



# Agile Record

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**Kanban**

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## Creating my own flow with personal kanban

by *Huib Schoots*

Agile is not something you do, it is something you are. With that in mind, I started working at codecentric. A passionate company that not only helps customers to implement agile methodologies, but also helps the same customers to be agile, at all levels of the organization. We are self-steering, our processes are visual and transparent and are periodic 'geretrospected' to learn from the past to improve.

If you work for an organization that is trying to get agility across to customers, why not extended it to the rest of my life? A joke goes around about applying agile in your private life: "You can easily use Scrum at home, but I wouldn't recommend it! You will find out very quickly who is the Product Owner, and it's not you ...". With that sage advice in mind, I started searching how I can apply more agile principles in my everyday life. At Potslightning, the peer conference before Agile Testing Days 2012, I was introduced to "Personal Kanban" by Meike Mertsch<sup>1</sup>.

Personal Kanban is not to be confused with the original Kanban as developed and applied successfully by Toyota. And it isn't the software development technique to quickly and as effectively as possible meet customer demand in a team. I am talking about a real personal variation. It is based on the same principles as the original:

- The starting point is: I want to create value (not finish pre-made checklists)
- I want to get as much flow as possible in the things I do

The rules are deceptively simple<sup>2</sup>: visualize what you do and put a limit on the work in progress.

I am easily distracted and have a tendency to take on too many things at once. I'm also an eternal optimist and structurally plan not enough time to get things done. Finally I have trouble saying no when fun or interesting things pass by. So when Meike told me about personal Kanban I thought that could help me too....

For me personal kanban works better than finishing various tasklists. These have a tendency to become especially large and I can't do the tasks from top to bottom. In a tasklist you can't or

only poorly see where you currently are working on, not to mention that it shows how many things you actually doing simultaneously. And in my case that is often too much. The list doesn't help me actually to get all those things done. The tasklist can ultimately only help me afterwards to make sure everything is done. It does not help to support the process to actually do anything.

And that is precisely what visualization does! By defining a simple process and visualizing it, suddenly it becomes (painfully) clear what the real progress is. By defining a clear limit for the work in progress it might become painfully clear that it will be very difficult to fulfill all those nice promises you made so casually within a reasonable time. And that's a big advantage of Kanban in your daily live: you can start measuring how many of those promises you can handle per day, week or month. So now you can finally see if that commitment you made to your partner to do a particular job tomorrow is real. And that will prevent a lot of course.

This is my personal Kanban board:



<sup>1</sup> <http://agiletester.webnode.com/news/personal-kanban-to-my-rescue1/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.personalkanban.com>



In the meantime I have been using it for a few weeks now and I feel I have more grip on what I'm doing. I still have to force myself to keep using the board and I am still not fully satisfied, but it really helps me.

I have my kanban board always with me because I keep it in my note book. I started with two separate boards: private workitems (top) and a work-related (bottom). In the meanwhile I have put them together. The work I do for clients during office hours is not on my board. The both boards were actually competing for the same timeslots. So it was not very logical to keep two boards.

I will keep experimenting with my board and it is likely that I will change my board or the process in the near future. If I can buy the right size, I might consider using multiple colored stickies. Or try an extra lane "queue" on the board. Time will tell. ■

## > about the author

### Huib Schoots



Huib Schoots is currently an agile test consultant at code-centric where he shares his passion for testing and agile through coaching, training and giving presentations on a variety of subjects. With fifteen years of experience in IT and software testing, Huib is experienced in different testing roles. Curious and passionate, he is an agile and context-driven tester who attempts to read everything ever published on software testing. A member of the Dutch Exploratory Workshop on Testing, black-belt in the Miagi-Do School of software testing and coauthor of a book about the future of software testing. Huib maintains a blog on [magnifiant.com](http://magnifiant.com).

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Issue	Deadline for Articles	Topic
No. 14 (May 2013)	April 1, 2013	"Agile adoption stories – What Worked and What Didn't"
No. 15 (Aug 2013)	July 1, 2013	"Distributed Team Management"
No. 16 (Nov 2013)	October 1, 2013	"Refactoring"

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