

Chapter 4.18

Ara Irititja:

Towards Culturally Appropriate IT Best Practice in Remote Indigenous Australia

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a digital archive database system for the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people in Central Australia has been a challenging information technology (IT) project requiring unique thinking about database design, implementation and deployment. What might seem like sound, standards-based IT practice in a typical urban or academic location becomes unworkable in the physical realities of remote Australia and in the context of indigenous Australian cultural sensitivities. Based on the experience of the Ara Irititja Project, this chapter outlines the central issues facing the development of archive databases for indigenous peoples in remote Australia and points towards the need for a new approach to IT best practices in this context.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, Anangu (Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara peoples of Central Australia) celebrated the 10th anniversary of the granting of the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981* (South Australia). As part of the celebrations, John Dallwitz was engaged by the Pitjantjatjara Council to create a display of historically significant photographs.

During the research for this display, it became clear that there was a vast amount of historic and culturally significant material (not only photographs but also films, videos, sound recordings, documents and artefacts), held in private and public collections completely inaccessible to Anangu. However, the 3,000 Anangu on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (referred to in this chapter as “the Lands”), in

In 1994, Ara Irititja was established to develop a response to this dilemma when John Dallwitz, along with anthropologist Ushma Scales and Anangu Schools teacher Ron Lister, received the first funding from Pitjantjatjara Council Inc. This chapter outlines the central issues facing the design, implementation and deployment of archive databases for indigenous peoples in remote Australia and points towards the need for new thinking around information technology (IT) best practices in this context.

$$1 - \frac{1}{n} = 1 - \frac{1}{\frac{n-1}{c}} = 1 - c = 0.6$$

- It is the last two points that make Ara Irititja unique as an archive. The fundamental intention of

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