# Am I Still a Software Engineer If I Don’t Write the Code?

## Exploring the Software Engineering Identity Crisis

Annie Vella | 13th May 2025

# Who Am I?

Software Engineer | Technical Leader | Self Professed Nerd

Present:

- Distinguished Engineer at Westpac NZ
- Master's of Engineering student at the University of Auckland

Previously:

- 2004 - 2014 - Software Engineer
- 2014 - Present - Technical Leader

# Why this matters to me

# The Joys of the Craft

"The programmer, like the poet, works only slightly removed from pure thought-stuff. He builds his castles in the air, from air, creating by the exertion of the imagination."

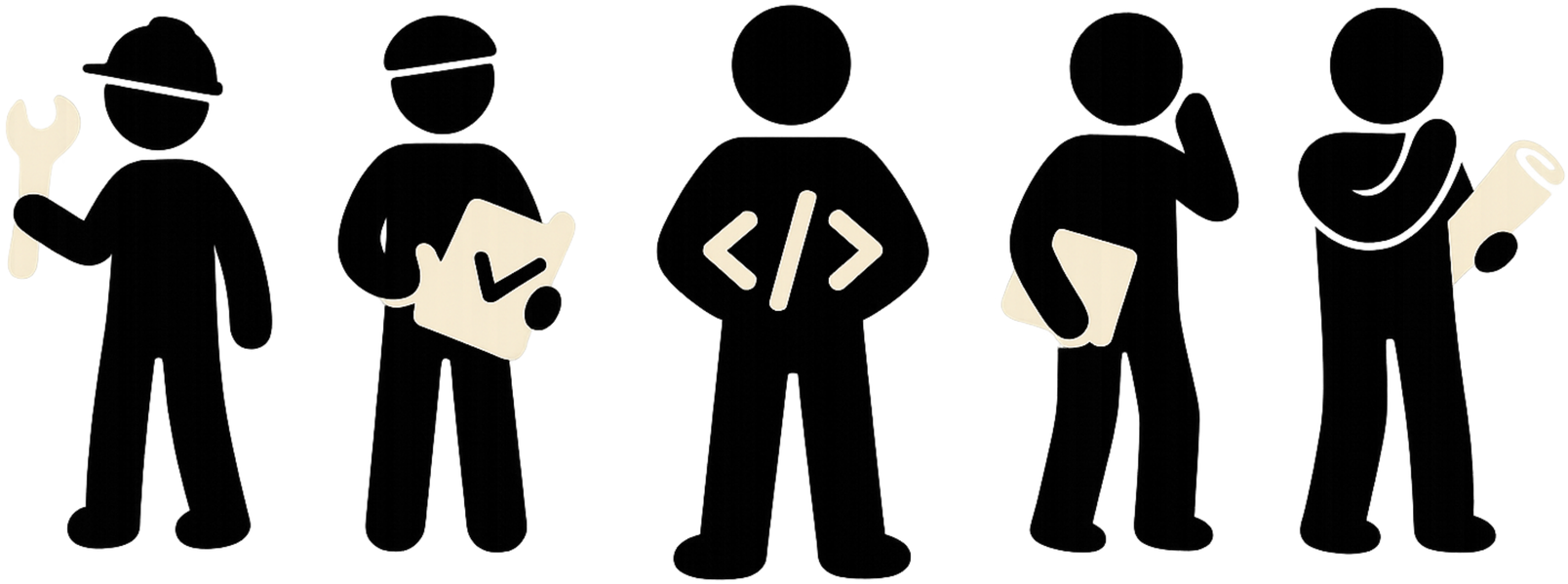
Frederick P. Brooks, The Mythical Man-Month
Chapter 1, Addison-Wesley, 1975

It feels *so good* to build something useful

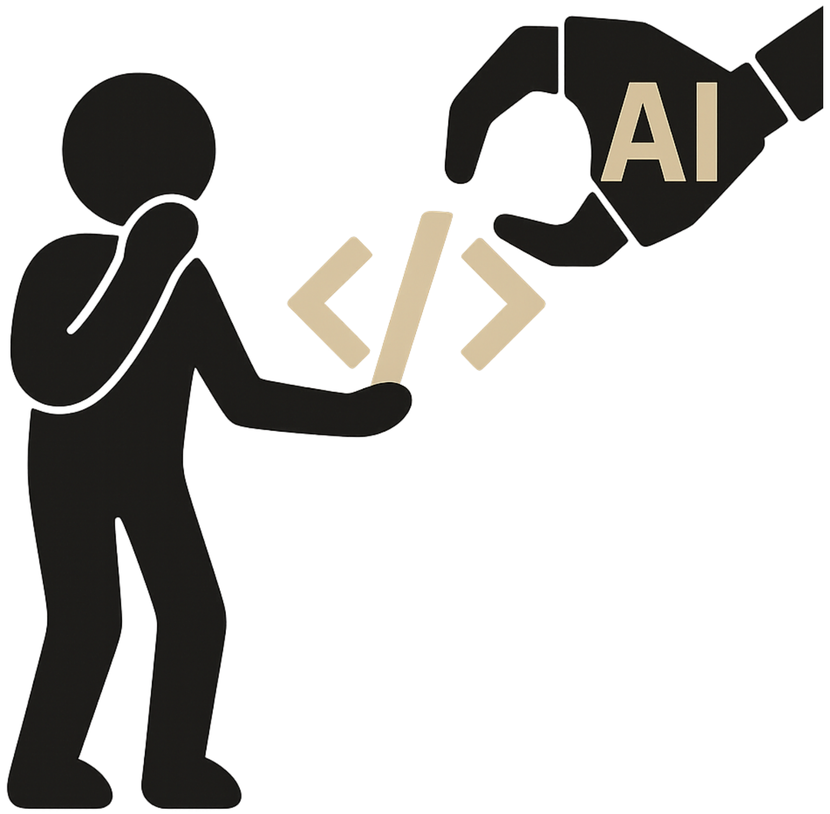
# The struggle is real

It's often challenging and frustrating, and always takes longer than you expect

# Software engineering is complex



Product Engineer != Software Engineer




And now AI has come for the one thing we kept

## Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei says AI will write 90% of code in 6 months, automating software development within a year — Is this the final nail in handwritten coding's coffin?

News By Kevin Okemwa published March 13, 2025

Is coding dead in the water? Anthropic CEO claims AI will write 90% of code within the next 6 months.

Comments (5)

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Anthropic's CEO thinks all code will soon be AI generated. (Image credit: Getty Images | Chesnot)

https://www.windowscentral.com/software-apps/work-productivity/anthropic-ceo-dario-amodei-says-ai-will-write-90-percent-of-code-in-6-months

## "AI Will Do Most Of Coding Soon, Better Than Top Coders": Mark Zuckerberg

Currently, AI can help in auto-completing a section of code, and soon will become even better than the top coders, he added.

Edited by: NDTV News Desk | World News | May 02, 2025 18:43 pm IST

Read Time: 2 mins

Share

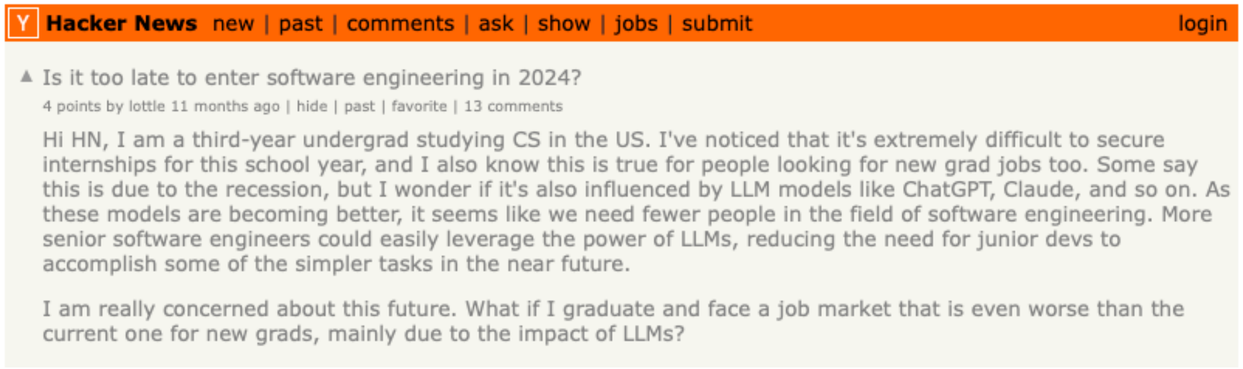
"Sometime in the next 12 to 18 months, most of these codes will be written by AI," Zuckerberg said.

META CEO Mark Zuckerberg has revealed that artificial intelligence (AI) will do most of the coding work for his company's Llama Project, adding he believes it will be smart enough to write most of the code on its own in the next 12-18 months.

https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/ai-will-do-most-of-coding-soon-better-than-top-coders-mark-zuckerberg-8311461

# Is software engineering dead?

https://www.reddit.com/r/WGU/comments/1b89euw/is_software_engineering_dying/




https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=39664697

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskProgramming/comments/yqg0wk/my_dad_says_i_shouldnt_do_software_development/

# What's my craft now?

Am I still a software engineer
if I no longer write the code?

# So, I wrote about it:

Annie Vella

Resources Speaking About

## The Software Engineering Identity Crisis

March 21, 2025

Many of us became software engineers because we found our identity in building things. Not managing things. Not overseeing things. *Building* things. With our own hands, our own minds, our own code.

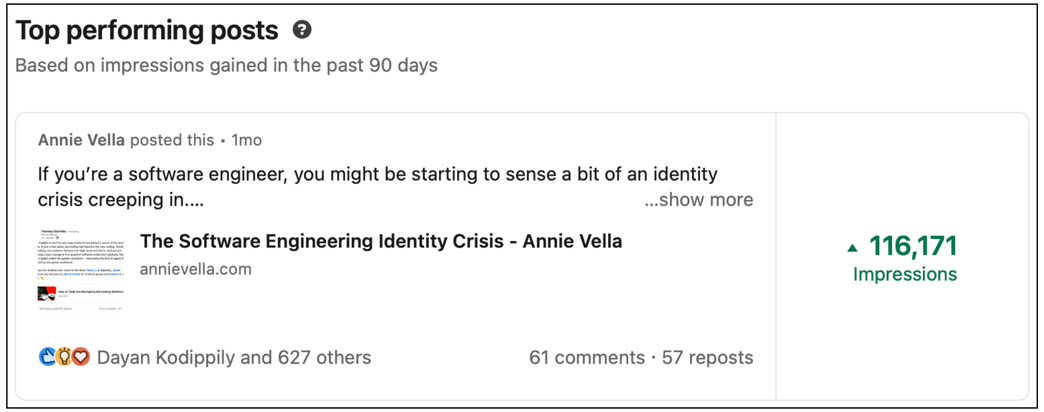
But that identity is being challenged.

AI coding assistants aren't just changing how we write software - they're fundamentally transforming *who we are*. We're shifting from creators to orchestrators, from builders to overseers. From engineers to something that looks suspiciously like... managers.

The irony cuts deep: for years, we've said that software engineering transcends mere coding. Requirements, design, testing, operations - these were all supposedly part of our craft. Yet the industry pushed us in the opposite direction. We handed these responsibilities to specialists - Product Owners, Architects, Quality Engineers, Platform Engineers - while we doubled down on our coding expertise. We became masters of our code, proud wielders of a modern magic.

And now, just as we've perfected this craft, AI is threatening to take it away from us.

https://annievella.com/posts/the-software-engineering-identity-crisis/




| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Software Engineering Identity Crisis - Annie Vella | 51,341 (65.5%) |
| 2 | Dear Software Engineer: It's Time to Reclaim Your Role - Annie Vella | 6,114 (7.8%) |
| 3 | The SDLC Strikes Back: Adapting to AI-Driven Development - Annie Vella | 3,705 (4.73%) |

**Fan mail - The Software Engineering Identity Crisis**

Absolutely flipping awesome.

Read your recent post on the Engineer Identity Crisis and I loved it!
Would love to connect :)

I loved (and reposted on LI) your piece on our current identity crisis, and am now catching up on the rest of your previous posts.

I saw your recent post and really appreciated your perspective. It was thoughtful and clear. I wanted to reach out and connect.

Hi Annie, I just read your article "The Software Engineering Identity Crisis" and omg, SO GOOD! The connection with the pendulum article from Charity Majors was a pleasant surprise at the end too! I'd love to connect and follow you here on LI!

Hi Annie,

I really enjoyed your article. I'm struggling with exactly the same thing. Like yourself, I started on a C-64, fell in love with programming, and now I'm in my early 50s watching AI have all the fun. The high point of my career was discovering the lisp family of languages and reigniting my passion for language itself and the power of expression that comes with such languages.

**Charity Majors** · 1st
cofounder/CTO, honeycomb.io
4w •

Last night, as I was falling asleep, I stumbled upon this beautiful, bittersweet piece by Annie Vella on the software engineering identity crisis being brought upon us by AI.

I left *multiple* reminders for myself to circle back to it today, so here you are. 🥰 Towards the end it cites the engineer/manager pendulum as a potential path forward, which was the cherry on top of a lovely, thought-provoking read.

# Is human creativity at risk?

Beth Spencer
https://bethspencerillustration.com/

# Despite the fears, AI adoption is surging

92% of 500
US-based devs use AI
*(GitHub, 2023)*

62% of 61,000
global devs use AI
*(Stack Overflow, 2024)*

97% of 13,372
global devs use AI
*(HackerRank, 2025)*

Sources:

- https://github.blog/news-insights/research/survey-reveals-ais-impact-on-the-developer-experience/
- https://survey.stackoverflow.co/2024/ai/
- https://www.hackerrank.com/reports/developer-skills-report-2025/

# The benefits are *very* tempting

✅ Time efficiency

✅ Cognitive support

✅ Improved flow state

"When I am stuck this helps a lot. It's my coding buddy."

"Generating a bunch of boilerplate terraform is much easier now"

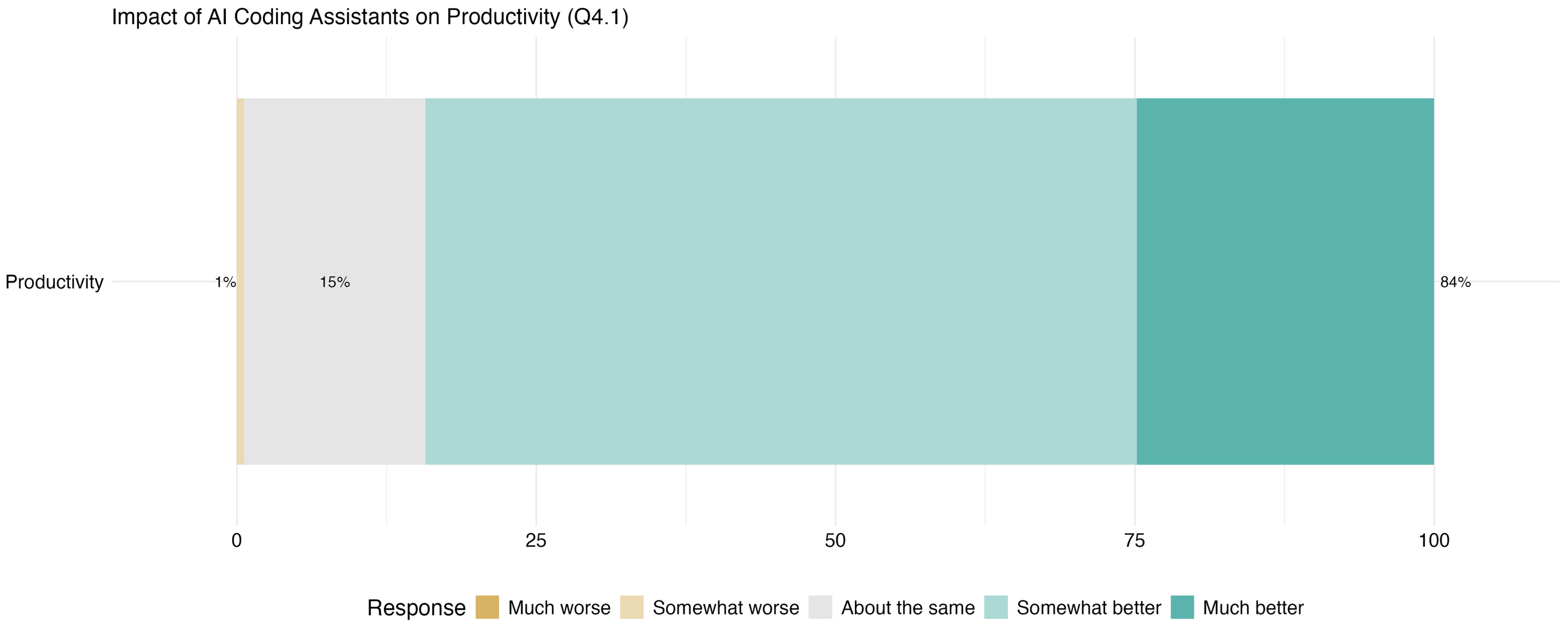
"It can find solutions which would otherwise require search and experimentation"

"I wouldn't have taken up a react front end role, AI assistant has enabled me to do it"

"A situation whereby I had to integrate a technology I haven't used before, AI helped me effortlessly"

"Significantly helped me get new projects going"

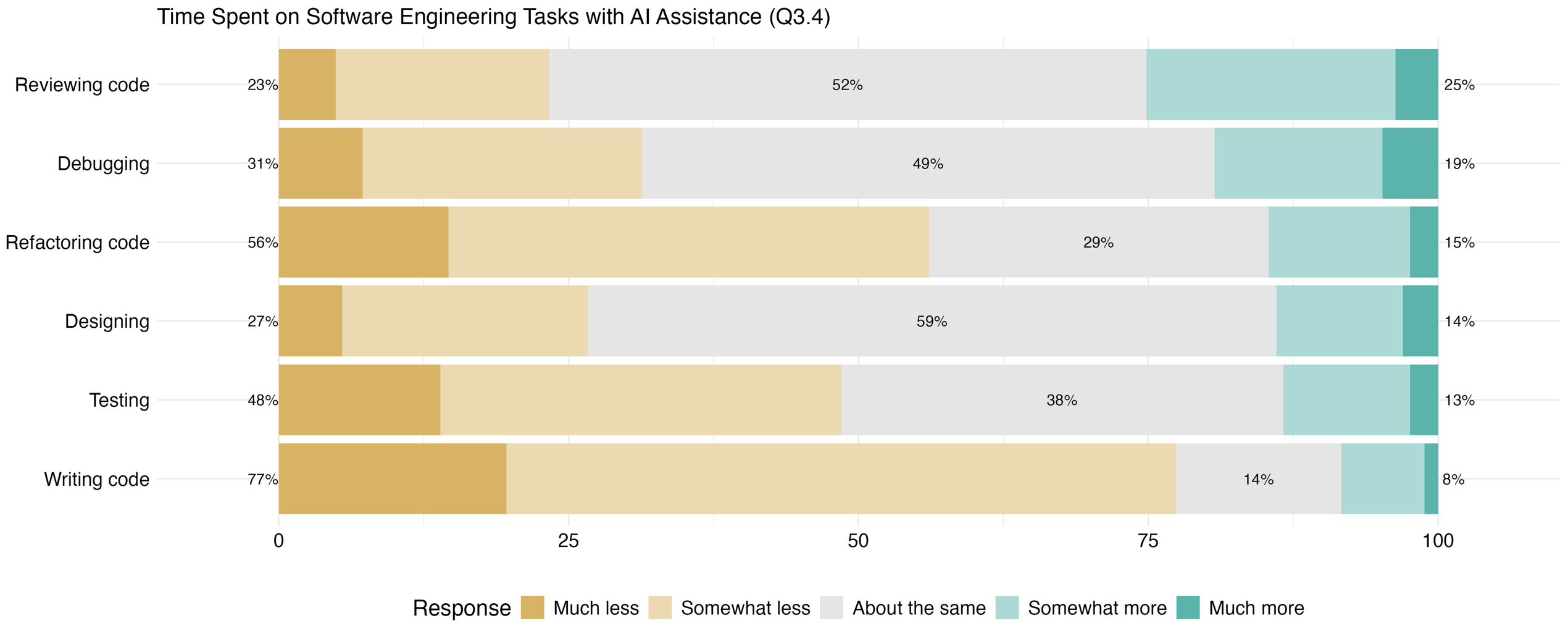
# 84% report improved productivity



We're gaining speed and scale.

But what are we *trading away*?

# Shifts in task focus



# AI smooths the terrain

But when the terrain is too smooth,
we stop noticing what we're
stepping over.

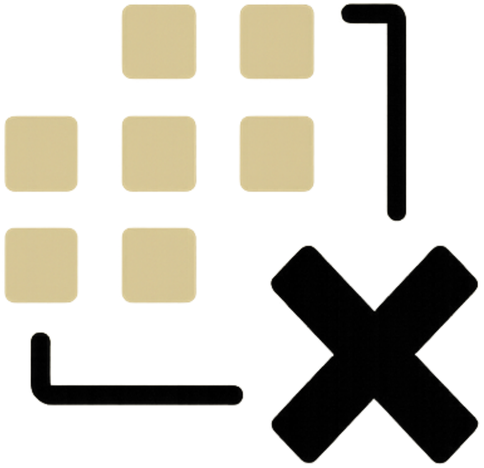
# It can lead us astray

AI isn’t always right and it doesn’t signal doubt which amplifies misplaced trust.

# Misplaced trust leaves traces in the code

GitClear analysed 211m lines of code written 2020-2024

17.1% increase in copy-pasted code



8x rise in duplicated code blocks

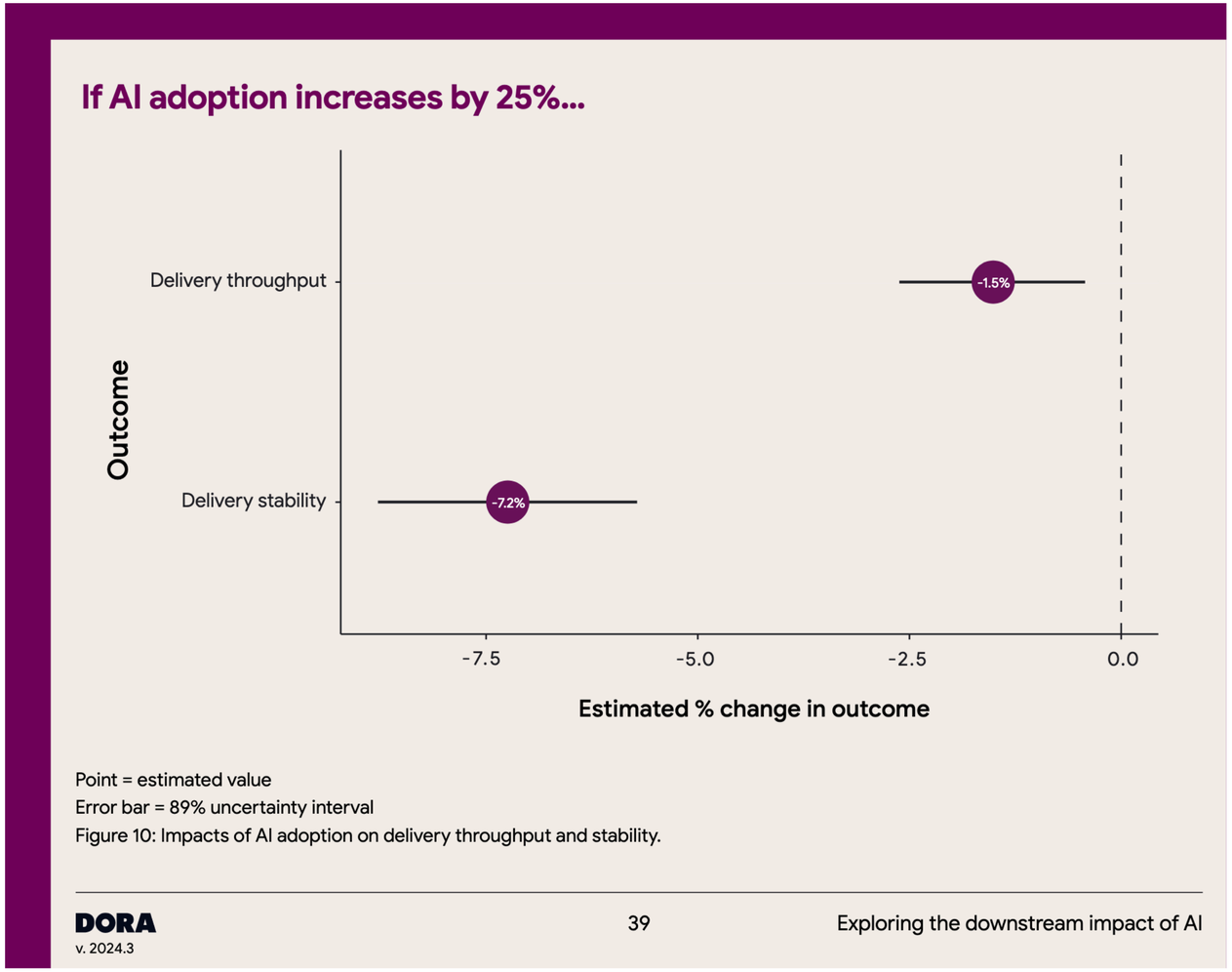
26% increase in code churn

https://www.gitclear.com/ai_assistant_code_quality_2025_research

# Early warning signs: stability is falling

## DORA 2024 Report

AI adoption is negatively impacting software delivery performance.



**Thomas Dohmke** • Following
CEO at GitHub
1w • Edited •

GitHub Copilot is the first use case where AI has joined a sector of the workforce at-scale. In just a few years, prompting has become the new coding. Developers are morphing into systems thinkers and high-level architects. And we are generating a step change in the speed of software production globally. Now, GitHub Copilot enters its agentic evolution -- becoming the first AI agent broadly embraced by the global workforce.

Thank you for lending your voice to the story **Yang Lu** & Tapestry, **Jason Gowans** & Levi Strauss Co, **Brent Foster** & TD Bank group and **Kalyani S.** & Verizon. 👏

**How AI Tools Are Reshaping the Coding Workforce**
wsj.com

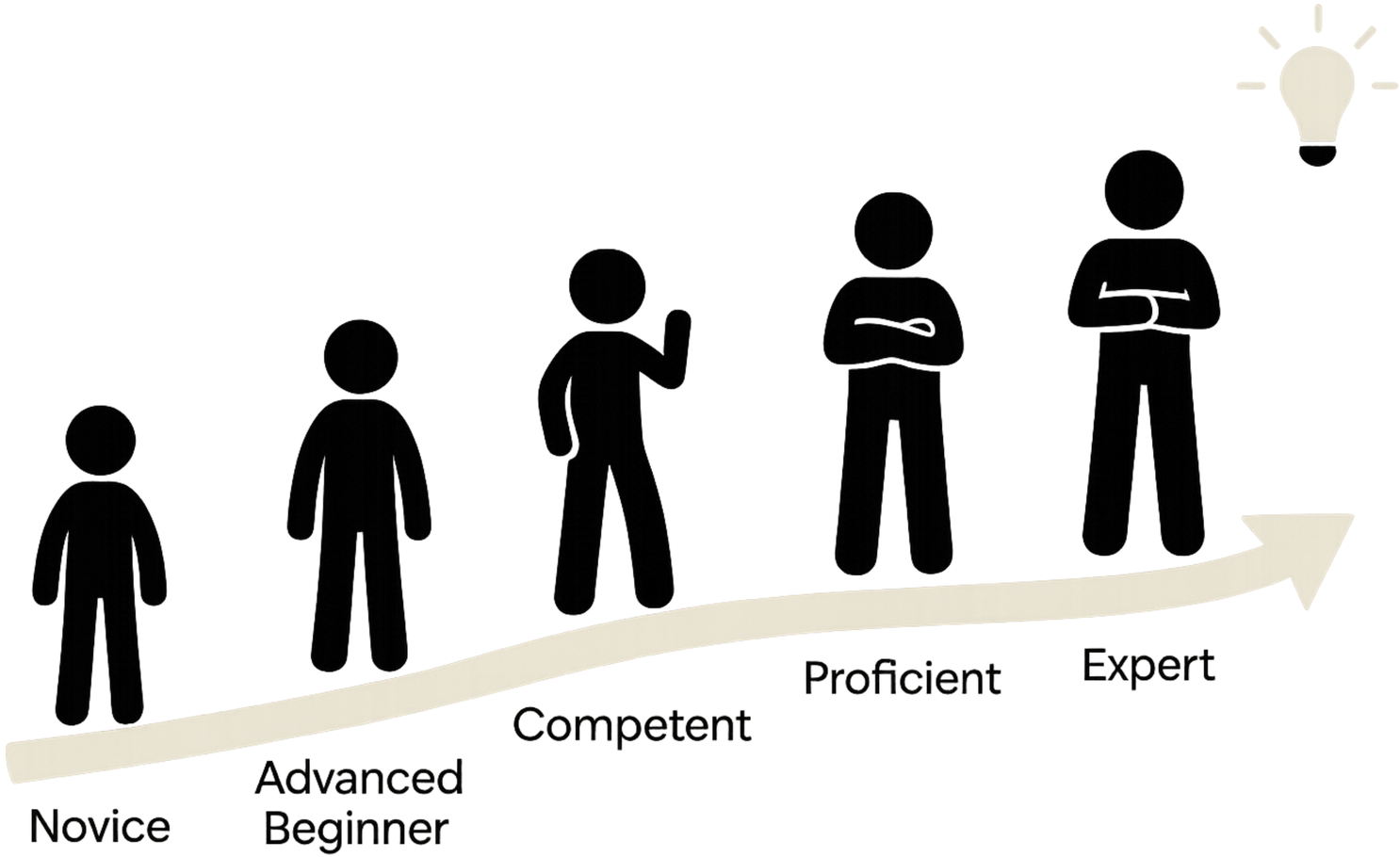
Nick Frolov and 412 others 14 comments · 47 reposts

# AI is transforming software engineers into architects

# You can’t prompt your way to intuition

## The Dreyfus Model

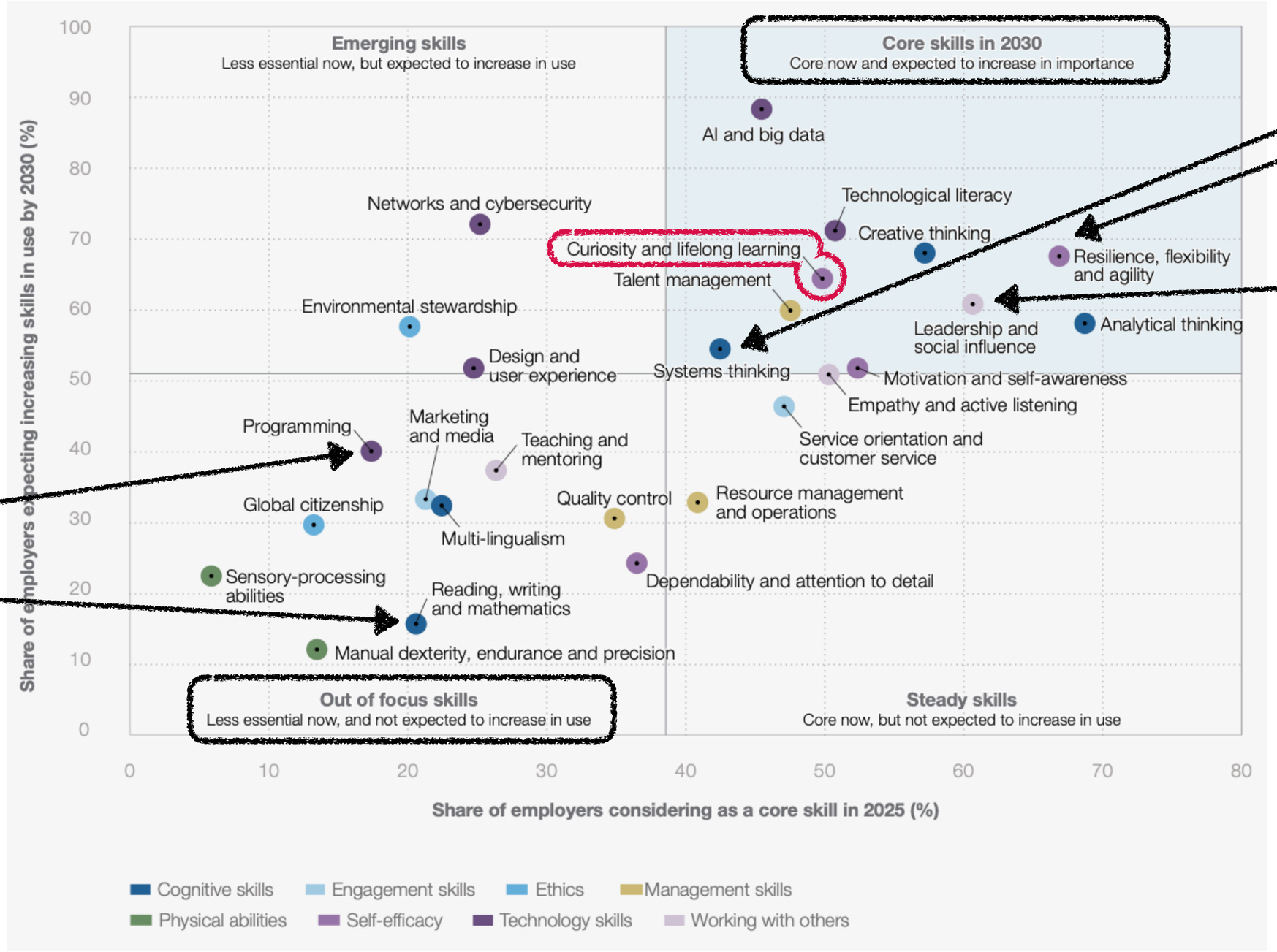
- Recollection
- Recognition
- Decision
- Awareness



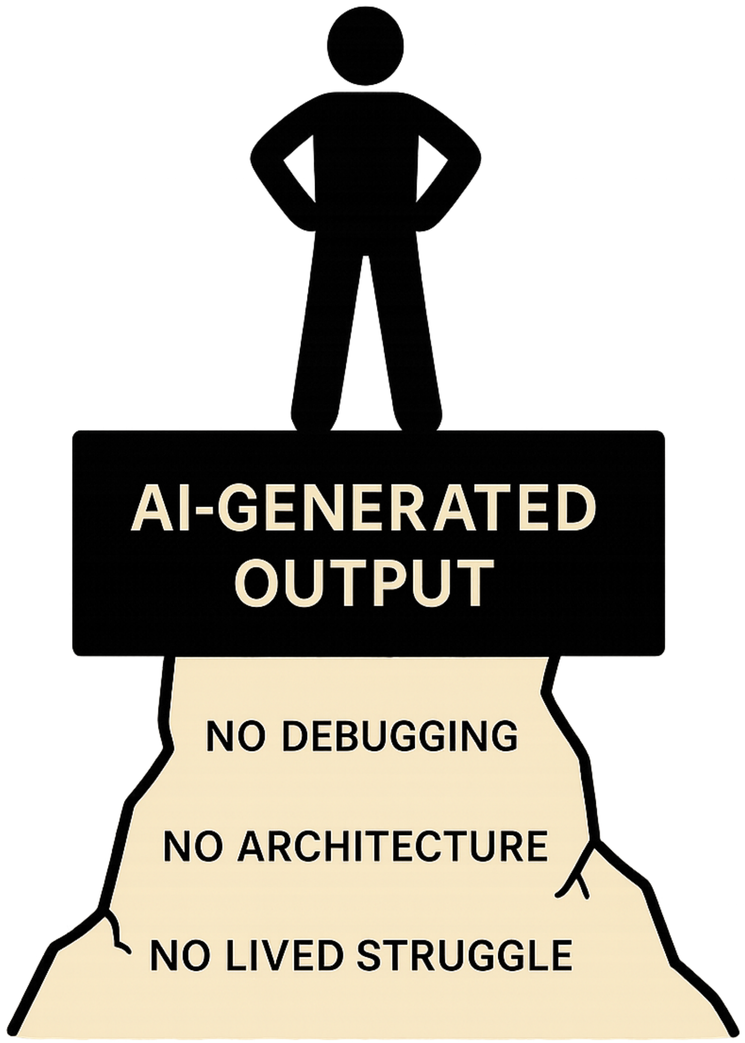

*10 years of hard, varied work*

# World Economic Forum

## The Future of Jobs Report 2025




https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/




# The risk of over-reliance on AI

How will we recognise quality if we've never had to learn what makes it good?

"I will usually copy and paste my code into GPT as soon as I run into a problem instead of thinking it through logically because a lot of the time, it can do it faster than I can."

"I feel like I am building a dependency on the tool and committing less to memory."

"It does mean I don't figure out the problems myself sometimes. So I lose out on that experience of understanding"

"I've tried to bring down the dependence since I feel it affects my skills."

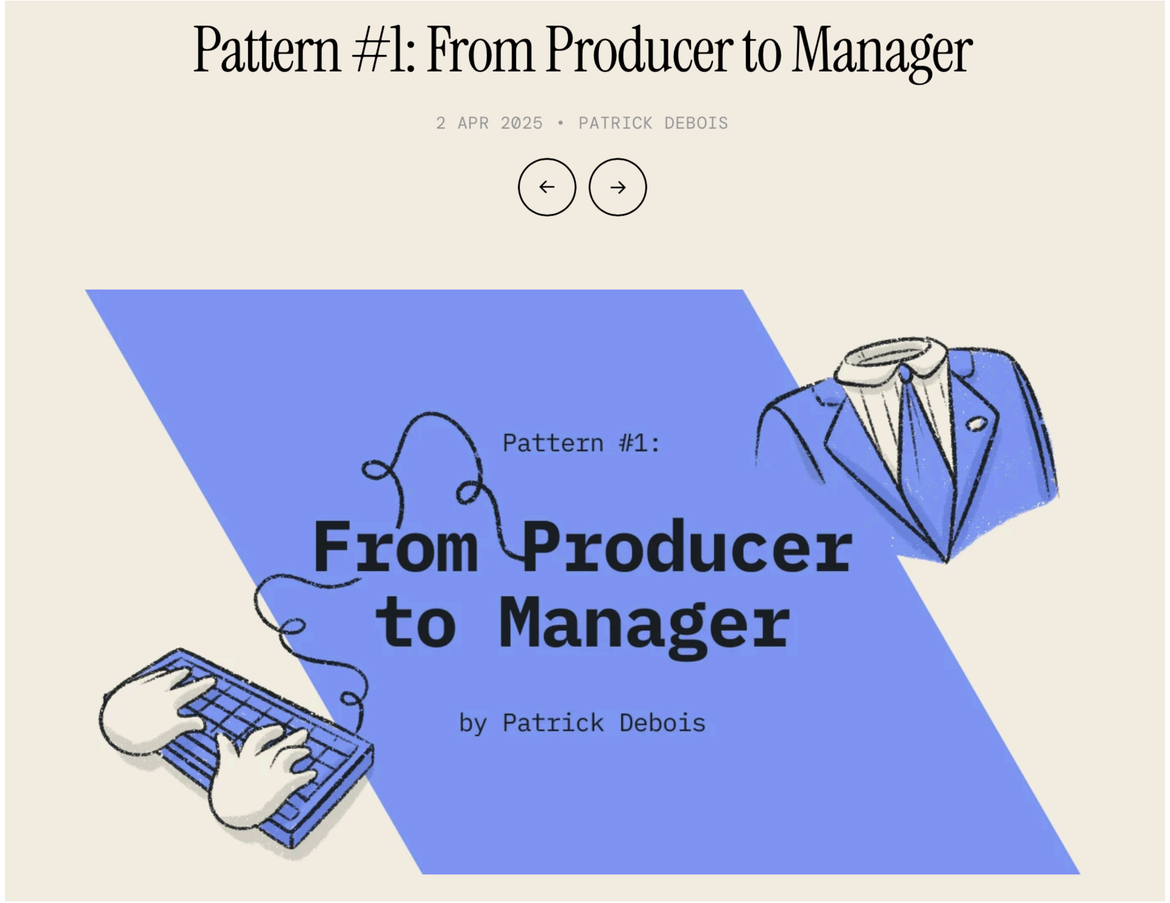
"I am feeling that excessive usage is making me feel dumb about myself"

"May also lead to over reliance, potentially slowing down the development of problem solving skills and deep technical expertise."

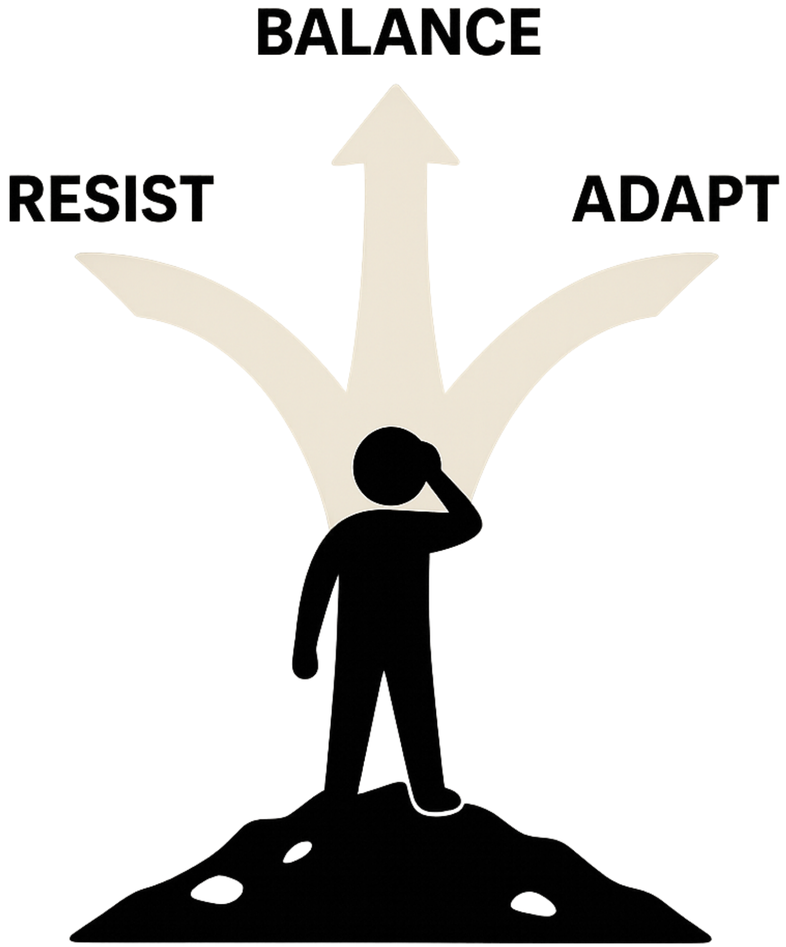
# My own identity crisis

## The Reluctant Manager

# A familiar feeling




https://ainativedev.io/news/from-producer-to-manager




# Ok, so what now?

We have no option but to learn how work in this new system

# Reclaim your role

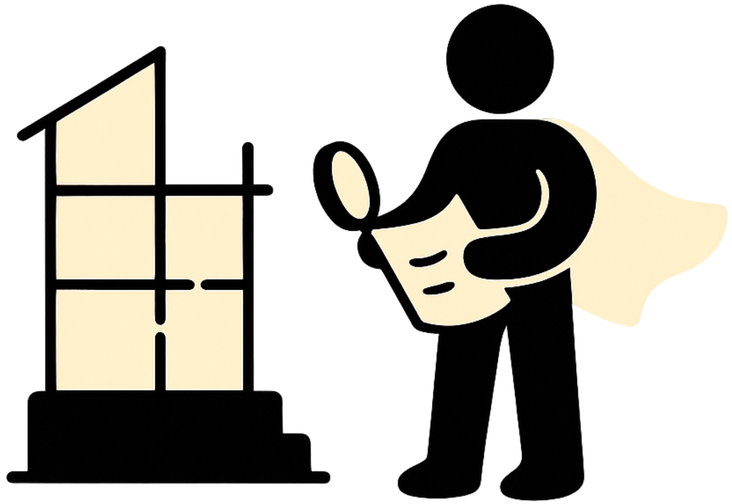
## Are we seeing a return of the generalist?

# New tools, new problems, new solutions

Designing non-deterministic systems

Digital Identity for AI agents

Smarter source control systems



Internet designed for AI

Prompt-driven development

Human-AI teaming

New *builders*

# Consider the importance of creativity

## Seamful AI

✅ Signals doubt

✅ Presents various options

✅ Documents and preserves the “paths not taken”

Inman et al. (2025). *Seamful AI for Creative Software Engineering*. IEEE Software. DOI: 10.1109/MS.2025.3534085

# Let go of control, not awareness

The craft is shifting from hands-on to system-aware

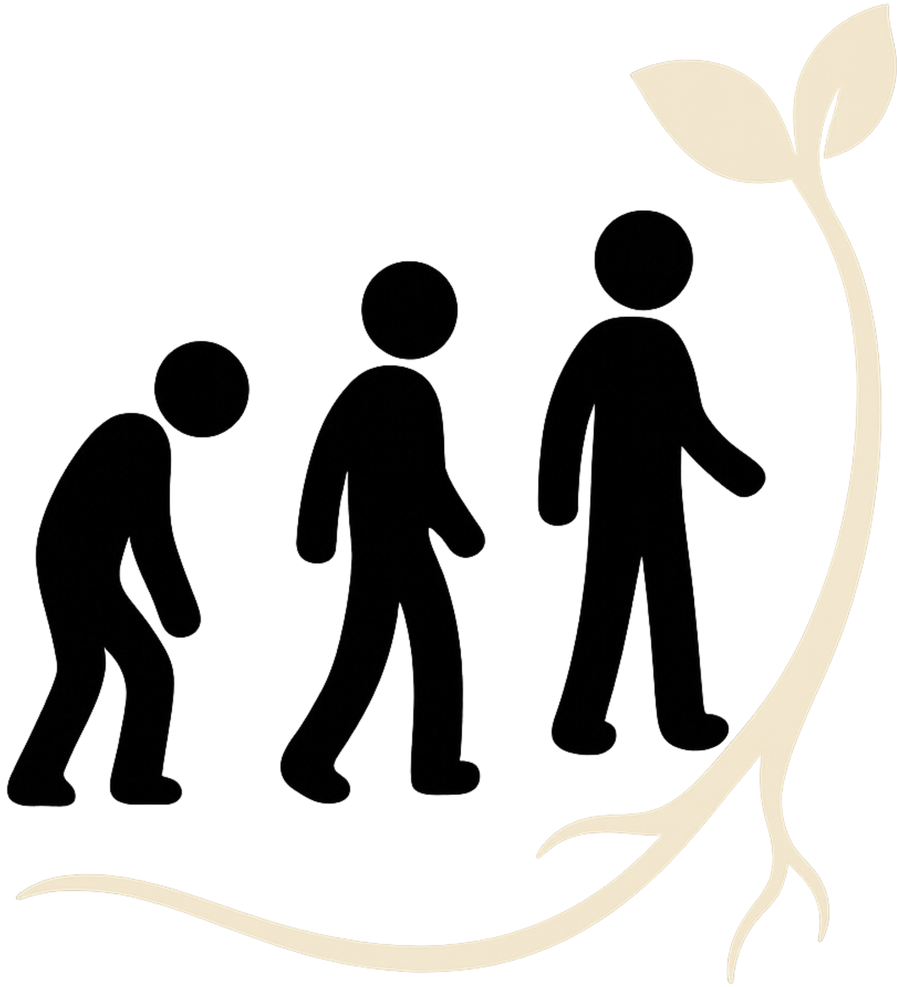
# The Identity Pendulum

Your career doesn't have to be a straight line.

# Evolution, not extinction

The role isn't disappearing -
it's being *reimagined*.

And *we* get to shape it.



# So, am I still a software engineer if I don’t write the code?

*Am I still solving problems? Still shaping systems? Still carrying the craft forward?*

# Contact Details

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Twitter/X: https://x.com/codefrenzy

Bluesky: https://bsky.app/profile/codefrenzy.bsky.social