The Unsexy Truth About AI Success

Leadership, Hygiene, and Human Foundations

John Harbison

Head of Product Engineering at PrescriberPoint, pioneering agentic workflows in healthcare.

https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-harbison/

Jess Wolfe

Customer Success Manager at Swarmia, focused on driving engineering effectiveness.

https://www.linkedin.com/in/thejessicawolfe/

The question that started this...

How do you measure engineering effectiveness now that AI is in the picture?

...the answer is not story points.

AI amplifies what you already have.

You cannot outrun process breakdowns by adding more AI.

The Measurement Baseline (Camry vs. IndyCar)

Metrics designed to keep the driver calm. Lots of problems are hidden until a threshold triggers a warning.

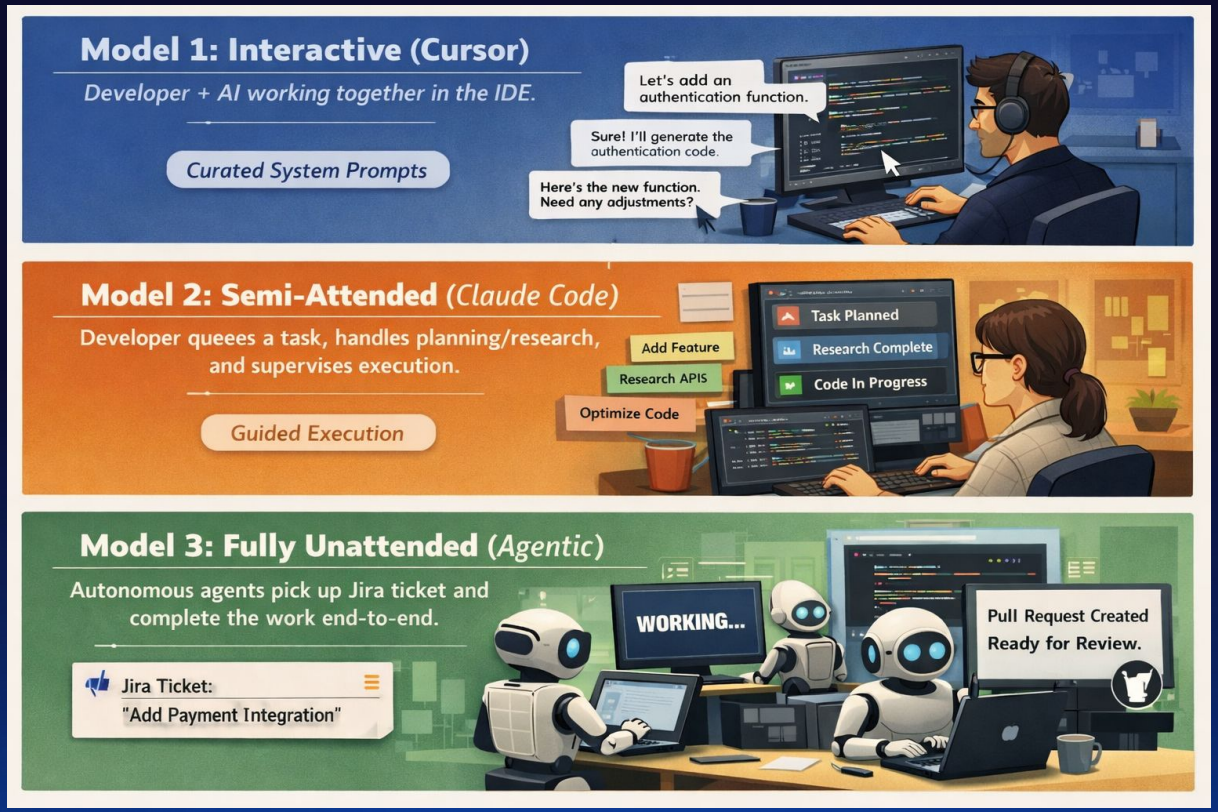
Metrics designed to protect a highly stressed engine and maximize performance. Live vitals and alarms are front-and-center, plus pit wall telemetry.

Measurement Baseline: Traditional vs AI-Optimized

	Camry (Traditional)	IndyCar (AI-Optimized + Swarmia)
Problem detection	After sprint/milestone, (missed sprint, spillover)	As patterns emerge (review time trending up)
Core dashboard vitals	Sprint burndown, velocity, backlog health, ticket status	PR cycle time stages, DORA, Investment Balance, Work Log, Focus Summary
Granularity	Sprint level ticket aggregates, Story points	Commits, Comments, PR stages (author → review → merge), developer level, agent-level
Quality / stability signals	Bug spikes after “Done”, Post-sprint defect reports	DORA drift (lead time grows, deployment frequency drops, MTTR rises, CFR spikes)
Bottleneck detection	Growing “In Progress” column, long-lived tickets (visible after accumulation)	Real-time PR review latency, merge delays, stage-specific slowdowns
Engineering leader	Periodic check-ins, Manual report pulls	Pit-crew telemetry mindset, working agreements, proactive unblocking
Developer	Standup status updates, manual ticket updates to show progress	Automated nudges + notifications, focus on coding, actionable alerts


The Trifecta of Success
ENGINEERING
PRODUCT
DESIGN
PRD
ENGINEERING
DESIGN

The AI Culture Shift: Strategic Decisions



The Secret Sauce

From writers to orchestrators

Engineers haven’t written code without AI in 12 months

UAT Experts

Senior engineers are now taking on user acceptance testing and security audits

Engineer Autonomy

Autonomy is earned through business and technical domain mastery and enabled by org context

Prompting vs Hooks

Engineers don’t “prompt harder”. Instead the org creates context that drives agent behavior. Constrain AI with skills, hooks and guardrails so outputs stay consistent.

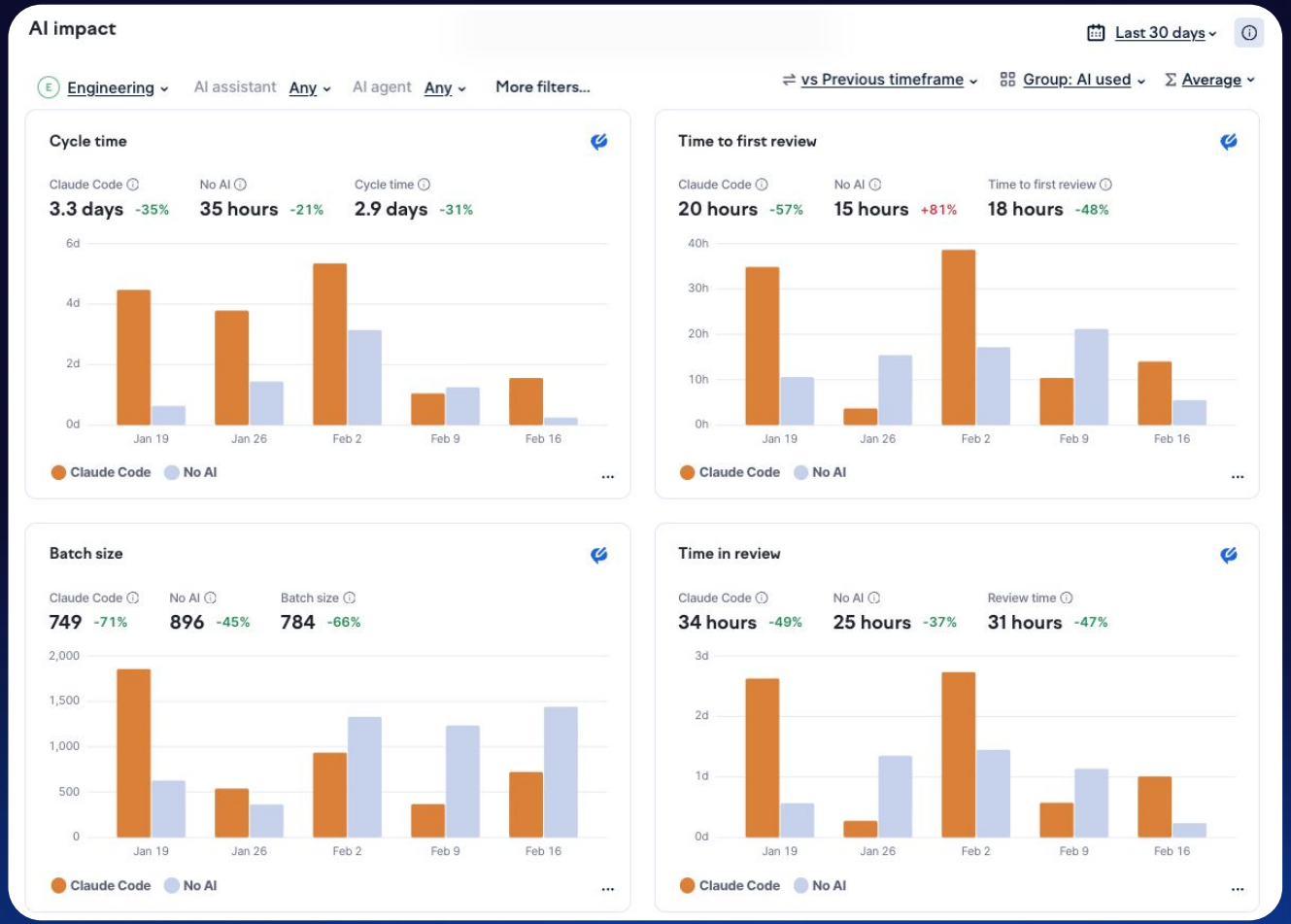
Org Shift Needed

The Engineer (Business + Tech Domain Mastery)

The Organization (Invests in providing the Context)

The Manager (Creates the Coach/Apprenticeship Environment)

It is even easier to be a good human with AI because mentorship and positive reinforcement deliver outsized ROI in an AI-augmented world.

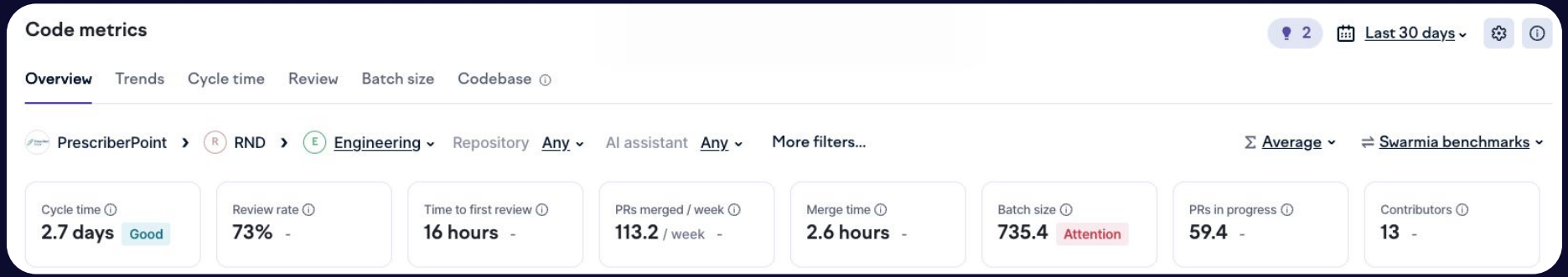


What it looks like in practice: last 30 days

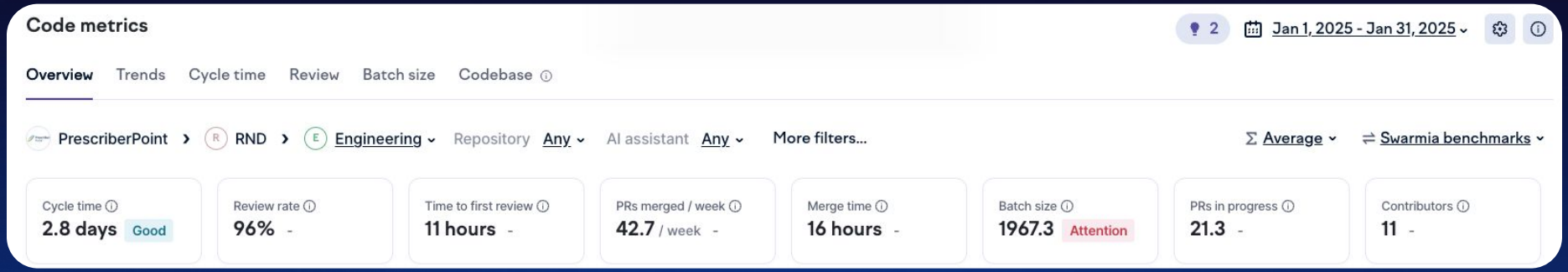
AI experimentation is a journey

Now vs Baseline

Now



Baseline



Now vs Baseline

Now

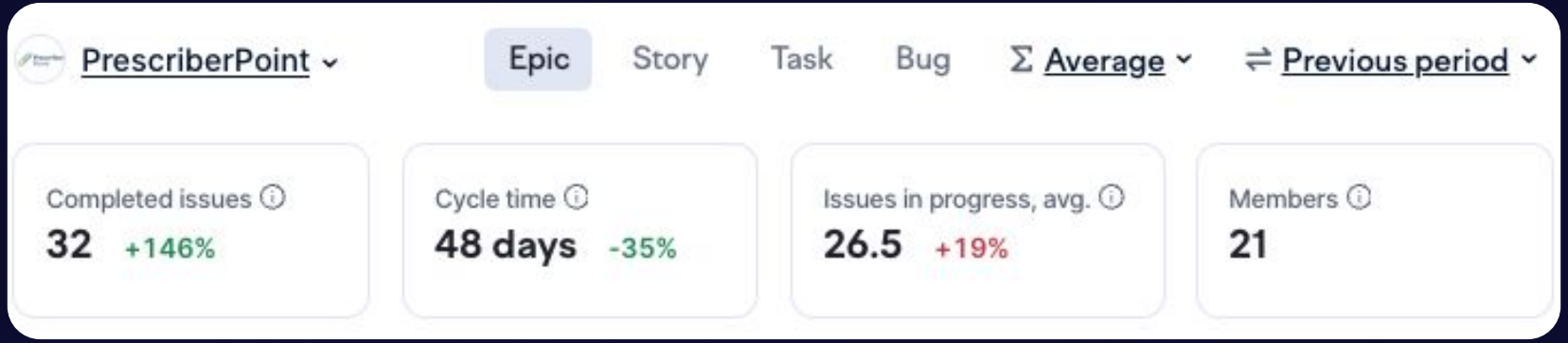
Deployment frequency	Change lead time	Time to deploy	Change failure rate (CFR)	Mean time to recovery (MTTR)
14 / week +91%	14 days -32%	9.9 days -37%	15% +5	5.7 days -55%

Baseline

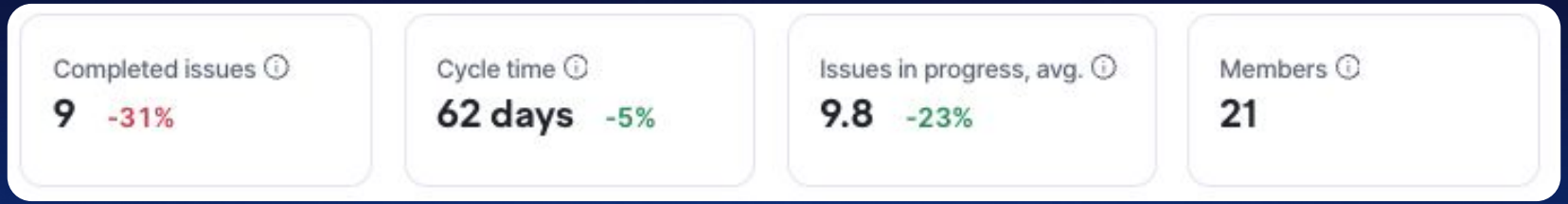
Deployment frequency	Change lead time	Time to deploy	Change failure rate (CFR)	Mean time to recovery (MTTR)
3.4 / week	12 hours -5%	-	13% -2	47 hours -14%

Now vs Baseline

Now



Baseline



Next Steps

- Fix your process and data hygiene first: You can’t accelerate a broken foundation.
- Allow room to learn: Start with a small team to prove the method.
- Measure outcomes, not activity: Focus on features shipped and business value that was realized from those features, not lines of code.
- Starter AI workspace

  QR code url: https://github.com/theJohnHarbison/starter-ai-workspace

Recommended Reading

Learn more about how PrescriberPoint fixed their engineering fundamentals with the help of Swarmia before going fully agentic.

bit.ly/4bWpzh9

What tool are the metrics from?

Swarmia is a software engineering intelligence platform that helps you answer questions like: What does our engineering productivity look like with AI vs before? Is our AI investment paying off? Who are the most advanced AI users who could coach their peers?

Book a meeting with us to learn more

bit.ly/3MJZKXf