



# Kanban - Pull Systems

By: Greg Hart, President - Hart Innovative Solutions, Inc.

Kanban is a visual system of production control using returnable containers, cards or spaces to pull products from the producing workstation or supplier into the consuming workstation or business. Control inventory buffers and queue sizes through defined First-In-First-Out (FIFO) squares or lanes. The system is very disciplined, with defined rules.

The goal is to continually reduce kanban / buffer sizes to lower inventory level, improve quality and reduce lead-time. Information and services as well as products can be pulled. McDonald's method of keeping burger lanes full during peak periods is a recognizable example of a pull system in a service application.

Apply other visual production control methods such as scheduling boards when traditional lean methods don't fit the situation. Queues controlled via pull systems result in lower inventories and shorter, more predictable lead-times to improve customer service.

## Key Benefits

- Visual production control simplifies communication for a self-regulating workplace requiring minimal management intervention
- Shorter, predictable lead-times improve ability to promise earlier order completion and deliver on-time
- Inventory reduction results in improved cash flow
- Pull systems support continuous improvement programs and employee involvement leading to high performance

## Activities

- Apply extensive experience to designing, modeling and implementing kanban card system, returnable containers, FIFO lanes and other queue control methods - individually or in combination
- Call upon understanding, direct experience and observation of numerous alternative pull system mechanisms to fit a variety of production scenarios
- Rely on expert facilitation teams to design, test, orient, train and implement kanban for high involvement and ownership

Are you looking for a way to synchronize production with demand? Kanban directly links supply with the demand-pull of customers or down-stream operations. Supermarkets, reorder boards, kanban squares or FIFO lanes are a few ways to accomplish material flow objectives. Incorporate "one less at a time" to continuously reduce kanban buffer levels, and to discover and eliminate problems. Get the help of an experienced "sensei" to accelerate your learning curve.

