thedico
THE DIGITAL INSIGHTS COMPANY

A FOUNDER SELF-DIAGNOSTIC

Boundaries & Bandwidth

Twelve questions that tell you whether your business can run without you. Answer them the way things actually are this month — not the way you plan to fix them next quarter.

TIME	METHOD	BUILT FOR	REF
8 minutes	Self-scored	Founder-led firms	TD/BB/01

WHY GOOD COMPANIES STOP GROWING

You became the operating system

See, in the process of building a business, people work very hard and they touch a number. Ten crores. Fifteen crores. Eight million dirhams. And then they stop.

Not because the market dried up. Not because the founder stopped trying. They stop because everything in the company still runs through one person.

And it always shows up as a people problem first. Managers who won't take ownership. Staff who wait to be told. Invoices going out late because everybody is too busy. A founder who used to stop taking calls at seven o'clock and cannot remember when that ended.

Those are not people problems. In twenty-five years of doing this, I have not once found a people problem. I have found boundary problems and bandwidth problems that look like people problems.

Boundary

Who decides what, and where one person's job stops. If your team cannot answer that in writing, every gap in the company gets filled by you.

Bandwidth

What a person can actually carry, and how you would know. Your manager says he is too busy. He could be really busy, or he could be doing unnecessary things. There are only two chances. What tells you which one — data.

> *Put the process as the foundation. The system as the foundation. Then place the people on top of it. Do not put the people first and put the process on top of them. When people shake, process shakes.*

M

Maran
FOUNDER, THEDICO

FIGURE 01

Which way round did you build it?

HOW MOST FOUNDERS BUILD

PROCESS

PEOPLE

People carry the system. When a person shakes, the process shakes with them.

HOW IT HOLDS

PEOPLE

PROCESS & SYSTEMS

The system carries the people. A person can leave and the process stays standing.

Most founders build the second way by accident. You hire a good man, the work goes well, and the way he does it quietly becomes the way it is done. Nothing is written. Then he leaves for a competitor and the process walks out of the gate with him — and you are back on site yourself, at forty, doing the job you hired him to stop doing.

FIGURE 02

The four states

Every founder-led company sits in one of these. Boundaries on one axis, bandwidth on the other. Only one of the four grows without costing you your evenings.

BOUNDARIES → IS OWNERSHIP CLEAR

THE HERO You see everything and you decide everything. Nothing moves without you in the room.	**SCALES** People own their patch, and you can see them carrying it without asking.
CHAOS Nobody knows whose job it is, and nobody can prove anything either way.	**BUSY, BLIND** Everybody says they are busy. You have no way to check which ones really are.

BANDWIDTH → CAN YOU SEE THE LOAD

MEASURED

HOW TO ANSWER

Twelve questions

Yes or No. There is no partial credit — “sometimes” is a No. Answer as things actually are this month. Be harsh with yourself: a flattering score is worth nothing to you. It is like sitting with your doctor and not explaining anything.

01 Boundaries

Q01 Could each of your managers write down, without asking you, the three outcomes they are accountable for this quarter? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Q02 In the last thirty days, has anybody told you that a job you handed them was not theirs to do — and were you fine with it? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If she says it to me more than twice, she comes and tells me: Maran, this is not in my list of things to do. And I accept it. I don't take it egoistic.

Q03 Can somebody two levels below you get a routine decision made without it reaching your desk? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Q04 Do your managers hire their own people, and hold the budget for them? ☐ YES ☐ NO

No hiring is done by me. I give them the budget and they show me the KPI.

Q05 Is there a written amount below which somebody else signs, and above which you sign? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Q06 When a client escalates directly to you, does it trigger a look at what broke in the process — or do you simply solve it and move on? ☐ YES ☐ NO

> “*I don't talk to any of my people between nine and five. I have a policy. If anybody is coming to me and asking me questions in between nine to five, that is a process mistake. I will go to the process.*”

M Maran
FOUNDER, THEDICO

02 Bandwidth

Q07	Can you see what each department finished last week without asking a single person?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Q08	When a manager tells you he is too busy, can you check it against data instead of taking his word?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Q09	Does your month have fixed dates for invoicing, certification and collection that run whether or not you chase them?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Q10	Is this month's salary being paid from money already earned — not from an advance on work you haven't delivered yet?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Q11	If your best manager resigned tomorrow, is what he knows written down anywhere other than his own head?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Q12	In the last six months, have you taken five working days off without anybody calling you?	☐ YES	☐ NO

> *I ask organisations to hand over what you are not supposed to do. What you are not here for. That is where delegation actually starts — not with what you are willing to give away, but with what was never yours to hold.*

M Maran
FOUNDER, THEDICO

NOW COUNT YOUR YES ANSWERS

Your reading

One point for every Yes. Find your band below. Nobody scores twelve in the first year of trying — the number matters less than which of the two halves you lost it in.

10–12 Structurally sound

You have built something that survives you. Your constraint is market or capital, not organisation. Stop reading operations content and go and work on growth.

07–09 Partially delegated

The structure is there but it leaks. Usually the boundaries are drawn and the bandwidth is invisible — you have told people what they own, but you have no way of seeing whether they are carrying it, so you keep checking. Fixable in a quarter. The work is measurement, not restructuring.

04–06 Founder-dependent

The company runs, and it runs through you. Growth from here costs you time you no longer have — which is why the last two years felt harder than the two before. Every new project adds load instead of leverage. This is the most common band, and the most expensive one to sit in, because from outside it looks like success.

00–03 Founder as operating system

You are not running a company. You are personally executing one, at scale. The business has no memory outside your own head. This band does not hold — it ends in a forced restructure or a health event. Treat it as the priority it is.

WHICH HALF DID YOU LOSE IT IN

MOSTLY PART 01

A boundary problem

People do not know where their job stops, so everything lands back on your desk. The fix is written ownership and a signing limit — not more supervision.

MOSTLY PART 02

A bandwidth problem

Ownership is clear but invisible, so you keep checking by hand. The fix is measurement: fixed dates, reports that arrive without being asked for.

COMMON DEFECTS REGISTER

Nine ways founders end up in the bottom bands

Reading these is worth more than the score. Most founders recognise four or five straight away.

BD-01

Solving the symptom, at speed and at scale

Transport is slow, so you lease a bigger camp. The camp has no kitchen, so you buy a restaurant. Each move is defensible on its own and ruinous in sequence — because each one installs permanent fixed cost to fix a temporary variable problem, and then creates the next problem it has to solve.

BD-02

The insight arrives after the money

You know exactly what went wrong. You knew within a month. That is not the gap. The gap is the distance between deciding and committing — and no dashboard, no tool, no org chart creates that distance. Only a person sitting in the room before the decision does.

BD-03

Crediting luck for the wins

If you put your success down to timing, God, or a chance meeting, then you have no model of how you win. And you cannot delegate what you cannot explain. This is the hidden root of most delegation failure — not trust, not talent, but the absence of a method you can hand over.

BD-04

Mistaking trained discipline for character

“Nobody had to motivate me.” Somebody did. A boss, a routine, a structure that made the behaviour automatic until it started to feel like personality. Then you judge your team against a discipline that was installed in you, and read its absence as a defect in them.

BD-05

Buying loyalty instead of contracting for performance

The rescue, the loan, the perk given instead of the raise. It does not produce obligation. It produces entitlement. And when it fails you feel betrayed, instead of seeing a design fault in the incentive. That is a classic sign of becoming personally attached to an employee — and that is exactly when they start taking things for granted.

BD-06

Recruiting a younger version of yourself

Fifty candidates interviewed, nobody good enough, position left open. You are not hiring a manager. You are hiring yourself at thirty — your work ethic, none of your authority. That requisition cannot be filled, and every month it stays open you do the job yourself.

BD-07

Secrecy manufacturing the mystique it fears

Hide the numbers and every client who arrives in a good car becomes a rumoured jackpot, followed by a queue at your door asking for two thousand. Open books, framed properly, generate less entitlement than closed ones — because people who can see the margin stop inventing it.

BD-08

Rebuilding the company you escaped

Most founders left a job because their effort was invisible to an owner who asked, at the end of every month, what exactly they had been doing all month. Then they become the owner who cannot see effort — and ask the same question that drove them out.

BD-09

Wearing exhaustion as a credential

“I don't have time to sleep, that's how much work there is.” Said with pride. It is not proof of commitment. It is the clearest measurement available of how much of this company has no home except you.

> *You cannot blame an entire market and say the people have become bad, so how can I run a company. It is not that the people have become bad.*

M Maran
FOUNDER, THEDICO

WHAT TO DO WITH A LOW SCORE

You cannot operate on yourself

It is not a hiring decision. It is not software either — most founders in the bottom bands already own the tools and still cannot get compliance through them. And pouring in more projects or more money will not solve it. That only adds weight to a structure that is already bending.

The first move is an audit of boundaries and bandwidth: an outside, department-by-department look at who owns what, what each of them can actually carry, and where you are silently absorbing the difference. It has to come from outside. The one thing you cannot assess is the system you are personally holding up.

You can be the best doctor in the country. You still cannot operate on yourself. That is why you need a third eye.

> *Three years back I decided I will not execute anything but delegate. Even at the cost of my growth. Let my revenue come down this year, I don't care. The first year there was a lot of chaos. Year two and year three, every minute of my time goes into growth.*

M Maran
FOUNDER, THEDICO

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Send me your score.

Reply with your number out of twelve and the two questions that stung most. I will tell you what I would look at first — no deck, no pitch, just the read.

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