

# The agile mindset

- There's an old philosophy joke where two fish are swimming in the ocean. One looks at the other and says, "The water looks pretty cloudy today." The other fish looks back and says, "Yeah, what's water?" I love this joke because it shows that the way we do things often becomes part of our own reality. It's the water we're floating in without even thinking. We don't question the way we work, instead we think that the way we work is the only way that makes sense. But the way we work reflects a certain mindset. It might seem natural for you to have a set of skills that makes you a specialist. Maybe you're a project manager or a database engineer so you only focus on these skills when you're working. It also might seem natural for you to work on detailed plans. Otherwise, you might have costly rework. Yet the water we swim in isn't always so clear. In fact, it might be more efficient to have generalists instead of specialists. Instead of having a few people who really know one area, it might make sense to have everyone know a little bit about everything. It also might make sense to focus on short-term planning. So instead of focusing on eliminating rework, you're actually embracing uncertainty. Some of these ideas are now more commonly known as the Agile mindset. That's how you should think of it, as a mindset. You're not just focusing on a different way to work. Instead, you're focusing on a different way to think about working. I've seen many organizations that try to use Agile to improve their product delivery. They might rename their project managers into Scrum masters. Maybe they'll break down their requirements into Agile-style user stories. All of these Agile practices are fine, but on their own they're not going to help you reach a higher level of productivity. To get real benefit from Agile, you have to start by addressing your team's mindset. You have to take a hard look at the reality of how your team works together. It's better to be a team that's terrible at Agile practices but understands the mindset. A truly Agile team should be able to ask tough questions about the way they work and be open to continuous improvement. If you see Agile as just an updated set of project management tools, then you'll probably be disappointed. You don't want your team to be focused on Agile practices. Instead, you want to be focused on thinking like an Agile team. That's why the first step is to focus on the why. When you look at these Agile practices, don't think about mastering them. Instead, think about the reasoning behind them. Think of it this way. Later you'll learn about the importance of delivering in shorter iterations or what are commonly called sprints. These are typically two weeks long. When you see these, you shouldn't think how you're going to deliver your product in two weeks. Instead, think about the reasoning behind sprints. Why does shorter sprints improve your team's agility? These questions will help you so much more when you're trying to change your team's mindset. If you're just working the same way but in a shorter timeframe, then you're not going to

see much improvement. If you understand why you're doing things differently, then you'll be much better off as an Agile team.