

Improvement Loop

Overview

It's about Improvement, not adoption

The improvement loop is a structured session to stimulate valuable change. Too often continuous improvement just focuses on applying new practices - the aim of the improvement loop is to look wider than that: to increase learning, improve flow, impact, fitness for purpose and create a better environment for people to be in and work.

Each Improvement Loop has a common format:

1. **Remember the goal**

This could be the overall goal of the team, or something else that the team is working together to achieve long term. This orients the session on the overall objective.

2. **Reflect on where you are now**

The team reflects and uses situational awareness to surface valuable areas for change. There are many ways of doing this. We include a step by step example of based on the Kanban Values (we recommend that you do use this every month or two). You might also choose to use one of the many retrospective techniques out there, make up your own, or explore on the big-

gest obstacles that are holding you back.

3. **Next Target: Decide what step you want to take towards the goal**

Once you've reflected on the current condition, the next step is come up with the change that you want to make - describe this by saying what will be different from now, rather than how you're going to get there. It should be achievable within a couple of weeks to a couple of months at most.

4. **Explore options and choose**

Look at the Kanban Guide and see if there are any options that help you to get to the next target. If not consider other options, there are many non-kanban ways to improve, so don't expect to take forward options from the Kanban guide every time.

5. **Close with agreed action**

Make a commitment to each other to take action. Agree what you're going to try, how you will know it is working, when you're going to review it to see if it's working or not, who's going to do what to get started and by when.

Preparation

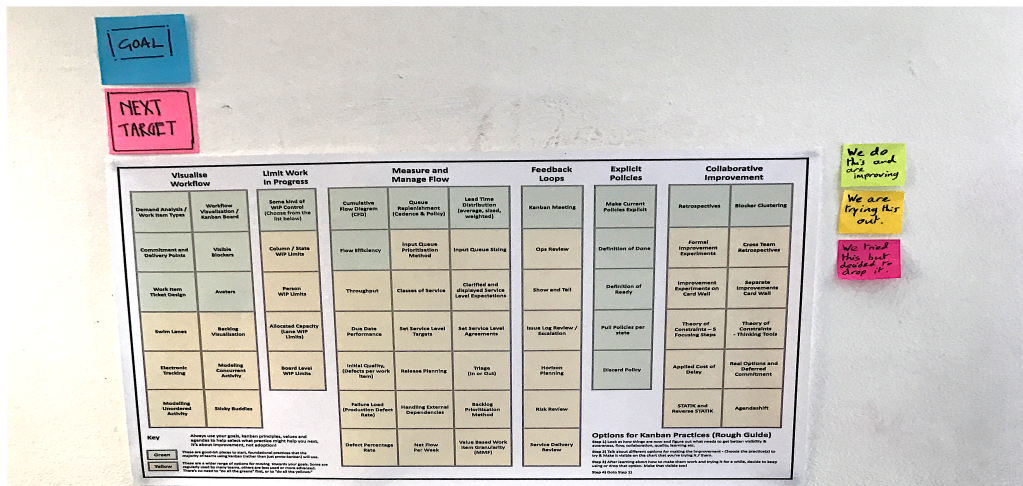
Materials

- Team's Kanban Guide Poster (New one if being introduced to the team for the first time.)
- Sharpies for writing (1 per person in the team, plus 1 for yourself)
- 1 pack of standard rectangular (76mm by 127mm) post-it notes
- 3 packs of different colours of standard square (76mm by 76mm) post-it notes
- 3 different colours of small square (38mm by 38mm) post-it notes for the Kanban Guide poster (Red, Yellow and Green work well for this).
- Blu-Tac

Before the Session

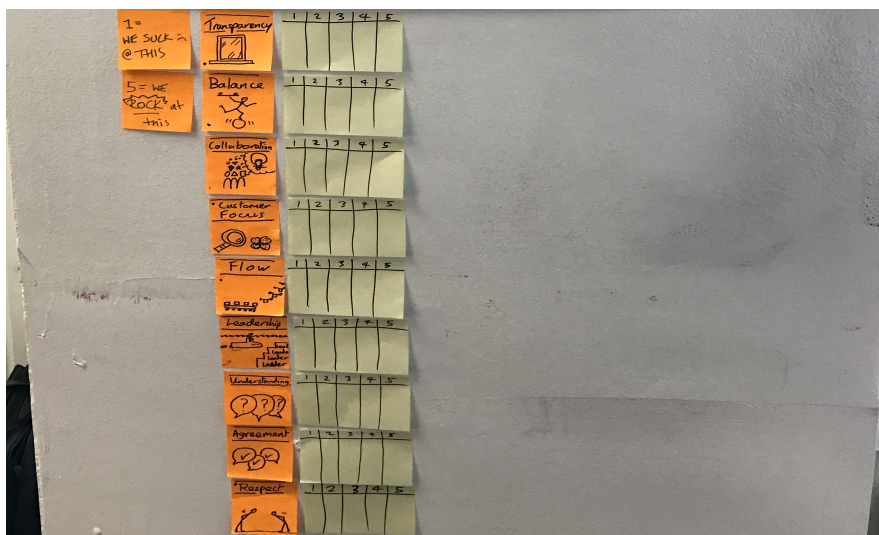
Set things up on a wall as per the photo

- "Goal" post-it note at the top
- "Next Target" underneath it
- Kanban Guide Poster, with key on the right.



If you are running the Kanban Values Reflection, also set up the following:

- Each of the Kanban Values listed on a square post-it.
- To the right of each value a rectangular post-it note, with numbered columns from 1-5 (these are called "Gradients of Agreement")
- A key for the numbers on two post-its : 1= we suck at this, 5 = "we ROCK at this"



If this is the first time you've run the session, first introduce the Kanban Guide and populate it. Use the "Introducing the Kanban Guide" checklist to help with this.

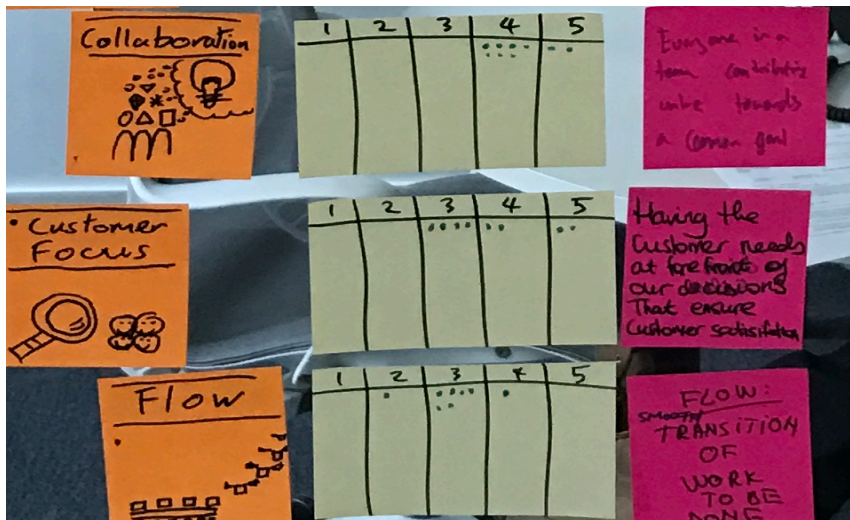
Running the Session

Remember the goal

- Give everyone a minute to write down the goal on a post-it. This can either be the overall goal for the team or another long-term goal based on a theme.
- Get everyone to take turns reading out their post-it and sticking it on the wall next to the "Goal" post-it above the kanban poster.
- Discuss - if the team is aligned, celebrate it. If not, ask what that might mean. Don't spend too long dissecting this but make a mental note to bring up aligning on the team purpose as a potential option for improvement later on in the session

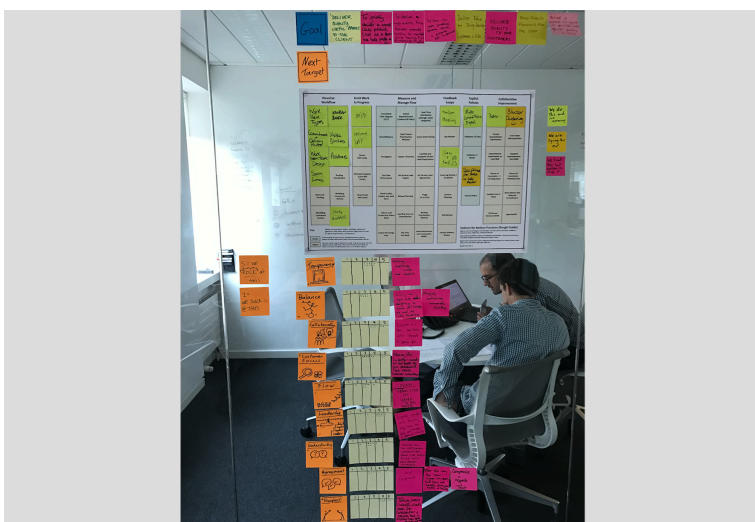
Reflect on where you are now

- Get team to pair up (one triad if needs be) and choose 1 value per group. Make sure no-one duplicates a value.
- Give them 90 seconds to come up with a definition or example of that value, if they want they can write it on a post-it note.
- Let each group share their definition of the value, let people discuss if they want, but keep it to less than 5 minutes.
- After each value definition, get the team to do Fist of Five voting and record the results by on the numbered post-it note next to the value



- After all the voting, discuss the results and choose one or two areas to focus on. Stimulate discussion by looking at the results ask the team what stands out. If necessary, flag clusters and large variance (in the dots on the post-it notes) and ask, "What does this mean?"
- After the discussion, get the team to choose one or two values to focus on based on the results and the overall goal.
- Move the selected values post-it note(s) to the left so that they stand out from the rest.

By this time, you'll have ended up with something like this:



Explore options and choose

- Based on the selected values, as a team decide what you want to change, describe it in terms of what will be different in 2-8 weeks time. Write this down on a post-it note or two, and stick it next to the Next Target post-it
- Check-in with the Kanban Guide - get the team have a look at what's already in place, and what experiments are in flight.
- Evaluate experiments you're trying out (usually the orange post-it notes on the poster). If they have become part of standard practice then change the post-it colour (usually to green). If you decide to stop a practice, change the colour to suit (usually to red)
- Consider what options you've got to make the next target. Ask whether any of the Kanban Guide options will help towards your target. Often, if there isn't a specific option that fits, choosing the deliberate experiment option is good place to start. Make sure you think of other options not included in the Kanban Guide too.
- Agree what option(s) that you're going to try out to get to the next target

Close with agreed action

- Have a short discussion to agree what needs to happen to take the option(s) forward
- Get the team to pair up (one triad if need be) and give them 2 or 3 minutes to tell each other what they are personally going to do and when to help make this happen.
- If people have no active work to undertake relating to the option then a good commitment for them to make is to hold those who do to account by checking in and asking about progress

- Get people to write what they're going to do on a who, what, when sheet on a flipchart (<http://gamestorming.com/games-for-decision-making/whowhatwhen-matrix/>) and agree a time for a 10 minute check-in with the facilitator in about a weeks time.

After the session

- If you want, take a photo, record of the session
- Ideally the team takes the Kanban Guide, next target and who, what, when matrix back to where they're sitting and place them in a visible and accessible location
- Follow up with an invite for the agreed time to check in on progress, this only needs to be 10-15 minutes.