

QUICK START GUIDE

FLIGHT LEVELS IN 8 STEPS

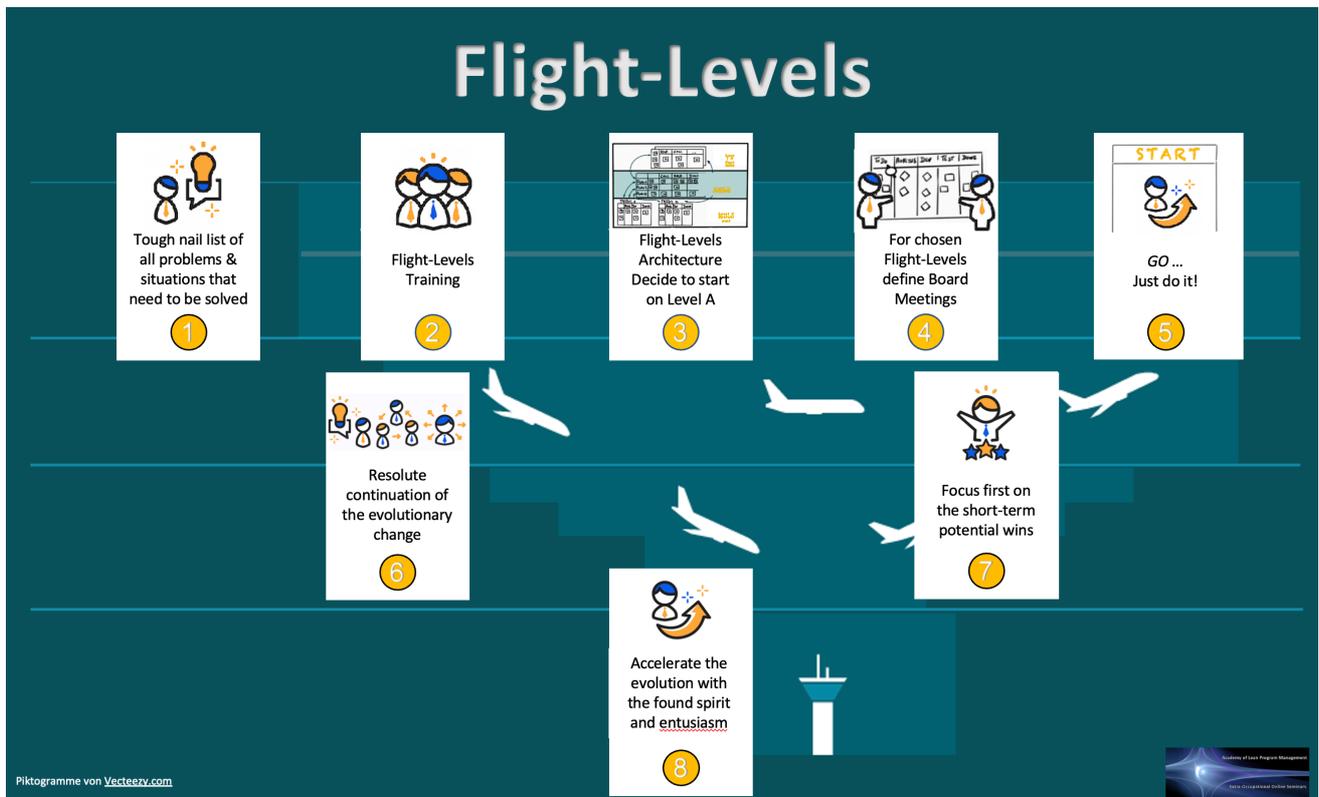
You have come across the Flight-Levels methodology and find the approach interesting for your company? If you have Kanban experience, that's perfect! As the Flight-Levels methodology is just starting to spread, **best practices** examples are often still missing for orientation. But don't worry, with our proven [APM®](#) methodology you will be guided step by step through the learning path.

So what's the best way to get started?
Which steps ensure the best possible success?
Is there a Flight Levels guide?

When dealing with many different methods, the key phrase for me is:

Only use methods that enable the development of the target state at the same time!

Lean and [Agile](#) mean that each learning journey of an organization is very individual and only leads to success step by step! So be prepared for the following common processes. One step forward - learn - one step to the side or even discard again. Learning means that not all detailed steps for the next year are already listed in order to check off the topic at the end with a success milestone "flight levels introduced". However, the following basic steps have proven to be effective for introducing and applying flight levels. This guide summarizes the **lessons learned from numerous flight level implementations in 8 compact steps**.



[Download the poster "FLIGHT LEVELS - Quick Start" for free](#)

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#1: Reveal ALL problems and situation to be solved!

Only with the admission that ALL problems and situations that need to be solved are uncovered hard-core, the initial situation in the company can be correctly assessed and understood. After this hard-hitting analysis, the problems that need to be solved with Flight Levels can be derived.

- Only a realistic picture of the actual state, even if it may look drastic, creates the possibility to solve the problems!
- What part(s) of the organization are we talking about?
- How big?
- Number of people?
- How are they working there at the moment?
- Where?
- Meetings?
- Roll?
- Artifacts?



INTRODUCE FLIGHT LEVELS - TIP:

It's important to understand the current state, but don't overdo it and put weeks of effort into it. Find the right measure!

- Develop a crystal clear picture of the problems that need to be solved: What's going well? What are we satisfied with? What should be improved? Which problem(s) should be solved?
- Define the problems as specifically as possible. Avoid (too) generic problem definitions!
 - Examples that do not allow for specific solutions:
 - Problem definition 1:* "Lack of transparency".
Weak point: How is it to be assessed later whether the transparency has improved?
Tip: Drill down! Who (people, teams?) misses which info exactly? When would he/she say: Now I have enough transparency?
 - Problem Definition 2:* "Teams are sub-optimizing and dependencies are not being managed."
Weak point: How is it to be assessed later whether the management of dependencies has actually generated added value?
Tip: Drill down! Which teams are involved? Why are they not talking to each other, what is the cause? What is the consequence of not managing dependencies? What is the goal of managing dependencies (e.g. reducing "time to market")?
- Experience shows that there are always too many problems at the same time. Therefore, prioritize the problems clearly!

QUICK START GUIDE

#2: Get familiar with Kanban and flight levels!

To work with Flight Levels you need some [basics about Kanban](#). If you want to introduce Flight Levels, you should understand the Kanban philosophy and know the principles and practices of modern Kanban concepts. Based on this, you can get into the [Flight Levels thought model](#).

- Read up in detail - I've also put together some recommended books and articles.
- Exchange ideas with practitioners who are already working with Flight Levels!
- Attend a Flight Levels Training!
- Also, check out my blog articles for detailed information on Flight Levels and a concise summary of Kanban.

#3: Decide which flight level you want to start with!

With the knowledge from Step #1 and Step #2, you can go ahead and design an initial version of your flight-level architecture. Here are a few pointers to help:

Flight Level 1

- Which teams exist at flight level 1? This corresponds (very often) to the actual status of the team set-up, regardless of whether it is functional according to the organization chart or cross-functional.
- Example: Department Team 1, Department Team 2, Sales Team, Marketing Team, etc.

Flight Level 2

- Why do the teams work together to achieve what? What end-to-end coordination(s) are involved?
- Is it a value stream, e.g. for new products from marketing to R&D to sales? Or are there other reasons for cross-team collaboration, e.g. ensuring operation and maintenance - with specialized teams that need to cooperate to achieve their goal of "satisfied customers"?
- There can be multiple Flight Level 2 boards.
- Example: "Product development and launch of new kitchen appliance", "Operation and maintenance of cloud storage".

Flight Level 3

- Here, the strategy definition, implementation and performance measurement are presented.
- There is typically only 1 board per organization or organizational unit (very large organizations may have multiple boards).
- Example for a car manufacturer: "commercial vehicles", "passenger cars".

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INTRODUCE FLIGHT LEVELS - TIP:

As important as it is to understand the current state, it would be pointless to put weeks of effort into it. Find the right measure!

You decide which **flight level you start with**. This is often not easy - but you can approach the right answer with different questions:

- Reflect on the findings from #1: Where is the most suffering? Which flight level is best suited to solve the most important problem?
- "Leadership Support": Where is the will for change and the support for it great? Which teams are open and willing to participate?
- Which flight level offers the greatest improvement leverage? The higher the flight level, the greater the leverage. At Flight Level 3, decisions are made on whether to relaunch or discontinue products or services. Flight Level 2 enables cross-team improvements. Flight Level 1 focuses on operational work in specific teams.

#4: Define for this flight level: your board, meetings and interactions between flight levels!

Now it's a matter of fleshing out the board in detail, **including meetings and making connections to other flight levels**.

INTRODUCE FLIGHT LEVELS -TIP: Do not conduct STATICS workshops! (Systems Thinking Approach To Kanban) - a defined process that helps understand how an organization behaves as a whole, rather than analyzing isolated components. [Learnmore about STATIK](#)

Boards serve to create transparency and structure the collected work. Without communication, they generate little added value! Kanban is communication, therefore **meetings - the so-called "feedback loops" - are essential**.

Typical (Kanban) Meetings:

- (Daily) Standup, Replenishment Meetings, Retrospectives (at all flight levels)
- Release planning meeting, operations review (evaluate at flight level 2 and 3 whether it makes sense)

Also consider **how the work items are connected between levels**, i.e. between level 1 and level 2 or between level 2 and level 3:

- Bottom up: What from Flight Levels 1 can I find (typically in aggregate form) again on Flight Levels 2? What from Flight Levels 2 can I find (typically in aggregate form) back on Flight Levels 3? How exactly?
- Top down: What from Flight Levels 2 can I find (typically in more detailed form) back on Flight Levels 1? What from Flight Levels 3 can I find (typically in more detailed form) back on Flight Levels 2? How exactly?
- How is communication between the flight levels ensured? In most cases, this does NOT require additional meetings. The key is to answer the question: Which team members from Flight Levels 1 attend which meetings at Flight Levels 2 to ensure the flow of information? And which team members from Flight Levels 2 and 1, if any, attend which meetings at Flight Levels 3 to ensure the flow of information?

QUICK START GUIDE

#5: Go - just do it!

Fill the board developed in Step #4 initially with work (work items). And then get started: Conduct the defined meetings and gain practical experience!

#6: Improve evolutionarily!

Very important: Be prepared for **turbulence in the air**. Steps #1 to #4 usually build a steep upward motivation curve - but then the **daily grind** hits:

- The meetings are perceived as an add-on to the already far too jam-packed calendar.
- And what does this board with (electronic) notes actually bring us? We knew all that before, didn't we?
- And we don't see any improvements yet either.

The first valley is reached... **What to do?**

- Discipline is a prerequisite for success: Conduct the defined meetings and maintain the board!
- Seek improvement through evolutionary change: Use meetings, especially retrospectives, to identify improvements and get actions for implementation. Example: Which (of the far too many bilateral) meetings can we eliminate because they will be replaced by focused communication in Kanban meetings? What specific changes do we make to drive real improvements?
- Start collecting and using metrics from Day 1 to make improvements (and even regressions) objectively measurable.
- Look for a Flight Levels coach you trust. He can give you valuable content impulses, slips neutrally into the role of facilitator and is also sometimes "Wadlbeisser".
- Give yourself time - and Kanban and the Flight Levels a real chance!

#7: Generate quick wins!

Try to generate the first concrete measurable improvements in a timely manner. This will motivate you and everyone involved. Use the achievement of these first goals and communicate them in the company, because "Do good and talk about it!".

#8: Do more of this: Evolution (or sometimes Revolution)!

Now take small - and sometimes larger - steps towards continuous improvement. Reflect regularly on the achievement of the goals from Step #1: How far have we come? Does it still make sense to continue? Or do other problems have a higher priority in the meantime?

QUICK START GUIDE



INTRODUCE FLIGHT LEVELS - TIP:

Also look beyond the levels! For example, if you started at Flight Level 2: Are stakeholders and top management ready for Flight Level 3? Do they actively ask for and "cull" flight levels from you because they are excited about what has already been achieved? Or does it make sense to go to Flight Levels 1? By working at Flight Levels 2, you gain maximum visibility of Flight Level 1 and the teams' work and strengths and weaknesses become apparent. Which teams need support?

Introducing flight levels in the context of change management

The goal of the flight-level approach is to identify and name problems in the company, to actively address them and thus improve the business result. This usually requires change on many different levels. This Quick Start is therefore based on a proven **change management model by Harvard professor John P. Kotter**: The 8-step process for successful change initiatives helps to shape change successfully and avoid the failure of transformation projects.

1. Demonstrating urgency - "Establishing a sense of urgency".
2. Building the Guiding Coalition - Creating the Guiding Coalition
3. Developing a Vision and Strategy - "Developing a Vision and Strategy".
4. Communicating the Change Vision
5. Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action
6. Generating Quick Wins - Generating Short-Term Wins
7. Consolidating Successes and Producing More Change
8. Anchoring Change in the Culture - Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

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Book recommendations:

<https://www.leanability.com/de/>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/FlightLevelsAcademy>

<https://www.scaledagileframework.com/>

<https://kanbanize.com/de/kanban-ressourcen/kanban-erste-schritte/was-ist-kanban>

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanban>

[David J. Anderson: Kanban – Successful Evolutionary Change for Your Technology Business](#)

[David J Anderson & Andy Carmichael: Kanban Case Studies](#)

[Henrik Kniberg & Mattias Skarin: Scrum and Kanban – making the most of both](#)

[Klaus Leopold](#)

- [Kanban in der IT](#)
- [Kanban in der Praxis](#)
- [Agilität neu denken](#)

[Mike Burrows: Kanban from the Inside](#)

You want to learn more about this change management model, I recommend John P. Kotter's book "[Leading Change](#)".

