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INTRODUCTION

"What should I do?" the Zen apprentice asks his master while standing in front of a tall ladder.

"You can climb the ladder, rung by rung, to the top."

"How many rungs does the ladder have?" asks the apprentice.

"Eighteen," the Zen master replies.

"And what should I do when I'm at the top?" the pupil wants to know as he places his foot on the first rung.

"You can stand there," the master explains in a friendly manner, "you can enjoy the view, you can climb back down, or you can continue to climb without any rungs."

This book has been written to give you the courage to climb further. It tells of ladders tall and short, of passionate climbers and spectacular climbs. A common feature of all climbs is that they begin with the first rung and then proceed step-by-step. Each one of these steps represents a small alteration through which you can gain new experience and improve.

We believe that this Zen story is a fitting introduction to a book about Kanban—after all Kanban is also about step-by-step change. Clear structures provide a gradual process of improvement that is relatively easy to establish. Many Kanban practices

are like simple ladders. It is due to this that Kanban is quickly becoming a sensation, enjoying widespread popularity in the world of software development.

"Kanban rocks" is how one of our customers summed it up. He, like many other Kanban fans, has reason to be thrilled. Kanban:

- Follows **simple rules**
- Is built and runs on **easy-to-master mechanics**
- Can be implemented with **relatively little effort**
- Can lead to **remarkable improvement in very little time**

Sounds good, doesn't it? However, we have not written this book just for the growing Kanban fan base. We will emphasize critical aspects and the several traps into which users repeatedly fall and present some practical guidelines for Kanban change management to help avoid these traps. In order to do so, we will investigate various starting points, identify relevant system and environmental factors, and describe the personal challenges involved in a process of continuous improvement. Ultimately, Kanban is always about the whole system. Kanban:

- Often starts with a small team but **always has its eye on the organization as a whole**
- Concentrates on technical development but is simultaneously **always aligned with economic value creation**
- Aims to improve software development processes but **requires everyone involved in these processes to be willing to change**
- Is quick to apply but **requires mindfulness in order to improve continuously**

It is relatively easy to start a Kanban initiative at your place of work. However, it is highly challenging to implement the initiative in such a way that you create a culture of continual improvement. Practice shows that a *quick-fix* approach to Kanban at the workplace will rarely deliver long-lasting change—professional change management is required to achieve a sustainable environment.

1.1   WHAT WE CARE ABOUT

Kanban Change Leadership will show you all that is necessary to properly understand change management with Kanban and be able to apply it optimally. In order to achieve this, we provide you with many maps, tools, and, most importantly, various scenarios. We draw on our own experience as Kanban coaches and change experts to enable you to read real case studies and then apply what you have learned systemically. In other words, we attempt to smuggle valuable knowledge about organizations, cultures, strategies, and emotions from systems theory into the book without losing sight of the real world. What good is the best theory in the world if you're not capable of applying it appropriately?

On the subject of appropriate action, in a study carried out by Kimberley-Clark, people were asked what they would take with them on a desert island. More than 50% of the 1000 people asked said it would be very important for them to take toilet paper. What can we conclude from this? As the German economist Günther Ortmann put it, "people think practically" [1].

Practical thinking is a requisite for twenty-first-century change management. In this book, thinking is based on four fundamental principles as stipulated by David J. Anderson [2]:

1. **Kanban begins where a system is already in place**. No big change, rigorous training or process transformation is required. You have already begun climbing the Zen ladder simply by bringing about awareness of your current work processes.

2. **Kanban respects the current state**. Neither the current processes nor the existing functions are called into question. In this context, to respect is to assign meaning to that which is already there and subsequently, together with all other value-creation partners, build on this meaning.

3. **Kanban seeks incremental, evolutionary changes**. It's all about proceeding step-by-step—not in a single, massive leap—and agreement among all essentially involved in this process of change. In other words, Kanban requires that all stakeholders in a given value-creation process have a shared understanding of the work and improvement, regardless of whether this concerns the core team, clients, suppliers, owners, or senior management.

4. **Kanban requires leadership at all levels of the organization**. In order to create a culture of continuous improvement, all involved should contribute their ideas for improvement and be able to implement them. The operationally active employees frequently best know what needs to be improved in their daily work environment—let us support them in equalizing their viewpoint with that of management and taking the next step toward improvement together.

We believe that beyond these principles a profound fundamental understanding of how a culture can create continuous improvement is necessary. Our opinion is that the following principles are relevant:

1. **Kanban is an initiative for change**. We are concerned with systemic improvement, where collaboration rather than individual performance is important. Value creation and quality of work increase due to better structures and clearer rules of play between all cooperating partners.

2. **Kanban is concerned with the overall working environment**. The improvement of this environment requires critical reflection on each individual's fundamental mindset, expressed in terms of performance and cooperation. This in turn requires the willingness to continually work on one's self-development.

3. **Kanban revolves around people and not around mechanisms**. It is people who drive a sustainable process of improvement, and they achieve this very

visibly through emotions: joy, courage, enthusiasm, but also anger, disappointment, and sadness. We strongly recommend that these emotions be respected and used since, ultimately, they can very much be seen as the key drivers of change.

4. **Kanban is a team sport**. You need allies to create a culture of continual improvement. You need partners who will create and sustain new value with you. You need the support of your management because you want to expose systemic problems and resolve them. And you must have your stakeholders on board because you cannot create the added value you want without their active cooperation.

These principles emphasize the complexity of the change you can effect with Kanban. It requires an approach to match this complexity, and this is the reason why simply diving into Kanban is not generally recommended—you would risk achieving short-term change at the cost of the long-term potential for improvement. In the context of the introductory story, you would climb down again after reaching the tenth rung if at all and never get to the point where you climb further, without rungs.

"It shows who is truly committed," a colleague once said in a discussion about this limitless climbing. Be sure of your decision before making such a commitment. Use our guidelines to define your point of departure before embarking on your Kanban adventure. Try to identify the corporate culture you belong to. And assemble a training program tailored to your personal work situation from the exercises we provide.

1.2   WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

There are three target groups we particularly want to reach with *Kanban Change Leadership*:

1. **Those who are fundamentally interested in Kanban**: "Hey, this is cool! What is it exactly? How does Kaizen work?"
2. **Those involved in change management in IT**: "What approaches are there? What are the unique features of a process of continual improvement? What can I personally adopt from Kanban change management?"
3. **Those considering a Kanban initiative or already underway**: "What do I have to look out for? How do others do it? What could I also try out?"

The three parts of this book correspond to these three target groups.

In the first part, we focus on the foundations of Kanban. What are the basic assumptions? How can you visualize the current situation? What is the purpose of work-in-progress (WIP) limits? What are service classes? How can you apply metrics? And much more. Part 1 establishes the technical basis of Kanban and indicates the mechanisms required.

In the second part, we explain the context of Kanban change management. What are the options for change? What can they set in motion? What are the consequences for a business? What particular opportunities does Kanban-driven change provide? Besides mechanistic formulas and processes for automatic improvement, in Part 2, we share with you a contemporary understanding of the professional process of change. Despite the fact that everyone talks about change, there is still plenty left to say on the matter.

In the third part, we relate the technical system of Kanban with the social system of business and show you, using selected case studies, how to build a culture of continual improvement. How do you start the process? How do you define your point of departure? How do you create a Kanban system tailored to your field of work? What should you look out for when using it? Part 3 provides you with a compendium of experience showing how Kanban is applied in various situations.

"I don't know whether it will be better when it's different," the German philosopher Lichtenberg once said. "But that it must be different to be better, that much I know." In this spirit, we wish you a most inspiring read and good luck.