



## BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required The Spirit of CSR

Breakout Session Summary

Thursday, November 6, 2008 | 10–11:30 a.m.

### Speakers

- **David Begay**, Vice President, Indigenous Education Institute
- **Yu Tanabe**, U.S. Business Development Manager, Nikkei America, Inc.
- **Michael Thomas**, President and Co-Founder, Monterey Institute for Social Architecture
- **Allen White**, Vice President and Senior Fellow, Tellus Institute (moderator)

### Highlights

- Spiritual practices of interconnectivity are present in cultures around the globe and can be advantageous to corporate practices.
- CSR practices must be culturally and spiritually relevant in order to be effective.
- Creating cultural change may be a slow process that requires small steps.

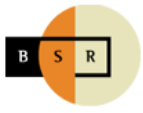
### Memorable Quotes

- “I don’t know why we think our systems aren’t susceptible to the natural laws of the earth.” —Michael Thomas, Monterey Institute for Social Architecture
- “You can’t turn organizations around unless you turn people around.” —Alan White, Tellus Institute
- “The challenge is how to fight with a greedy stock market that is always demanding more and more. We have to change the mechanism of the stock market.” —Yu Tanabe, Nikkei America, Inc.
- “Objectivity in the Euro-American world is valued, subjectivity is undervalued; in the Native American world both are valued.” —David Begay, Indigenous Education Institute

### Overview

White began the session by broadly defining spirituality as “any tradition or practice that raises the consciousness of individuals or organizations in regard to their connectedness to the larger world.” According to White, most global cultures have spiritual belief systems centered on community, connectedness, and responsibility. People bring these belief systems





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into their workplaces, and companies incorporate these belief systems into their work cultures.

Thomas then told the story of how he integrated spiritual aspects of Native American traditions into the Granite Construction Company. In order to embed the belief systems into his company culture, Thomas assigned to each leadership team member the responsibility of ensuring that a core ethical value remained on the company's agenda. This shifted executives' thinking away from themselves and towards the stewardship of their value.

Tanabe believes that corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Japan must be rooted in their culture of community obligation and sharing. Early CSR did not take root in Japan, because CSR practices were seen as European propaganda. The challenge for the Japanese is defining CSR in alignment with their belief systems. The Japanese are patient capitalists: they want long-term relationships and value creation—belief systems already consistent with CSR frameworks.

Next, Begay discussed how language is a key component of the Western disconnect between human and nature, mind and body, matter and spirit. He stressed that all things are connected and interdependent, a perspective that seems absent from Western thought. Begay encouraged corporations to be open to other world views.

The panel urged for the expansion of the definition of wealth creation beyond capital returns to also encompass environmental, social, and cultural benefits. CSR can be seen as a competitive advantage, but great change can only occur if we share best practices and work together.

An audience member raised the concern that as individuals develop a deeper spiritual consciousness, they are unable to do corporate work because it is too discordant with their personal beliefs. Another audience member added that making money is a means to an end, but it is not an end in itself. The discussion concluded with a comment about how pushing the business case for CSR seems shallow, but perhaps it is the baby step needed to raise a company's consciousness.

White concluded with praise for the rich dialogue, saying, "This is the kind of issue that defies easy containment, but that's okay because we need a few less containers in the world."

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This summary is also available on [www.bsr.org/bsrconferences/2008/session-summaries.cfm](http://www.bsr.org/bsrconferences/2008/session-summaries.cfm).

