Scrum boards look similar to the undiscerning eye, so here's how to tell the difference: Though both use work item status markers like To Do, In Progress, and Done, Scrum limits work in progress *per iteration*, while Kanban limits work in progress *per state*. Items are only added to the Scrum board before an iteration begins, whereas they can be added to a Kanban board as soon as capacity opens up. The project owner almost never makes changes to a Scrum board, but they can do so to a Kanban board.

You may spot an Urgent lane for high-priority items on a Kanban board, but you'll never see one on a Scrum board, where work can't be changed once an iteration has begun. Tasks on Scrum boards are more regularly sized than those on Kanban boards, due to a grooming and prioritization process in Scrum that includes resizing the work. And at the end of an iteration, you'll see that all the tasks on the Scrum board have been moved to Done, which rarely happens with a Kanban board.

A Deeper Look at Kanban

Kanban differs from Scrum in that it focuses on completing an entire project of work and not merely individual sprints. Workflow in Kanban is measured in cycles, which represent the amount of time it takes for a single task or work item to be completed. Cycles have no set time limits; rather, workflow is based on continuous delivery. As the team becomes more efficient, they optimize workflow and productivity, thus decreasing cycle times. This process is known as *continuous improvement*. As a result, forecasting the delivery of future projects becomes easier and more accurate.

The beauty of a Kanban board is its simplicity. With three major columns and a focus on WIP, a Kanban board quickly reveals bottlenecks in workflow, allowing team members to immediately take action by "swarming in" to help move the project to the Done column. Unlike with Scrum, Kanban teams are not required to be cross-functional — you can have a team of specialists with similar skills working on a rapidly evolving product in a Kanban environment. Kanban also works well in creative environments.

San Francisco Agile Coach [Chris Gagne](#) says that Kanban is more useful than Scrum when a team has difficulty planning a whole sprint ahead. This includes teams that frequently face urgent issues.



“With Kanban, you can change the queue at any time and avoid interrupting the work in progress. It’s a lot more flexible.”

The Four Principles of Kanban

Four basic principles have emerged through the evolution of Kanban in knowledge-based industry.

1. **Start with what you do now.** You do not have to start from scratch to apply the Kanban process. Kanban, with its focus on WIP, can be easily overlaid onto your current project and processes.
2. **Agree to pursue incremental, evolutionary change.** Kanban is incremental by nature and, therefore, focuses on making small, continuous changes to current processes that can be easily tracked. Major overhauls of processes are discouraged, as users tend to resist large-scale changes.
3. **Respect the current process, roles, responsibilities, and titles.** Kanban recognizes that your current processes have value and doesn’t mandate changes to existing processes. Rather, Kanban introduces small, incremental alterations into your current processes to contribute to the overarching goal of continuous improvement. Your team will respond more readily to small adjustments rather than wide-sweeping changes.
4. **Encourage acts of leadership at all levels.** In Kanban, leadership is not relegated to a designated few. Rather, the entire team is responsible for fostering kaizen — a mindset of continuous improvement leading to workflow optimization in a process that all team members can contribute to and embrace.

The Six General Practices of Kanban

In addition to the aforementioned four principles, the Kanban process embraces six practices:

1. **Visualize workflow.** Seeing work progress across the Kanban board is key to optimizing workflow and revealing bottlenecks in the pipeline. When team members can easily identify a problem, they can take specific steps to resolve the issues and put workflow back on track.
2. **Limit work in progress (WIP).** The WIP column plays a central role in the Kanban process. Restricting WIP forces the team to focus on a finite number of tasks and drive work to completion.
3. **Manage flow.** Consistently tracking and analyzing cycle times and other agreed-upon metrics leads to an ever-evolving process of fine-tuning and streamlining processes to improve workflow and forecast delivery.
4. **Make policies explicit.** Kanban teams need to establish basic rules specific to their process, including when to move a work item to the next state, how to post WIP limits, how to flag impediments, and how to organize and maintain the board. Team members should also understand and buy into both the overall Kanban process and their own team's guidelines and goals.
5. **Implement feedback loops.** Scheduling Scrum-style standups, reviews, and retrospective meetings can help in assessing what worked, what didn't, and what to improve for each project cycle. This holds especially true for new teams.
6. **Collaborate for improvement, evolve experimentally.** With no set due dates, work in progress becomes the focus in Kanban, with continuous improvement and delivery as the goal. As team members collaborate to troubleshoot problems and brainstorm new ideas, the process becomes more efficient and streamlined, thus optimizing workflow.

Jim Benson, Owner of Modus Cooperandi and Creator of Personal Kanban, boils down the Kanban process further into two simple rules: visualize your work and limit your work in progress.

What Are the Pitfalls of Kanban?

Kanban is most effective when team collaboration is strong and team members are fully engaged with the Kanban board and process. Problems can arise when team members do not understand or are not fully involved with the process.

- **WIP Limits:** WIP limits are a key feature of Kanban, and it won't work if you don't implement them. Your team needs to establish limits that are reasonable and stick to them, even under pressure from managers and customers, in order to keep work flowing smoothly. If in-progress work exceeds established limits or if limits are set too high, members may experience overload, putting workflow and delivery at risk. Problems may also arise if a team member veers off to work on a lower-priority task before finishing the one they pulled from the To Do column. It is essential that team members complete high-priority tasks first before moving on to the next.

- **Board Maintenance:** A well-maintained Kanban board visually communicates workflow progress and impediments at a glance. Simplicity is key with Kanban; if a board is too cluttered or confusing, or it is not updated regularly to reflect the most current work status, workflow will falter. If team members have trouble figuring out where to place a card or are not able to track workflow status, it may be a good idea to discuss how to restructure and simplify the board.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** Each member needs to take responsibility for the team's success for the Kanban process to work. This includes being on board with established WIP limits and being willing to "swarm" in to help a colleague if a task is on the line. On the other hand, a team member who tries to own a piece of the process and not allow others to help can jeopardize everyone's productivity. A lack of collaboration and communication between team members threatens the Kanban process and sabotages trust. If communication is failing, the team may want to add daily stand-up meetings, reviews, and/or retrospective meetings to their Kanban process.
- **Removing the Knowledge from Knowledge Work:** The purpose of using Kanban is to improve process management on the whole, not for a team to devolve into several highly specialized but disconnected functions. When people using a Kanban board overspecialize — that is, when they work exclusively on certain types of tasks — information silos pop up. The team can lose sight of the overall objective because it's focused too heavily on individual milestones. This is especially dangerous when work items on the Kanban board are meant to integrate with each other. This can turn Kanban into something more like traditional linear Waterfall project management.

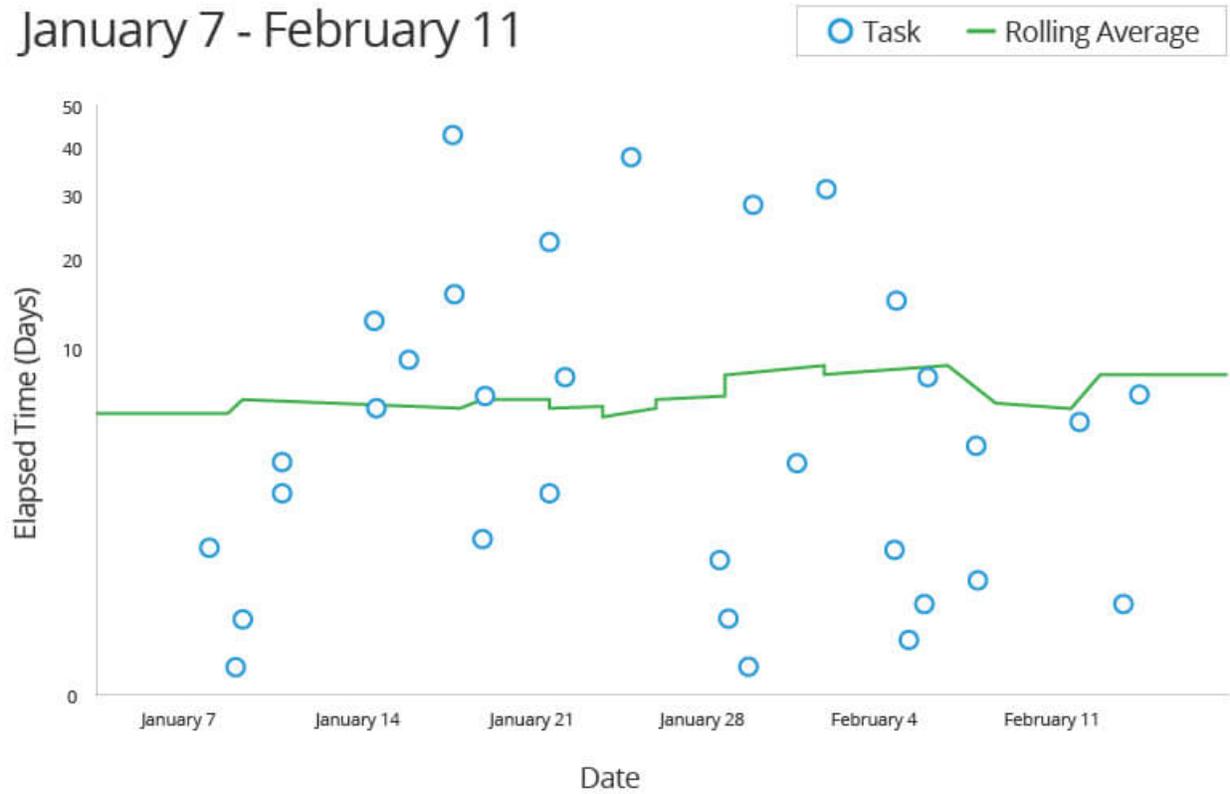
Visualizing the Kanban Metrics

Kanban's only metric is cycle time. So how do you measure intangible values such as continuous improvement and workflow optimization? Given Kanban's focus on visualization, it is not surprising that visual tools have emerged to measure the success of Kanban-managed projects. The ones in widest use are control charts and cumulative flow diagrams.

Control Charts

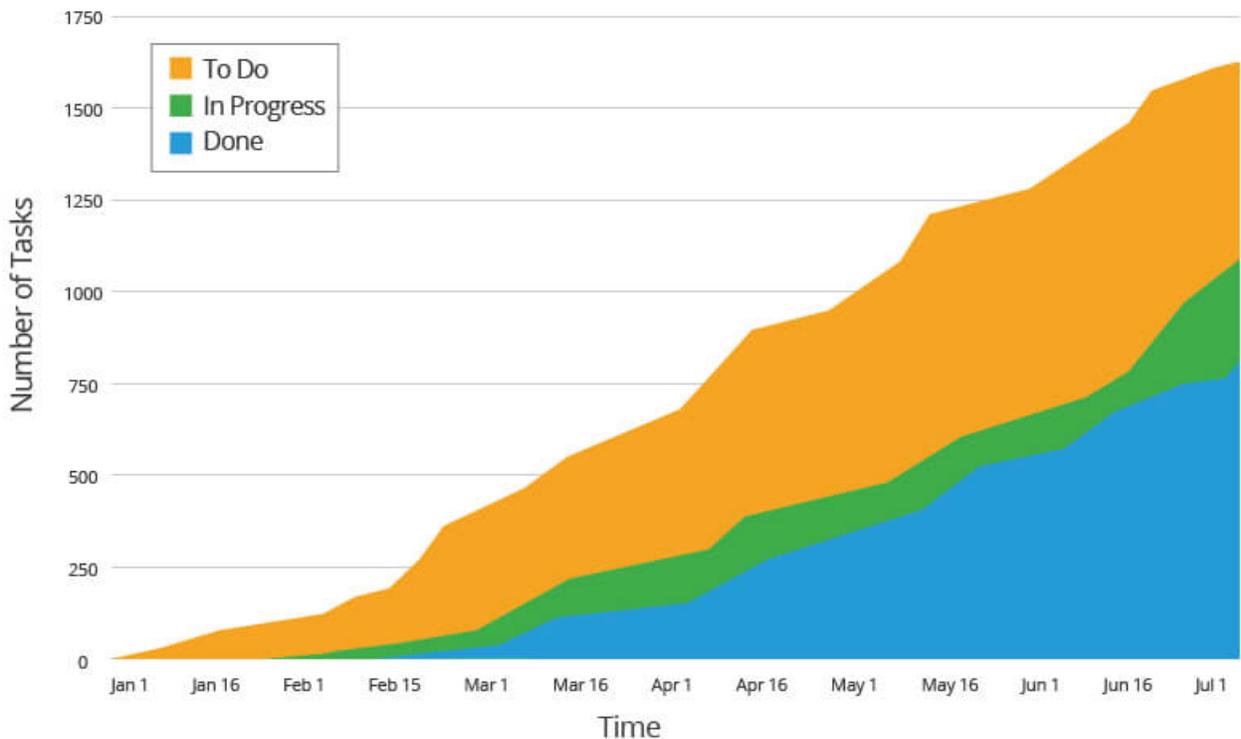
In Kanban, each cycle represents the amount of time it takes to carry one task or piece of work through to completion. To set the picture, control charts depict a series of cycles over an established timeframe using graphics, bar charts, or large dots, to name a few. If the team is experiencing continuous improvement and operating at an optimal level, the control chart will display a downward curve of individual cycles. The control chart visually directs the team toward future delivery goals.

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Cumulative Flow Diagrams

A cumulative flow diagram (CFD) typically takes the form of an area chart that displays the amount of work in each work state over an established period of time. Each color in the CFD represents the three (or more) work states on your Kanban board. A CFD provides an effective visual for identifying team performance and bottlenecks at a glance.



Online and Digital Kanban Boards

The steady rise of flexibility in the workplace has driven the need for Kanban boards to become both virtual and visual representations of workflow. Online and digital Kanban software tools are rapidly emerging as the tool of choice for organizations that are spread out, remote, or distributed globally.

Online boards are web- or cloud-based; digital boards are apps that you can upload to your mobile device. Both feature virtual cards that you can easily color code, as well as drag and drop horizontally between work states and vertically between swim lanes, just as you would using a physical board. Both are accessible 24/7, and they can be shared instantly to collaborate with team members and stakeholders who are on site or remote.

The ability to expand virtual cards with notes and attachments, brand the board with your business's logo and colors, view your data through multiple filters, and analyze information using built-in metrics are a few of the ways you can turn your Kanban board into a robust online or digital asset. Some Kanban tools can be integrated with third-party software such as Google Apps or [Jira](#), giving them an even stronger advantage over physical boards.



Build a Kanban Board with Microsoft Excel

With the ability to move data between columns, filter and pivot data, and apply numerical formulas, an Excel spreadsheet is ideal for creating a rudimentary Kanban board. You can assign your three columns (lanes), add tasks, and color code to give your board some visual impact.

Today's more sophisticated Kanban software tools use an Excel-based spreadsheet as the data access layer for information displayed on virtual Kanban cards. How data is organized and filtered on the spreadsheet determines how it will be presented on the cards.

Scrum, Kanban Boards, and Scrumban

Scrum is a formal, structured process developed by Jeff Sutherland in 1993 as a framework for implementing Agile methodology. Scrum uses fixed-length iterations to drive workflow toward producing a potentially shippable, deliverable product or piece of software. The Scrum process includes its own set of roles, procedures, and meetings, and is designed to encourage team commitment, increase efficiency, and optimize workflow.

Whereas Scrum is a specific project management framework, Kanban can be applied to existing Scrum processes. This hybrid of Scrum and Kanban is known as Scrumban. Scrum teams can use Kanban boards to visually zoom in on work in progress, make changes as needed, and identify logjams in the pipeline. Imposing limits on WIP keeps work flowing smoothly and promotes continuous improvement.

Vice versa, a small Kanban startup team working on a rapidly evolving product may choose to incorporate Scrum daily standups and other meetings and roles into their Kanban process to enhance team communication and keep product development on track. This would also be an example of Scrumban.

As in Kanban, Scrumban operates according to the principle of incremental changes. Thus, Scrumban is ideal for teams that want to transition from Scrum to Kanban.

Kanban Boards in Jira

Jira is a proprietary issue-tracking software developed by Atlassian in 2002. Originally created to track software bugs, Jira now incorporates an iterative project management approach for tracking issues.

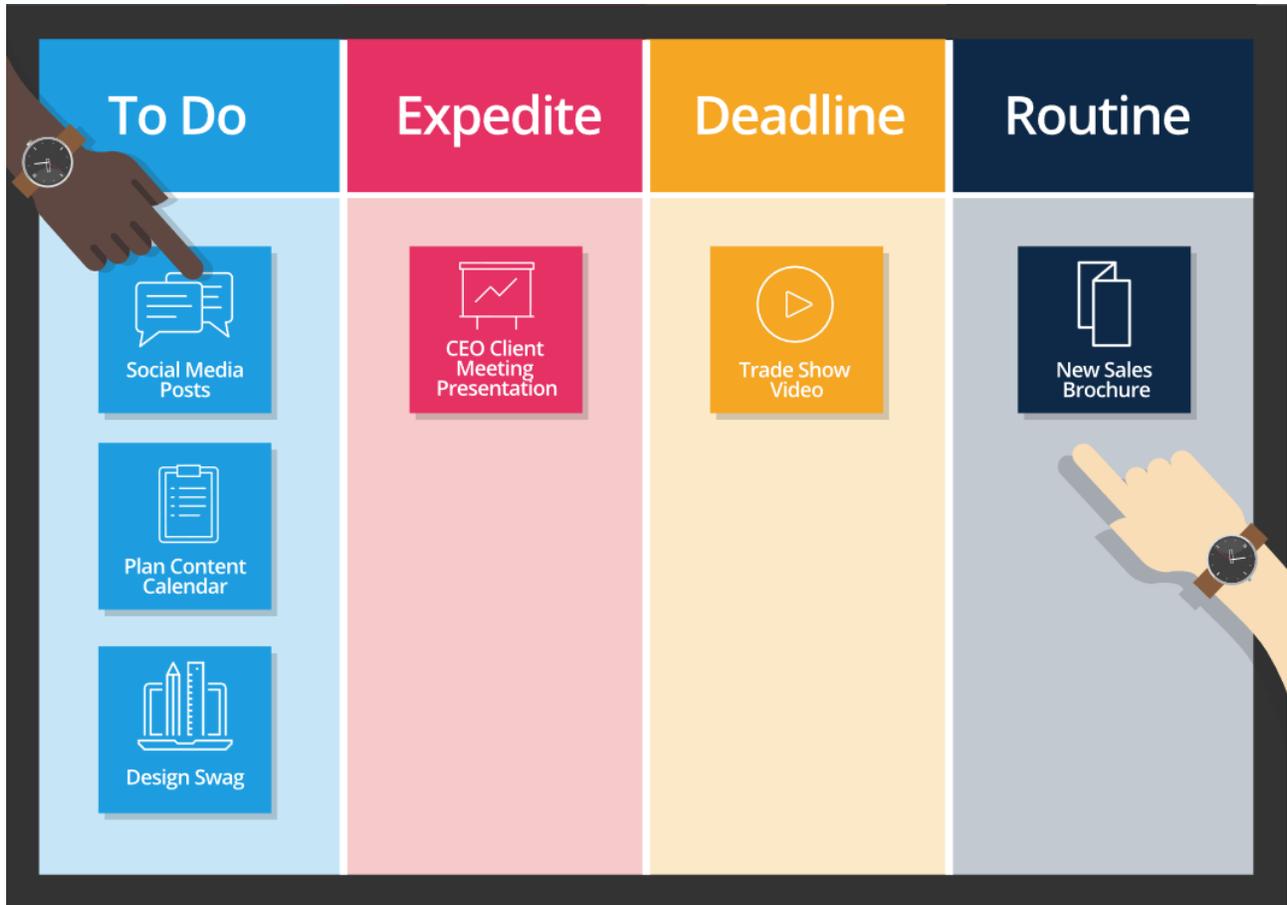
Jira can be integrated with your project management tool to assign priorities, monitor workflow, and drive work through to completion. Your online tool becomes the visual face for your Kanban board, while Jira operates in the background to manage your workflow. Jira complements the Kanban process by automatically syncing updates with your online tool and ensuring that work status is always current. With Jira, it's easy to observe backlogs and set WIP limits.

Use Case: Kanban Board for Marketing

Agile Coach Gagne notes that one strength of Kanban is its flexibility around a team's needs. Thus, it's well-suited for many fields, including marketing. A Kanban board for a marketing team might have swim lanes for To Do, Expedite, Deadline, and Routine, he

says. In this case, To Do would contain work that has been identified and is waiting to be pulled by the team.

The Expedite column would include urgent items or needs that arise on short notice — for example, if the CEO asks the marketing team to pull together a presentation for a client meeting in a few days. The Deadline column holds tasks that have firm due dates. Here the marketing team might list a video that it needs to produce for a trade show in three weeks. The Routine column would cover work that is not as time sensitive — say, a piece of marketing collateral for an upcoming trade show. Still, the team has enough old brochures that the job isn't urgent.



How One Project Manager Puts Kanban in Action

Sasha Simone, Senior IT Project Manager at American Tower in Boston, describes herself as a “Kanban addict.” She says, “As a project manager, I always have more than my share of projects going on at once. While not all of them are implemented at the same time, I capture all of them (both ideas and what is going on at any given time) and plan and prioritize these projects using Kanban.”

Here’s the exact system she implements with her Kanban board.

“I use color-coded sticky notes usually on a whiteboard (sometime even on a file folder) to track and manage all of my projects. All projects have their own vertical row, with columns To Do, Doing, and Done. Daily, I’ll look at each of the queues to see where I am at any

given time with my projects. If something is waiting on a third party, for example, I may put a red sticky note over the task, so I know it cannot move forward until it is resolved.

“Daily, I’ll also review my boards to see if the goals or priorities of the work have shifted. I might have a task that a week ago was of highest priority but can now be moved to a lower priority, helping me focus on the most important work, which brings value to my customer and my company.



“One thing I love about Kanban as a project manager is seeing all the work in the Done column. It is a nifty way to share with the teams all the work they have accomplished. It also helps when speaking with management and my direct supervisor when explaining all the work I have accomplished in a particular period of time.

“Kanban does wonders for organization and efficiency. I know at any given time where everything is, what is in progress or Doing, and it helps break down the work into manageable pieces, helping all involved in the process. It helps with the schedule too,” Simone concludes.



The photo above shows Simone in front of a giant Kanban board’s Done column. She says it was vital to the successful execution of a large project. “Without it, we would have been using Excel spreadsheets to track the work and indicate it as Done. What better way to manage the work? In my opinion there isn’t one,” she says.

Personal Kanban Boards

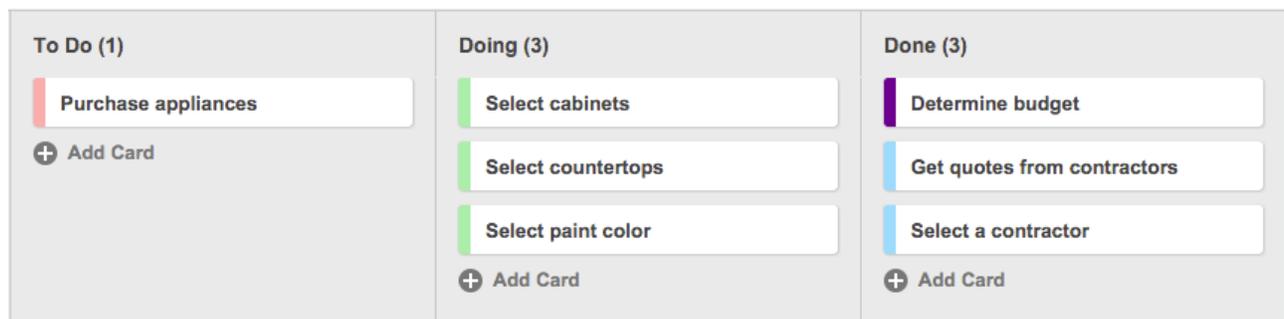
Now that you have learned how Kanban boards can help improve workflow and increase productivity in a business environment, why not use them in other areas of your life as

well? Kanban can help in any situation that involves tracking work items and moving them to completion. In the book that he co-authored with Tonianne DeMaria Barry, *Personal Kanban: Mapping Work | Navigating Life*, Jim Benson stresses the importance of value over production — that is, how to use Personal Kanban to make your life better, as opposed to simply getting more done.

A Personal Kanban board can be used in any scenario where you can visualize a chunk of work, break it down into manageable components, and limit how many tasks you can physically accomplish at any one time. Personal Kanban projects are typically less defined and more haphazard than those in a work environment. In most cases, you alone are responsible for completing the work; as a result, personal projects can feel overwhelming at times. Limiting your WIP gives you the breathing room to finish one task before starting the next. As you move your cards across the board, you will experience a sense of accomplishment and relief as you work toward your goal.

You can use personal Kanban boards to plan vacations, weddings, home improvement projects, or even weekly meals. A brightly colored Kanban board can inspire children to complete household chores and offer them a feeling of accomplishment.

Personal Kanban boards can be as simple as a chalkboard, as slick as a mobile app, or as decorative as frames covered in fabric and cord. Because Personal Kanban boards are used in less structured, more fluid environments, you can adapt them in whatever way works best for you. Whatever style you use for your board, keep it simple and make it visual. Allow your Personal Kanban board to pave the way toward greater productivity and less stress in your daily life.



Simone uses Personal Kanban with her daughter to organize homework and school assignments. “It helps her see what she needs to do and stay organized. Kanban can be used in everyday life, at work, anywhere!” Simone says.

Gagne posts his Personal Kanban board on a physical whiteboard in his home office. At the moment, he says he has 19 sticky notes spread among three columns: To Do (where they are sorted in priority order), In Process (which has a limit of two items at a time), and Done. He uses it mostly for one-off tasks rather than routine personal chores.

Virtual or Physical? How to Decide on a Kanban Board

Though you’re likely to find that virtual Kanban boards are superior to physical boards, a

whiteboard and Post-its make more sense in a handful of use cases. These include workplaces where not everyone has access to a computer for most of the workday, teams where people don't have the tech know-how to get the most out of an online Kanban board, and teams with people who simply enjoy using physical Kanban cards more than virtual ones.

Aside from those cases, virtual Kanban boards almost always offer more benefits. For example, they automate time-tracking for work items, they streamline the process of assigning and notifying them team of their responsibilities, they're easier to read than some untidy scrawls, they allow you to sift through large numbers of cards quickly, and they integrate with a variety of other project management tools.

Seven Tips for Choosing the Right Kanban Board Software for Your Team

Here are seven tips for choosing a software tool that is customizable and meets the needs of your business or organization.

1. **Flexibility and Scalability:** A smaller team in a flexible working environment is more likely to benefit from Kanban's informal, streamlined process than a larger, more rigid organization. Look for a tool that is easy to use, yet provides a variety of customizable features that will accommodate your team's work style and projects. If your team is planning to expand, select a tool that offers a high degree of scalability.
2. **Sharing and Collaboration:** Your Kanban software tool should provide multiple features for sharing and collaborating with team members, stakeholders, outside contractors, and so on. Look for a tool that includes easy-to-use email integration and discussion options, as well as one that provides a means for exporting your board's data. The tool should include a method for securing restricted information, with the ability to share only relevant or approved information with stakeholders and third parties. You'll also want to be able to invite individuals to specific Kanban boards, then assign them to cards and subscribe them to notifications for updates on the cards.
3. **Card Display and Expandability:** You will want your online Kanban board to resemble a physical board as much as possible. You should be able to easily color code your virtual cards, and drag and drop them between columns. Your tool should also allow you to expand your cards by adding notes, images, and reports — whatever you can't do with a physical board. The ability to attach checklists, tasks, images, and documents to cards is helpful. They need to have a due date function, and you want to be able to label or tag them, such as with the column name they fall under on the board or task type (operations, quality assurance, etc.)
4. **Ease of Use:** A good Kanban board software tool should be easy to set up and intuitive to learn, with a clear correlation between card data and spreadsheet columns. Team members need to intuitively understand how to implement features such as email sharing, color coding, and symbology.
5. **Drag and Drop/WIP Limits:** Team members should be able to easily drag and drop

cards between columns to reflect current work status and stay within WIP limits. Too many tasks in the WIP column can put workflow at risk; therefore, team members need to be able to drag and drop one or more cards back to the To Do column. In addition, a tool that lets you toggle your card display between different sets of data, such as status or owner, will give you a higher degree of flexibility in viewing and tracking workflow.

6. **Metrics Reporting and Display:** Your tool should include a Reports feature that allows you to compile, filter, and share information gleaned from spreadsheets and virtual cards. A tool that can also chart and display high-resolution, color-coded graphics such as Gantt charts would be a valuable asset to your team.
7. **Ability to Integrate:** Look for features that set one software tool apart from the rest, such as the capability to integrate with third-party software. For example, a software tool that integrates with Jira's issue tracking software will save team members valuable tracking time and eliminate duplicate entries. A tool that works with Google Apps would provide your team with the ability to communicate via Google Hangouts, export to and import from Google Drive, and publish cycle times from your software's calendar to Google Calendar. Of course, if dealing with these integrations sounds like more trouble than it's worth, you could simply (and preemptively) throw the kitchen sink at the problem and pick the Kanban board app that has the most features built in.

If you are specifically looking for a digital Kanban app for your mobile device, learn how to [choose the right Kanban app to meet your needs](#).

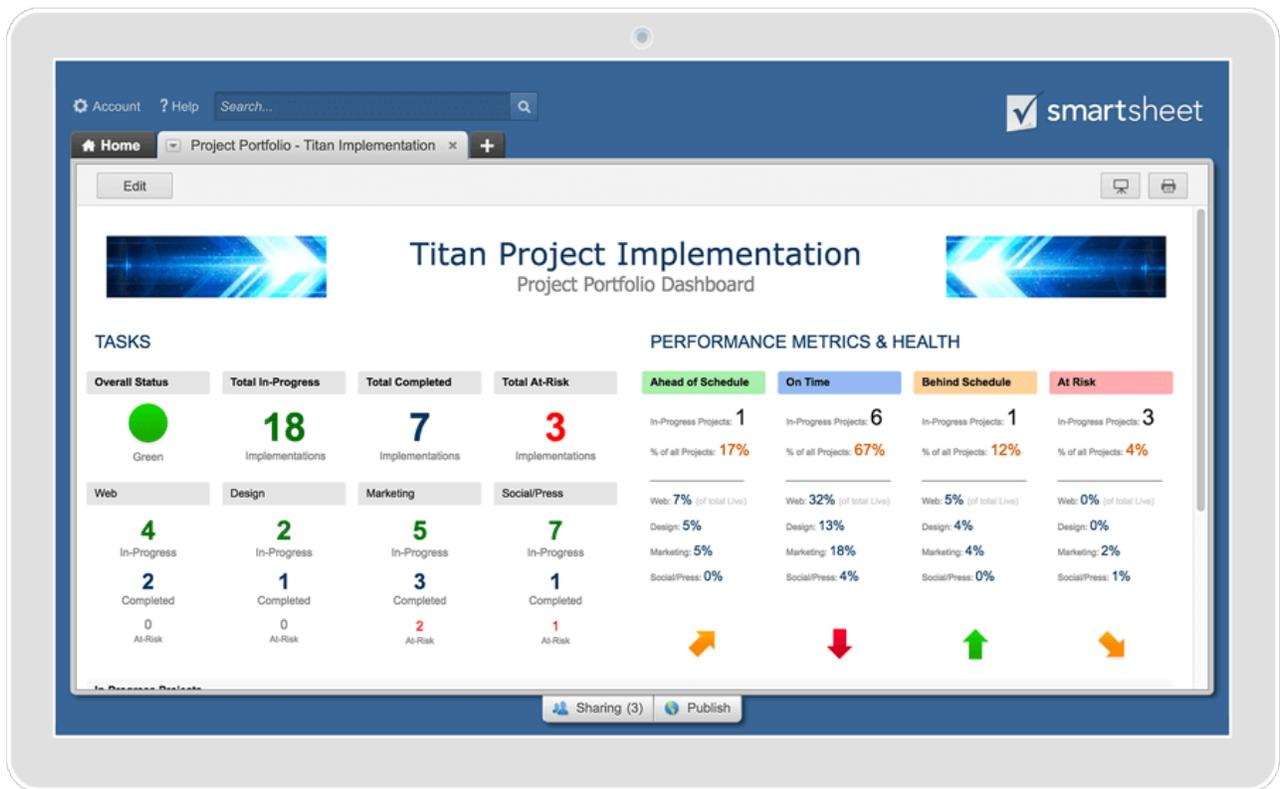
Build a Better Kanban Board with Smartsheet for Project Management

It started with Toyota, and now it's everywhere. Kanban is a methodology that businesses swear by, and it's led to countless success stories around the globe. This approach to project management starts with a card and a simple layout, but the potential is endless. To get the most out of Kanban, you'll want a flexible, powerful system with a visual edge that lets you stay on top of your work. Smartsheet delivers all this and more.

Smartsheet is a work execution platform that enables enterprises and teams to get from idea to impact - fast. Top project management leaders rely on Smartsheet to help align the right people, resources, and schedules to get work done.

Use Smartsheet Card View to create real-time, online Kanban boards that will help improve collaboration and visibility on your next project. Create consistent project elements, increase speed, and improve collaboration with scalable options in Smartsheet that fit individual work preferences. Hold yourself and your team accountable, improve visibility into team priorities, and ensure nothing slips through the cracks.

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