planview™

Enterprise Kanban for Scaling Agile Teams

5 BENEFITS OF USING KANBAN TO CREATE TEAMS OF TEAMS FOR YOUR AGILE TRANSFORMATION

The success of your Agile initiative depends largely on the day-to-day work of your teams and the individuals within them. Even if your Agile initiative begins with a bang – how do you keep that energy, that enthusiasm, and that sense of urgency alive in your teams? What steps are taken at an organizational level to build teams of teams and scale Agile successfully – both virtually and co-located?

As organizations expand Agile from teams to teams of teams (Agile Release Trains or ARTs), their main obstacle becomes a lack of visibility. Leaders lose sight of the work in process and no longer see the big picture. Neither the individual team members nor their leaders have the time to provide constant status updates. Rather than spend time on the administrative overhead to combine reports and spreadsheets, organizations are turning to enterprise Kanban to solve the visibility need. According to Gartner, while Scrum practices are prevalent (90%), 68% now use Kanban or Scrumban (22%) within the technology parts of the business.[1]

Every organization gets to a point in its Agile transformation when existing methods for planning, managing, and coordinating work break down. Teams and Teams of Teams (ARTs) need a better way to prioritize their dynamic, shifting work. At the same time, the organization needs to coordinate across teams and ensure accountability towards business outcomes. Current methods from both project-centric and team-based Agile perspectives, fall short.

1. Gartner Circle Research Report, The Agile Enterprise, October 2019

TRADITIONAL PROJECT APPROACH SHORTCOMINGS

- Prioritizations are not dynamic, resulting in resources stuck in initiatives that aren't always the priority of the business and are incredibly tedious and difficult to change.

- Requirements and scope created as part of the project plan, impose significant overhead on changes to it later. Non-iterative scopes lead to stuck priorities, making it difficult to take on incremental work.

- Lack of insight into work assigned leads to inefficiency as people are assigned to multiple projects at one time, leading to delays and lack of focus.

- Significant time and effort is required to translate what team members are working on into a standardized project status report.

TRADITIONAL AGILE APPROACH SHORTCOMINGS

- Focus on team-only work leads to limitations when a deliverable is shared across teams.

- A focus on technology related work, such as software development, often doesn't give business teams an opportunity to engage or connect.

- Work done at the team level is often not connected to the overall business strategy, making it difficult to align when pivots are required.

The best way to overcome the short-comings of project-centric Agile delivery is to ensure your organization has the visibility it needs to the connect enterprise strategy to the work delivery teams. Enterprise Kanban is an excellent option for providing the visual management methods and tooling needed to better connect delivery teams to the enterprise's strategic goals, for both virtual and co-located teams and teams of teams.

Benefits of Enterprise Kanban for Scaling Agile Teams

To truly support Agile innovation, teams need workflow methods that:

- Are flexible and can evolve over time

- Quickly and effectively provide valuable insights to leadership

- Reduce waste

- Expose systemic and localized inefficiencies

- Reduce dependencies between teams while increasing quality of communication

We'll explore the top five benefits of implementing enterprise Kanban in your organization to successfully scale Agile beyond the teams and connect ARTs for better business outcomes.

1. Increase Flexibility

Unlike most workflow management methods, enterprise Kanban is built for flexibility. Most workflow management methods involve significant manual effort to build, share, and maintain. Teams spend time aligning around their plans, but then don't have structures in place to ensure that alignment continues as the work progresses.

Plans are usually built around deadlines, which must be manually adjusted (and communicated to everyone involved) anytime they change. Most workflow management methods were designed to help teams execute their plans, exactly as planned – but life and work, as we all know, require us to expect the unexpected.

By contrast, enterprise Kanban is built for change. Modern implementations of Kanban use digital tools, like Planview LeanKit, that allow teams to plan, manage, track, and deliver their work in a shared, living space. Teams and teams of teams can customize Kanban boards to accurately reflect their true workflows – and leaders can view those boards (in a single program board) to easily see progress on initiatives at a glance.
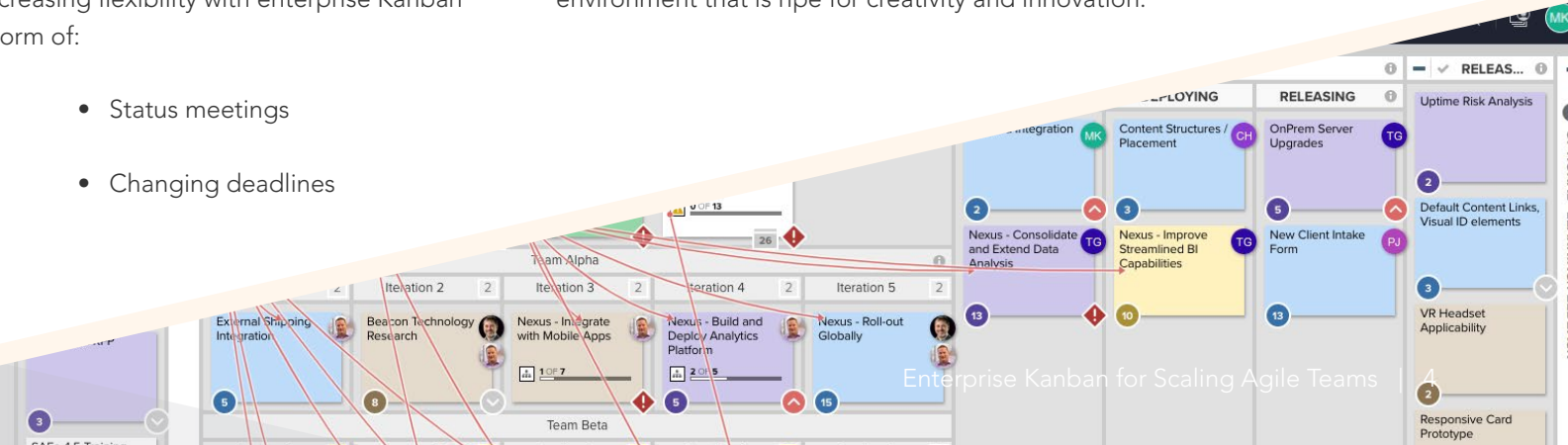
If plans change, it's to adapt those plans and inform all invested parties in a matter of clicks – no major reworking of static plans, no wasted effort, no frustrated employees. This flexibility also allows teams to adjust and evolve their Kanban portfolios as the Agile initiative evolves and grows.

2. Reduce Waste

Kanban was originally designed to help auto manufacturers reduce waste on assembly lines, by creating a better system for managing inventory and a workflow that enabled speed and greater efficiency without increasing costs. These benefits carry through in modern implementations of enterprise Kanban. As mentioned above, increasing flexibility with enterprise Kanban inherently reduces waste, in the form of:

- Rework

- Duplicate effort

- Status meetings

- Changing deadlines

Reducing waste in this sense not only saves time and money – it also creates healthier, happier working environments in teams. No one enjoys the manual tedium involved in constantly redoing plans – reducing the need for this type of intellectually draining, emotionally taxing work can help maintain a work environment that is ripe for creativity and innovation.
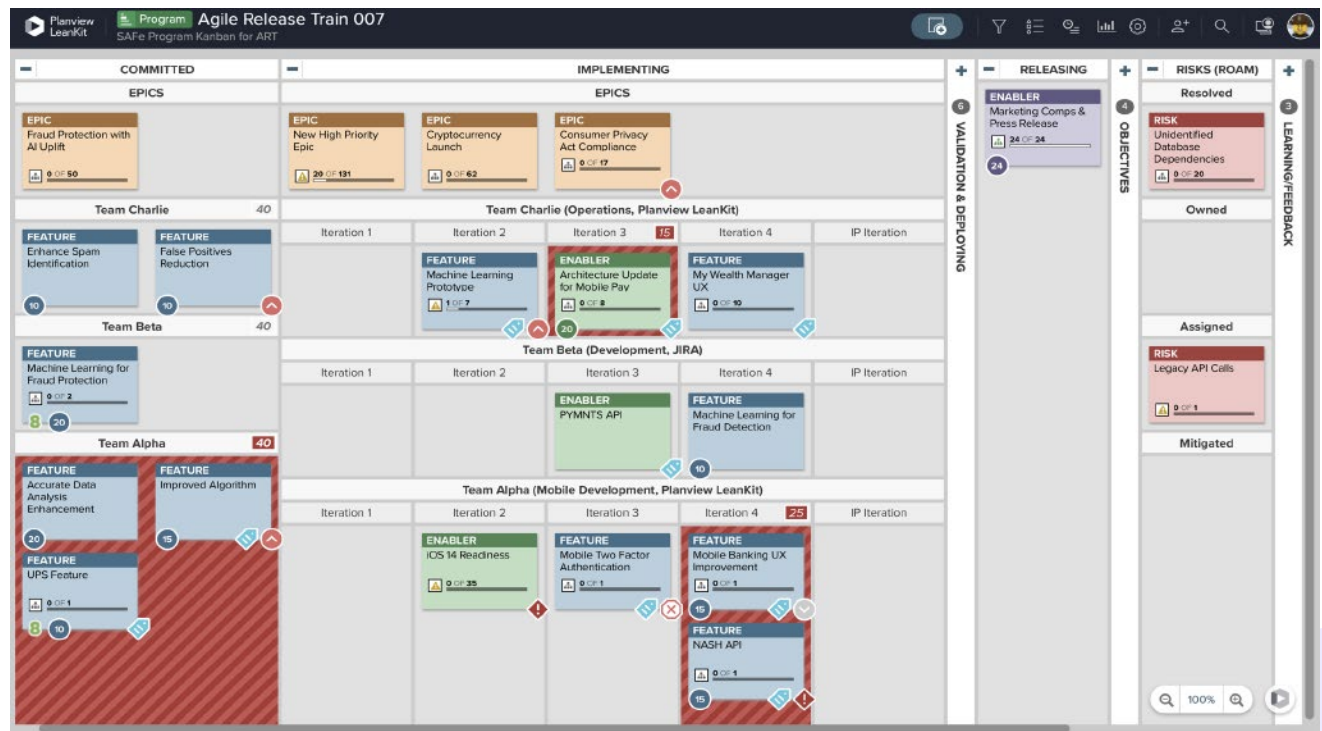
3. Arm Leaders with Insights

When you use enterprise Kanban to manage the work of your Agile teams, you empower everyone in the organization – especially leaders – with valuable insights into what's happening across the company. If an executive has a question about a certain team's capacity, or is curious about an ongoing initiative, they can first look at that team's Kanban board (or board of boards for an ART) to get a near-instant understanding of:

- What's in progress

- What's up next

- How long work has been in progress

- What roadblocks are preventing progress from being made

They can also view board analytics to understand team or ART capacity, productivity, and more. In most organizations, executives spend a majority of their time trying to simply get a basic understanding of what's going on and how it's going, in addition to creating long-term strategies for growth.

Using enterprise Kanban to manage workflows arms leaders with the insights they need to have productive, meaningful, and informed conversations with their teams, without the need for non-stop status meetings and updates. It can also help them create smarter, more informed plans based on the true realities of their organization.

4. Increase Accountability, Reduce Dependencies

Implementing a Kanban system inherently creates more accountability in any organization – which can be intimidating to some. It can be a vulnerable experience for anyone to suddenly have to share exactly what they're working on, how long it's taking them, and other information about their daily work.

However, the trade-off for this momentary feeling of exposure is a newfound sense of shared ownership over work, which we've seen make a noticeable impact in terms of both productivity and morale. No one likes wasting time on work that is redundant, unnecessarily tedious, or otherwise not valuable. Visualizing work not only increases accountability, it increases communication around how work is done, which can help to expose time- and morale-draining dependencies.

By making the work visible, dependencies and relationships become clear. You encourage teams to find ways to decouple work, to focus scope on only those things truly required to achieve the larger business objective. And when dependencies do exist, you can plan ahead across teams to ensure a smooth delivery.

A Kanban board can help visualize wasteful, systemic patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed - for example, if an executive insists on personally reviewing every piece of work a team completes, creating a near-endless backlog of undelivered work items. This is not only inefficient from a productivity/cost standpoint, it's also destructive for morale. Knowing that a piece of work might never get delivered, or might be rendered obsolete while waiting for a review, is demoralizing for employees and can slowly kill motivation across a team.
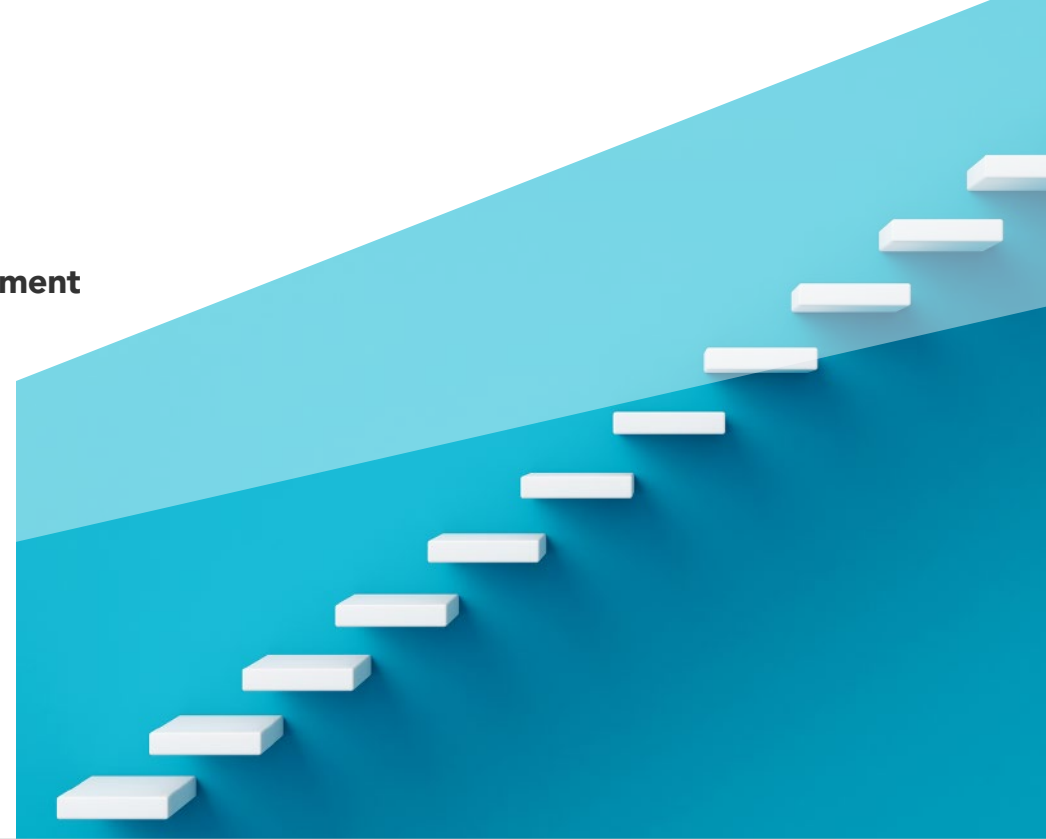
Enterprise Kanban features, such as the ability to block a card on a board if it's waiting on someone else, creates a sense of shared responsibility across the organization for identifying these sources of waste, and working to resolve them. It's not uncommon to hear that it took implementing a Kanban system for organizations to realize just how much waste was hiding just beneath the surface of their seemingly 'effective' workflows.

5. Expose Inefficiencies and Support Continuous Improvement

In addition to being highly inflexible, existing workflow management methods don't offer solutions for exposing problems or solving them. Kanban was designed to help teams not only manage their work, but also improve the way they work. More advanced Kanban tools – such as WIP limits and blockers – can help teams and teams of teams identify exactly where they have inefficiencies. Then, they can create cards for each of the problems that need resolution, and track that work alongside their project-driven work.

Often, the simple process of defining your team's basic workflow, a key step in customizing your Kanban board, uncovers all kinds of systemic and localized inefficiencies that can be mitigated through more intentional process design.

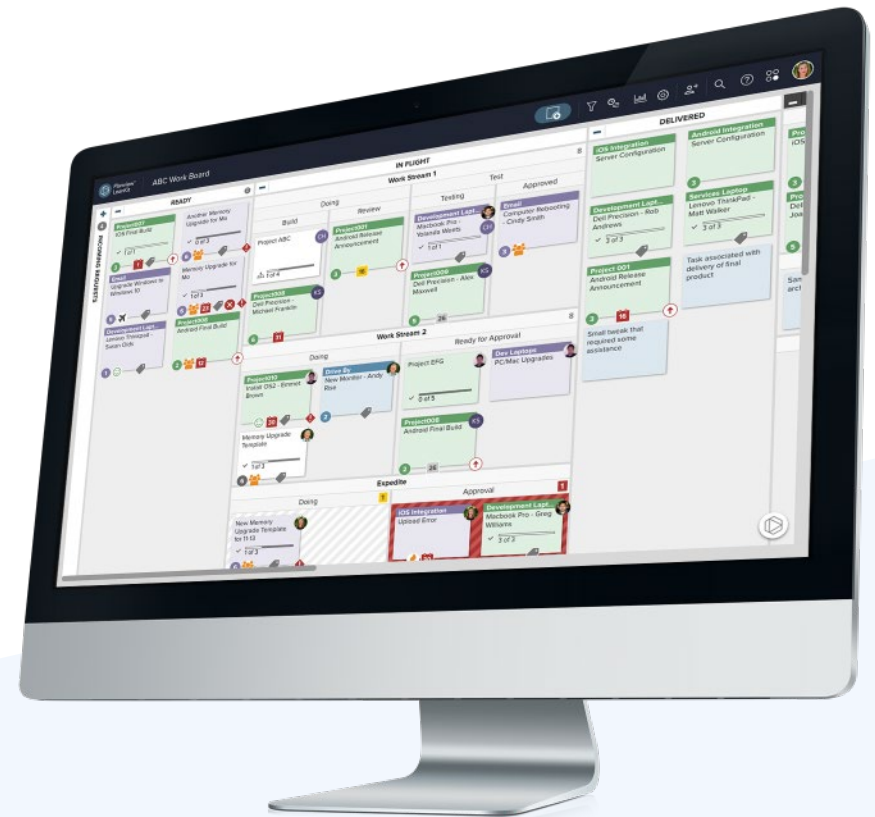## Underpin Your Agile Transformation with Enterprise Kanban

Often, the conversation around Agile transformation stays at the macro-level: How does leadership need to evolve? How should long-term planning methods change to align with Agile values? How do organizations expand their Agile initiatives without disrupting necessary, non-Agile business functions? How far should our Agile transformation extend? Enterprise Kanban provides the answer to an equally important question at the leadership, team, and ART levels – how do we design our workflow management methods to effectively support Agile innovation at scale? What steps can leaders, teams, and the individuals within them take to increase agility, flexibility, and value in their everyday work?

By connecting multiple Kanban boards to visualize process and flow, you can gain insight into how teams are progressing on broader programs and initiatives. Your teams can optimize workflows, start to move faster, and work together more effectively for continuous improvement and delivery. In addition, enterprise Kanban quickly communicates high-value information to stakeholders and executives.

The benefits described here are invaluable to the success of any Agile transformation, but this is not an all-inclusive list. There are many less tangible, less obvious benefits to enterprise Kanban that happen over time – such as increases in workplace satisfaction, morale, and productivity. The bottom line is that enterprise Kanban can provide an excellent foundation for scaling Agile and ensuring the success of your Agile transformation.

About Planview's Lean and Agile Delivery Solution

Planview's Lean and Agile Delivery solutions enable organizations to adopt and embrace Lean-Agile practices, scale Agile beyond teams to Agile Release Trains or teams of connected teams, and connect strategy to delivery while continuously improving the flow of work, to deliver work smarter and faster. With Planview, choose how you want to scale and when. We'll help you transform and scale Agile on your terms and timeline.

To learn more about the Planview Lean and Agile Delivery Solution, visit **Planview.info/teams-of-teams**.

planview™