

Getting work done in a large organization is tough

Back in 2018, when I started my first real job. I was an “Engineer” by title. It was a generic title and it meant that I got to be the jack of all trades. Although an industrial engineer by degree, I was also a design engineer, process engineer, mechanical engineer, and manufacturing engineer. To make sure my production area was up and running I donned a new hat at different times of the day.

My projects ranged from designing new tooling for a new product to making improvements on the processes for existing products. It was fascinating that I was using my Solidworks (3D CAD) skills in the morning, and my Excel skills by lunch. Later in the day, I would jump on the production floor and get my hands dirty to troubleshoot any machine issues.

The best part was the impact I was having with my work. Some of my projects were focused on throughput improvement and scrap reduction. But my favourite were the ones that helped the machine operators directly. With the improvement I made on the machines I was able to ease their work. Seeing the smile on their faces when I improved a chronic machine issue was priceless. It motivated me to help them even more.

It was a smaller organization and I was the only engineer for my production area. Any improvement or change in my area had to go through me as I was on the front line. Time was the only limiting factor for project completion and I could prioritize my projects based on business needs. I could dictate the pace of each project. The best part was that I was an individual contributor and I could get work done at my will.

Working in a larger organisation

But things changed when I moved to a larger organization. Now I had the title of an “Operations Excellence Engineer”. Although the title was specific, the job responsibilities were generic. I was NOT the only ‘engineer’, there was a different engineer for every function. This role was challenging from the get-go.

I was barely understanding the product we made. Our product is complex with multiple components, different processes and with numerous types. The scale of these projects is bigger so I couldn’t complete them with solo efforts. I had to work with cross-functional teams to get things done. I wasn’t an individual contributor anymore.

I was facilitating these projects, instead of doing hardcore engineering work. I had to make sure everyone was on the same page. With so many minds working on one project, there were disagreements. Obviously! Nobody agreed to the schedules, expectations and scope. And my projects were not necessarily top priorities for other groups.

The annoying part was that any improvement or change that I wanted to make involved a lot of paper-work. getting a nod from 5 different people, filling out 10 different papers, waiting for approvals from 16 different people and then starting the actual work. I understand that since we make medical devices, some regulation is necessary.

But all this was new territory to me. I felt like I was a deer caught in headlights. It was frustrating as I couldn’t get any work done. I started doubting my skills and abilities as an

engineer. The first few months were super challenging and I was having a hard time dealing with this.

But I needed to get work done.

So here is how I have dealt with it.

Understand the organisation

There is a reason why the organisation is setup in a certain way. I obviously cannot change the whole organisation. So I made peace with the slow-pace and learned how to play the *game* with the cards that I was dealt.

Nurture Relationships

I made friends with my colleagues from other functions. Getting to know them helped me understand their goals. And understanding their goals helped me to delegate tasks that aligned with those goals.

Attack the problem not the person

Disagreements lead to conflicts. It is easy to take them personally. But nothing about the workplace is supposed to be personal. Ultimately the goal of everyone working there is to help the company progress. So I found common ground and worked with it.

Take things off their overflowing plate

I found out ways to provide my project stakeholders with information to make their lives easier. Be it providing the necessary data to help them understand the need for scope changes. Or helping them with tasks to reduce friction in their decisions. One thing I experienced was that if I could help them solve their problems, they would come back to me with 10 times the help.

Build credibility

I used my individual contributions to show that I knew what I was doing. I wanted to make sure that they knew they could trust me with the plans.

As I planted flags along the path, I got everyone on the same page. People started agreeing to the expectations and with fewer conflicts. I was finally able to get projects moving and push them towards completion.

Getting work done in a large organization is tough. There is so much bureaucracy, meetings, and management that the actual work that gets done is minuscule. Finding common ground in all the chaos, building relationships and aligning goals between teams can help to get work done.

I have some way to go before I become really good at getting work done in a large organization. I have to really push myself outside my comfort zone. And these few steps

have helped me overcome these trials. This might not be the Harvard Business Review-approved way to get work done.

But this is my unique way.