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PANEL 18

THE INFUSION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES INTO TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES: LESSONS FOR IS RESEARCH

Panel Chair: Michael D. Myers, University of Auckland

Panelists: **Conrad Shayo**, Claremont Graduate School
Barbara Gutek, University of Arizona
Heinz Klein, State University of New York at Binghamton

The impact of new information technologies on traditional societies is an area that has not received much attention, yet there is a lot to be learned from them. To paraphrase DeLisi (1990), an understanding of the interplay of the various forces unleashed by information technology in traditional societies can help us find solutions to modern organizational problems. DeLisi's observation that the Yir Yoront Aboriginal tribe of Australia was "literally destroyed by the introduction of technology" is strikingly similar to what is still happening in traditional societies that are currently embracing information technology. For instance, Lewis and Samoff (1992) observe the rise of a class of "computer elite" in Tanzania which is fighting for both political and economic legitimacy. Another example is what happened to the Chagga tribe of Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. Formal education systems were introduced among the Chagga during the colonial period. This partially destroyed the Chagga's age-old tradition of storing and transmitting societal knowledge (mainly history and technology) orally through the male members of the society. For the first time, some of the "restricted" societal knowledge was captured on paper — and hence available for men and women who could read. For the first time, women's rights to education became an issue in Chagga families — women asked the question, who was more equal than the other: the boys or the girls?

This panel discusses the changes that have taken place with the introduction of new information technologies into traditional societies, taking the case of Tanzania, and focusing on the Chagga tribe of Kilimanjaro. The panel will focus on the lessons for IS research. Specifically, the panel will look at:

* the positive and negative impacts of new information technologies in traditional societies

* the lessons that modern organizations can draw from them — particularly gender and power distribution issues

* the best research methods that can be used to study traditional societies

The panelists offer a number of diverse angles to the discussion:

* Michael Myers, now involved in IS implementation research, previously conducted ethnographic research concerning social and organizational change in the small Melanesian nation of Vanuatu.

* Conrad Shayo, a doctoral student in Information Science at the Claremont Graduate School, has been raised in two cultures: the traditional Chagga and Tanzanian culture and the modern western culture. He will be able to give an inside (or emic) viewpoint on the interplay of the various forces released by the introduction of new information technologies in Tanzania — and specifically among the Chagga tribe.

* Barbara Gutek has written extensively on information systems and gender issues in developed countries.

* Heinz Klein will comment on the issues raised by the panelists from the perspective of life world colonization (Habermas) and reflect on the emancipatory and repressive potential of ISD know-how (as a form of knowledge) in the evolution of society.

REFERENCES

DeLisi, P. S. "Lessons from the Steel Axe: Culture, Technology, and Organizational Change." *Sloan Management Review*, Volume 32, Fall 1990, pp. 83-93.

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