Introduction to the Minitrack on Cultural/Indigenous Knowledge Impacts on Knowledge Systems, an Intersection of Beliefs

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Cultural and indigenous knowledge is too often forgotten in today’s societies and business world. However, as globalization continues it is a deeper understanding of these key issues that can indeed be the difference between successful and unsuccessful sustained global business operations.

Cultural knowledge is that knowledge particular to a subgroup of a population. For example in a diverse culture such as the United States there are many subcultures with their own knowledge such as ethnic groups, activity focus groups (such as rappers or state boarders, or organizational sub cultures), or other groups formed on some demographic premise. Indigenous knowledge focuses on that knowledge, frequently contained in oral systems, that has evolved over the time that Native Peoples have inhabited their homelands. For example, Knowledge Systems of outsiders are discussed by indigenous peoples in North America such as Native Americans, First Nations People, and Alaska Natives as 'Western' knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge also applies to rather homogenous populations that migrated to, and settled in, an area and have remained settled in that area for generations. Such populations are noted for maintenance of customs, language, and beliefs that their ancestors brought to the new location. In addition, story-telling, to convey the customs and beliefs, are a component to these populations, as they are to more traditionally define indigenous populations.

Cultural knowledge may be similar to indigenous knowledge but may have a much shorter history and may be conveyed through its own language and online communities. Such knowledge systems are, in many respects, endangered. Cultural groups may be short lived or if long lived, may be in danger of being sublimated into larger cultural groups. Indigenous peoples throughout the world are subject to external events, such as disease and war, which have annihilated certain populations in the past. In addition, efforts by outsiders to have the indigenous population assimilated into their world views frequently resulted in the loss of knowledge. Think of the Library at Alexandria. Now think of populations with only an oral history and retention of knowledge. What is lost when the last member of the population is gone? Furthermore an understanding of such cultures and the knowledge sharing that takes place within them can also assist in the design, development and successful deployment of various IS solutions such as telemedicine or mobile health solutions.