

12 Signals Your Team Is Performing AI Adoption, Not Aligning To It

Run it on your own team. Mark what is true today, count the checks, and find out which conversation to have first.

How to use this

Each signal is something you can observe in your team, not something your team tells you. Read the description, then tick the box only if you can point to a recent example. If you would have to guess, leave it empty. Use the notes line for the example you had in mind; it is what you will bring to the conversation.

Every ticked signal is a place where the team may be complying instead of aligning. A tick is not an accusation. It is a prompt for a question you probably haven't asked yet.

This is not a maturity model and there is no level 5. Your total appears on the last page and updates as you tick boxes. It works in Adobe Acrobat and Reader. In a browser or phone preview, count the ticks yourself.

The six dimensions

1. Measurement & Visibility
2. Quality & Technical Health
3. Team Dynamics & Culture
4. Leadership & Accountability
5. Organizational Structure
6. Expectation Management

SIGNAL 1

You report an adoption rate. You can't report an impact rate.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

You can say what share of the team uses AI tools weekly. You can't say what happened to defect rate, change failure rate or time-to-production since the tools arrived.

WHAT IT MEANS

Your measurement was built to answer "are we adopting?" instead of "is adoption working?" The first is easy and visible, so that is the one your team learns to satisfy.

EVIDENCE

Only 20% of engineering teams use metrics to measure AI impact, despite 90% tool adoption (Jellyfish, State of Engineering Management 2025).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Pull a pre-rollout baseline for one outcome metric and put it next to the adoption number in the same view.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 2

Engineers say they feel faster. You haven't put measured numbers next to that.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Standups are smoother and velocity looks good. Nobody has set defect rate, rework and change failure rate beside velocity for the same period.

WHAT IT MEANS

Felt productivity and measured productivity can diverge badly. If you've only looked at one side, your team has learned to give you the side you look at.

EVIDENCE

Q3 2025 tracking study, 18 CTOs and 500+ engineers: developers self-reported +20% productivity while measured output showed -19%, a 39-point gap.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Run velocity and quality side by side for last quarter and discuss both with the team, out loud.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 3

The team ships faster. Nobody has checked what is inside what shipped.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Deployment frequency and ticket closure are up. Security scanning and defect tracking were not upgraded to match the volume of AI-generated code.

WHAT IT MEANS

AI code tends to work on the expected path and fail on edge cases. Teams that raised throughput without raising inspection are accumulating debt at AI speed, and it stays invisible until production surfaces it.

EVIDENCE

Security reviews found 322% more vulnerabilities in AI-generated samples than in hand-written code (Q3 2025 engineering tracking study).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Compare current vulnerability density with a pre-AI baseline, not with last sprint.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 4

Engineers can describe the AI-generated code. They can't explain why it was designed that way.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

In reviews and retros, answers to "why this pattern, why this library, how does it fail under load?" turn vague.

WHAT IT MEANS

Comprehension debt. The code is in the repo but the mental model isn't in the team, so the next incident takes far longer to debug. AI removed slow steps that were doing invisible learning.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Change the merge bar from "what does it do" to "why this approach, and what are the failure modes."



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 5

Your loudest adopters are your newest or most anxious engineers. Your seniors went quiet.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

The visible AI leaders are not your deepest contributors. Senior engineers are muted or openly skeptical, and the two groups collaborate less than they used to.

WHAT IT MEANS

Two things at once. Seniors have the most invested in the current paradigm, and their caution can be real judgment or identity protection. Fast adoption by juniors can be real integration or identity anxiety. Neither group is wrong, and they need different responses.

EVIDENCE

55.5% of early-career developers use AI tools daily, well above their senior counterparts (Stack Overflow Developer Survey 2025).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Separate "who uses AI" from "who uses it well" and track outcomes by person, not activity.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 6

PR review time went up after AI tooling arrived.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Generation got faster and the path from commit to merge didn't. One or two senior reviewers account for most of the increase.

WHAT IT MEANS

Review is the last place seniority still controls output. Some of the slowdown is legitimate quality concern. Some is territorial. You need to know which, because the responses differ.

EVIDENCE

Code review wait time is the top bottleneck in AI-adopting teams, rising while generation time falls (LinearB 2024 survey, 2,000 engineering teams).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Write down review criteria that apply equally to AI-generated and human-written code, and close the informal extra-scrutiny flag.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 7

Nobody has defined who owns AI-generated code when it breaks.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Incident process, on-call and ownership docs are unchanged. In a recent postmortem, "the AI wrote it" appeared as context, explanation or an unspoken assumption.

WHAT IT MEANS

The engineer who accepted the suggestion feels like a reviewer, not an author. That is a rational reading of an ambiguous norm, and the norm is yours to set.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Add an "acceptance owner" field to the PR template. Whoever merges AI output is the author, with full ownership.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 8

Your AI champion is an IC with no authority over what decides adoption.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Someone runs the demos and writes the guides. Their recommendations on budget, process or policy were acknowledged and not actioned. They are starting to disengage.

WHAT IT MEANS

Culture change needs authority: incentives, budget, process. Naming a champion delegates visibility and keeps the decisions. The champion absorbs the friction and the blame without the levers.

EVIDENCE

Grassroots champion models sustained 23% adoption vs 67% where senior leaders visibly modeled AI use and made structural changes (Gartner 2024).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Give the champion explicit authority over one structural decision, and answer each of their recommendations with action or a stated reason.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 9

Management layers shrank and nobody redefined what the remaining managers are for.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Your IC-to-manager ratio rose, by design or unfilled attrition. What "managing" means now that AI handles status, summaries and coordination has not been restated.

WHAT IT MEANS

Coordination and information forwarding are being automated. Managers whose value sat there are in a weakening position today, and someone has to start the conversation about what replaces it.

EVIDENCE

Korn Ferry 2025: 41% of companies trimmed management layers. Amazon, Google and Microsoft all cut layers in 2024.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Ask each manager: remove every task AI does at 80% quality from your week, what is left? Expect a specific answer.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 10

The same two or three engineers present the AI wins every time.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Showcases and all-hands segments feature the same faces. Most of the team watches. You haven't checked whether impressive demos track engineering quality.

WHAT IT MEANS

Showcases reward articulate, confident people, not sound judgment. Over time the team optimizes for how a demo looks, and engineers with deeper judgment but less polish lose standing.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Feature an engineer explaining what went wrong with AI and how they caught it. Give the hardest-to-impress people equal stage time.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 11

Next year's productivity projection is higher than this year's measured result.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Planning decks and board updates assume large AI gains. Compared against measured outcomes, not self-reported ones, the projection has no support in the trend line.

WHAT IT MEANS

Your managers inherit the gap between promise and reality with no new headcount, no new tools and no way to say so upward. They will perform the number instead.

EVIDENCE

67% of engineering leaders predict 25%+ velocity gains in 2026, only 6% have seen gains above 30%, and 60% report no significant productivity impact (Jellyfish 2025; Engineering Leadership Report 2025).

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Rebuild next year's projection from your own measured baseline and be able to show where each figure came from.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

SIGNAL 12

The last honest conversation about AI's real impact needed an incident or an outsider.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

Meetings and retros report strong adoption and steady progress. The last genuinely uncomfortable thing anyone said came after something broke, or when someone external asked.

WHAT IT MEANS

Alignment is being performed while real uncertainty is handled privately. The incident or the facilitator isn't the problem. It shows how wide the gap had grown.

FIRST MOVE IF IT'S TRUE

Go first. Name one specific AI uncertainty of your own in the next team meeting and see who follows.



I see this on my team right now.

Mark what is true today, not what you plan to fix.

What I actually observed:

Your score

Signals ticked:

0 / 12

Reading:

What your count means

0 to 3. Mostly aligned. Your team is telling you the truth and you're measuring enough to hear it. Check the ticked signals for blind spots anyway.

4 to 6. Mixed. Parts of the team are complying without conviction. Start with the lowest-numbered signal you ticked, because measurement problems feed the rest.

7 to 9. Performing. You are reading a dashboard that your team has learned to keep green. Expect the cost to show up as quiet attrition before it shows up in metrics.

10 to 12. Deep performance. Reporting and reality have separated. The most useful next step is one honest conversation, not another tool or training.

A note on what this isn't

This does not measure how much AI tooling you have, which vendors you use or how many people finished training. It asks whether your management layer can see what is really happening on your team and act on it. The teams that get lasting value from AI will not be the ones that adopted fastest. They will be the ones whose managers could see clearly, measure honestly and say what they found.

Want to talk through your result? Reply to the message this came with and put your count in the subject line.

Developed by Anton Weiss. Ant Weiss IT Leadership Coaching. Executive coaching for engineering leaders working through AI change.