

CHAPTER 16

GETTING AHEAD IN THE FUNCTIONAL-MATRIX ORGANIZATION

A typical functional-matrix organization is shown in Figure 16-1. In this structure, the company is organized around functional groups. Everyone in the functional group usually has the same background but may not work on the same product. The left-hand column of the functional-matrix structure identifies the engineering departments in the company according to function. The top row of the matrix identifies the projects within the company. For the example shown, three types of vehicles are produced: the ZX50 and ZX90 cars and the S5 truck. The top row of the matrix identifies the program manager(s) responsible for getting work done.

In this type of organization, the functional manager is usually responsible for making the salary and promotion decisions, while the program manager usually determines the work to be accomplished. Companies utilize the matrix organization since it is a very efficient way to run the business of large organizations. Highly skilled engineers of a particular technical background are grouped together. When a program manager needs an engineer with a particular expertise they contact the functional managers of the group to get an engineer assigned to the program. The functional manager determines the best person for the job on the basis of the skills and experience needed and then assigns that person to support the program. This type of structure allows the company to quickly move people on and off programs and hopefully to assign the best person to the job.

Working in a functional-matrix organization offers several advantages for your career. First, you are working with people who have a background similar to yours. This is advantageous when you get stuck on a problem. Usually, someone in your department has faced a similar problem and is readily available to help you. Second, you may work on more than one product at a

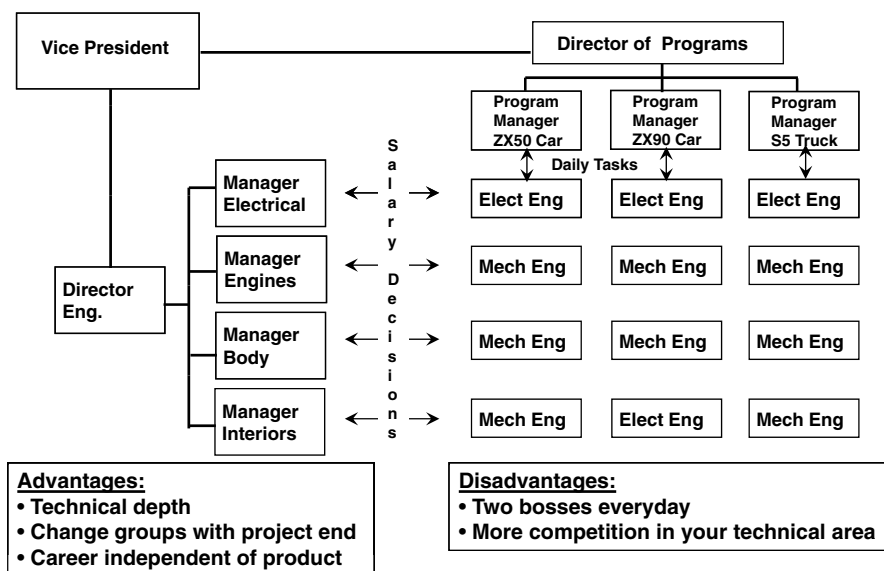


FIGURE 16-1 Typical functional organization found in large corporations.

time, providing more job security. This arrangement also provides more protection when the product fails since career is not directly tied to the success of only this product. Third, in a functional-matrix organization you can quickly move from one product to another as they come and go.

Working in the functional-matrix organization also offers some disadvantages. Most of the time, work direction comes from your program manager and technical direction comes from your supervisor. This places you in a very tricky situation when the program manager and your supervisor disagree. If you follow your supervisor's direction, it may make the program manager upset and they could very possibly move you off their program. If you follow your program manager's direction, it may upset your supervisor and affect your raise, since they directly control your salary.

In a functional-matrix organization you really have two supervisors to please on any given day: your functional manager and the program manager. You have to find a way to keep both happy, if you are going to get that promotion or raise. Often the program manager and department supervisor sit down and discuss your performance to determine the raise you will be getting. The ultimate decision is up to your department supervisor, but you had better make sure the program manager agrees with his assessment of your worth.

It doesn't hurt to simply ask your functional manager and program manager how you're doing. It's better to find out well in advance of job review time that they think your performance needs significant improvement. Asking in advance provides you with time to improve your performance and subsequently change their perceptions before your performance reviews.

Another disadvantage to the functional-matrix organization is that you are placed with a group of people who all have similar background to yours. You may find it is tough to shine or stand out in the crowd when everyone there is doing the same thing. You have to look for ways to be different.

SUMMARY

In a functional organization you really have two bosses to keep happy. This means a lot of extra work for you. These two are your functional manager and the program manager. To get your next promotion both these people must agree you are ready for it. To ignore one and focus your career actions only on the other is taking a big chance. A very common mistake by engineers in a functional-matrix organization is to ignore their functional manager who they rarely see, and instead, focus on the program manager who they are in daily contact with. The program manager gives you the opportunity to prove yourself; however, it is your functional manager who ultimately has to recommend and support your promotion to upper management. Functional managers rarely promote engineers who they know little about or seldom interface with.

Most companies are not strictly organized in either a product-oriented or functional-matrix fashion but rather are a mixture of both. In order to move ahead in either organization you must know how it works and what the pitfalls are. No one organization type is better for your career than the other. The important thing is to recognize there are differences, and that what works in one, may not work in the other. Find out how your company is organized and who determines your raises. You could be working hard to impress someone in the organization who has no involvement with your raise. Make sure you report your progress on a continuing basis to the person who conducts your performance appraisals. In this way, they will always know what a great job you are doing.

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 Determine how your company is organized. Is it a functional organization? Who reports to whom? Can you identify all the levels and the person at each level between you and the vice president engineering? If you can, you're in great shape! If you don't know who they are, how can you expect them to know who you are and promote you?
- 2 Who is your program manager? Can you name the people in the program management organization?