PM Software

PLANTA pulse –
Venturing Agility

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Agile methods are popular. For established multi-project software this means an increase in the use of mixed portfolios. In return, new agile tools must increasingly support both the PMO's view on the entire portfolio and an everyday project activity view. PLANTA pulse is a solution for cooperation in agile projects. For this purpose the software offers flexible todo item boards which can be applied to one's own procedures. The software also convinces when it comes to combining agilely coordinated projects, subprojects, and work packages with the scheduling in overall projects, and summarizing them for multi-project evaluation.

Agile procedures have long been relevant not only for purely agilely coordinated projects. Even though they may not always be suitable in pure form, they prove to be useful tools for partial activities. As has been the case with many other PM methods, this method also resulted in mixed approaches. Labeled with the pregnant term of hybrid project management, they pragmatically combine the best from different worlds. Consequently, PM software also supports mixed planning methods, combines portfolios from projects with and without agile procedures and integrates agile subprojects in the scheduling of overall projects.

With its efficient functions for resource and date scheduling, multi-project system PLANTA Project is perfectly suitable for planning even complex projects in which dependencies between individual activities must be planned strictly upfront. No least because of this the manufacturer also counts many companies from the sector of machine and equipment construction among its reference customers. But even in such projects which require heavy upfront planning, agile procedures are becoming increasingly more popular, e.g. to coordinate the increasingly comprehensive share of software development or early planning phases. PLANTA pulse reflects this very development. The software can be used as independent web-based solution for agile project management. However, it is also connected to PLANTA Project. This enables integrated hybrid project management.

Kanban Board and Team Planning

The PLANTA pulse starting page provides an overview with small tiles for each of "its" boards. These are boards for which one is responsible as a manager as well as boards on the todo items of which one works as a team member. Boards which have been marked as public by their owners are also displayed to all users directly below their own boards. A click on a tile takes the user to the respective task board.

The task boards show the project todo items as cards in different columns, in PLANTA pulse they are called lists, which can be set up according to one's requirements. These lists can, e.g., show the processing status of the todo items in a classical way, perhaps "pending", "in process", and "completed". It is also possible to have one list for each field of activity (figure 1). PLANTA pulse also administers backlogs as boards the lists of which can, e.g., distinguish between components. From a backlog board the todo items are then moved to a sprint or release board for editing. The "My todo items" area provides another use case: Here users find all todo items assigned to them - in the lists, the todo items of a single board are scheduled respectively. Those who wish to have a better overview of their todo items should use this board. A filtered selection of one's own todo items is displayed by means of self-defined data queries. This way one can keep an overview of all due tasks in a project.

If one works with Kanban and wants to restrict the number of todo items processed at the same time, one can define a limit for the "in process" list. Furthermore there are swim lanes in PLANTA pulse which divide the board vertically. This results in a matrix in which the cards are grouped vertically, e.g. by the planned release or by the team responsible for the release. This assignment, however, is merely informational - it does not influence the properties of the todo item: By moving a card from one team swim lane to the next, the resource assignment is not automatically changed.

A click on the card is sufficient to have the todo item properties shown. They include the name and description, the assigned team members, as well as an optional start and due date. Furthermore, checklist items can be created. When processing the todo item later, team members immediately receive an information on which partial aspects are to be considered. If additional specifications are to be made, the board owner can simply add input fields for further properties. However, a central specification by PMO is not yet possible.

The team addresses short questions on specific todo items directly in PLANTA pulse: The discussion function can be used by users to add comments to the cards of the board which the program shows chronologically. Notes, questions, and supplementary documents are therefore always immediately associated with the respective project todo item and the team can do without a load of e-mails. Documents can be attached

to each todo item, e.g. calculations or concepts. This way PLANTA pulse can cover the entire teamwork.

Hybrid PM

In principle, PLANTA pulse is an entirely independent software. If one only wants to use the task boards, there will be no need for any additional software. What makes the program furthermore interesting for hybrid project management is that it can be connected to PLANTA Project via web services.

To do so, tasks are defined in the PLANTA Project schedule and resources are scheduled to begin with. PLANTA Project then considers these planned values in all portfolio evaluations so that multi-project planning becomes possible for agile subprojects as well. The tasks can be linked to PLANTA pulse in two simple steps: At first the task is marked with a checkmark as "relevant for pulse", then the synchronization is launched via a program menu. Subsequently the task is available as a board in PLANTA pulse, where it can be further specified with lists and todo items by the designated team. For later synchronizations, the todo item is then updated in PLANTA Project in accordance with the work reporting and the completed board todo items from PLANTA pulse.

This close connection between the PLANTA Project schedule and the PLANTA pulse boards is not only helpful if you want to have the individual sprints displayed in the schedule and reflect the project situation in multi-project overviews. In non-agile projects, the schedule can also be kept simple if the work packages are not planned in depth. Instead, the work package is assigned to a resource team which then uses PLANTA pulse to coordinate its todo items.

Conclusions

PLANTA pulse is designed optically attractive, clearly structured and can therefore be controlled intuitively, so that no instruction, or only a brief instruction to the software is necessary. Individual project teams can start immediately. If, however, several projects are to be coordinated with the software, a consistent concept is necessary which must be imparted before use.

PLANTA pulse gives the user a lot of freedom. It is, e.g., possible to implement one's own todo item management approaches besides Scrum or Kanban. Following the slogan "flexibility is good, basic standards are better for a complete overview", it would suit the solution quite well if it gave the PMO more options for setting frameworks and user-defined fields per project type. For multi-project environments this is of special importance in order for team members not to see themselves confronted with different

rules in each project. However, we must not forget that the software is still quite new and is continuously developed.

PLANTA pulse is generally suitable as individual solution. Users can book the software as a service for a monthly fee and get right started. The solution can certainly demonstrate its strengths in connection with PLANTA Project, if it is managed to simplify the preplanning in the schedule to fewer and more general specifications and instead facilitate the coordination among team members with PLANTA pulse. Then, agile procedures will also be possible in large, mixed project portfolios.
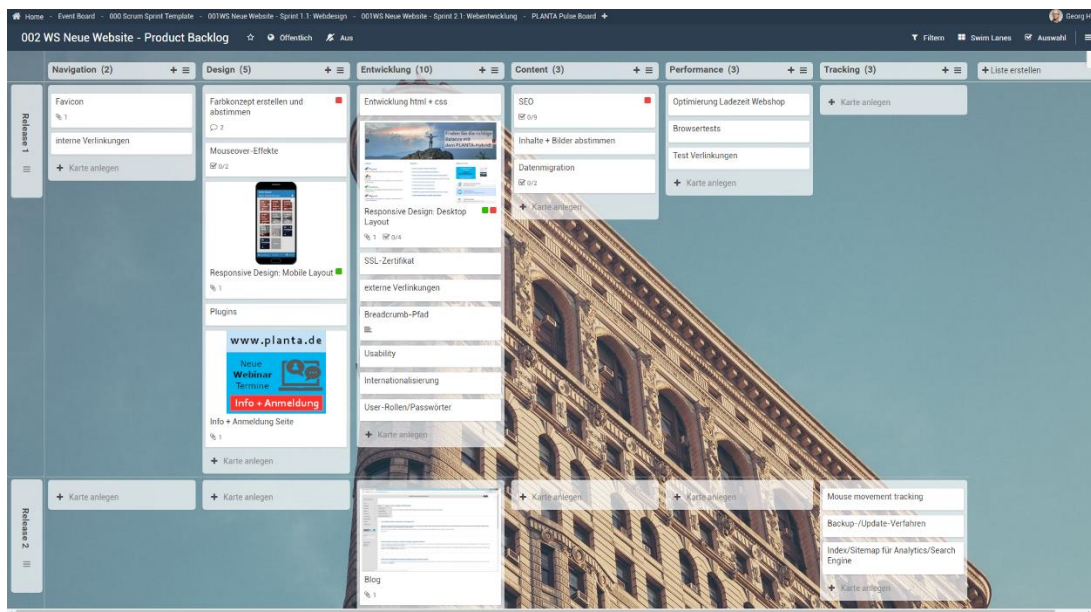

Figure 1: Images and sketches enrich the task boards.

Detailed information about PLANTA pulse: https://www.planta.de/produkte/planta-pulse/

Author

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