```
$ amplify --input=manager
```

AI doesn’t fix managers. It amplifies them.

The leverage gap between leaders and their teams is growing — and it's mostly made of decisions leaders control.

LARRY GALAN · ESSAY · 9 MIN · AUGUST 2026

There's a scene playing out across a lot of leadership careers right now, and almost nobody talks about it.

A leader gets real access to frontier AI tools. Within weeks, their personal output jumps — agents running in parallel, work that used to take a week landing in an afternoon. The gain is genuine, and so is the feeling that comes with it. It's a dopamine hit. I've felt it, and most people using these tools seriously have.

The hit isn't the problem. **The problem is what happens next, quietly.**

---

01 / THE YARDSTICK

The bar moved. Nobody scheduled a meeting about it.

Once your own output jumps, your sense of what "normal" looks like quietly shifts. You don't notice it happening, because you only see your finished work — not the six dead-end prompts, the two restarts, the judgment calls that fifteen years of experience let you make in seconds. **You end up judging by a highlight reel.**

Then, sooner or later, they read a team estimate and think: *this could be done by Friday.* Without any malice at all, the team is now being measured against a number that was never a team number.

Ask the leader, and they're just holding the bar. Ask the team, and the bar moved — and nobody scheduled a meeting about it.

WHAT THE LEADER SEES vs. WHAT HAPPENED

THE HIGHLIGHT REEL

- finished work, in an afternoon

THE FULL TAPE

- six dead-end prompts
- two restarts
- fifteen years of judgment, spent in seconds
- finished work

In plain terms: the new "normal" was built from the left panel. The estimate it judges was built in the right one.

The tell is usually the same: estimate reviews turn quietly tense, and it takes months to locate the source. The estimates haven't changed. **The yardstick has.**

Call it the yardstick problem.

---

02 / THE GAP

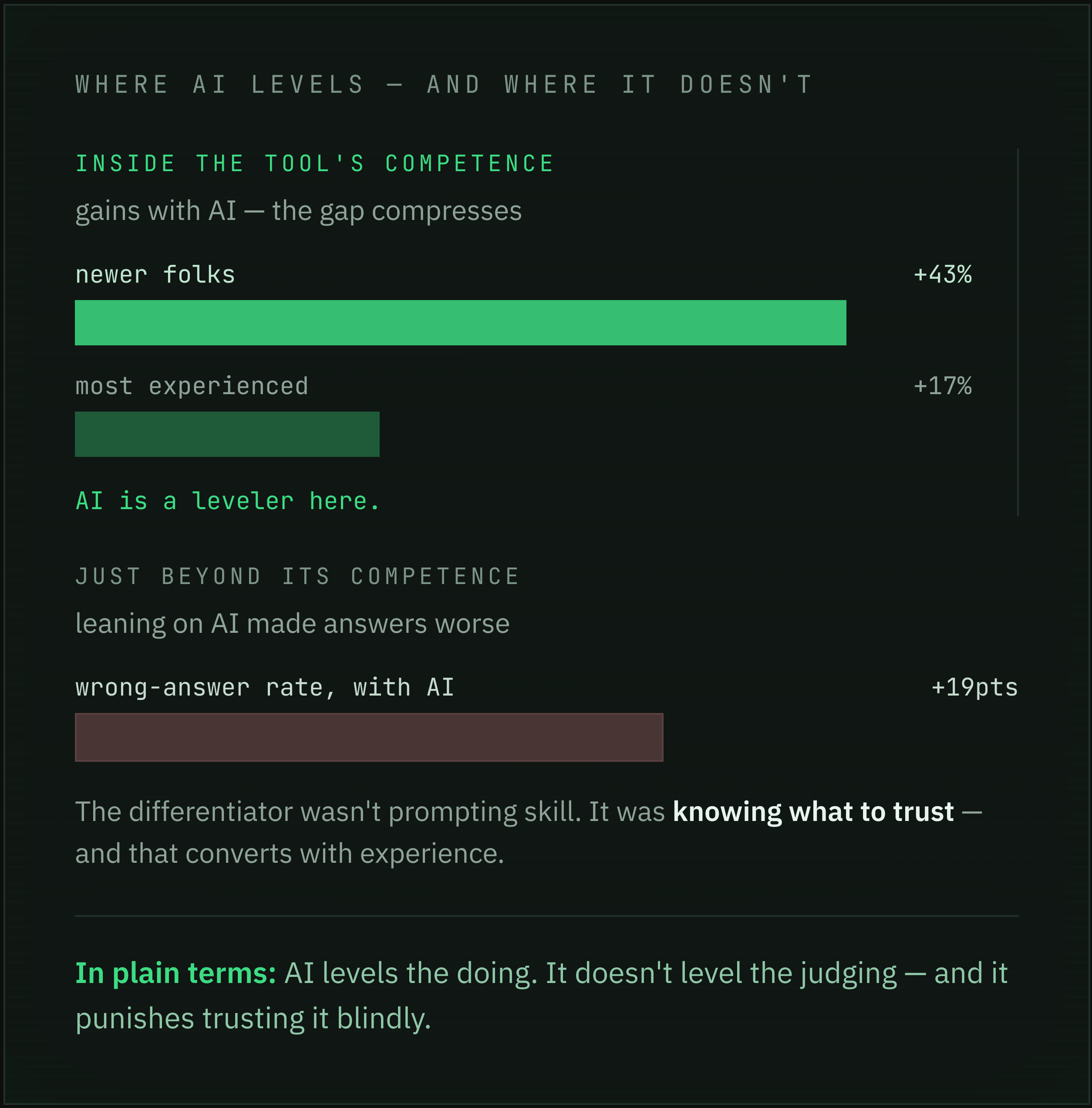
Structural, not attitudinal.

It's tempting to blame the distance between a leader's output and the team's on effort, or on people being slow to adopt the tools. Usually it's neither. **Three built-in differences do most of the work.**

Access. The executive has the frontier tools and no procurement friction. The analyst has a locked-down license and a policy memo.

Leverage. This is the tricky one. The big field studies found AI *narrows* skill gaps: in the Harvard–BCG study, the bottom half of consultants improved 43% with AI versus 17% for the top half, and a study of five thousand support agents found new hires gained 34% while veterans barely moved. On work the tool is good at, AI is a leveler. But the same study found the flip side: on tasks just past what the tool can handle, people who leaned on it were 19 points *more* likely to get the answer wrong. What separated people wasn't prompting skill. It was knowing what to trust. When the hard part is judging the output rather than producing it, experience wins — and a leader who assumes everyone gets their results from the same tools is missing that gap entirely.

Permission. Senior people experiment freely. Junior people often genuinely don't know what they're allowed to touch, so they use less, learn slower, and fall further behind a bar they never saw move.



None of these is fixed by telling people to work harder. **All of them are fixed by leadership decisions.**

03 / THE BENCH

The second-order cost.

There's a quieter failure mode that matters more. When a senior person can do a junior's work in ten minutes, the tempting move is to stop assigning it. Just do it. Ship faster.

This is already happening. Stanford's Digital Economy Lab, using payroll data covering millions of workers, found that jobs for early-career workers in the most AI-exposed fields have fallen roughly 13% relative to their peers since late 2022 — while experienced workers in the same fields show no comparable drop. The economy is already running the experiment: keep the seniors, skip the juniors.

THIS QUARTER vs. EIGHTEEN MONTHS OUT

WHAT THE DASHBOARD SHOWS NOW

Throughput up.
Cycle time down.

seniors shipping at machine speed

WHAT NO DASHBOARD SHOWS

The bench stopped growing.

the bill arrives in ~18 months

In plain terms: "just do it yourself" optimizes the quarter and quietly liquidates next year's capability.

Run a team this way for a year and you've traded next year's capability for this quarter's speed. The bench doesn't disappear all at once — it just stops growing, and the bill arrives eighteen months later when nobody below the leader can own anything without them.

Delegation was never only about efficiency. It's how the next generation of judgment gets built.

That's still true. It's just easier than ever to forget.

---

04 / BOTH WAYS

Amplification cuts both ways.

This is the part that gets missed: AI doesn't make anyone a better or worse manager on its own. **It amplifies whoever they already were.**

A manager who already measured people against themselves now does it with a superhuman baseline. A manager who already hoarded the interesting work now hoards it at machine speed. But a manager who already thought in terms of team capability now has more leverage than ever to distribute — and those teams are pulling away from everyone else's.

SAME AMPLIFIER, TWO OUTPUTS

measures people against themselves

thinks in team capability

×AI

...with a superhuman baseline

...with more leverage to distribute than ever

In plain terms: the technology is neutral about which manager you become. It is not gentle about it.

Bad managers are getting worse. Good ones are getting better. The technology is neutral about which one you become. It is not gentle about it.

05 / WHAT TO MEASURE

Three replacements, none of them complicated.

STOP MEASURING → START MEASURING

01 BASELINE	the leader's personal output	→	**team throughput**
02 ORDER	expectations first	→	**tools & permission first**
03 SIGNAL	shipping alone	→	**shipping + learning**

In plain terms: nobody gets held to an AI-era bar until they have AI-era access.

Measure the team's output, not your own. A leader's output is an input to the system, not the standard for it.

Hand out the tools before you raise the bar. Nobody gets held to an AI-era standard until they have AI-era access — and explicit permission to experiment, and to fail while learning.

Count learning, not just shipping. If the work is getting done but nobody is getting more capable, that's not a team. It's a queue.

THE ACTUAL JOB

Don't benchmark the gap. Close it.

The gap between a leader's leverage and the team's is real, it's growing, and it's mostly made of decisions leaders control. So the job isn't to measure people against the gap. **The job is to close it.**

`$ exit --one-line`

The best leaders in this era won't be the ones who move fastest. They'll be the ones whose teams do.

LARRY GALAN
building an AI-native firm

AUGUST 2026