



Making Kanban Work

Controlling your time through visualisation

January 2019

simply brilliant thinkers
making software brilliantly simple



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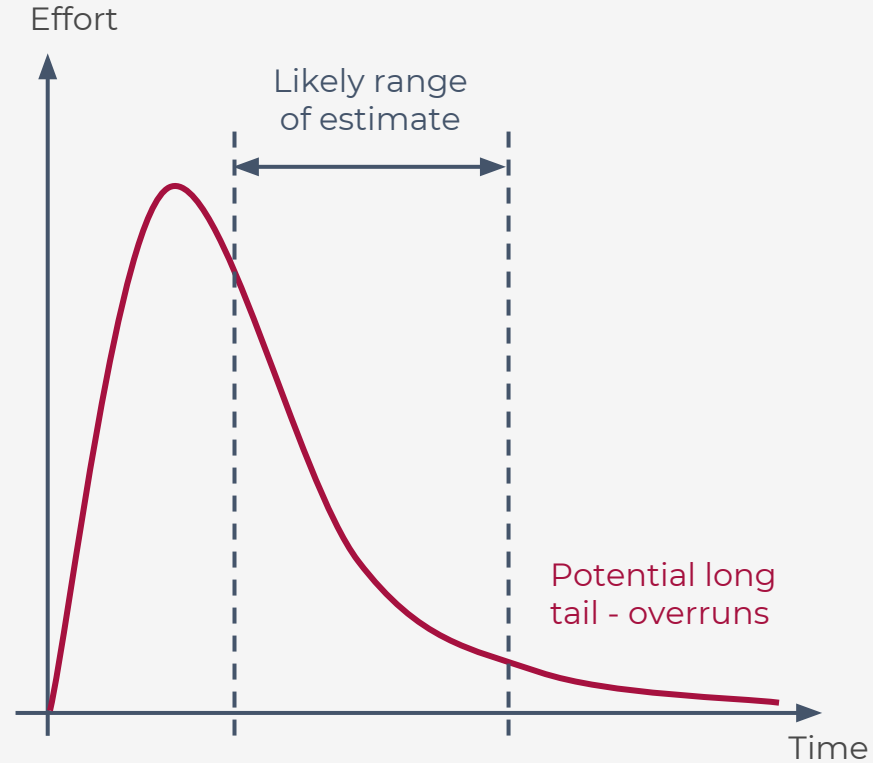
What do ***you*** want to
get out of today?



Does this feel familiar?

Parkinson's Law

- Spend more time on a task, requires less peak effort
- To finish in less time requires greater concentrated effort
- Another effect: **“work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion”**
- A long tail can kill efficiency — so what can you do about this?



Time management

- We seem to be constantly doing something - but what exactly?
- Not all our tasks are **the same**
- Not all our tasks are **predictable**
- Not all our demands are **planned**
- And we are online 24/7 to respond to these... or to get **distracted** by these



Time management


“You can't save time. You can only spend it, but you can spend it wisely or foolishly”

— Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh*


“Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of”

— Benjamin Franklin


Phrases and anti-patterns that
make this worse



*“This is
really
urgent”*



*“This is
really
urgent”*



*“Do you
have a
minute?”*

*“This is
really
urgent”*

*“Do you
have a
minute?”*

*“We need a
can-do
attitude”*

*“Just
make it
happen”*

*“Get it
over the
line”*

**We find it really hard
to say no...**



Mindfulness - focus on the task in hand

- Golden State Warriors: **NBA champions** in 2015, 2017 and 2018
- Moreover, they have **changed the way the game is played**
- Four core principles: joy, **mindfulness**, compassion, competition
- Mindfulness: focus on the task at hand, not getting distracted by surrounding noise



How can we achieve this?

Traditional workflow

- Organisation pushes work to a team
- Emphasis is on resource utilisation — **keeping people busy**
- Can lead to overload and stress
- Which itself can lead to lateness, quality issues, other inefficiencies



Exercise #1

**Let's simulate a team trying to deliver
customer features...
...using ping pong balls**



High utilisation.. versus Flow



High utilisation
and flow...



or Responsiveness?

Wait states / bottlenecks

- Often, “work in progress” isn’t technically in progress but **waiting**
- This can be part of the workflow, through **dependencies**
- Or it could be due to inefficiencies such as **bottlenecks**
- Tasks spending 85% of time in a waiting state is “normal”
- Tasks spending 60% of time in a waiting state is “good”



Traditional business models

- Based on manufacturing in factories
- If a worker turns the same handle 100 times, then the same thing will happen >99 times
- The manager wants to see that the team is busy
- The organisation knows / understands the big picture
- The team is only trusted with turning the handle



Breaking the model

- IT isn't quite like that:
 - Some things are repetitive
 - But many tasks are **creative problem solving**
- IT is **just dissimilar enough** to break this model



Optimising processes

“A bad system will beat a good person every time”

— Edward Deming

So - change the model!

- Move from organisational push to **team pull**
- Gives sustainable pace - the sweet spot for **flow** and **utilisation**
- Desirable side-effects:
 - Team has control
 - Allows team to flourish with mastery, autonomy and purpose



Exercise #2

Now let's retry delivering customer features (ping pong balls), but this time letting the team pull the work from a to-do list.

What *e/se* causes us to be
so busy?

“Time thieves”

- Too much Work In Progress (WIP)
- Unknown dependencies
- Unplanned work
- Conflicting priorities
- Neglected work
- **Lack of visibility — not knowing what is going on**





Too much Work In Progress



Unknown dependencies



21
 13 00 FORUM: FRANCK LEISOVICI
 14 30 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: COMPAGNIE DU ZÉRO
 15 00 FRUITS DE BOUCHE: DAVID MOSS
 16 00 FOYER: CHRISTIAN RIZZO
 17 00 FORUM: DAVID MOSS

OUVERTURE

22

14 00 UNE PEINTURE PARLÉE
 15 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: LES KELLERS
 19 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: JULIE NICOLE ET SIR ALICE
 20 00 TEATRINO PALERMO: INAUGURATI
 20 30 GRANDE SALLE: ELMGREEN & DR

23

14 00 UNE PEIN...URE PARLÉ
 16 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REI
 GILLES GASTON-DRE
 19 00 CONFÉRENCE-PERFO

29

14 00 UNE PEINTURE PARLÉE
 16 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: LAURENT FRIQUET
 ET MARIE-PIERRE BRÉBANT

30

14 00 UNE PEINTURE PARLÉE
 16 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: GILL
 SOPHIE LENOIR ET STÉPHAN
 19 00 CONFÉRENCE-PERFORMANCE
 GUILLAUME DESANGES

5

14 00 UNE PEINTURE PARLÉE
 14 00 TEATRINO PALERMO, CINÉMA 2: BORIS CHARMAI 2
 18 00 BEAUBOURG-LA-REINE: GILLES GASTON-DREYFUS,
 SOPHIE LENOIR ET STÉPHANE ROGER
 18 00 PARFUMS POURPRES DU SOLEIL DES PÔLES
 20 30 GRANDE SALLE: STEVEN COHEN

6

14 00 UNE PEINTURE
 16 00

Unplanned work

**Conflicting
priorities**





Neglected work

Foto: Peter Häger, 2013

Lack of visibility



So, what is it that we need to do?

- Change the model - go from organisational push to **team pull**
- Allow our teams to manage their time and be **mindful** of their work:
 - Focusing on the task at hand
 - Not getting distracted by surrounding noise
- Identify what is **stealing time**... and how to deal with that



看板

Kanban

A “visual signal”

On Kanban...

“The aim of Kanban is to make troubles come to the surface”

— Taiichi Ohno

Visualise your workflow: basic workflow

To do	In Progress	Done

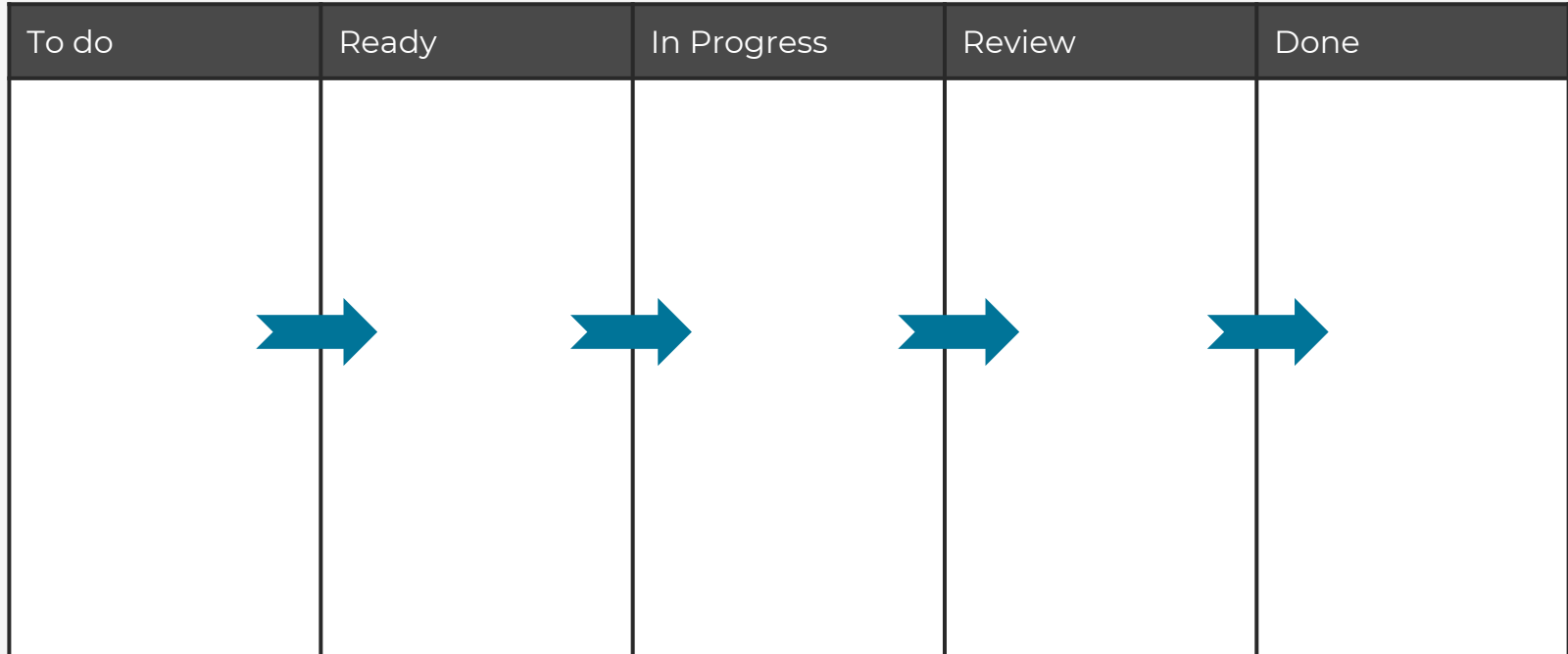
Express tasks as tickets going through a journey to completion: visualise this

Visualise your workflow: tailored workflow

To do	Ready	In Progress	Review	Done

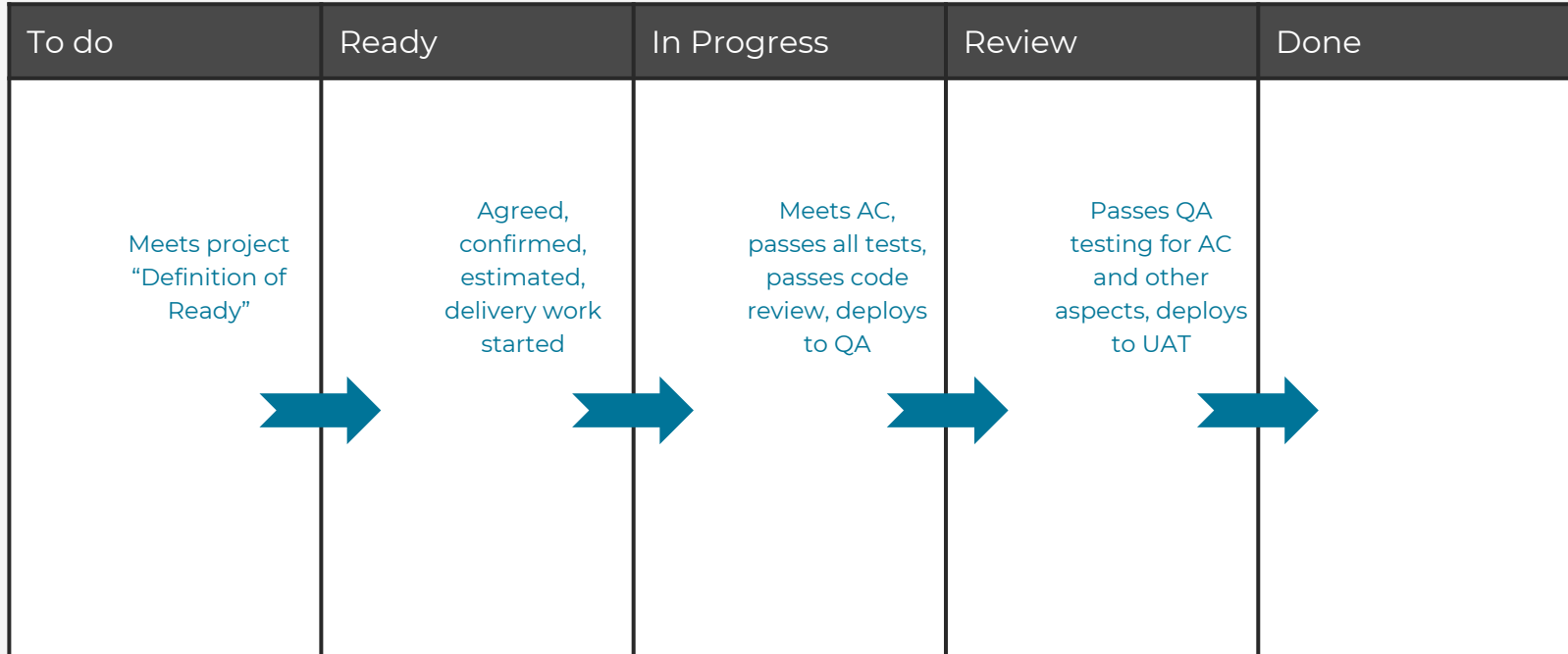
Having columns and transitions *shows* where work gets blocked or stalled

Set policies and make explicit



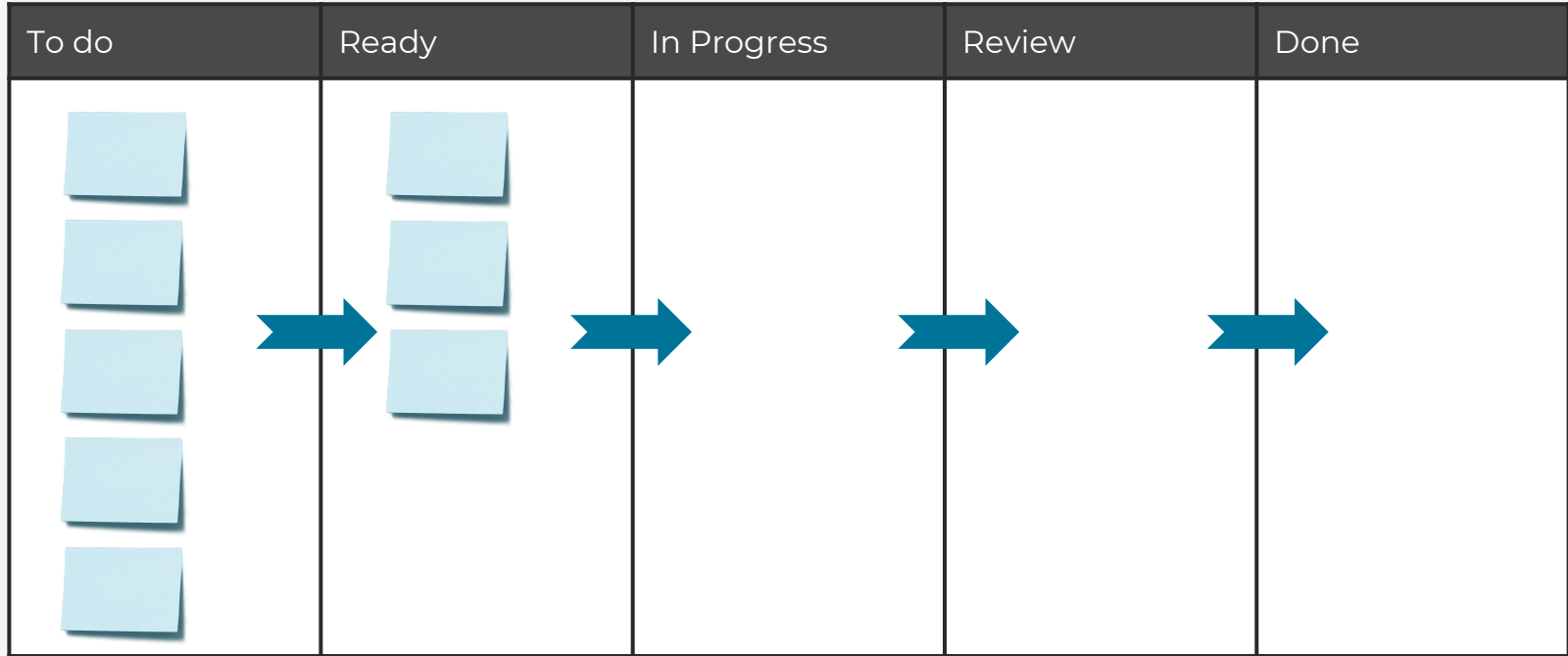
What are the conditions by which a ticket can progress into the next column?

Set policies and make explicit



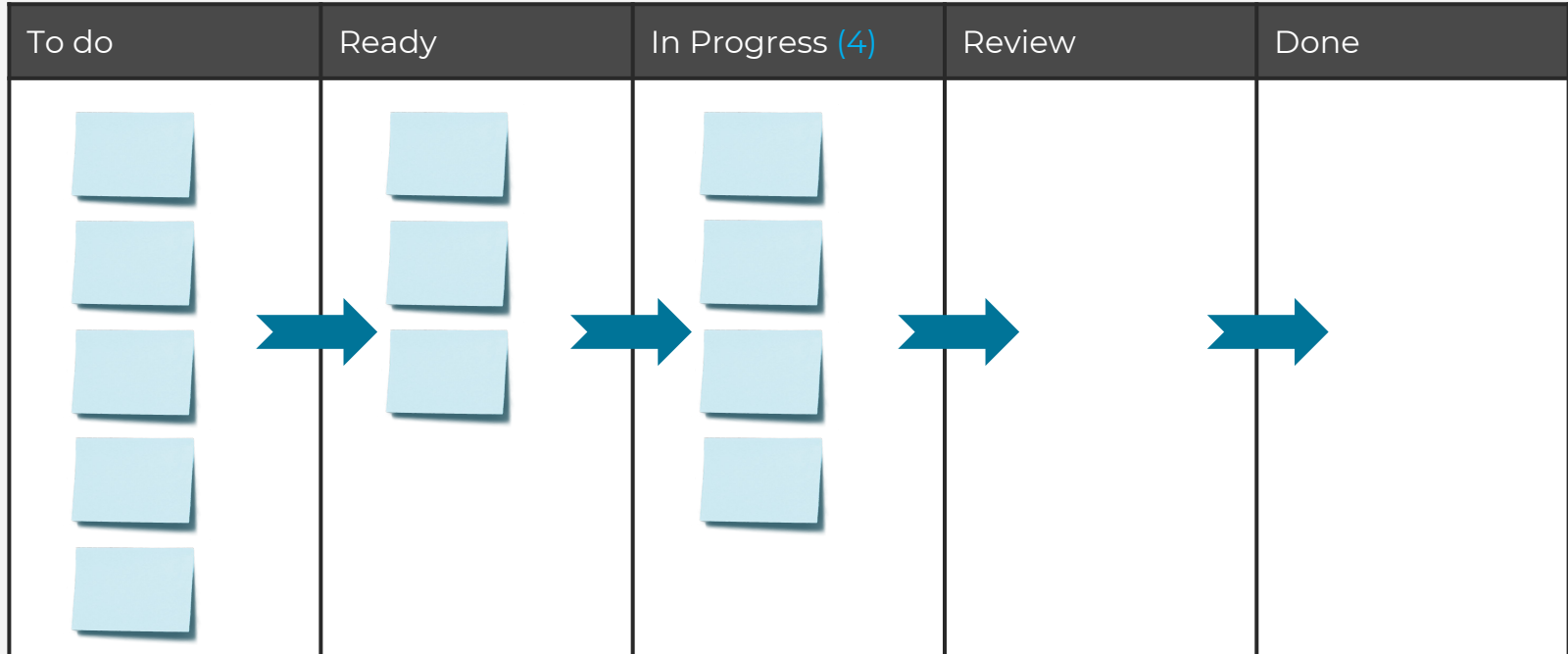
Collaboratively define these within the team, then use them!

Identify tasks - one task per “ticket”



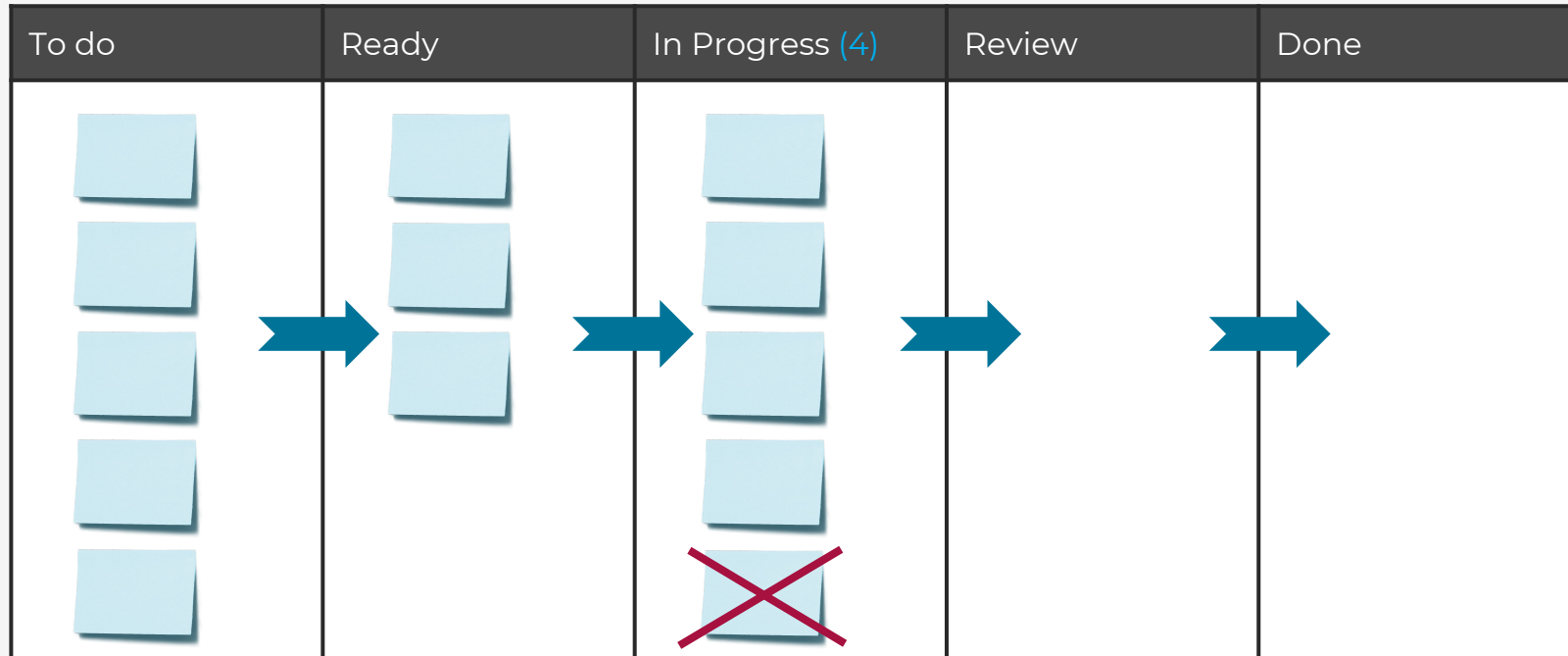
Split tickets into one task per ticket — otherwise tasks can “hide”

Limit Work In Progress - set your WIP limit



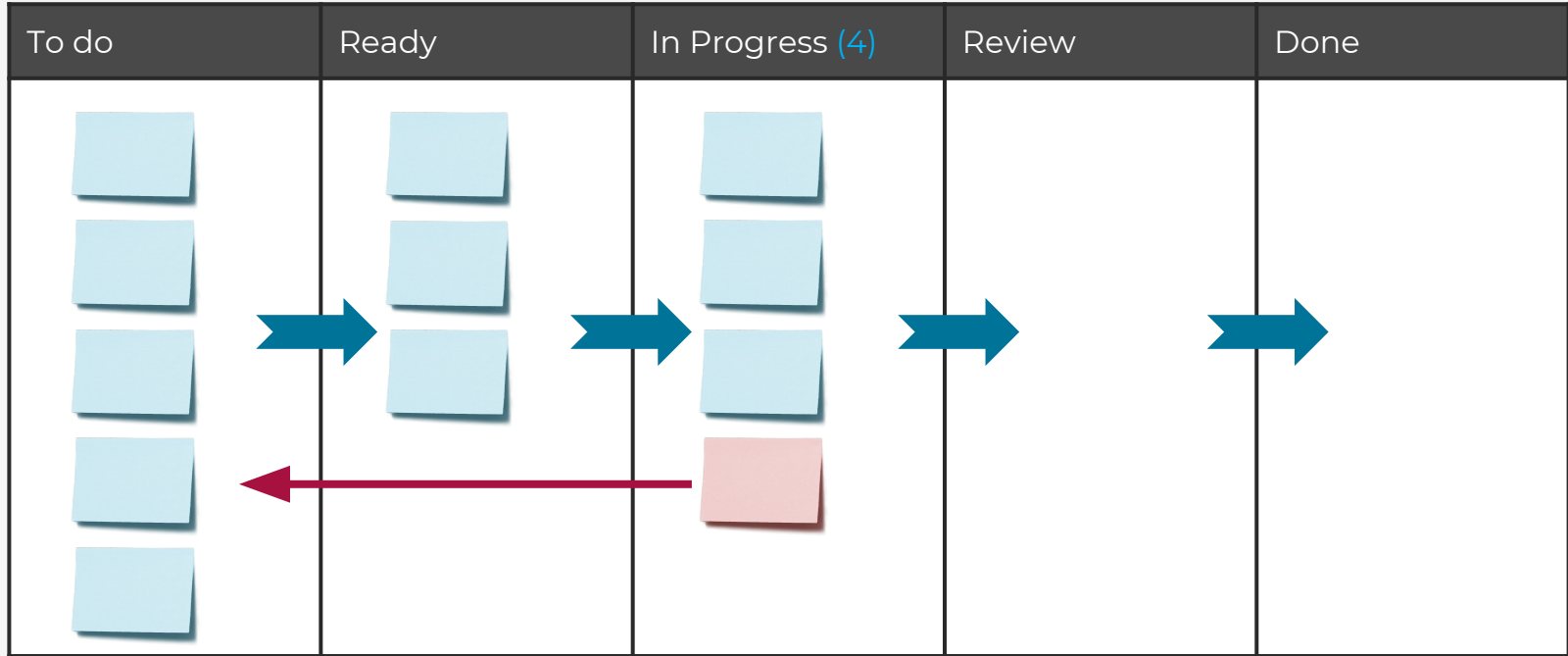
Collaboratively define this within the team, then use it!

Limit Work In Progress - set your WIP limit



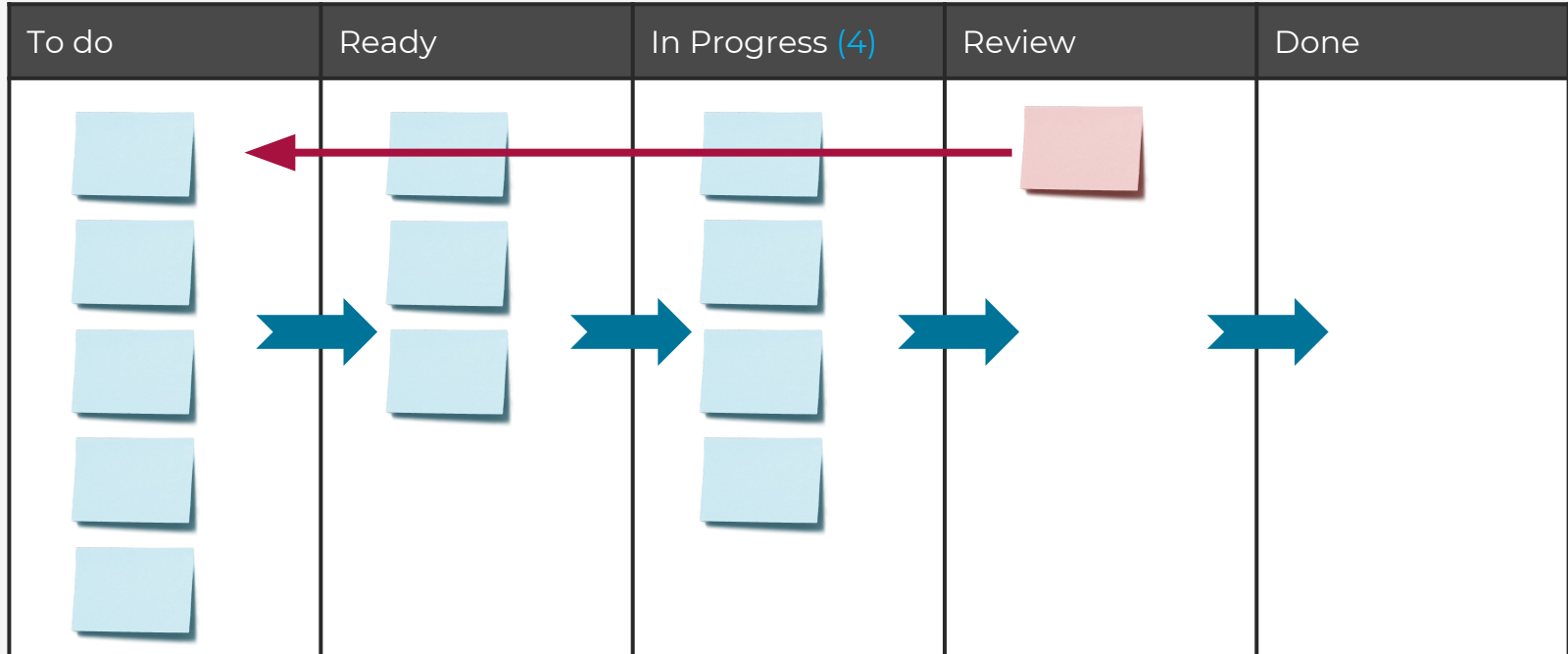
WIP limit hit: stop starting tasks and start finishing them!

Manage flow (e.g. blockers, dependencies)



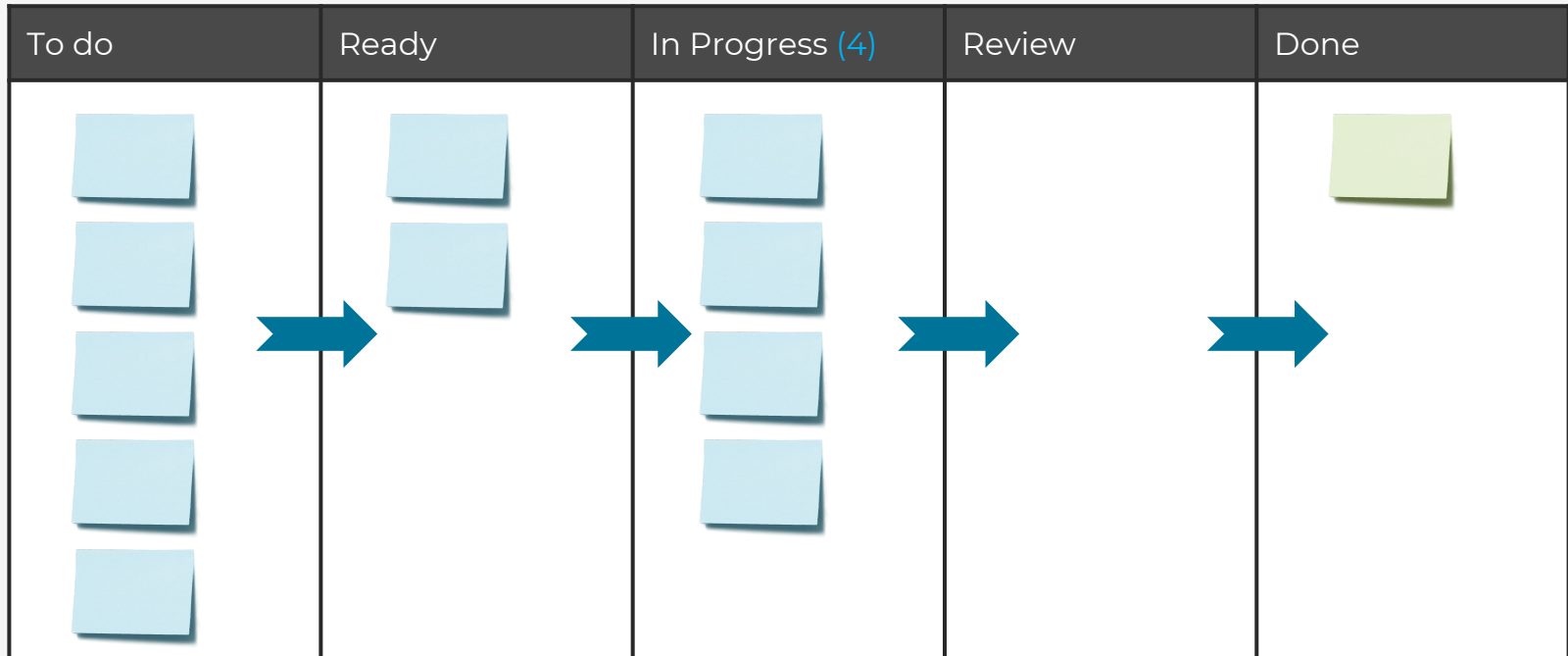
Blocked ticket: back into “To do” until blockage removed. Work to remove blockage

Manage flow (tickets not satisfying set policies/definitions)



Ticket not passed review: back into Backlog for rectification

Implement feedback



Feedback: e.g. tickets into backlogs, process improvements etc. Make this happen!

Exercise #3

Let's take the role of the manager of a takeaway shop. What might a Kanban board look like for the process of making multiple pizzas/burgers at once? What are the transitions?

How to implement Kanban well

- Start with what you know or do now
 - For example, you can start with existing roles and job titles
 - Do not need a “revolutionary adoption”
- Empower your team
 - **Transparency** and **collaboration** encourage collective decisions and responsibility



How to implement Kanban well

- Ensure that there are **iterations** and opportunities for **feedback**
 - Feedback on outputs and use to plan next work
 - Feedback on process: incremental and evolutionary change to improve



Top tips

- Personalise the process — **you make the rules!**
- Structure your team to have a “shield”, e.g. a Product Owner to protect the team from unplanned work
- Combine your Kanban board with a daily stand-up for really powerful visualisation of status and flow



So what?

How Kanban helps: achieve mindfulness

- Mindfulness — focusing on the task at hand, not getting distracted by surrounding noise
- Kanban increases focus by reducing multitasking:
 - Limiting WIP
 - Showing and dealing with conflicting priorities



How Kanban helps: manage utilisation / flow

- Helps a self-organising team to organise themselves!
- Visualisation of the flow, tasks and progress
- Shows bottlenecks
- Shows capacity
- Limiting WIP helps encourage delivery and reduce “jams”
- Pull of work maintains utilisation



How Kanban helps: beat the “time thieves”

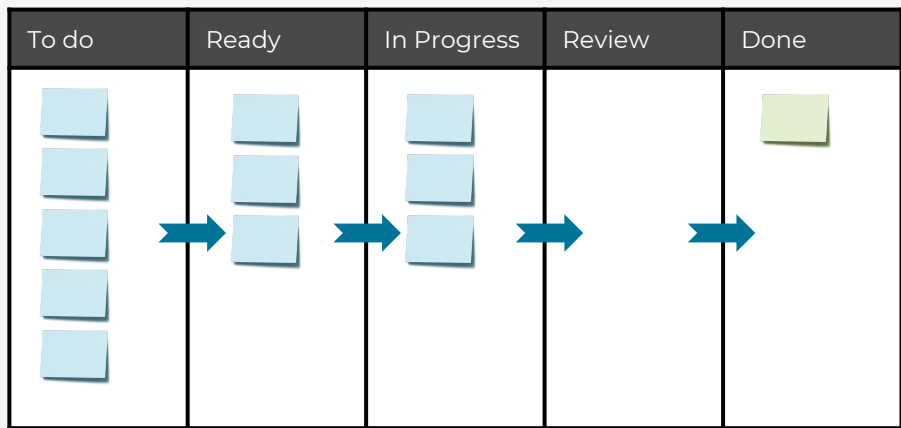
- WIP is limited — things get delivered
- Unknown dependencies are surfaced through flow conversations
- Unplanned work is visualised and can become planned in
- Conflicting priorities can be identified from the board / flow conversations
- Neglected work is visualised, enabling decisions to be made
- In fact all work is visualised — so the team knows what is going on



A low-angle, close-up photograph of several runners' legs and feet as they start a race on a red running track. The runners are wearing various colorful athletic shoes, including pink, blue, green, and white. The track has white lane markings and a yellow starting line. The text "Getting started" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

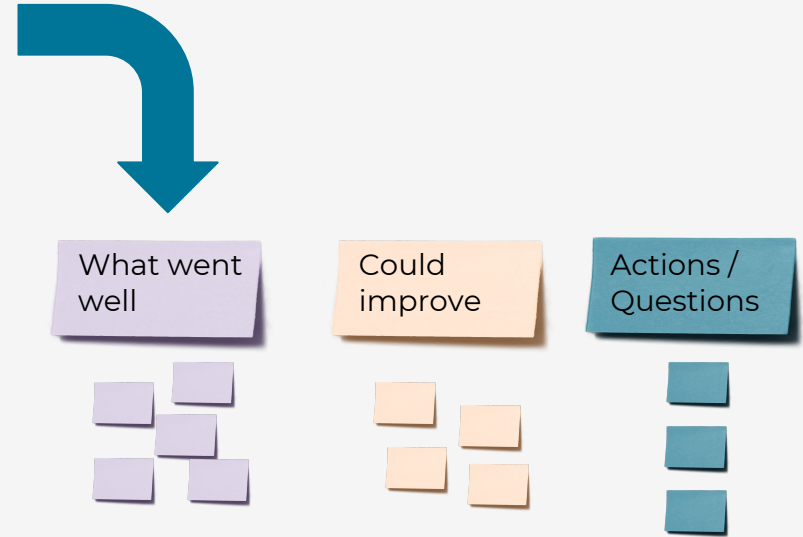
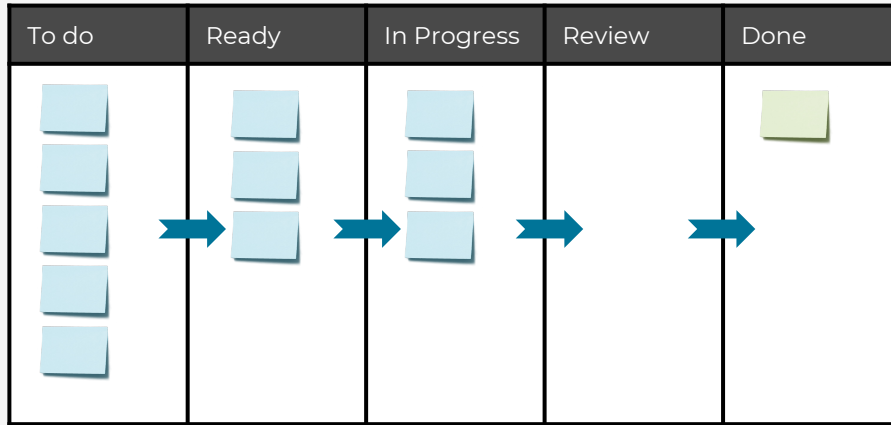
Getting started

Start with where you are now



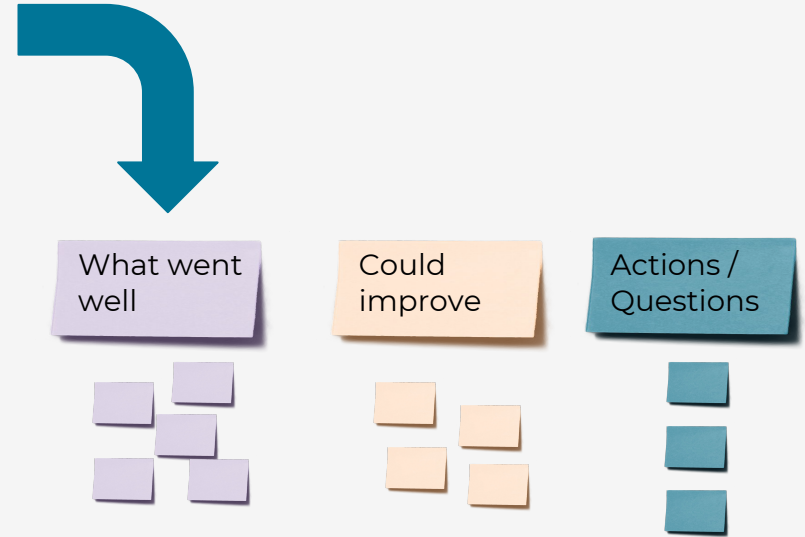
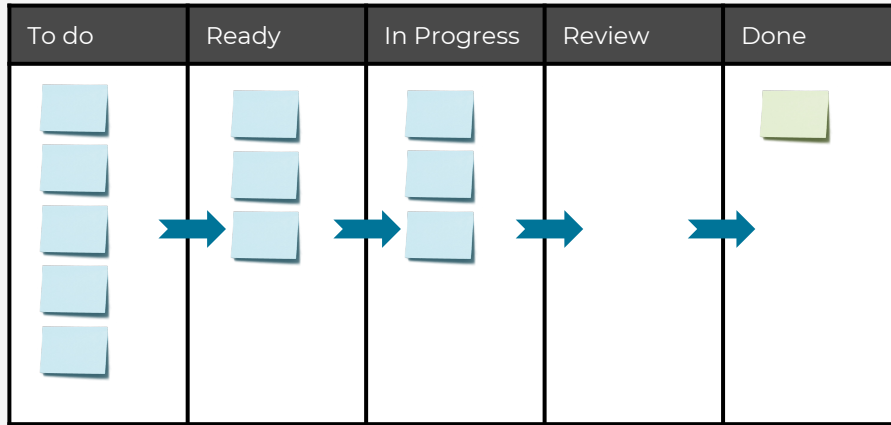
Observe your current workflow **as it is**. Then split that into states and identify the transitions. Keep running like this for a while, just **visualising what currently goes on**.

Review your workflow and processes after iteration(s)



At an appropriate point, e.g. end of an iteration, **reflect on your current process**: workflow, states and transitions. How would you like this to be? Retrospectives are very useful for this, along with process metrics.

Feed back and improve your processes



Feed these learnings into **revisions of the process**. Adjust the Kanban board and transitions accordingly. Run with these changes and review again.

Inspect



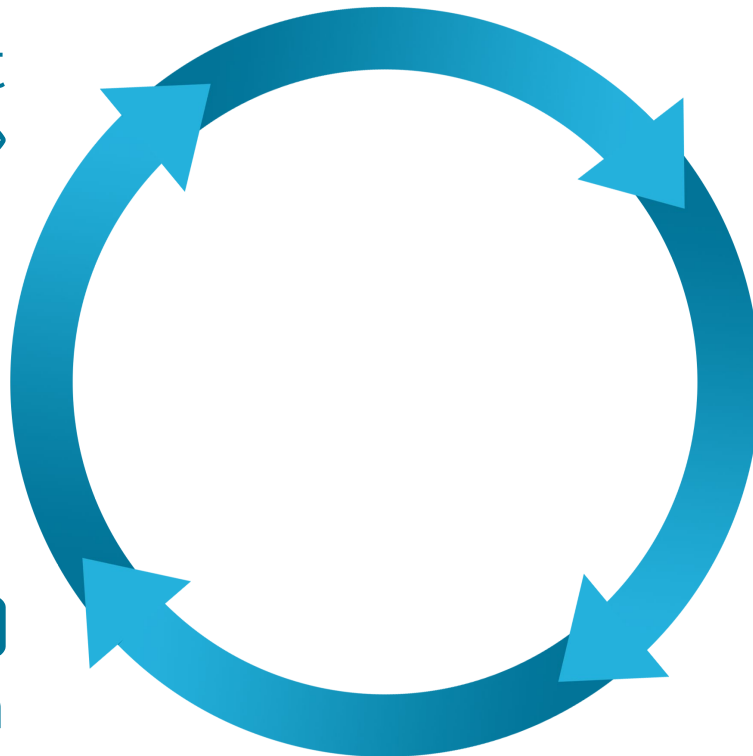
Adapt



Plan



Action



Because you start with *where you
are now...*

... you can apply Kanban to
virtually any situation

Things to watch out for

- Ignoring your WIP limit
- Inappropriate or misunderstood transitions
- Team not updating the board
- “This task is so small, it doesn’t need to go on the board”
- “All of our teams must work in the same way”



Playback



You may need Kanban when...

- Members of your team are asking you for status updates
- Members of *other* dependent teams are asking you for status updates
- When urgent issues pull people away from focused or planned efforts
- When everyone feels really busy, but no-one can say exactly why, or justify that work needs to be dropped

How to use Kanban

- Start from where you are
- Define your workflow — shared understanding!
- Define your transitions — shared understanding!
- Set a limit on Work In Progress — and stick to it
- Use the board to manage flow, manage blockers, and open up conversations about the work

How to use Kanban

- Shine a light on your current situation
- Identify, prioritise and implement improvements
- Balance the demands of the business (utilisation) with efficient customer delivery (flow)

Kanban in combinations

- Combine with retrospectives to identify and power improvements
- Bring the board into stand-ups to emphasise delivery and show unplanned work

Join us next time...

“Getting Prioritisation Right”

Thursday 14th March, 5:00 - 7:30pm, Box UK HQ

In this next session in our Agile workshop series we'll explore ways to **reduce noise**, **remove distraction** and **ramp up value**, by bringing some order to your backlog.

Exploring practical techniques to validate task priority and support effective planning, this is a must-attend if you're looking to work more effectively and efficiently, while still delivering maximum value.

www.boxuk.com/getting_prioritisation-right





Spread the word...

- Know someone that would find these events useful? **Invite them along** to the next one!
- Post your invite on social using the hashtag **#boxukevent**
- **£50 Amazon voucher** up for grabs!



Thank you!

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