Which AI Role Fits You?

The 2027 Career Self-Assessment for Forward Deployed Engineers,

Solutions Engineers and AI Consultants

1. Introduction

AI is moving out of the lab and into everyday business operations. As it does, companies need people who sit between technology and the customer: people who can build, explain and guide AI adoption. Three roles have emerged at the centre of this shift: the **Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE)**, the **Solutions Engineer** and the **AI Consultant**.

All three work closely with customers, and all three need a mix of technical and business skills. That is exactly why they are easy to confuse. Job titles overlap, descriptions vary between companies, and many professionals apply for roles that do not match how they actually like to work.

This self-assessment helps you cut through the noise. Instead of asking which role is trending or which pays the most, it asks a more useful question: **which kind of work energises you?**

Who this assessment is for

- **Software engineers** curious about customer-facing, high-impact work.

- **Sales or solutions engineers** wondering whether to go deeper technically.
- **Consultants and business analysts** exploring more hands-on AI work.
- **AI and data professionals** deciding where their skills create the most value.
- **Career switchers and graduates** choosing a direction for 2027 and beyond.

What you'll get

- **Your primary role match:** the role that best fits your preferences and strengths.
- **Your secondary fit:** a close alternative or hybrid direction.
- **Your skill gaps:** the specific skills to build next.
- **A next-step plan:** a 30-60-90 day starter plan for your matched role.

> **Example**
>
> Priya is a backend developer with four years of experience. She assumed she should move into AI engineering. After taking this assessment she scored 13 for FDE and 5 for Solutions Engineer: she loves building, but she also enjoys solving problems directly with users. That insight changed her job search from “AI engineer” roles to forward deployed and implementation roles at AI platform companies.

2. The 3 Roles at a Glance

Before you begin, here is a short definition of each role. Keep these in mind, but don't overthink them; the questions are designed to reveal your fit without you needing to be an expert in any of the roles.

Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE)

An FDE works directly with customers to **build, integrate and deploy** working solutions inside real business environments. For example, an FDE might connect a hospital's scheduling system, patient database and messaging platform to an AI agent that manages appointment changes automatically.

Solutions Engineer

A Solutions Engineer helps customers understand **how a product solves their problem**. They run demos, build proofs of concept and answer technical questions, usually alongside the sales team. For example, a Solutions Engineer at an AI platform might build a two-week pilot that shows a bank how the product can summarise loan documents.

AI Consultant

An AI Consultant helps organisations decide **what AI to adopt, why and how**. They assess business processes, recommend technologies, build business cases and guide implementation. For example, an AI Consultant might help a retailer decide whether AI demand forecasting is worth the investment and design the rollout roadmap.

Snapshot comparison

	Forward Deployed Engineer	**Solutions Engineer**	**AI Consultant**
Primary focus	Building and deploying solutions	Demonstrating product fit	Recommending AI strategy
Coding level	High	Low to moderate	Varies (often low)

Main deliverable	Working production system	Demo, proof of concept, technical design	Strategy, roadmap, business case
Success measured by	Deployment, adoption, business impact	Technical validation, deals won	Business outcomes, strategic value
Works most with	Engineers, IT teams, end users	Technical buyers, sales teams	Executives, business leaders

> **The key distinction**
>
> An FDE **builds**. A Solutions Engineer **demonstrates**. An AI Consultant **advises**.

3. How to Take the Assessment

The assessment has **20 questions** split into **5 sections**. It takes about 10 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers, and no answer is better than another; each one simply points towards a different role.

The rules

1. **Answer based on what you enjoy, not only what you're good at.**

   You can learn skills; it's much harder to change what motivates you.

2. **Pick one answer per question.** If two options feel close, choose the one you would pick on a typical Tuesday, not on your best day.
3. **Go with your first instinct.** Overthinking tends to pull answers towards what you think you should like.
4. **Imagine you already have the skills.** If an option sounds appealing but you lack experience, still choose it if it excites you.

What the letters mean

Letter	Points towards	What it reflects
A	Forward Deployed Engineer	Hands-on building, integration and deployment
B	Solutions Engineer	Technical communication, demos and product fit
C	AI Consultant	Strategy, business analysis and advisory work

> **Tip**

> Don't look at the letter meanings while you answer. Cover this table or jump straight to the questions on the next page; knowing the mapping can bias your choices.

4. The Assessment: 20 Questions

Tick one box for each question. When you finish, move to the Scoring Sheet in section 5.

Section 1: Work Preferences

These questions explore the type of work and environment that keeps you motivated day to day.

Q1. Your ideal workday involves…

☐ **A)** Building and shipping a working system that people start using immediately.

☐ **B)** Presenting a live demo to a prospect and answering their toughest technical questions.

☐ **C)** Leading a strategy workshop where leaders decide which AI projects to prioritise.

Q2. Which problem excites you most?

☐ **A)** "Our ERP and CRM don't talk to each other, and the new AI agent needs data from both."

☐ **B)** "The prospect isn't sure our platform can handle their data volume. Can you prove it?"

☐ **C)** “The board wants an AI strategy, but nobody knows where to start.”

Q3. Which team setup suits you best?

☐ **A)** Embedded with a customer's engineering team for several weeks until the solution is live.

☐ **B)** Paired with an account executive, supporting several prospects at once.

☐ **C)** Part of a small advisory team working directly with senior stakeholders.

Q4. Which pace of work do you prefer?

☐ **A)** Longer, hands-on cycles where I stay with a problem until it works in production.

☐ **B)** Fast-moving work with many short customer engagements each month.

☐ **C)** Structured phases: assess, recommend, then guide the implementation.

Section 2: Technical Depth

These questions explore how deeply you want to work with code, systems and technical detail.

Q5. How do you feel about writing production code?

☐ **A)** It's what I enjoy most; I want my code running in real environments.

☐ **B)** I'm comfortable building prototypes and demos, but not maintaining production systems.

☐ **C)** I'd rather guide the people who build than write the code myself.

Q6. A critical bug appears at 6 pm, the night before a launch. You…

☐ **A)** Open the logs, reproduce the issue and ship a fix.

☐ **B)** Find a workaround and explain clearly to the customer what's happening.

☐ **C)** Assess the impact on the rollout plan and update stakeholders on options.

Q7. When it comes to APIs and integrations…

☐ **A)** I enjoy building integrations myself and connecting systems end to end.

☐ **B)** I understand them well enough to explain and configure them for customers.

☐ **C)** I know what they enable for the business; the details are for engineers.

Q8. A major new AI framework is released. Your first reaction is to…

☐ **A)** Build something with it this weekend to see how it really works.

☐ **B)** Learn how it compares with my product so I can answer customer questions.

☐ **C)** Evaluate what it means for my clients' strategy and where it could fit.

Section 3: Customer and Communication Style

These questions explore how you prefer to interact with customers and stakeholders.

Q9. A customer says the solution isn't working. You…

☐ **A)** Dig into the logs and the integration to find and fix the root cause.

☐ **B)** Walk them through the product's capabilities and suggest a better configuration.

☐ **C)** Step back and reassess whether this was the right solution for their goal.

Q10. You're asked to present to 50 people. You feel…

☐ **A)** Happy to do it, but I'd rather show a working system than talk through slides.

☐ **B)** Energised; live demos and audience questions are my favourite part of the job.

☐ **C)** Comfortable, especially if I'm presenting a strategy to executives.

Q11. A customer says, "This is too expensive." Your best response is to…

☐ **A)** Show measured results from the deployed solution, such as hours saved per week.

☐ **B)** Run a tailored proof of concept that proves value on their own data.

☐ **C)** Build a business case with ROI projections and a phased investment plan.

Q12. Which stakeholders do you most enjoy working with?

☐ **A)** Engineers, IT administrators and the end users of the system.

☐ **B)** Technical buyers and evaluation teams comparing products.

☐ **C)** Executives and heads of business units making investment decisions.

Section 4: Outcomes and Motivation

These questions explore what success and impact mean to you.

Q13. You feel most proud when…

☐ **A)** Your system goes live in production and people rely on it every day.

☐ **B)** A customer signs a contract because your demo convinced them.

☐ **C)** Leadership adopts your AI roadmap and starts executing it.

Q14. Which success metric would you most like to own?

☐ **A)** System uptime, user adoption and number of tasks automated.

☐ **B)** Proof-of-concept conversion rate and deals won.

☐ **C)** Business outcomes such as ROI, cost savings and transformation milestones.

Q15. Which piece of feedback would mean the most to you?

☐ **A)** "Your system saves our team 20 hours a week."

☐ **B)** "Your demo is the reason we chose your product."

☐ **C)** "Your roadmap changed how our company thinks about AI."

Q16. What frustrates you most?

☐ **A)** A great plan that never actually gets built.

☐ **B)** A great product that customers don't understand.

☐ **C)** A great tool deployed to solve the wrong problem.

Section 5: Career Goals

These questions explore where you want your career to go.

Q17. In five years, you see yourself as…

☐ **A)** A lead or principal Forward Deployed Engineer running complex deployments.

☐ **B)** A solutions architect or head of a solutions engineering team.

☐ **C)** An AI transformation lead or partner at a consulting firm.

Q18. How do you prefer to learn?

☐ **A)** Building projects, joining hackathons and reading technical documentation.

☐ **B)** Product training, shadowing demos and learning from customer conversations.

☐ **C)** Case studies, frameworks and industry research reports.

Q19. Which work environment appeals to you most?

☐ **A)** An AI startup or platform company deploying into enterprise customers.

☐ **B)** A SaaS or cloud vendor with a strong sales organisation.

☐ **C)** A consulting firm or an in-house digital transformation office.

Q20. How do you prefer to work with clients?

☐ **A)** Deeply with a few customers, on-site when needed, until the job is done.

☐ **B)** With many customers through frequent, shorter calls and visits.

☐ **C)** With several client organisations over months, meeting executives regularly.

5. Scoring Sheet

Count how many times you chose each letter in every section, then add up the totals. Your totals should add up to 20.

Section	A (FDE)	B (Solutions Engineer)	C (AI Consultant)

1. Work Preferences (Q1–4)			
2. Technical Depth (Q5–8)			
3. Customer and Communication (Q9–12)			
4. Outcomes and Motivation (Q13–16)			
5. Career Goals (Q17–20)			
TOTAL			

How to read your score

Your result	What it means	Where to go next
12 or more of one letter	**Strong match.** This role closely fits how you like to work.	Read your profile in section 6 and start the 30-60-90 plan.

8–11 of one letter (highest)	**Clear match.** This is your best fit, with some interest in other roles.	Read your main profile and check your second-highest letter.
Top two letters within 2 points	**Hybrid profile.** You'd thrive in a role combining both.	Go to section 7 for hybrid profiles and matching job titles.

Look at your section pattern too

Your section scores often reveal more than your total. For example:

- **High A in Technical Depth but C in Career Goals:** you enjoy building now but are drawn to strategy later. An FDE role is a strong launchpad towards AI transformation leadership.
- **High B in Communication but A in Technical Depth:** you're a technical communicator. Consider FDE roles with heavy customer exposure, or senior solutions engineering.
- **High C in Outcomes but A in Work Preferences:** you care about business impact but like being hands-on. An AI implementation consultant or FDE + Consultant hybrid may suit you.

Example scoring

Rahul's totals: **A = 9, B = 8, C = 3.** A and B are within 2 points, so he has an **FDE + Solutions Engineer hybrid** profile. His section scores show A dominating Technical Depth and B dominating Customer and Communication. He is a builder who enjoys customer-facing work: a strong fit for forward deployed roles at AI startups, where FDEs often support pre-sales too.

6. Your Results Profiles

Find the profile for your highest-scoring letter. If you have a hybrid result, read both profiles, then go to section 7.

Mostly A: Forward Deployed Engineer

You are… a builder who wants to see technology working in the real world. You're happiest when you can take a messy business problem, understand the systems involved and ship a solution that people actually use. Plans and demos are fine, but your satisfaction comes from production.

Why this role fits you

- You enjoy writing code and solving integration problems end to end.
- You like working directly with users to understand what they really need.

- You measure success by adoption and impact, not by documents or presentations.
- You're comfortable with ambiguity and enjoy figuring things out on the ground.

A typical week

Day	What you might be doing
Monday	Discovery session with a logistics customer's operations team to map their order workflow.
Tuesday	Build an MCP server that exposes the customer's inventory database to an AI agent.
Wednesday	Debug an authentication issue with the customer's IT team; deploy the fix.
Thursday	Run user testing with dispatchers; refine tool descriptions and error handling.
Friday	Review usage dashboards, document learnings and share feedback with the product team.

Core skills to build

- Python and/or TypeScript, plus software engineering fundamentals.

- APIs, databases and enterprise system integration.
- Cloud deployment (AWS, Azure or GCP), containers and CI/CD.
- LLMs, RAG, AI agent frameworks and protocols such as MCP.
- Testing, monitoring and debugging in production.
- Customer discovery and clear technical communication.

Career path

Software Engineer → Forward Deployed Engineer → Senior FDE → FDE Lead or Principal FDE → Head of Deployment, Solutions Architect or Engineering Manager.

Mostly B: Solutions Engineer

You are… a technical communicator who loves helping customers see what's possible. You understand technology well enough to build convincing demos and proofs of concept, and you get your energy from conversations, presentations and winning customer trust.

Why this role fits you

- You enjoy explaining complex technology in simple, persuasive terms.

- You like variety: many customers, many industries, many problems.
- You're motivated by visible wins, such as a successful demo or a signed deal.
- You prefer building prototypes over maintaining production systems.

A typical week

Day	What you might be doing
Monday	Discovery call with a bank's technology team to understand their document workflow.
Tuesday	Build a tailored demo showing how the AI platform summarises loan files.
Wednesday	Present the demo to the bank's evaluation committee; handle security questions.
Thursday	Scope a two-week proof of concept with success criteria agreed with the buyer.
Friday	Answer an RFP's technical section and share customer feedback with product managers.

Core skills to build

- Deep product knowledge and competitive positioning.
- Demo building and proof-of-concept development.
- APIs, integrations and cloud fundamentals.
- Technical presentation and storytelling.
- Customer requirement analysis and objection handling.
- Collaboration with sales and account teams.

Career path

Associate Solutions Engineer → Solutions Engineer → Senior or Principal SE → Solutions Architect or SE Manager → Director of Solutions Engineering.

Mostly C: AI Consultant

You are… a strategic thinker who wants AI to solve the right problems. You care about the bigger picture: whether a project makes business sense, how it fits the organisation and how people will adopt it. You enjoy working with leaders and turning complexity into clear decisions.

Why this role fits you

- You enjoy analysing processes and spotting where AI creates real value.
- You're comfortable presenting to executives and guiding decisions.
- You think about risk, governance and change management, not just technology.
- You measure success in business outcomes and long-term transformation.

A typical week

Day	What you might be doing
Monday	Interview department heads at a retailer to map forecasting and inventory pain points.
Tuesday	Evaluate three AI demand forecasting vendors against the client's requirements.
Wednesday	Build a business case with costs, risks and projected ROI.
Thursday	Present a phased AI roadmap to the leadership team; agree governance principles.
Friday	Coordinate with the implementation partner and define KPIs for the pilot.

Core skills to build

- AI, machine learning and generative AI fundamentals.
- Business analysis and process optimisation.
- AI strategy, digital transformation and change management.
- AI governance, risk and responsible AI.
- Business case development and ROI evaluation.
- Stakeholder management and executive communication.

Career path

Business Analyst or Associate Consultant → AI Consultant → Senior AI Consultant → AI Transformation Lead or Manager → Partner, Director or Chief AI Officer.

7. Hybrid Profiles

Many of the most valuable professionals don't fit neatly into one box. If your top two letters are within 2 points, you have a hybrid profile. These combinations are increasingly in demand as companies look for people who can bridge more than one function.

A + B: The Technical Builder Who Loves Customers

You enjoy building real solutions, but you also come alive in customer conversations and demos. You're the person who can run the discovery call, build the prototype that afternoon and deploy it the following month.

Job titles to search for

- Forward Deployed Engineer (at AI startups, where FDEs often support pre-sales)
- Customer Engineer
- Technical Solutions Engineer
- Implementation Engineer

How to position yourself

Highlight projects where you both built something and presented it to users or stakeholders. In interviews, tell stories that span the full journey from first conversation to production.

> **Example**

> A developer who built an internal AI tool and then trained 200 colleagues to use it has a perfect A + B story.

A + C: The Strategic Implementer

You care about why a solution matters to the business, but you also want to build it. You can talk strategy with executives and then open a code editor to make it real.

Job titles to search for

- AI Implementation Lead
- Forward Deployed Engineer (enterprise or government focus)
- AI Implementation Consultant
- Technical Program Lead, AI

How to position yourself

Show that you can connect business outcomes to technical delivery. Quantify impact in business terms (cost saved, time reduced) alongside the technology you used.

> **Example**
>
> An engineer who identified a reporting bottleneck, built the business case and then automated the process with an AI workflow is a classic A + C profile.

B + C: The Technical Advisor

You enjoy customer conversations and strategy more than hands-on building. You're strongest when helping organisations choose the right technology and understand how to adopt it.

Job titles to search for

- AI Solutions Consultant
- Pre-Sales AI Strategist
- Customer Success Architect
- AI Advisory Specialist

How to position yourself

Build credibility with both technical buyers and executives. Show examples of demos, workshops or roadmaps you have delivered, and keep enough technical depth to stay trusted by engineers.

> **Example**
>
> A solutions engineer who regularly runs AI readiness workshops for prospects before demos is already operating as a B + C hybrid.

8. Your Skill Gap Action Plan

Knowing your role match is only useful if you act on it. Use this section to turn your result into a concrete plan.

Step 1: Rate your skills

List the core skills from your matched profile (section 6). Rate your current level from 1 (beginner) to 5 (expert), set a target level, and decide how you'll close the gap.

Skill	Current (1–5)	Target (1–5)	How I'll learn it	Deadline
Example: APIs and integration	2	4	Build 2 integration projects; GSDC FDE course module	60 days

> **Make it stick**
>
> Share your plan with one person who will check in on you at 30, 60 and 90 days. People who make their goals visible are far more likely to follow through.

Step 2: Follow your 30-60-90 day starter plan

Forward Deployed Engineer

- **Days 1–30:** Strengthen Python and API skills. Build a small app that calls an LLM and one external API.
- **Days 31–60:** Build an AI agent that connects to a database and a SaaS tool (for example, CRM data plus Slack notifications). Deploy it to the cloud.
- **Days 61–90:** Solve a real workflow problem for a friend's business, a non-profit or your current team. Document it as a portfolio case study and start a certification.

Solutions Engineer

- **Days 1–30:** Pick one AI product and learn it deeply. Record a 10-minute demo video.
- **Days 31–60:** Build a proof of concept for a realistic use case and practise presenting it to friends or colleagues.
- **Days 61–90:** Shadow sales calls if possible, write a sample RFP response and apply to SE roles at SaaS and AI vendors.

AI Consultant

- **Days 1–30:** Learn AI and generative AI fundamentals and read three AI adoption case studies in your target industry.

- **Days 31–60:** Map one real business process, identify AI opportunities and write a one-page business case.
- **Days 61–90:** Develop a phased AI roadmap with governance and KPIs. Present it to a mentor and add it to your portfolio.

9. Next Step: Get Certified

Scored as an FDE or an FDE hybrid? The Forward Deployed Engineer role is one of the fastest-emerging careers in AI, combining software engineering, AI implementation and direct business impact.

The **GSDC Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE) Certification** helps you build structured knowledge of the skills and responsibilities behind the role, so you can move from interest to readiness.

What the certification helps you develop

- The working model and responsibilities of a Forward Deployed Engineer
- AI agent integration with enterprise APIs, databases and protocols such as MCP
- Cloud deployment, testing and production monitoring

- Customer discovery, problem-solving and delivering measurable business value

> **Ready to take the next step?**
>
> Explore the certification: www.gsdcouncil.org/certified-forward-deployed-engineer
>
> Talk to an advisor: calendly.com/aditi-advisor-gsdc
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