Transcript: Consulting and Project Office at Your Service, May 7, 2009

Mary: Hello, and welcome to the latest NUIT to Go podcast. My name is Mary. I'm a member of the NUIT Communications team, and today I’m here with the two-man team of Farhan Hasan and Mark Desmond, and they are in the CPO office. CPO, you might be wondering, you know how we are in IT, a big fan of acronyms, CPO is the Consulting and Project Office, and they are a division of ITMS, which is Information Technology Management Systems, and they are a division of NUIT, Information Technology. So welcome. Thanks for joining us today!

Farhan: Mary, thank you for having us here.

Mark: Yes, thank you.

Mary: OK, so let's get started. Tell me about the CPO. What's the mission of your group? Who are you?

Farhan: So our mission - first of all, like Mary mentioned, we’re an internal organization to IT Management Systems, and our main mission is to implement projects successfully and have repeatable successes for every IT project across the university. Now our main core competency is technology acquisitions and project management. Mostly the technology acquisitions relate to executing successful contracts for vendors and to get favorable terms across the University. So what I mean by that is, we want to be able to leverage various contracts that different schools or units have across the University, and have purchasing power that every unit can take advantage of to get better pricing and better terms and conditions and have less liability for the university. So again, to summarize our mission statement, repeatable success for every IT project.

Mary: OK Mark, tell me about what you do.

Mark: Well basically, I head up the project management side of the house. We have multiple projects going on, which is really available as a free service to any of the different schools here at Northwestern University. It’s really our mission to bring forward, you know - basically, everybody knows a project is something, it has a very measurable set of tasks with a definite start and finish, we really look to bring about the right players, the right sponsors, the right stakeholders of all the key personnel together, and we’ve got a process established to identify the scope of work and then really create a project schedule based on best practices, so we hope you identify your business requirements, the key stakeholders, and there’s a project chartering process that we go through to help establish and define what are the critical success factors and what you’re really looking to accomplish with your project, and through that process we help to facilitate at whatever level, whether you want us to really be a project manager or just consult and give advice in the different areas for
project management, what we’re going to help you create is an appropriate work breakdown structure and give you some practice advice surrounding how best to execute and assign resources. It’s sort of a little difficult from an audio perspective to really define exactly what we’re going to provide, but we’re going to provide that level of granularity and help you to define the best way, the best approach, you know, help you set the right dependencies and the right associations between tasks, make sure that you’ve levelled your resources properly, that you have durations set correctly, that you don’t have any one task that’s running too long, that you’ve established a proper critical path, and really help to facilitate that process and really allow for an effective project management experience.

Mary: Nice. So when I hear CPO, I think “contracts”. What can you do to help me with this contract I have?

Farhan: Sure. So the contracts are just one type of service that we offer. In addition to just contract executions, what we are, we’re almost like a bridge to the general council. A lot of times, folks from different units may not have access directly to talk to the particular lawyers that are involved and need to review a contract, because as everybody may or may not know, there’s only six people in the University that are VP-level, six or roughly six to seven at the VP level that can only authorize and sign and execute a particular contract, whether it’s an IT contract or some other type of contract. So what we do is we have access, through the general council, to facilitate the signature of these contracts. So basically, what we offer is, we offer the administrative overhead to be removed from the department, and we work with the departments to gather their requirements, and after their requirements are inputted and agreed upon by the vendor into the particular contract, we work with legal to iron out any legal issues that may be for that contract before it gets approved and signed.

Mark: Right, and we also bring about all the best practices that have evolved over time, so whether it’s all the key security concerns and all that sort of language and all the different legal language that’s really best practice to insulate the University and you as a customer. So not only do you benefit from just what we have to offer, but you benefit from the learned experiences from Kellogg and from Feinberg and from whatever other school that’s really allowed us to manage their contracting process, so you really get best practices, and we bring kind of some standard language into the contracts to really ensure a smooth and successful and maybe help streamline the progress.

Mary: Very nice. So you mentioned Kellogg and Feinberg. Can anyone at the University contact you for your great help? Who’s eligible?

Farhan: Absolutely. Anybody, any representative from any school, department, any unit from the University can contact us, and we actually encourage, and we’re going on actually a marketing effort to pitch our services and let people know that they have to go through us, or have to go through legal counsel, to get their contracts approved, and even as a director at, say, Kellogg, for example, they are not allowed to sign these contracts themselves, so
absolutely, anybody can contact us, and we’re happy to assist. And again, this is a non-billable service. It’s completely free of charge, so it will not hit any of your IT budget.

Mary: Wow, that sounds like a win-win for everyone, especially in these economic times. So where can we point people to find more information? Tell us about your website.

Mark: You can go out to the NUIT website, and under the ITMS department and find CPO. It’s currently a work in process. We hope to further, we’ve got some project in place today to, or some projects we’re looking to put in place to facilitate that process and really provide almost like a self-service portal so that once you do submit a contract, you can come and find and get the status of your project, kind of see where you’re at in the process, because it has multiple iterations, and if you’ve ever dealt with a lawyer, you’re well aware of how many possible iterations that could be. Just think about the time you purchased your first home, and that will clear that up for you. But you can reach us at CPO, or you can call myself at 847-467-0781, or Farhan Hasan at 847-467-0325. We’d be more than happy to help you. And there are some other things that we can help, so there are lots of areas we can help you, not just in contracts, not just in project management, but if you just need somebody to talk to, we’re there as well.

Mary: Great, that sounds good. I’ll have links to the web page and contact information on our podcast page, but I think that’s about all the time we have for today. Thank you so much.

Farhan and Mark: Thank you.

Mary: Really appreciate all the great information that you provided and the services that you’re providing the University. Thank you.

Farhan: Thank you.

This has been a presentation from the Northwestern University Information Technology Support Center. Please e-mail future topic suggestions to NUIT Communications at It-communications@northwestern.edu.

- NUIT to Go! Podcasts Archive
- NUIT Home