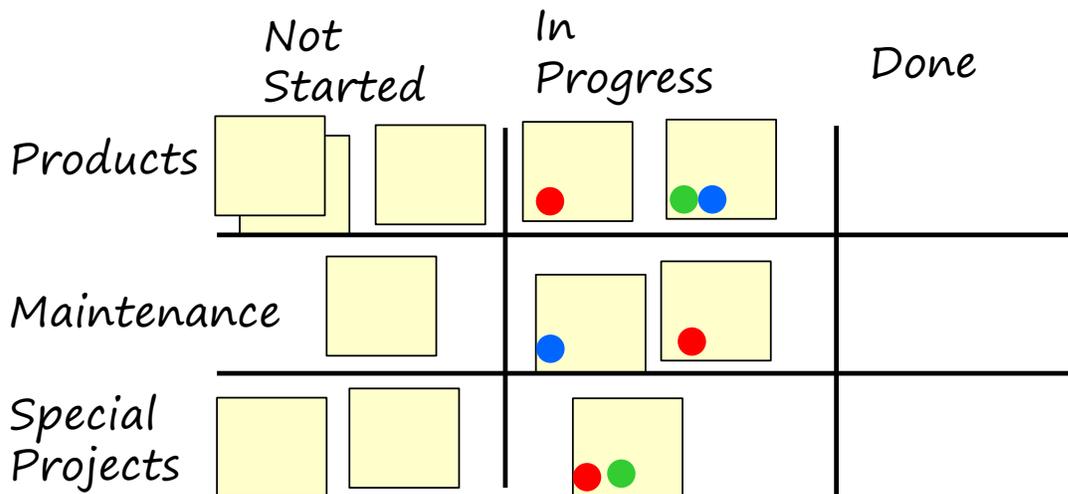


More Techniques for Visual Planning Boards

How to Make Ownership and Workload Visible

by Kathy Iberle



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Key Points

- Managers can quickly see progress and workload with a Visual Planning Board.
- If your jobs pile up in one spot, don't start more jobs until the traffic jam has been cleared.
- "Nothing Ever Gets Done Around Here" might be caused by too many jobs in progress.

What is a Visual Planning Board?

A Visual Planning Board is a simple, visual method to monitor progress and manage work. If you aren't familiar with Visual Planning Boards, you may want to read our publication [Visual Planning Boards for Small Groups](#) before reading this.

Understanding Status, or "Who's on First?"

A Visual Planning Board provides a quick way to answer a number of common questions.

How many jobs are waiting to be worked on?

This question is very easy to answer using a Visual Planning Board. You can count the number of total jobs in "Not Started", or count them by category.

| | Not Started | In Progress | Done |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|------|
| Products | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Maintenance | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Special Projects | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Who is working on which job?

Put a colored dot sticker or a colored mark on each sticky note to represent each individual who is working on that job. This will show at a glance who is working on what.

| | Not Started | In Progress | Done |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------|------|
| Products | 3 | 2 (1 red, 1 green) | 0 |
| Maintenance | 1 | 2 (1 blue, 1 red) | 0 |
| Special Projects | 2 | 1 (1 red, 1 green) | 0 |

How far has that job gotten?

This question is asked when the work moves through stages or phases. For instance, a carpentry project might move through cutting, gluing, sanding, and finishing.

Represent stages or phases with columns on a Visual Planning Board, by dividing the "In Progress" column into the various stages used by your organization.

| | Not Started | Cutting | Gluing | Sanding | Finishing | Done |
|-----------|-------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|------|
| Product 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Product 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Product 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

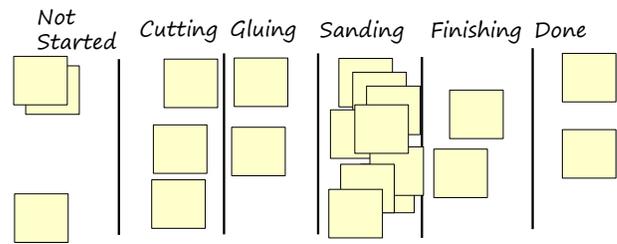
Nothing Ever Gets Done Around Here

Visual Planning Board can also be used to speed up the progress of work through an organization.

Traffic Jams

A common cause of slow progress is a “traffic jam” in one of the stages. In this Visual Planning Board, we can see a traffic jam in “Sanding”. Once there is a traffic jam, starting new jobs will just make things worse. The new jobs will reach Sanding, then sit there and wait.

The organization will get more done in the long run if the traffic jam is cleared before any more new jobs are started. This can be expedited if the people who usual work on the earlier stages can help clear jobs. For instance, if no new jobs are started, the people who normally do “Cutting” will not be completely busy. Perhaps some of them can help with “Sanding”.

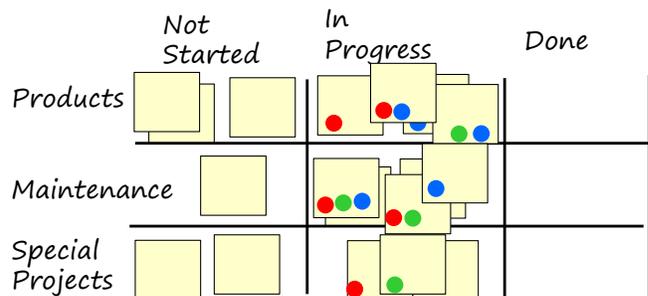


Switching Back and Forth All Day Long

Switching from one job to another takes a certain amount of time. That time can be as little as fifteen seconds (for simple routine work) to as much as fifteen minutes (for complicated intellectual work). When people are switching their attention from job to job all day long, those little bits of time add up quickly to a significant amount of time spent task-switching. If instead, a person works on only a few different jobs during a given day, he or she will get a lot more done.

The Visual Planning Board can help you get this task-switching under control and free up that time for your real work.

1. Track which people are working on which jobs, using colored dots or marks as described above.
2. Count up how many items each individual is working on, as shown here. This total is known as the person's *Work-in-Process*.
 - Green: 4
 - Blue: 4
 - Red: 4
3. Choose a Work-in-Process (WIP) limit for individuals. For jobs requiring concentrated attention, two or three is a good limit.
4. Now comes the hard part. *Stop starting new jobs* until enough jobs have finished bringing most individuals down to your desired WIP limit.
5. Once the workload is near the WIP limit, keep it there. When existing jobs finish, it's time to start new jobs.



As soon as the workload gets close to the WIP limit, you'll see the number of jobs finished per week go up, and your people will be happier.

Learn More

The Visual Planning Board is a tool used in a family of methods known as “Lean”. Lean methods which include a Work-in-Process limit are known as “Kanban” methods.

Did you like this paper?

Find more like it on the Iberle Consulting Group website: www.kiberle.com

Other papers you might find useful:

- “Visual Planning Boards for Small Groups: How to Simplify Communications in Your Workgroup”
- “Visualizing Workflow in Your Organization: How to Use States on Your Visual Planning Board”

About the Author



Kathy Iberle has been working with agile software development and Lean development teams for many years. Kathy recently retired from Hewlett-Packard after a multi-faceted career as a developer, quality engineer, and process improvement expert in a variety of product lines. She is now the owner and principal consultant of the Iberle Consulting Group. Kathy has published regularly since 1997, served as co-chair of the Program Committee of the Pacific Northwest Software Quality Conference (PNSQC) in 2009, and participated in the invitation-only Software Test Managers Roundtable for five years.

Kathy has an M.S. in Computer Science from the University of Washington, and an excessive collection of degrees in Chemistry from the University of Washington and the University of Michigan.



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