Tribal Wisdom and Indigenous Ways of Knowing:
Teaching Materials
Module 2 of Tribal Wisdom for Business Ethics
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GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Time: 15-20 minutes
Materials: None
Physical Setting: Space suited to small group discussions.
Group Size: No limit; however, recommended small groups of 3-5 persons with large group discussion as wrap-up.

Discussion Questions:
1. In the beginning of the film, Dr. Pepion states, “so we’re connected to all things, we need to respect all things.” Explain your interpretation of his statement in regard to business ethics, especially regarding corporate citizenship behavior.

2. Find a specific business example of good corporate citizenship that demonstrates this theme of “connectedness.”
In what ways does this corporate citizenship benefit society?
In what ways does this corporate citizenship behavior benefit business? (Some research suggests that more ethical corporations tend to be more profitable.)

3. Businesses are often top-down enterprises, with the CEO or President at the top and others in layers to the bottom. This reflects a belief in hierarchy, that some people are much more important than others. Sometimes a person’s high status might be due to their knowledge or skills. With the indigenous ways of knowing presented in this module, there is not one best way of knowing or understanding something. Instead, there are many ways of knowing, and many “truths.” What does this emphasis on multiple and different ways of knowing mean for traditional business hierarchies? In simple terms, are the bosses always, or even usually, the ones who “know” the most? How can a business re-imagine a hierarchical model (the “chain-of-command”) differently, in order to emphasize the value of various kinds of knowledge within the business?

4. Quantum science and chaos theory especially argue that this formerly “primitive” idea of the connectedness of all things is actually a truth on the cutting edge of science.

One example of the connectedness concept is the “butterfly effect” in chaos theory. What is the “butterfly effect”? 

According to Wikipedia, “The name of the effect, coined by Edward Lorenz, is derived from the theoretical example of the details of a hurricane (exact time of formation, exact path taken) being influenced by minor perturbations equating to
the flapping of the wings of a distant butterfly several weeks earlier.” In overly simple terms, the idea is that something as small as a butterfly flapping its wings in Japan could cause a hurricane weeks later in the U.S. In what ways is the “butterfly effect” similar to indigenous wisdom as described by Dr. Pepion? What are the business and ethical implications of the “butterfly effect”?

Activity: Brainstorming, Parking Lot and Group Discussion

**Topic:** Knowledge and Ceremony

**Materials:** 3 large Post-it sheets on which you have written the three prompts. Enough Multicolored markers for everyone to write a response.

**Physical Space Required:** Classroom/meeting space large enough for students to break into groups.

**Total time:** About 40 minutes

_before the activity, post 3 giant Post-its around the room with the 3 questions from the prompt below._

**Part A: Brainstorming - 20 min**

Divide students into 3 groups. Give everyone 1 minute to read the prompt below. Then direct each group to one of the large post-it notes. Each group will have 5 minutes to brainstorm their response to the prompt question posted on the wall. At the end of 5 minutes, all groups will rotate to the next question. This continues one more time.

**Prompt:** Pepion discusses ceremony in relation to storytelling and the transmission of vital cultural knowledge such as cosmologies and creation. Expand upon his idea by discussing the notion of ceremony in a business context.

(1) How are vital narratives and stories from your own culture relayed through ceremony in business practices?

(2) Why are ceremonies and festivals important to both Native and non-native cultures and individuals?

(3) For example, how might an event like a harvest festival, equate with notions of sustainability within business practice?

**Part B: Whole Class Discussion for 10-15 minutes.**

Share your examples of ceremony, narratives, and business. (The instructor, or a volunteer, can read the questions and corresponding answers to lead the discussion.)

Is there anything unexpected and surprising about relating business and ceremony that you had not considered before this exercise?