

# Transforming “TSUNAGARI” into Empowerment – Insights from the LinkedIn × Yorimichi Club January Meeting

On **January 15, 2026**, the community program **Yorimichi Club**, facilitated by **Creative Guild**, held a workshop themed “**Turn ‘Connection’ into Power!**” in collaboration with **LinkedIn Japan** at the **Minato-ku Industrial Promotion Center** in Tokyo. More than fifty participants—spanning nationalities, generations and sectors—gathered to explore the essence of “**TSUNAGARI**” (つながり), the Japanese concept of human connection. Through dialogue, the group discovered that connections are not merely social interactions but an intangible form of capital that fuels personal, organisational and societal resilience. This insight report summarises the discussions and the participants’ voices, structured around five steps.

## Step 1 – What is “TSUNAGARI”?

### Intrinsic significance

- **Health capital.** Harvard School of Public Health reports that people with strong social ties tend to live longer and healthier lives; conversely, social isolation increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and depression, raising mortality risk by 26–29 %. The seriousness of loneliness has led some countries to create Ministers for Loneliness.
- **Social capital.** “TSUNAGARI” represents the intangible network of trust and reciprocity that enables people to support each other, share information and exchange resources. Research categorises social capital into **bonding** (strong ties within homogeneous groups), **bridging** (links across diverse groups) and **linking** (connections to institutions or decision makers). These forms of capital influence access to healthcare, education and innovation.
- **Prosocial behaviour.** Contributing to others improves one’s own health. Harvard research shows that older adults who volunteer 15 hours per week improve their memory and physical abilities and tend to live longer.

### Contemporary understanding and gaps

- **More “links”, fewer relationships.** The ubiquity of social media increases the number of contacts, but the conversion of contacts into trusting, sustained relationships is low. Many participants noted that ties formed at events or through SNS are difficult to maintain.
- **Career capital.** In an era of portfolio careers and project-based work, participants recognised that the breadth and quality of personal networks are becoming critical career assets.
- **Self-connection.** As guest speaker Daniel Singer noted, connecting with others starts with being connected to one’s ideal self and core values. This internal alignment helps people embrace unexpected encounters and expands their network.

### Why call it “TSUNAGARI”?

In Japanese, **tsunagaru** means “to connect” or “to be linked.” By using **TSUNAGARI** rather than the English word connection, the discussion emphasised the **holistic, relational nature of human ties**

rather than simple transactional contact. “TSUNAGARI” conveys a network of **trust, empathy and mutual growth**—a form of social capital that cannot be bought. This term underscores that connections are a **state of being** rather than an action, aligning with the Japanese cultural emphasis on harmony and collective wellbeing.

## Step 2 – How do we build “TSUNAGARI”?

### Inner needs driving connection

- **Safety and recognition.** People connect to satisfy belonging needs and self-esteem; enlarging one’s network reduces uncertainty and provides psychological safety.
- **Curiosity and growth.** Participants noted that curiosity about people and new fields is a starting point for connection. Exposure to diverse people and cultures broadens perspectives and encourages personal growth.
- **Contribution and self-efficacy.** Helping others and co-creating projects enhance one’s sense of purpose and happiness. Participants felt that joining forces enables challenges that individuals cannot tackle alone.

### Four-stage model of “TSUNAGARI”

The workshop proposed a **four-stage model** for deepening connections: 1. **Link** – an initial contact, such as exchanging business cards or following someone on SNS. 2. **Connection** – getting to know the person behind the contact; sharing backgrounds and interests. 3. **Engagement** – continued interactions or collaboration; communication frequency increases and bonds deepen. 4. **Relationship** – mutual trust and interdependence enable joint value creation; bonding, bridging and linking capital converge.

To circulate through these stages, the following elements are crucial: \* **Openness.** Let go of fixed ideas and defensiveness; be receptive to unknown people and ideas. Participants observed that being open-minded softens barriers.

Showing up. Increase serendipity by participating in diverse events and communities. Research on social capital highlights the value of weak ties—looser acquaintances that often provide novel information.

**Enjoying the process.** Those who enjoy connecting naturally attract others. Psychological energy is contagious.

Designing continuity. Community managers should orchestrate both the ignition of initial enthusiasm and the maintenance\* of relationships (“heating and warming”). Sustainable community design reduces reliance on a single charismatic leader.

### Organisational and societal issues

- **Lack of psychological safety.** Hierarchical cultures and evaluation systems turn one-on-one meetings into lectures, hindering dialogue. Organisations must institutionalise spaces for open conversation.
- **Scarcity of bridging and linking capital.** Marginalised communities often lack networks that connect them to other groups or to decision makers.
- **Career ownership.** As lifetime employment erodes, individuals must develop and maintain their own networks.

## Step 3 – Why is “TSUNAGARI” difficult?

Participants identified several obstacles:

- **Expectation vs fear.** People want to belong but fear rejection or the vulnerability of showing their true selves. This tension hinders deepening connections.
- **Unconscious bias.** Societal labels (age, gender, nationality, job, income, status, group affiliation) unconsciously shape whom people approach and how they judge others. Such biases limit who becomes part of our network.
- **Trust deficit.** Social media fosters envy and comparison; many people hesitate to show weakness or failure. Without authenticity and trust, relationships do not progress from superficial contact.
- **Institutional isolation.** Rigid organisational structures and siloed communities make it hard to build linking capital across departments or sectors.
- **Personalisation and inheritance.** Valuable relationships often depend on specific individuals; when those leaders leave or change roles, connections disappear.
- **Social taboos and stigma.** Admitting to loneliness, mental health challenges or professional failure remains stigmatised. This culture of concealment obstructs meaningful dialogue.

These barriers highlight the need for safe spaces and support structures that normalise vulnerability and inclusive networking.

## Step 4 – What future can “TSUNAGARI” create?

The group envisioned a future where intentional connections generate transformative impact:

1. **Improved health and wellbeing.** Robust social ties reduce loneliness and chronic disease risk. Studies show that volunteering and prosocial behaviour improve memory, cognitive function and physical health.
2. **Enhanced creativity and innovation.** When psychological safety is ensured, diverse individuals co-create new ideas and value. Communities such as Creative Guild, Uvance Innovation Studio and Musubi demonstrate how open networks foster innovation.
3. **Socio-economic resilience and civic engagement.** Trust-based networks enable mutual aid during crises, inclusive resource distribution and civic participation. Bridging capital can connect marginalised groups to supportive institutions.
4. **Bridging differences to build just, regenerative economies.** Linking across different organisations and regions allows knowledge, capital and opportunities to circulate fairly. In the long term, such “regenerative flows” can reduce regional disparities and create sustainable socio-economic ecosystems.

## Step 5 – Where do we start?

### Action principles

1. **Connect with yourself.** Clarify your ideals and values to align with people and opportunities that resonate. This self-connection is the foundation of all other ties.
2. **Start where you are.** Build relationships within your immediate environment—family, colleagues, neighbours—before seeking distant networks.
3. **Practice “bridging” and “linking.”** Reach across differences (age, region, profession, nationality) and connect to institutions (public agencies, educational bodies, companies). This expands your social capital beyond bonding ties.

4. **Design continuous interaction.** Use community managers or designated roles to maintain and “warm” connections, ensuring they survive beyond initial excitement. Use common projects, peer learning or shared rituals to sustain engagement.
5. **Create safe micro-hubs.** Establish small spaces—physical or virtual—where people can speak openly about challenges, aspirations and failures without fear of judgement. Such hubs build trust and psychological safety.
6. **Share and inherit networks.** Document connections, share contact information and create systems that allow relationships to outlive individual custodians. Encourage senior members to mentor others and introduce them to their networks.
7. **Align personal and professional networks.** Integrate “TSUNAGARI” into career development by recognising networking as a core skill. Companies and organisations should facilitate cross-sector exchanges and support employees’ network-building efforts.

## Reflections

At the Yorimichi Club meeting, participants experienced the **power of TSUNAGARI** first-hand. People from disparate backgrounds engaged openly, built connections and even launched new collaborative projects on the spot. Language barriers melted away thanks to simultaneous translation and AI tools. The session highlighted that **TSUNAGARI is not just about increasing contacts but about cultivating a culture of openness, curiosity and reciprocity**. The group left with a commitment to start from small, enjoyable actions and to “heat and warm” their networks so that connections evolve into relationships that generate collective strength.

## Conclusion

The January 2026 Yorimichi Club gathering demonstrated that **TSUNAGARI**—human connection imbued with trust and mutual growth—is a powerful engine for personal wellbeing, organisational innovation and social resilience. While digital platforms multiply our “links,” forging meaningful relationships requires intention, openness and continuous care. By recognising “TSUNAGARI” as a valuable form of capital and by practising the principles outlined above, individuals and communities can transform connections into enduring power.

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