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Thread: [How Industrial Quality Thinking Exposes the Limits of Agile Rituals](#)

Stanley - February 9, 2026, 3:55 am

How Industrial Quality Thinking Exposes the Limits of Agile Rituals

Kanban and Agile in IT often degrade into rituals—boards, meetings, and buzzwords—while losing the system-level quality thinking that made them effective in industry. Drawing from manufacturing, energy, and fintech, this article explains why quality must be a management function, not a QA role, and how industrial tools like RCA, pull systems, and waste reduction create more reliable software without abandoning Agile.

<https://hackernoon.com/how-industrial-quality-thinking-exposes-the-limits-of-agile-rituals?source=rss>

R5N3T - February 9, 2026, 4:02 am

Nice take. Agile and Kanban really lose their value when they turn into routines instead of focusing on real quality.

Aeowulf - February 9, 2026, 5:08 am

(Feb 9, 2026 05:02 AM)R5N3T Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Nice take. Agile and Kanban really lose their value when they turn into routines instead of focusing on real quality.

Absolutely. I've been at a place that implemented the... routine of it. SO MUCH MORE WORK and time wasted to focus on them, with no value add. It was such a PITA.

R5N3T - February 9, 2026, 5:17 am

(Feb 9, 2026 06:08 AM)Aeowulf Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Absolutely. I've been at a place that implemented the... routine of it. SO MUCH MORE WORK and time wasted to focus on them, with no value add. It was such a PITA.

I get your point. I've seen this before too, lots of extra work with little to no real value. It can be really frustrating.

SIM-5610537 - February 9, 2026, 7:18 am

Agile and Kanban came into software dev as practical escapes from rigid waterfall hell — pulling ideas straight from Lean manufacturing and Toyota Production System (TPS). The promise: faster feedback, slashed waste, better quality.

But in most IT shops today? Agile has turned into empty rituals:

- Stand-ups with zero real learning
- Kanban boards showing piles of WIP but no actual flow
- Retros that spit out "insights" nobody ever acts on

The mechanics are there. The quality mindset that made them powerful? Long gone.

Look at Agile through real industrial quality lenses (manufacturing, aviation, energy, regulated fintech) and the cracks show instantly.

Agile as Ritual vs. Agile as a System

In a factory, a Kanban board isn't decoration — it's a hard control system:

- Regulates flow
- Exposes bottlenecks
- Signals abnormalities immediately

Meetings aren't ceremonies; they're decision gates backed by measurable system data.

In software? Too many teams run performance theater: Cards slide across boards with no WIP limits enforced

Stand-ups = "what I did yesterday" reports instead of system health checks

Retros = therapy sessions with no institutional change

Quality gets dumped on QA instead of built into every management decision

Result: lots of motion, zero progress.

Industrial truth: if a ritual doesn't alter system behavior, it's not a process — it's just a bad habit.

Quality Is a Management Responsibility, Not a Role

W. Edwards Deming hammered this decades ago: "Quality cannot be inspected into a product."

Quality comes from management choices — design, flow, incentives, feedback loops — not downstream inspection.

Yet most IT orgs still do the handoff dance: Devs throw code over the wall

QA catches defects

Ops stabilizes the mess

Real industrial systems don't tolerate this fragmentation. Recurring defects? Root cause almost always traces back to management: stupid throughput targets, overloaded teams, vague standards, broken incentives.

When quality = "QA's job", management is quietly admitting they're not accountable for outcomes. No amount of Agile ceremonies fixes structural failure.

Root Cause Analysis Over Symptom Patching

Industries that can't afford failure (power plants, aerospace, payments) don't just fix symptoms — they hunt causes.

RCA, FMEA, blameless post-mortems are automatic reflexes. Repeat failure = design/system flaw, not "human error".

Software teams? We: Patch the same bugs forever without touching architecture

Miss sprint goals and just "try harder next time"

Add more meetings to fix problems caused by too much WIP

Industrial reframing: If the team chronically overcommits and fails, don't ask "Why didn't they execute?" Ask: "Why does the system permit chronic overcommitment?"

Pull Systems, Not Activity Porn

True Kanban = ruthless pull. Work only starts when there's real downstream capacity. Inventory = risk, not safety blanket.

In software Kanban? Boards often become giant to-do lists:

- Dozens of items "in progress"
- Visible chaos mistaken for transparency

Industrial logic is brutal: excess WIP inflates lead time, hides defects, kills predictability.

A pull system without enforced WIP limits isn't pull — it's push in disguise.

High-reliability software teams (fintech, embedded, etc.) enforce: Strict WIP caps

Lead time + variability metrics (not just velocity BS)

Interruptions treated as systemic failures to eliminate

Outcome: not slower — more reliable delivery.

Waste Reduction — It Translates Perfectly to Knowledge Work

Lean's 7 wastes map directly: Overproduction -> features nobody uses

Waiting -> devs blocked on reviews/approvals/unclear specs

Handoffs -> excessive team silos

Rework -> late feedback + unclear standards

Agile rituals by themselves don't kill waste. Only system-level redesign does.

Biggest productivity wins in software usually come from removing structural friction created by bad management decisions — not from "coding faster".

Reclaiming Agile the Industrial Way

You don't have to ditch Agile. You have to rescue it from LARPing.

Treat Agile like a management system, not a team-level checklist: Boards -> actual flow control tools

Meetings -> real decision forums

Metrics -> signals that trigger system redesign

Quality -> leadership obligation, not a downstream role

Hard pill: Agile fails hardest exactly where management accountability is weakest.

Rituals stick around because they're easy to fake. Real system thinking is hard — it forces leaders to own how their decisions f**k up outcomes.

Industry learned this lesson the hard way decades ago.

Software is still catching up.

Thoughts? Flame away or share war stories from your orgs.