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What’s a Software Engineer?

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Yellow Raincoat

This isn’t a talk about AI…

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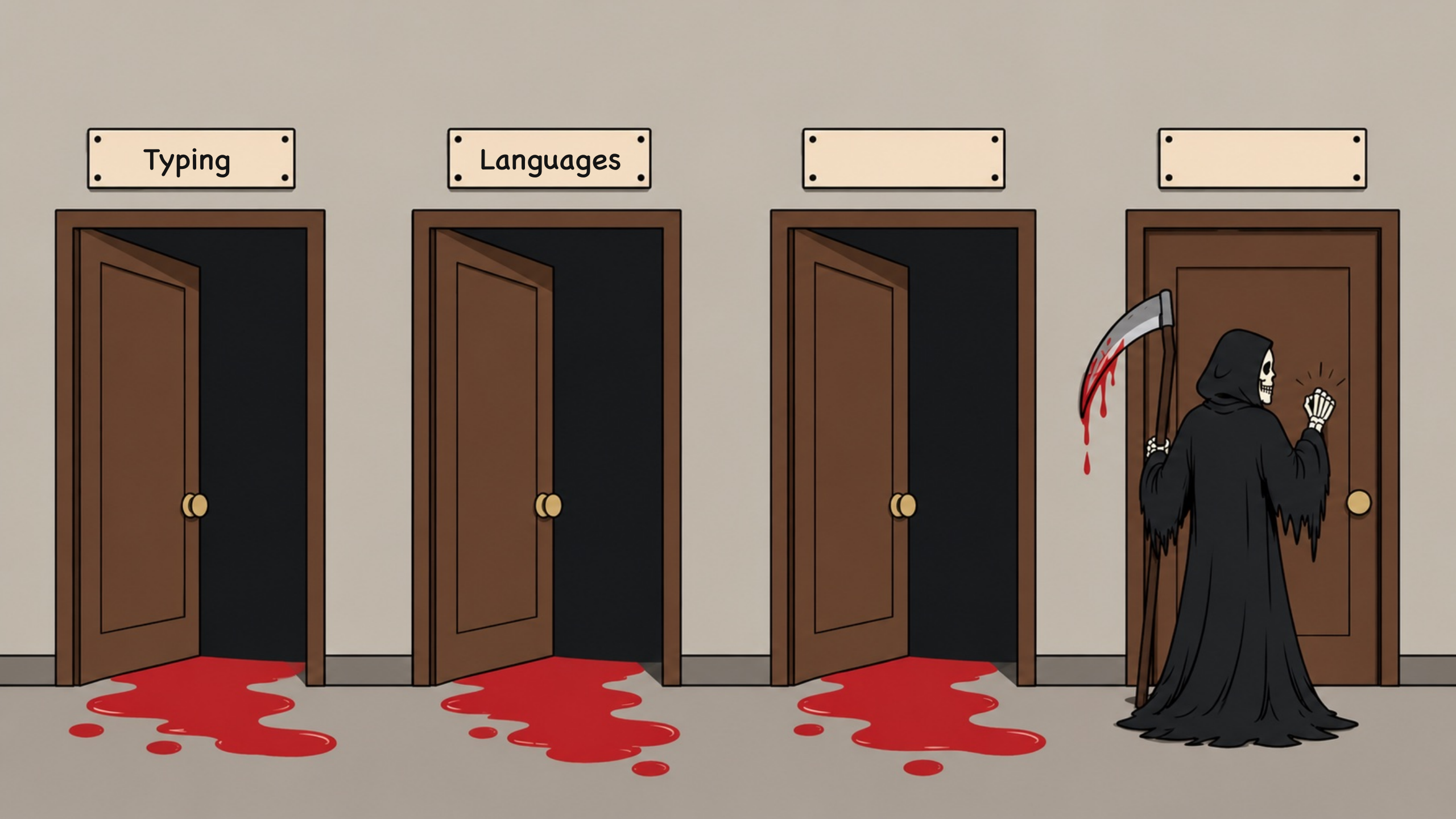
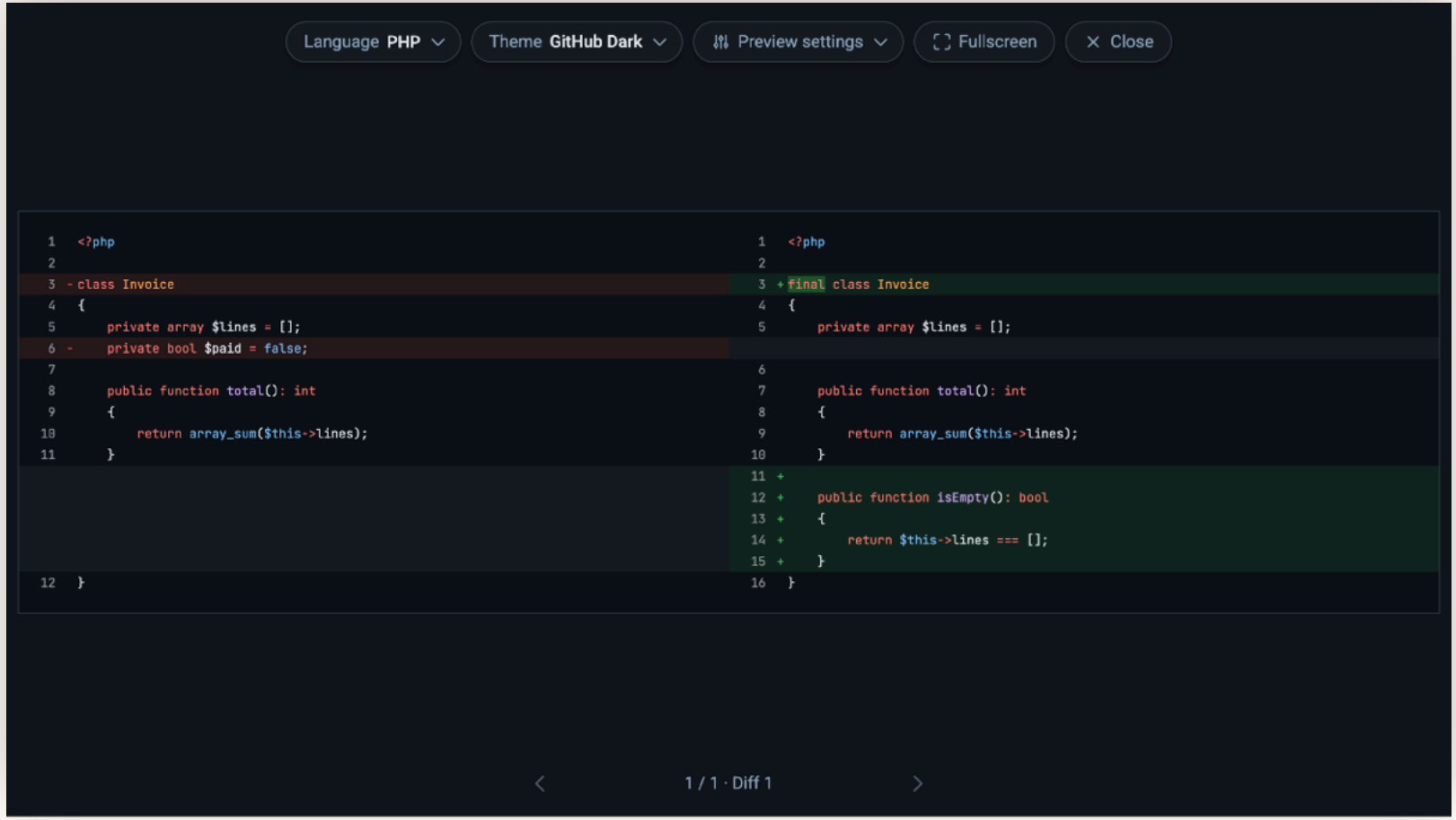
but AI is a central theme.

01

What’s going away


Typing
Languages



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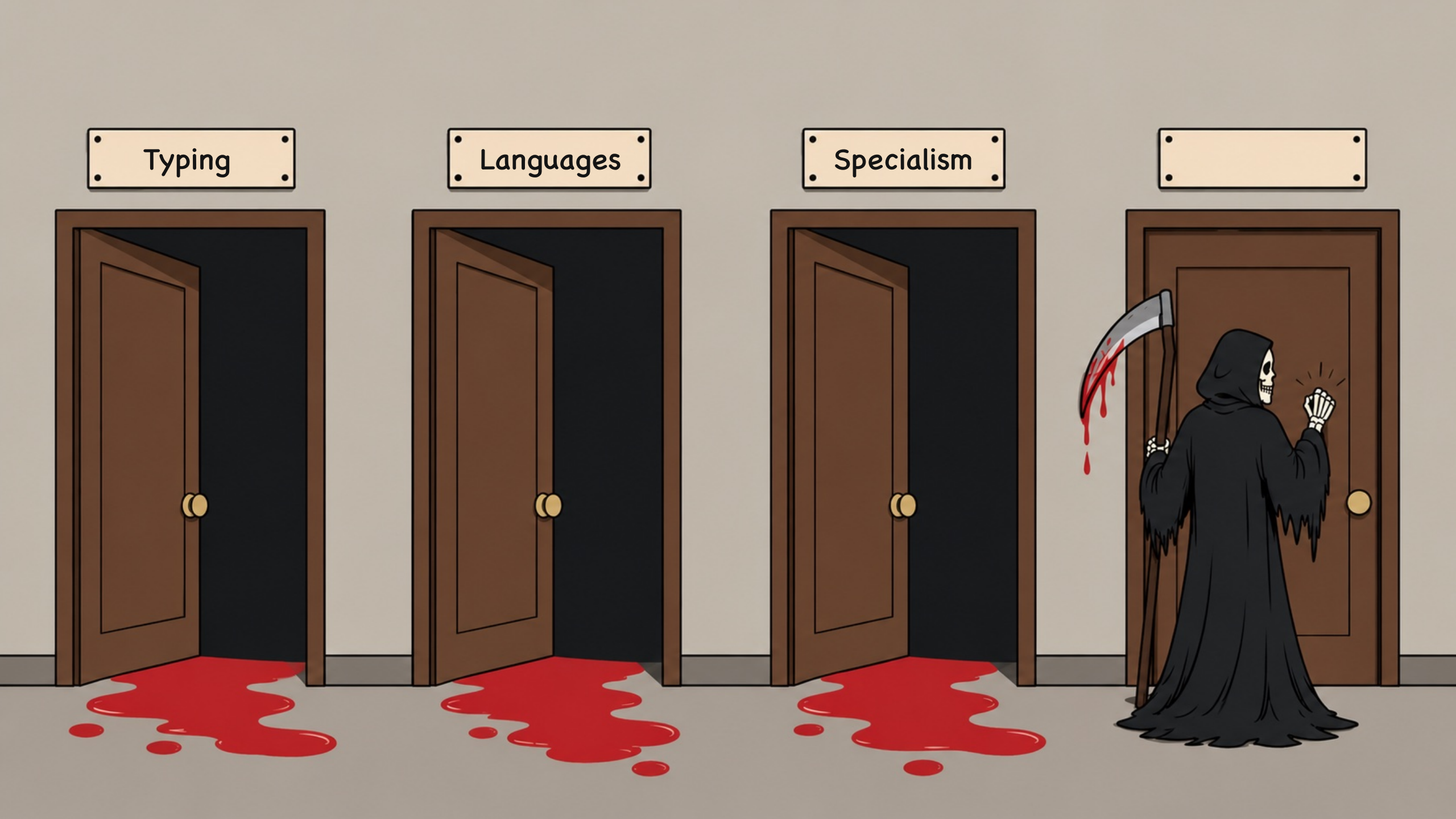
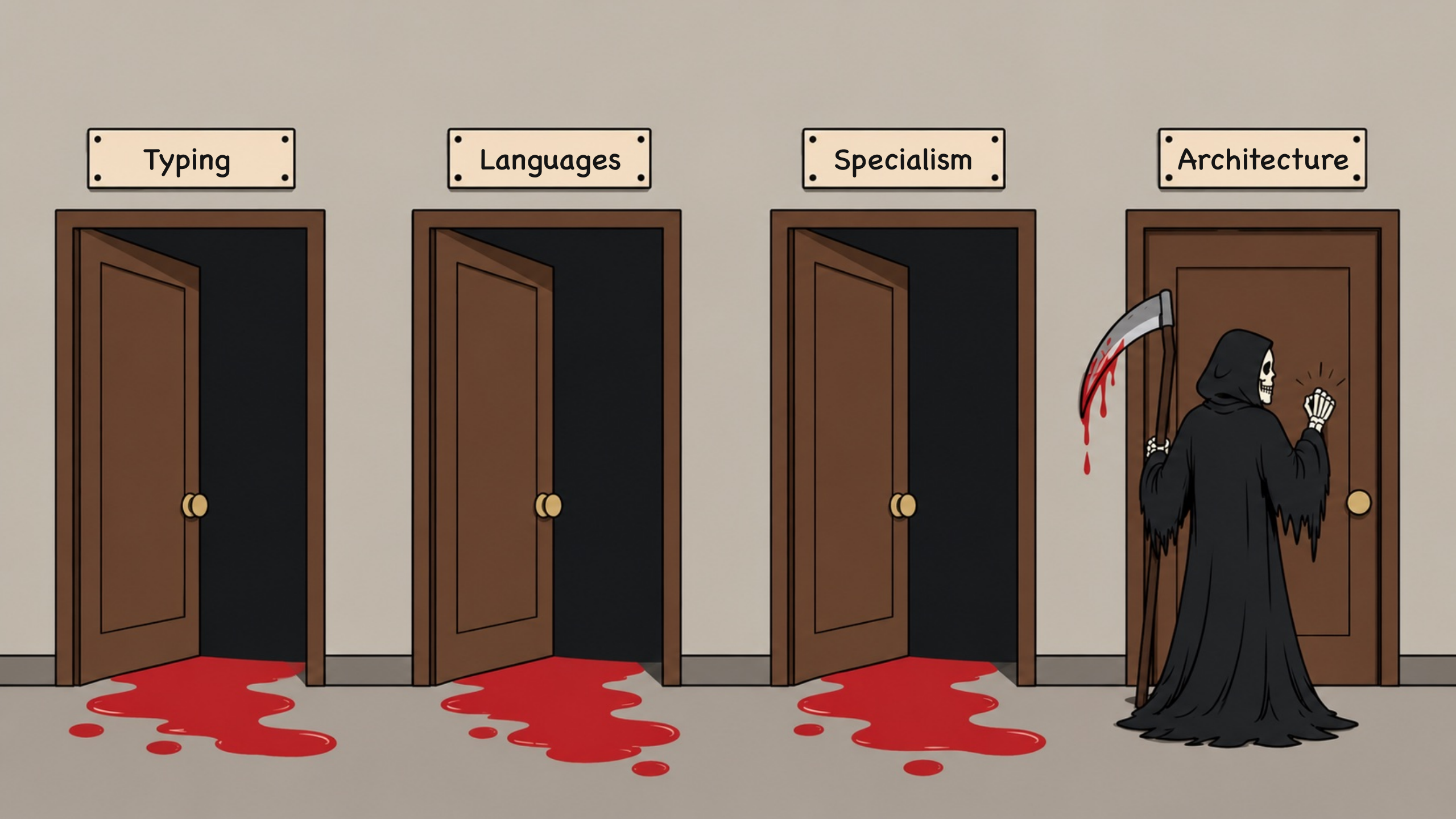
Expertise is still an advantage,
but no longer an excuse.


Typing
Languages
Specialism

It’s time for the generalists to rise again.


Typing
Languages
Specialism
Architecture

First shift

Input

- Typing
- Languages
- Specialism



Output

- Meets quality standards
- Built with the right tool
- Works in production

Architecture?

02

What’s staying

First shift

Input

- Typing
- Languages
- Specialism



Output

- Meets quality standards
- Built with the right tool
- Works in production

Output

- **Meets quality standards**
- Built with the right tool
- Works in production

Separate the good from the plausible.

Output

- Meets quality standards
- **Built with the right tool**
- Works in production

Output

- Meets quality standards
- Built with the right tool
- **Works in production**

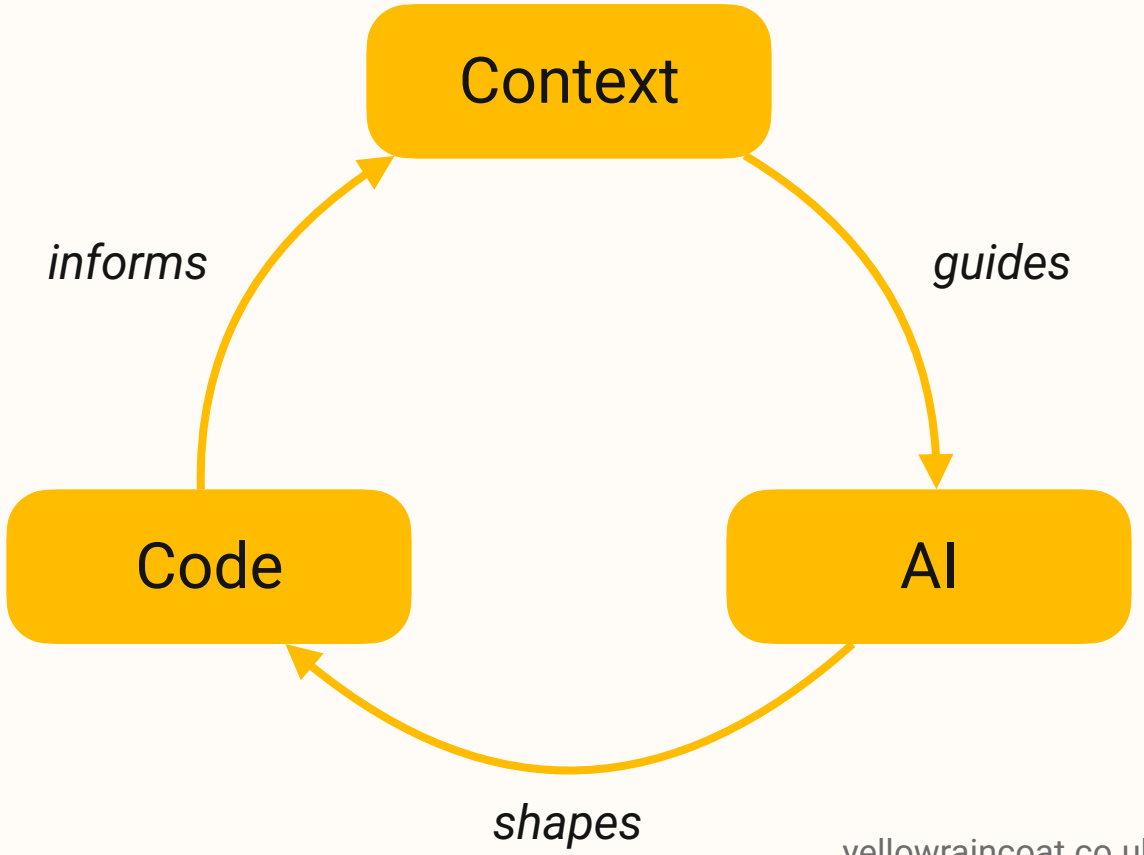
Harness engineering

Context engineering

- Instructions
- Conventions
- Examples

Automated checks

- Test suites
- Static analysis
- CI pipelines



03

Owning the outcome

Excellent output can still solve the wrong problem.

Owning the outcome

- “Can build” vs “should build”
- Understand the problem
- Understand the context
- The work doesn’t stop at shipping

Owning the outcome
≠
controlling it

Dependability, initiative and ownership are a mindset.

04

Getting there

How do we learn?

Things going wrong

Someone catching them first

Things going wrong

- Build something
- Practise system design
- Keep it running

05

Showing up

Meetups

- Free
- Lowkey
- Range of topics
- Real relationships

“Yes, but…”

- Feeling awkward
- Work/life balance

Meetups and conferences are the firmware between work and life.

Public speaking

- Start small (meetup lightning talk)
- But think big (conference talk)
- Expand your comfort zone



It’s about creating your own luck.

06

Where this all leads

What software engineers do

01
Tell good from plausible

02
Pick the right tool

03
Steer agents

04
Own the outcome

05
Build & run

06
Show up

What product engineers do

01
Tell good from plausible

02
Pick the right tool

03
Steer agents

04
Own the outcome

05
Build & run

06
Show up

Software engineers are becoming product engineers.

Closing thoughts

- AI is levelling the playing field
- Experience gives you a head start
- Don’t fear the vibe coders
- People still want people to build for them

QUESTIONS?

Thank you

Yellow Raincoat

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Slides & links

yellowraincoat.co.uk/projects/public-speaking/whats-a-software-engineer