# Value stream mapping symbols

Cheat sheet · the symbols on a value stream map and what each one means

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## MATERIAL FLOW

### Customer / supplier

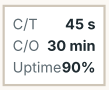
A company outside the plant. The customer sits top right, the supplier top left, each with a data box underneath.

### Process

One area where material flows without stopping. A new box starts wherever the flow stops and stock builds up.

### Shared process

A process other product families also use — a paint line, a big press. Not all of its time is yours.




### Data box

Under each process: cycle time (C/T), changeover (C/O), uptime, first-pass yield (FPY) and batch size.

### Workcell

Several processes joined into one cell that makes one piece at a time — continuous flow.

### Inventory

Stock waiting between steps. Count it on the floor, then turn it into days of customer demand.

### Truck shipment

Deliveries in from the supplier and out to the customer, marked with how often they run.

### Push arrow

Material made to a schedule and pushed to the next step whether it needs it or not.

### Shipment arrow

Raw material arriving from the supplier, and finished goods leaving for the customer.

### Supermarket

A small, controlled stock. The process that feeds it makes only what was taken out. Open on the supplying side.

### Withdrawal (pull)

The downstream process takes exactly what it needs from the supermarket, when it needs it.

### FIFO lane

First in, first out, with a fixed maximum. When the lane is full the process feeding it stops.

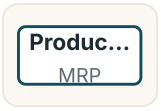
### Buffer / safety stock

Stock kept against swings in customer demand (buffer) or against internal problems (safety stock).

## INFORMATION FLOW

### Manual information
Printed schedules, phone calls, a list on the whiteboard. Label what it is and how often.

### Electronic information
EDI, email, MRP and ERP messages — the zig-zag marks it as electronic.

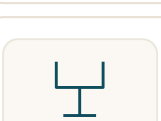



### Production control
Where the schedules are made — MRP, ERP or a planner with a spreadsheet.

### Production kanban
A card that tells a process to make a set quantity. It travels from the supermarket back to the supplying process.

### Withdrawal kanban
A hatched card that authorises moving parts from the supermarket to the process that uses them.

### Signal kanban
An upside-down triangle that triggers a whole batch when stock falls to a reorder point. Used where changeovers still force batches.



### Kanban post
Where kanban cards are collected before they are taken on.

### Kanban arriving in batches
Cards that pile up and travel together instead of one at a time.

### Sequenced-pull ball
Make exactly the next item called for, straight away — pull without a supermarket.

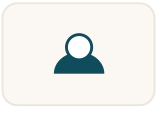
### Load leveling (heijunka)
Spreads the product mix and the volume evenly over the day at the pacemaker, one pitch at a time.

### Go-see scheduling
Someone walks the floor, looks at the stock and adjusts the schedule by eye.

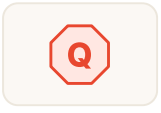
### Verbal / phone
Information passed on by word of mouth.

## GENERAL

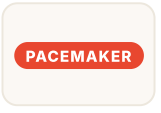
### Kaizen burst
An improvement the future state needs. In the builder each one becomes an action with an owner and a date.



### Operator
A person, seen from above. The number beside it is the headcount.




### Quality problem
Where scrap or rework happens (a common addition to the original set).




### Pacemaker
The one process that receives the customer schedule. Everything after it flows first in, first out.

### Timeline (lead-time ladder)
Upper steps: days waiting in stock. Lower steps: seconds of processing. Totals at the right-hand end.

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Symbols follow Rother & Shook, *Learning to See* (Lean Enterprise Institute); the quality-problem symbol is a common addition. Qlause is not affiliated with the LEI.
Free tools: takt time calculator, worked examples and the Value Stream Builder at qlause.app/vsm