The Career Disruption Audit

A Self-Assessment for Technical Leaders
Navigating What's Next

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Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, the Transtheoretical Model,
Professional Identity Theory, and Behavioral Chain Analysis

How to Use This Audit

This is not a personality quiz. It is a structured self-assessment built on validated psychological frameworks, adapted for the specific challenges facing technical professionals in a rapidly shifting landscape.

The audit measures five dimensions that determine how you experience and respond to career disruption. Each one is backed by peer-reviewed research and has been selected because it maps to patterns I see consistently in my work with technical leaders.

> **Set aside 20 to 30 minutes.** Find a quiet space. Answer based on how things are right now, not how you think they should be. There are no right answers. The goal is an honest snapshot of where you stand so you can see clearly what needs attention.

The Five Dimensions

1. Disruption Impact

How concretely AI and industry shifts are affecting your role and market position.

2. Identity Alignment

Whether your attachment to your current professional self is helping or limiting you.

3. Stuck Patterns

The behavioral sequences that keep you in place. Adapted from Linehan's DBT.

4. Readiness to Act

Where you fall on the stages of change (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983).

5. Core Needs

Whether your needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

After completing all five sections, you will have a composite profile that reveals your specific configuration of stuckness. Most people find that one or two dimensions explain the majority of their felt experience. Generic advice fails because it treats all stuckness the same. Yours is not the same as someone else's.

Disruption Impact

Before examining your internal experience, start with the external reality. How is the shifting landscape concretely affecting your work, your skills, and your position in the market? Many people feel a vague sense of threat without having mapped the specifics. Naming what is changing, and what is not, reduces ambient anxiety and creates a foundation for strategic thinking.

Rate each statement based on your experience over the past 6 months.

1. AI tools can now perform tasks that used to require my specialized expertise.
   SD D N A SA

2. I have seen roles similar to mine eliminated or restructured in my industry.
   SD D N A SA

3. The skills I spent years developing feel less valued than they were two years ago.
   SD D N A SA

4. I spend time worrying about my job security in ways I did not before.
   SD D N A SA

5. I am unclear on which of my skills will remain relevant over the next three years.
   SD D N A SA

6. My organization is making strategic shifts that could significantly change my role.
   SD D N A SA

Your Section 1 Score: Add your ratings for items 1 through 6. Total: _____ / 30

Scoring: Disruption Impact

6 to 12: Low disruption. Your immediate situation is relatively stable, though monitoring trends remains important.

13 to 20: Moderate disruption. You are experiencing real shifts that warrant proactive planning rather than waiting.

21 to 30: High disruption. Significant changes are underway. Clarity and action become urgent, not optional.

Reflection

Which specific changes feel most threatening? Which feel more like noise than signal?

_____

_____

_____

If you removed the emotional charge, what would a clear-eyed assessment of your market position look like?

_____

_____

_____

Identity Alignment

Research on professional identity shows that people who over-identify with a single role experience career transitions as existential threats rather than strategic pivots. This is especially common among technical professionals who have invested years developing deep expertise in a specific domain. The items below are adapted from research on organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and reframed for professional role identity.

Rate each statement based on how true it feels right now.

1. When someone questions the value of my technical specialty, it feels like a personal criticism.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

2. I find it difficult to describe who I am professionally without referencing my current role or domain.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

3. My professional successes feel like personal successes, and my professional setbacks feel like personal failures.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

4. If my current role were eliminated, I would feel lost in ways that go beyond the financial impact.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

5. I resist career options that would not use my existing technical skills, even when they are otherwise appealing.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

6. I would describe myself as a builder first. When I am not building, something feels off.

   SD   D   N   A   SA

Your Section 2 Score: Add your ratings for items 1 through 6. Total: _____ / 30

Scoring: Identity Alignment

6 to 12: Flexible identity. You can envision yourself across multiple roles without distress. Strong foundation for transitions.

13 to 20: Moderate attachment. Your professional identity provides meaning but may create blind spots around alternative paths.

21 to 30: High attachment. Your identity is tightly fused with your current role. Transitions will feel threatening until you expand your self-concept.

Reflection

If your current title disappeared tomorrow, what would remain true about who you are and what you are good at?

Is the builder identity something you chose, or something that chose you? Does it still serve you?

Stuck Patterns

Behavioral Chain Analysis, developed by Marsha Linehan as part of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, is a method for understanding the full sequence of events that leads to a problematic behavior. The avoidance items below are adapted from the Cognitive Behavioral Avoidance Scale (Ottenbreit & Dobson, 2004) and applied to career contexts. The chain-mapping exercise that follows helps you trace the specific sequence that keeps you stuck.

Rate each statement honestly. These items describe common patterns, not character flaws.

1. I tend to put off dealing with difficult career decisions until I feel more certain.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

2. I have spent significant time researching or planning for a transition without taking concrete steps.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

3. I avoid situations where my competence might be publicly evaluated, such as interviews, posts, or presentations.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

4. When I consider making a visible career move, I find reasons to delay or refine before acting.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

5. I engage in familiar, low-risk work to avoid the discomfort of tackling what I know needs to change.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

6. I can identify a recurring pattern where I build momentum, hit a point of exposure, and pull back.

    SD   D   N   A   SA

Your Section 3 Score: Add your ratings for items 1 through 6. Total: _____ / 30

Scoring: Stuck Patterns

6 to 12: Low avoidance. You are able to take action even when uncomfortable. Your stuckness likely comes from other dimensions.

13 to 20: Moderate avoidance. You have identifiable patterns that slow your progress. Awareness of the chain is the first step to breaking it.

21 to 30: High avoidance. Avoidance behaviors are a primary driver of your stuckness. Addressing these patterns directly will create the most movement.

Map Your Chain

Think of a recent time you knew you should act on a career-related task but did not. Walk through the sequence below.

1 **Vulnerability Factor**

What was your state going in? Tired, stressed, had a bad meeting, feeling behind

_____

_____

2 **Trigger**

What specific event or thought set the chain in motion?

_____

_____

3 **Thoughts**

What did you tell yourself? Not ready, not good enough, need more time, wrong moment

_____

_____

4 **Emotions**

What did you feel? Anxiety, shame, dread, inadequacy, apathy

_____

_____

5 **Avoidance Behavior**

What did you do instead? Worked on something safe, scrolled, researched endlessly

_____

_____

6 **Consequence**

What was the result? Temporary relief followed by frustration, guilt, or the same situation next week

_____

_____

Reflection

What would have happened if you had acted at the trigger point instead of avoiding? What is the realistic worst case?

_____

What is the cost of the avoidance pattern repeating for another 3 months? Another year?

Readiness to Act

The Transtheoretical Model of behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) identifies distinct stages people move through when making significant changes. Understanding which stage you are in matters because the strategies that work at each stage are different. Pushing yourself to take action when you are in contemplation creates resistance. Staying in contemplation when you are ready for action wastes momentum.

For each pair, circle the statement that feels more true right now.

1.

    A: I am not sure I need to make any changes to my career right now.

    B: I know something needs to change, even if I am not sure what.

2.

    A: I think about making a move but have not done anything concrete.

    B: I have started taking specific steps toward a transition.

3.

    A: I am gathering information and weighing options.

    B: I have a plan and I am executing on it, even imperfectly.

4.

    A: The idea of committing to a direction feels premature.

    B: I have committed to a direction and am working through the implementation challenges.

Scoring: Readiness Stage

Mostly A on pair 1: Precontemplation. You may not yet see the need for change. This audit itself is a step toward awareness.

Mostly A on pairs 2-3: Contemplation. You recognize the need but are weighing options. The risk here is chronic deliberation without action.

Mix of A and B: Preparation. You are getting ready. Focus on removing barriers and making the first step as small as possible.

Mostly B: Action. You are in motion. The work now is maintaining direction, handling setbacks, and staying the course.

Reflection

What stage are you in? Does that match how you have been treating the situation?

If you are in contemplation, what would it take to move into preparation? Not action. Preparation.

Core Needs

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) identifies three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy (feeling in control of your choices), competence (feeling effective and capable), and relatedness (feeling connected to others). When these needs are met, people experience intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. When they are suppressed, people feel stuck, disengaged, or anxious, even when nothing is technically wrong on paper. The items below are drawn from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction at Work Scale (Deci et al., 2001).

Rate each statement based on your current professional life.

Autonomy

1. I feel like I can make a lot of inputs to deciding how my work gets done.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

2. There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to go about my work.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

Competence

3. Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from working.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

4. I have been able to learn interesting new skills on my job.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

Relatedness

5. People at work care about me.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

6. I pretty much keep to myself and do not have a lot of professional contacts.
   SD   D   N   A   SA

Your Section 5 Scores: Items 2 and 6 are reverse-scored (1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1).

Autonomy (items 1-2): _____ / 10   Competence (items 3-4): _____ / 10   Relatedness (items 5-6): _____ / 10

> ### Scoring: Core Needs
>
> **2 to 4 on any sub-scale:** This need is significantly unmet. It is likely a primary source of your felt stuckness.
>
> **5 to 7:** Partially met. Functional but fragile. Worth attention before it erodes further.
>
> **8 to 10:** Well met. This area is a source of strength. Lean on it while addressing weaker dimensions.

Reflection

Which need is least met? How does that deprivation show up in your day-to-day experience?

_____

_____

Is there a relationship between your lowest-scoring need and your stuck patterns from Section 3?

_____

_____

Composite Profile

Transfer your scores from each section below.

Dimension	Your Score	Range	Level
1. Disruption Impact	_____ / 30	Low / Mod / High	_____
2. Identity Alignment	_____ / 30	Flex / Mod / High	_____
3. Stuck Patterns	_____ / 30	Low / Mod / High	_____
4. Readiness to Act	_____	Pre / Con / Prep / Act	_____
5a. Autonomy	_____ / 10	Unmet / Partial / Met	_____
5b. Competence	_____ / 10	Unmet / Partial / Met	_____
5c. Relatedness	_____ / 10	Unmet / Partial / Met	_____

Reading Your Profile

Look for the one or two dimensions where your scores are highest or most concerning. These are your primary leverage points. Addressing them will create more movement than trying to improve everything at once.

High Disruption + High Identity Attachment
The external threat and internal rigidity are compounding each other. The work is expanding your professional self-concept before the market forces the issue.

High Stuck Patterns + Contemplation Stage
You know what you need to do and cannot bring yourself to do it. The avoidance behavior is the bottleneck, not information or strategy.

Low Autonomy + High Disruption
You feel buffeted by forces outside your control. Regaining a sense of agency, even in small ways, changes your relationship to the uncertainty.

Low Relatedness + High Stuck Patterns

Isolation and avoidance reinforce each other. Connection with others who understand your situation is both the hardest and most impactful intervention.

High Competence + High Identity Attachment

You are good at what you do and that success has become a trap. The skills transfer. The identity might not need to.

Final Reflection

Write one sentence that captures what this audit revealed. Not what you should do. What you now see.

_____

_____

_____

_____

What's Next

This audit gives you a snapshot. A snapshot is useful. It tells you where to look. It does not, on its own, create change.

The patterns you identified in Section 3 did not form overnight and they will not dissolve through insight alone. The identity questions in Section 2 are not solved by thinking harder. The unmet needs in Section 5 require changes in your environment and relationships, not a better mindset.

What moves people forward is structure, accountability, and someone who can see the pattern from outside of it.

> I work with technical leaders navigating exactly these challenges. If this audit surfaced something worth exploring further, I am happy to have a conversation about it. No pitch, no pressure. A conversation between two people about what you are facing and whether working together makes sense.

References and Methodology

This assessment draws on established psychological frameworks adapted for career contexts. Section 1 items are author-developed for this context. Sections 2, 3, and 5 adapt items from validated instruments (cited below). Section 4 uses a simplified staging approach informed by the URICA. This tool is designed to surface meaningful patterns, not to serve as a diagnostic instrument.

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