

KANBAN AS A FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Kanban Project Management is a unique approach to project management that is based on the Kanban method. It is suitable for companies of all sizes, because flexibility and adaptability of Kanban methods make it a suitable approach for managing projects of varying complexity and expertise, from manufacturing and construction to software development projects. In today's fast-paced business environment, where customer requirements are constantly changing and competition is growing, effective project management is becoming critical to the success of any organization. The Kanban methodology provides companies with the opportunity to increase process transparency, optimize workflow, adapt to change, and continuously improve.

An important feature of this management method is that it can be applied at a wide range of scales, from the level of individuals and small teams to strategic business initiatives.

This article provides a detailed explanation of the Kanban methodology, analyzing its effectiveness in enhancing project management efficiency and adaptability.

The Kanban method originated in the 1940s at Toyota, where it was developed as part of a lean manufacturing system. The term Kanban is translated from Japanese as "signboard" or "billboard", reflecting the visual nature of the system. In the Toyota workshop, there was a board with cards. The cards contained the addresses of the sender and receiver, as well as information about the parts. When the team needed a new part, the corresponding card was sent to the part of the board for which external or internal suppliers were responsible. For greater convenience, the cards were color-coded: for example, an external supplier had a red card, and an internal supplier had a blue card. As a result, Toyota increased production, met deadlines, and reduced inventory to the required minimum. Thanks to Kanban, in 1972 Toyota became the first automobile company in the world to produce more than 10 million cars a year. This example was adopted by other industries.

Many organizations already utilize project management software integrated into their daily workflows. These platforms often include Kanban features, with popular examples being Jira, Trello, Monday.com, ClickUp, and Asana, among others. Building upon existing systems, the Kanban method offers a structured approach to visualizing and managing work. Rather than demanding immediate, disruptive changes, Kanban emphasizes a gradual, evolutionary improvement. This philosophy is rooted in four fundamental principles :

1. Start from what you have now. The methodology does not call for instant changes to the company structure and employee roles. On the contrary, you need to implement changes to the existing system.

2. Strive for gradual, constant and evolutionary changes. In other words, take small steps towards a big goal. At first glance, it may seem that global changes will bring more benefits and profits. But you need to remember that they will also bring huge risks. Gradual movement towards the goal is a more flexible and safe approach.

3. Respect flow processes and roles. You need to preserve what works well. This applies to relationships, positions and processes. Relationships with people will help to gain support for changes, and established processes will improve unstable ones.

4. Support leadership at all levels. Employees at all levels, not just management, should strive to be leaders and propose change. Kanban is primarily a visualization. For visualization, a board and a set of colorful cards are used. One color represents one performer or process. All team members can check the status of any task at any time. Such boards can be used for both personal time management and project planning. The simplest Kanban board is three columns: "To Do", "In Progress", "Done".

Spotify, the world's largest music streaming platform, is an example of how the Kanban methodology is applied. The company's operations team was having a hard time finding the time to keep up with their planned projects. So they turned to Kanban to divide projects into smaller parts that could be better planned and organized. On their board, they break tasks down into To Do, Doing, and Done columns and categorize them as tangible (i.e., physical work) and intangible (i.e., planning and design). Next, they determine whether the tasks are small (a workday), medium (a few days), or large (a week), with anything that takes longer being broken down into smaller tasks so that they can be reclassified as small, medium, or large. Since Spotify started using this system, they have noticed that lead times have decreased and more internal tasks are being completed, but the day-to-day work of people has not changed. The fundamental values of the kanban method are transparency, balance, collaboration, customer focus, flow, leadership, understanding, consent, and respect.

A Kanban board greatly improves communication within a team. If everyone updates tasks, the entire team knows who is working on which task. This reduces the risk of duplication of work and misunderstandings. The board also provides a way to track progress and ask for help if needed.

The Kanban method has a number of advantages that make it a popular tool for managing workflows. Here are some of them:

1. Visualization of the workflow, making it easier and more convenient to control the processes of task execution and keep them under control.

2. Optimization of the workflow, reducing the time for completing tasks, increasing team productivity.

3. Flexibility and adaptability, the ability to configure the Kanban board as you like and easily make adjustments to it.

4. The ability to quickly identify problems and barriers in the work, reduce the time to eliminate them and generally improve the quality of the workflow.

Of course, like any other method, Kanban has its drawbacks:

1. Kanban is not the best suited for complex processes with many interconnected tasks. It will simply be inconvenient to work with them on the board.

2. It takes some time to master the Kanban methodology. Therefore, it will not work to introduce it in the company "here and now".

3. Kanban cannot replace full-fledged communication in the team. And insufficient communication can lead to errors in work and misunderstandings.

It is also worth adding that Kanban is only effective if you use it correctly, and the use of the methodology is justified. If there is no real need for Kanban, then the system will only slow down the workflow, not optimize it.

Kanban project management can help you visualize your work to better understand your workflow. This allows you to organize and manage your work more effectively. It also allows teams to easily track each project and task, identifying inefficiencies and workflow issues.

To summarize, the main benefit of Kanban is improved workflow management through visual task tracking, which leads to increased efficiency and reduced bottlenecks. However, its success depends on proper implementation, which includes accurate visualization of the workflow, limiting work in progress, and continuous process improvement.

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