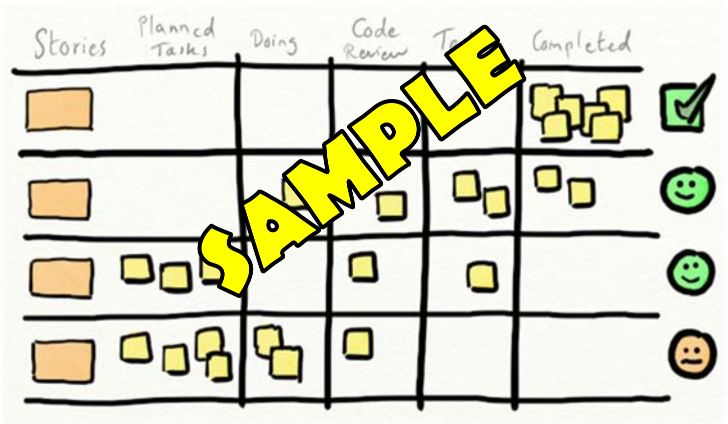
Toolbox for the Agile Coach

96 visualization examples

How great teams visualize their work



SAMPLE

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Toolbox for the Agile Coach
Visualization Examples
How great teams visualize their work
(Version 1.0)

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Welcome

This book is filled with visualization examples for teams to improve collaboration and communication, as well as shaping behaviors. It is written for people and teams working within an agile software development context.

The pages within only depict examples. Nothing else. No deep theoretical explanations. No explanation of Agile or Scrum. No references to Gamification. No discussion on how the brain interprets visual input or how our behaviors are influenced by visual information. There are other books written on those topics.

If a page contains an arrow (➡) in the upper corner, it means that there is a link to a blog or an article with more information to be found on the page “More information”.

If a page contains a heart (❤) you will find a person or team credited on the page “Sources of inspiration”.

The examples in this book might be perceived as if they are the best and only way of doing things. Of course that is not true. The examples are not best practice. They are only suggestions. You need to adapt them to your team’s context and needs.

This book is not intended to be read cover to cover. Browse. Jump back and forth. Pick what you like. Combine the ideas whichever way you find useful. Experiment and evaluate. Evolve or throw away.

Have fun!

Content

Introduction

The juicy stuff

Appendixes...

General Advice

Accessible – Position your wall with visualizations in the area where the team sits. You want it easily visible for everyone in the room.

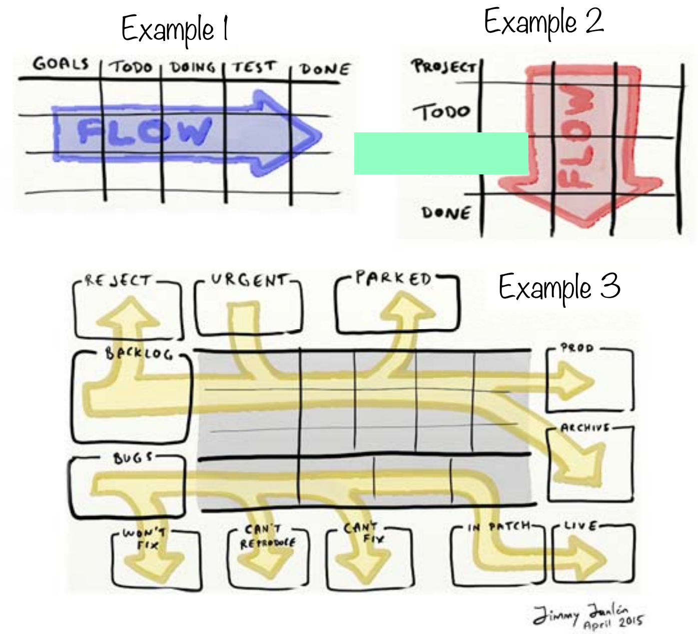
Simple - The wall needs to be easy to update. If you make it too cumbersome to update, the wall will probably deteriorate. If you suspect that it's not up to date, you will stop trusting it. If you don't trust it, you will update it even less frequently.

Clean – If you put love and care into designing the wall you will probably respect it more and want to continue to keep it nice and tidy. Don't go bananas, choose components with care.

Core flows – Design for the normal cases and core flows. Choose additional components based on the behaviors you want to change. Treat exceptions like exceptions.

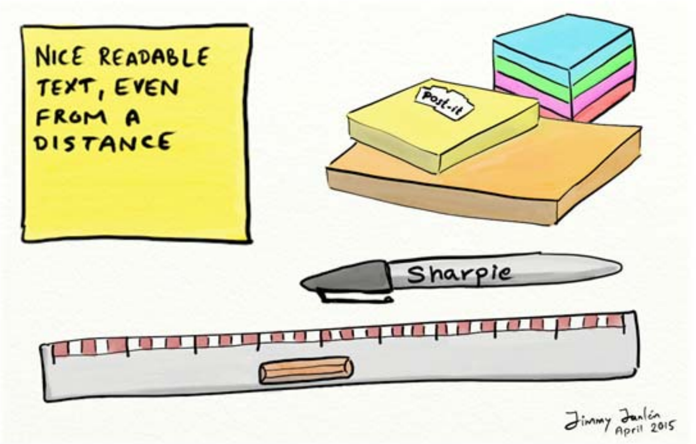
Evaluate – Your wall is a living thing. Evaluate each component's value and design regularly. Improve, adjust or abandon.

Visualize your workflow



Use boxes, lines, rows and columns to **describe your workflow** and which states work transitions between. Use Post-its to describe the work to be done which flows through your workflow. There is no right or wrong, keep on experimenting until you find a good representation of your workflow, a view that helps you see progress, collaborate, plan, do forecasts, and that reveals bottlenecks.

Tips

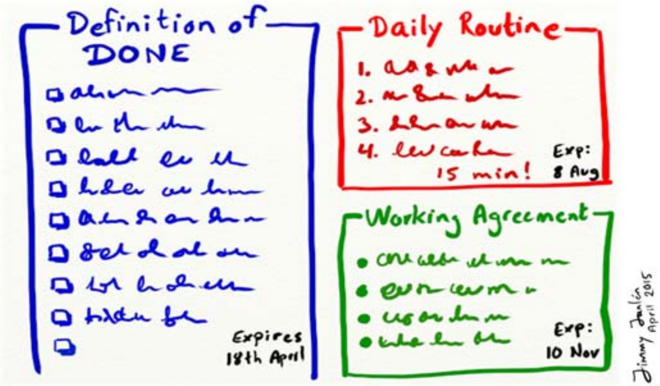


Write on Post-its with a **proper pen**, thicker than a normal pencil (like Sharpies, Pilot SignPens or similar). Don't write small text, it needs to be readable from a couple of meters. Only using **CAPS** almost automatically makes the text bigger and more readable.

Buy **proper Post-its**. Avoid the cheap fake ones. Get a lot of different sizes and colors. I can recommend Super Sticky Post-its and Stattys.

To make it simpler to draw straight lines on a whiteboard, get a **big ruler**.

Visualize your policies

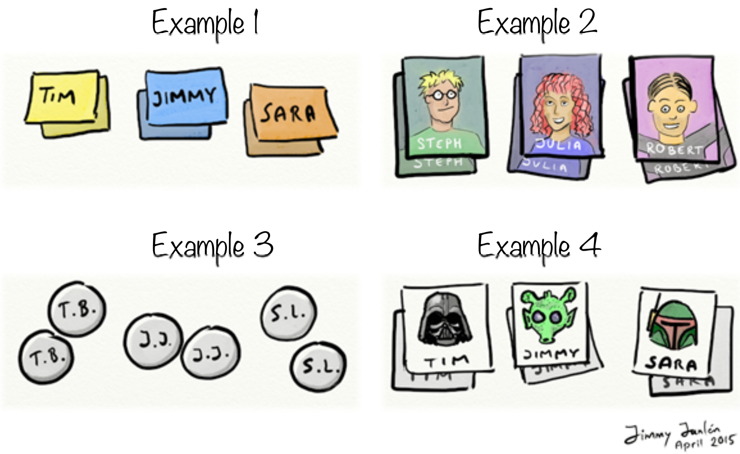


Make your policies, routines, working agreements and rules explicit and visible. Create posters or dedicate a portion of your whiteboard wall to your rules.

Making the policies explicit and visible forces you to come to a shared understanding within the team. It also gives you something concrete to refer to when you're discussing how to improve your way of working. Every policy should also have an **expiration date** (3-6 months into the future). When a policy expires, review it! Make a conscious decision to keep, modify or to abandon it.

Yet another tip is to skip the bottom line and add an empty bullet, signaling that there is more to come.

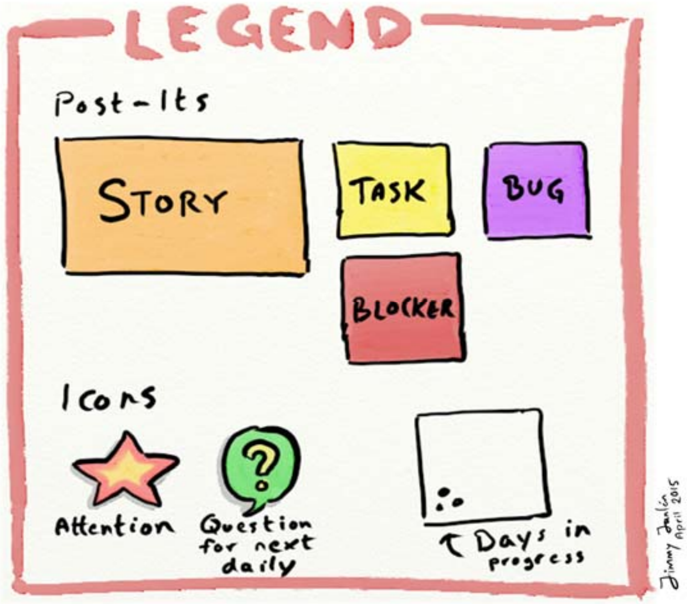
Avatars



Visualize who is working on which task with the use of **avatars**. If you work on a task, put your avatar on that task. The simplest version is names on small **Post-its**. More elaborate alternatives includes writing the initials on round **magnets**. But way more fun is to have **photos** of the team members. Even though I find it confusing, many teams like characters, such as South Park figures or cartoons. At least, **write the names** so that new team members don't have to guess who is Boba Fett and who is Darth Vader.

Use **Tack-it** or **magnetic tape** to make them stick to the board.

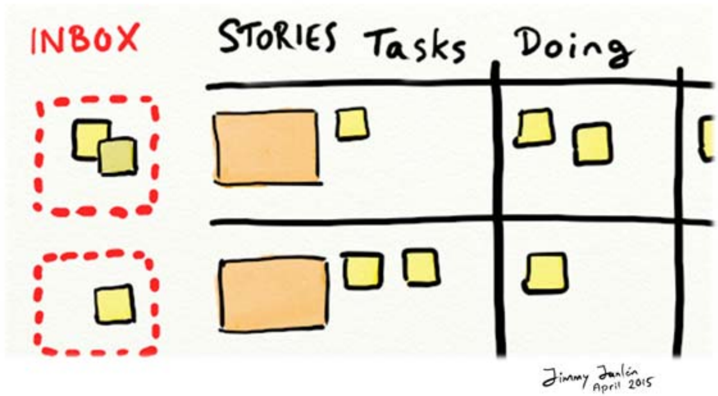
Legend



A good visualization that a team likes and continues to use over time tends to get more and more complex as the team adds more and more information to it.

To make it easy to understand for new team members, and curious colleagues – provide a **legend** that explains the colors, icons and symbols.

Inbox ♥

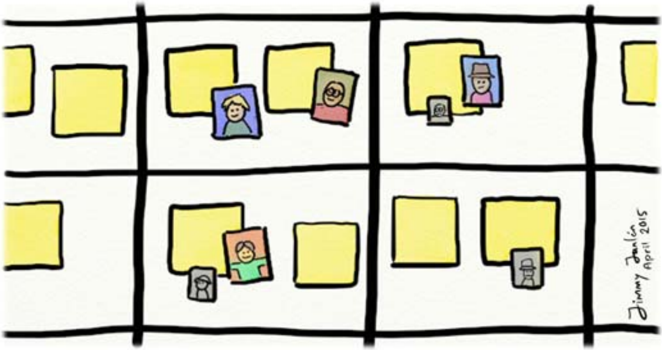


Are extra tasks frequently added by creative team members? Do you suffer from tasks introduced into the sprint by people/managers outside the team, asking specific team members for help? Does this sabotage the focus on the sprint goals? Add the **Inbox** policy!

Policy: new tasks aren't added to Planned or Doing, they must be placed in the Inbox. The following standup **the whole team decides** if the task should be done or not, i.e. if it's valuable and aligned with the sprint's goal. If the team decides it shouldn't be done now, it goes into the product backlog or into the trash bin.

Each Inbox should be empty by the end of the Daily Stand-up.

2 Avatars - One big, One small



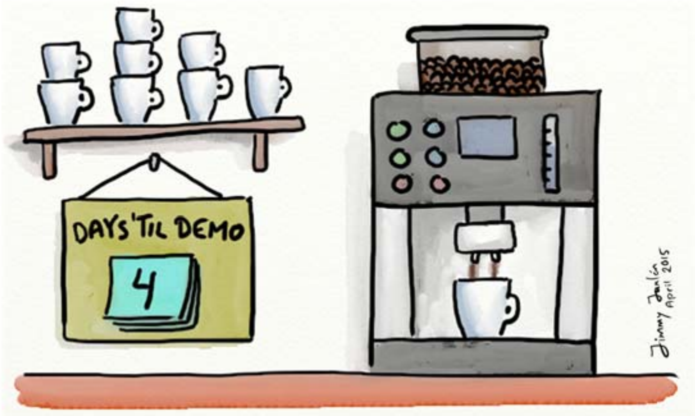
Each team member has **two avatars**, one big printed in color and one small printed in grayscale.

They mark which tasks that team member is currently working on. The big one signals the **main focus**. When blocked on the main task, the smaller grey avatar signals where the person is **helping out**.

Each team member is only allowed these two avatars. If the person wants to start a third task he/she either needs to finish any of the current ones, or put one of the current ones in the parking lot or move back the task from Doing to Planned.

If you currently only have one avatar for each team member, please ignore this example. You are good :-)

Days ‘til Demo

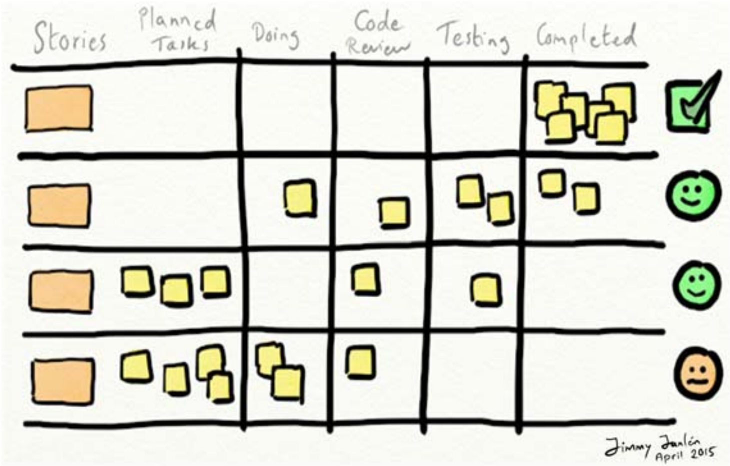


Days ‘til Demo is a simple **countdown to the next demo**. Its purpose is to raise awareness and to help teams **remember** to plan and prepare for the demo. And of course to raise the **expectations** for everyone else.

It simply shows the number of days left until the demo. The last one reads “TODAY at 2pm” (or something similar).

It’s preferably placed in a highly visible place, such as by the coffee machine or next to the toilets. And yes, a manual one like this needs to be manually updated by someone. This could be a good thing since it reminds the team that the day is approaching.

Confidence Smileys



This is a powerful alternative (or complement) to a Sprint Burndown.

At the end of every Daily Stand-up meeting the team asks themselves; **how confident are we that we will be able to finish each User Story by the end of the Sprint**. The answer is represented by a Confidence Smiley.

The team quickly goes through each lane/User Story and updates the color of the **Confidence Smiley**. When in disagreement, the most pessimistic voice wins.

Confidence Smileys (cont)

Happy/Green smiley = We are confident that we will be able to finish this story by the end of this sprint.

Nervous/Orange smiley = We will probably not be able to finish this story.

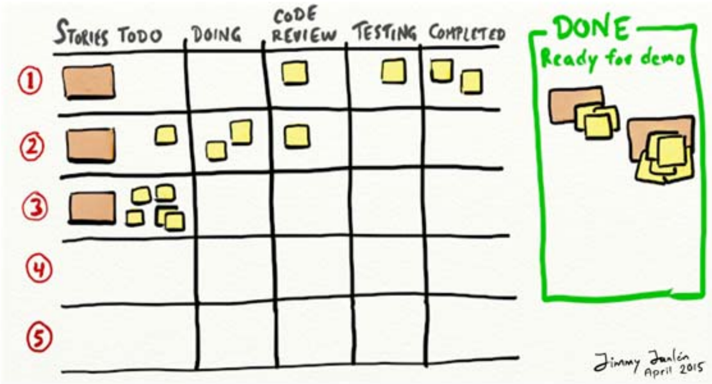
Sad/Red smiley = No way we will be able to finish this story.

Green checkbox = User story is DONE.

When a smiley shifts (from green to orange, or from orange to red) the team grabs the opportunity to discuss what they need to do, how they can help out, and if they need to alert Product Owners and Stakeholders on changes in the forecast.

Confidence Smileys offer an instant and simple overview of the team's sprint progress for anyone else as well.

Lane priority

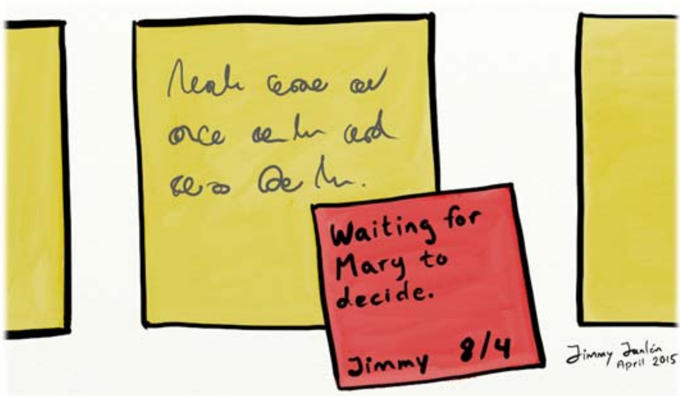


This is more of a process/working agreement tip than a visualization tip.

In order to work more efficiently as a team and to collaborate more on finishing stories rather than starting new ones – **agree to help out working on stories together in priority order**. Place the story of highest priority on the top, then rank the rest according to priority.

When a story has finished, move it to the “DONE / Ready for Demo” area. This will leave an empty lane. Some teams move all other Post-its up one lane to fill the gap.

Blocker Notes

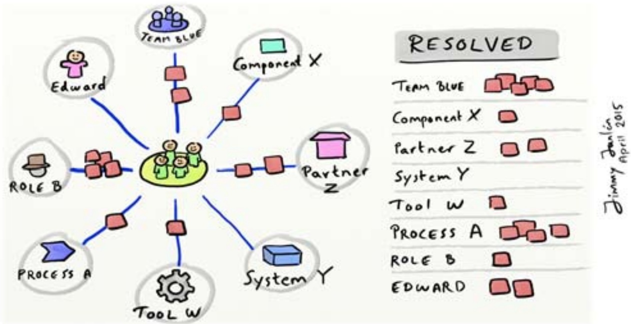


If you for some reason become blocked while working on a task, preventing you from moving forward - add a **red blocker note** on top of that task. This makes the reason known for everyone, and also works as a follow-up reminder.

Review the blockers during the Daily Stand-up and discuss how to **address and resolve** each of them.

The **description clearly states why** you are blocked, who you are waiting for (and why), or what the problem is. To make it even clearer, write your own name and the date you became blocked in the corner of the Post-it.

Dependency Spider



Draw a spider with your team in the middle. Around your team, draw your **dependency sources** that sometimes block your progress or force you to wait for some kind of response. On the legs of the spider you continuously add notes describing how you are currently blocked or dependent on that source.

When resolved, move the ticket to the “Resolved” area. When it’s time for a retrospective, grab Post-its of the most common sources and analyze what you can do to reduce or minimize the pain and frequency of those dependencies. To ensure that you’re not sub-optimizing for your team’s convenience, include the other teams or persons into the discussion.

A great tool for cross-company (and release train) retrospectives as well.