Analogue versus Digital board solutions – and the winner is …

By Sebastian Radics
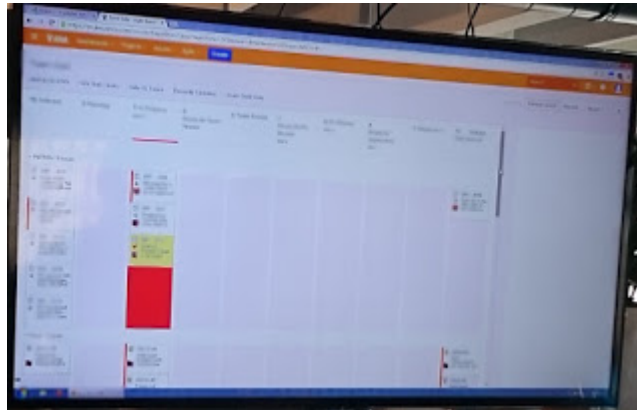
So far I was a strong believer in using analogue (physical) boards but experiencing the advantages of digital solutions I'm changing my orientation.

In this post I aggregate some advantages and disadvantages for both solutions.

Maybe you can add your opinion and ways of handling this topic in your environment and please suggest tools your are using?!

What to consider	Analogue board	Digital board	Comment
Additional information (like acceptance criteria, links to other stories, documentation, conversation,…)	ooo	+++	
Flexible visualization (e.g. adding new columns, combined column WIP limits, display >6 columns and 5+ lanes, sub areas e.g. for story and subtask handling)	+++	oo	Digital boards heavily depend on the tool in use. E.g. using JIRA working with split columns is only possible by using workarounds. Changing columns can become a nightmare depending on your administration scheme
Information radiator (being highly visible in the team area, including non team members)	+++	+	Digital boards depend on high resolution screens but can be easily distributed to different rooms

What to consider	Analogue board	Digital board	Comment
Mobility (use your board in your meetings, at different locations, simultaneously)	oo	+++	Physical boards can be moved to meeting rooms using rollable boards but cannot be available at different locations at the same time
Interaction among team members	+++	o	Being bound to a mouse and keyboard limits the level of interaction heavily
Notifications (new tickets, changes to ticket and status, comments)	o	+++	
Reporting	oo	+++	Often integrated in electronic tools
Administration	+++	oo	Depending on your organization and administration rules. I recommend giving as much authority to the team as possible.
Filtering and search	oo	+++	It's questionable whether this is a high prio requirement!
Network power dependency	+	o	Rarely a problem
Costs	+	o	TVs and especially high resolution screens can become a cost problem. In addition we have to consider license costs. It needs some sticky notes to reach that level .
Constraints	+++	ooo	Digital boards are limited to the software boundaries and sometimes you have to be creative
Audibility (History)	o	+	In environments where audibility is a must you can work with photo snapshots for physical boards
Workflow rules	o	+	Do we really need that?

What to consider	Analogue board	Digital board	Comment
Documentation	o	+	We should consider what way of documentation we try to achieve by using boards. I believe it's the wrong area for longer term documentation!
Decentralization	oo	+++	A major point for using digital boards is to be able to work with distributed teams
Metrics (charts, cycle time, WIP)	oo	+++	Tool dependent but usually well supported for digital boards
Consistency	o	++	Especially when using digital boards and physical boards in parallel it can become a maintenance overhead
Dependency	o	++	
Space	o	+	Sometime finding a place for a physical board is just impossible
A comparison	*-3*	*20*	*+ counts as +1 and o count as -1*

My conclusion… buy a high resolution flat screen (UHD, 4K), where you can display e.g. up to 12 columns and >5 lanes. Try to ease the use of pointing devices (any touch solutions available?) and find a tool that provides a high flexibility for handling columns and sub-columns and WIP limits including multiple columns (can you recommend one?).

This way the usage of a digital board becomes my preferred way of visualizing my process.

What about you? Are you using analogue boards or digital ones or even combine both? Can you recommend a solution or tool? Please share your insights via your comment 😉