

“Social Impact Created Through Connection”

LinkedIn Japan meets YORIMICHI-Club

Insight Report

Date: Wednesday, March 11, 2025, 6:30 PM–8:00 PM

Venue: Hall Dai, 11F, Minato City Industrial Promotion Center

※This report is based on inferences generated using ChatGPT from the content of the dialogue. Therefore, it should be used only as a reference that presents one possible perspective or interpretation.

Executive Summary

This event was held on the anniversary of March 11 under the theme of “social impact created through connection.” It brought together practitioners working across business, local communities, and international social issues, along with participants from the audience, to reflect on how we relate to society and how those relationships can generate meaningful change. Throughout the dialogue, a wide range of perspectives emerged: memories of the earthquake and disaster recovery, the kindness embedded in Japanese society, the social issues that remain difficult to see in everyday life, the role and responsibility of companies, and the possibility that even small daily actions can have a significant impact on others. One of the clearest takeaways was that social impact does not belong only to large corporations, foundations, or formal social initiatives. Rather, it begins when relationships shift, when mutual support becomes possible, and when value starts to circulate through human connection.

At the same time, the conversation also revealed why social impact remains difficult to sustain. Japanese society appears to have a strong foundation of kindness and mutual care, yet many social issues remain invisible, and people often hesitate to ask for help. Within companies, social contribution is still frequently separated from core business and treated as a side activity rather than part of the organization’s real purpose. In addition, the term “social impact” itself has become so large and abstract that it can feel distant from people’s daily lives. In other words, the problem is not a lack of goodwill. Rather, it is the lack of structures, language, and opportunities that allow that goodwill to become visible, actionable, and sustainable.

This report organizes the key insights that emerged from the event by examining the meaning of social impact, how it is created, what prevents it from expanding, what kind

of future it can open up, and where people and organizations can begin. The central conclusion is that what society needs now is not simply more “good intentions” or more “impressive initiatives,” but better ways of designing relationships so that hidden kindness, dormant resources, local pride, and genuine dialogue can be turned into lasting social value. The event made it clear that connection is not merely a by-product of social change. It is one of its most important starting points.

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1. Introduction

This event began with a simple but deeply important question: “Unexpected encounters can move society. But are those encounters really accidental?” At first glance, this might sound like a gentle theme suited to a community event. In reality, however, it goes to the heart of how change happens in society. Social transformation is rarely driven by institutions alone. More often, it begins when connections between people start to take on new meaning. Between companies and communities, between foreigners and Japanese society, between personal goodwill and organizational systems, and between everyday life and social issues, new possibilities emerge when different contexts meet. The significance of the event date—March 11—also shaped the conversation in an important way. The Great East Japan Earthquake remains one of the most profound

turning points in contemporary Japanese society. It forced many people to reconsider what had previously felt ordinary: the fragility of daily life, the uncertainty of human life itself, the vulnerability of infrastructure, and the importance of helping one another. This event did not treat those memories simply as a matter of remembrance. Instead, it used them as a bridge to future-oriented questions: What has changed since that day? What still has not changed? And how will we change from here? Although the event was not structured as a formal lecture, but rather as an open and lightly moderated conversation among speakers who had not previously met in person, the discussion surfaced a surprising depth of insight. This report does not simply document what was said. Its purpose is to identify the assumptions, structures, tensions, and possibilities embedded in the dialogue and to reframe them as practical insights for future action.

2. Event Overview and Purpose of This Report

The event featured three guest speakers, each working from a different perspective at the intersection of society, business, and human connection. Motoki Suzuki of LinkedIn Japan spoke from the standpoint of building teams and opportunities through professional networks. Francis Fon, representing KiFor, offered the perspective of a non-Japanese practitioner working to connect large corporations with small charities and underserved communities in Japan. Hideki Oka, a long-time community builder based in Kitakyushu, shared insights from practical work in regional management, tourism, public facility operations, and local revitalization. Facilitated by Takeshi Shibuya, the event created a multilingual and multicultural dialogue that crossed business, local community practice, and social innovation.

The goal of this report is not merely to summarize the session. Rather, it is to extract the deeper value of the conversation and organize it into a form that can support future reflection and action. For that reason, the report focuses less on reproducing individual comments word for word and more on what those comments reveal beneath the surface: the underlying values, tensions, structural issues, and emerging possibilities that define the theme of “social impact created through connection.”

3. Key Themes That Emerged from the Dialogue

Looking across the event as a whole, five major themes stood out.

The first was the question of definition: What is social impact, really? Related terms such as social contribution, social problem solving, CSR, and the SDGs are now widely

used, but often in ways that feel abstract, formal, or detached from lived experience. A major theme of the event was the need to revisit this concept at a more human level. The second was the role of the March 11 experience in shaping people's understanding of solidarity. The speakers' personal stories differed greatly, yet each one pointed to the same underlying recognition: in times of crisis, people are forced to reconnect with one another in a very direct way.

The third theme was the contrast between the kindness that clearly exists in Japanese society and the relative difficulty of translating that kindness into ongoing support during normal times. This gap between potential care and everyday social action became one of the event's central insights.

The fourth was the role of companies. Corporations possess resources, influence, visibility, and systems that individuals often do not. The discussion explored how those assets might be used not only for profit generation but also for broader social value creation.

The fifth was the importance of enjoyment, participation, and emotional engagement. The conversation suggested that people do not move solely because something is "right." They also move because something feels meaningful, accessible, enjoyable, and worth being proud of.

4. The Essential Meaning of Social Impact

One of the most important conclusions from the event was that social impact cannot be understood only as large-scale philanthropy or formal social problem solving. Francis, in particular, expressed discomfort with the phrase "social impact" itself, describing it as something that sounds overly corporate and detached from everyday life. He then pointed to the old Japanese principle of *sanpo-yoshi*—good for the seller, good for the buyer, and good for society—as an example of how business and social value were not originally seen as separate.

This perspective matters. It suggests that social impact is not a newly invented, high-minded category that belongs only to major institutions. Instead, it may be better understood as something that was once embedded in the way relationships, business, and society were naturally woven together—and that now needs to be rediscovered and redesigned in a contemporary context.

In this sense, social impact means creating a meaningful change in society, but that change does not begin only in government systems, nonprofit strategies, or global frameworks. It can also begin with a small shift in relationships: noticing someone,

checking in on someone, sharing access to information, connecting a company to a local initiative, or creating a setting where employees and families can participate in something meaningful together. These actions may appear small, but they change the quality of connection, and through that, they create new forms of value.

The conversation made clear that the essence of social impact lies not in scale, but in the quality of change it produces.

5. What the Memory of March 11 Revealed

Each speaker's memory of March 11 was different, but together they formed a powerful picture of what crisis can reveal about society.

Motoki Suzuki described being in the middle of interview preparation with a candidate when the earthquake struck. Even amid the confusion, he initially kept trying to continue with work, driven by a strong sense of responsibility and urgency around business. At the same time, he found himself helping strangers with directions for an extended period after the earthquake, because so many people were lost and desperate. His story captured the tension between professional obligation and spontaneous civic care, and how moments of crisis can make those two dimensions collide.

Francis recalled being an English teacher at an international kindergarten in Kanagawa. After the earthquake, he and several other teachers were stranded and stayed together for a few days. Even in that difficult moment, he remembered thinking that they were still lucky to have shelter. At the same time, the experience sharpened a deeper question for him: why were there people in Japan who still needed support, even in a society that appeared so orderly and kind? That question seems to have become one of the roots of his later work.

Hideki Oka spoke from a longer-term perspective, linking the period after the earthquake to broader changes in Japan's cultural readiness to talk about sharing, cooperation, and community-based value creation. His comments suggested that March 11 helped make concepts like support and sharing more visible, but that the harder challenge has always been how to embed those values into local systems over time.

Taken together, these stories suggest that the earthquake was not only a disaster. It was also a moment that exposed the fragility of ordinary life and brought the importance of mutual support into sharp relief. The challenge, then, is not simply to remember that moment, but to translate the lessons of emergency solidarity into everyday social design.

6. The Kindness That Exists in Japanese Society—and Why It Often Stays in the Background

A recurring theme throughout the event was the belief that Japanese society is fundamentally kind. Francis, speaking as someone who has lived in Japan as a foreigner for many years, repeatedly emphasized how helpful and generous people in Japan often are in practice. He shared examples of strangers helping travelers, people offering practical support, and Japanese society showing remarkable unity during natural disasters. The speakers also referenced widely recognized examples such as Japanese audiences cleaning up after football matches and nationwide support for disaster-affected regions.

These examples suggest that Japan has a real and substantial foundation of care. Yet the discussion also highlighted an important contradiction: although this kindness clearly exists, it often remains in the background during ordinary times. It appears more visibly in emergencies than in daily life.

Several cultural factors may help explain this. One is the strong norm of not causing inconvenience to others. Asking for help can be perceived not as a normal act of mutual dependence, but as imposing on someone else. Another is the value placed on endurance and self-control. In many contexts, showing that one is struggling can still be seen as weakness, immaturity, or a lack of discipline. There is also the issue of visibility: in Japan, serious hardship is often difficult to identify from the outside. People may look neat and socially functional, even when they are isolated, struggling financially, or in need of urgent support.

The event therefore points to a key insight: the problem is not that Japanese society lacks kindness. The problem is that the conditions under which kindness becomes visible and actionable are often too limited. What is needed is not simply more goodwill, but more situations, structures, and social norms that allow that goodwill to surface in everyday life.

7. The Structure Behind “Wanting to Help, but Not Being Able To”

One of the most important insights of the event was that the main issue is not a lack of willingness to help, but the structure that makes support difficult to activate.

Francis gave particularly striking examples. He spoke about single mothers, orphans, food insecurity, and other social issues in Japan that remain largely invisible to the general public. He also described how some people in need actively avoid using support services such as food banks because they fear being seen, judged, or stigmatized by

others. In such cases, the issue is not simply that support is unavailable. It is that both need and support remain hidden.

This creates a double invisibility. First, hardship is not easily recognized by society. Second, the people experiencing it often feel unable to show it. As a result, even where there is goodwill, it has nowhere clear to go.

Modern life reinforces this difficulty. People are busy, overloaded with information, and under constant pressure from work, metrics, notifications, and personal maintenance. It is not necessarily that they have become selfish. Rather, they often lack the time, emotional space, and attentional capacity needed to notice and respond to others.

This leads to a practical conclusion: expanding social impact cannot be achieved simply by telling people to be kinder. It requires better design. People need ways to see what is happening, understand where support is needed, and recognize how they can participate without excessive friction, shame, or uncertainty. Social impact, in this sense, is as much a design issue as it is a moral one.

8. Companies and Their Relationship to Social Impact

The discussion around companies was one of the richest and most practical parts of the event. A key starting point was the recognition that companies have resources individuals often do not: funding, visibility, networks, organizational structure, and the ability to standardize or scale action. For that reason, companies can play a major role in amplifying social impact.

At the same time, the participants were realistic about the tensions involved. As one audience comment pointed out, corporations have a financial responsibility to generate returns for investors. When a social issue affects many people, it can also become a business opportunity. This creates an inherent tension between making a positive impact and making a profit from human need. That tension cannot be dismissed with idealism. It needs to be acknowledged as one of the central challenges of contemporary business.

The speakers suggested that companies often fall into two broad categories. Some are genuinely motivated by a desire to contribute to society. Others engage in CSR or SDGs-related initiatives primarily because they are expected to do so as part of branding, compliance, or public relations. In the latter case, the work often becomes detached from the company's true energy, and the people assigned to it may feel that it is a low-status or unwanted role.

What seems necessary, then, is not simply more CSR. It is a re-integration of social value into the company's actual purpose, culture, and business model. Social impact becomes far more powerful when it is not treated as a side activity, but instead connects employees, families, communities, customers, and the company's long-term identity.

9. A Circulation Model Seen Through Local Practice

One of the most illuminating examples shared during the event came from Hideki Oka's work in Kitakyushu. He described a local Bon Odori festival that began on a relatively small scale as a town-building initiative and eventually grew into a major regional event supported by many companies and attended by large numbers of families.

This example is important because it shows that social impact does not expand through moral messaging alone. It expands when different kinds of value become connected. Companies support the festival not only because it is "good" in an abstract sense, but because it allows employees and their families to participate in something joyful, meaningful, and community-based. It creates pride. It strengthens the relationship between company and region. It functions as a form of family-oriented welfare. It gives companies visibility in a positive social context.

In other words, the event created a circulation model in which social value and corporate value reinforced each other. Support became not a charitable cost but a meaningful investment. That shift matters greatly. When social activity aligns with family pride, employee motivation, local identity, and brand value, it becomes easier for companies to sustain and deepen their involvement.

This case suggests that the future of social impact may depend less on persuading companies to "do the right thing" and more on designing contexts where social value, emotional value, and business value can genuinely reinforce one another.

10. What Participant Comments Reveal About Everyday Reality

The participant comments added an important layer to the discussion by grounding the theme in everyday perceptions and lived reality.

One comment defined social impact simply as "issues that impact society." This reflects an intuitive and accessible understanding of the concept. At the same time, another participant noted that when they hear the phrase "social impact," they first think of social media, online information, and something being amplified or becoming controversial through digital channels. This is highly revealing. It suggests that for many

people today, the term “social impact” is already mediated through the language of online visibility rather than through direct lived experience.

Several comments also reflected the deep mark left by the earthquake. One participant wrote that after the disaster, they came to realize that ordinary life is not guaranteed—that even life with one’s family, and the ability to buy food and daily necessities, cannot be taken for granted. This shows that awareness of social vulnerability often begins not in policy frameworks, but in lived disruption.

The corporate-profit tension also appeared clearly in the audience comments. One participant observed that corporations have a duty to deliver financial returns and that when many people need something, businesses may exploit that opportunity for profit. This made them feel that balancing impact and profit is inherently difficult. This is an important and realistic observation. It highlights why social impact cannot simply be framed as “doing good,” but must also be discussed in relation to systems of value creation and extraction.

Another participant noted that people are less likely to help when an issue does not affect them directly. If a family member is impacted by an earthquake, people will do anything to help. But if an earthquake causes suffering in another country, people may be far less likely to respond. This is a realistic view of how empathy often functions through proximity. It also reinforces one of the event’s main insights: if social impact is to grow, then distant issues must somehow be translated into humanly understandable, relatable, and emotionally resonant forms.

11. Core Insights from the Event

Taken together, the conversation points to several core insights.

First, social impact should not be understood primarily as “big social good,” but as a change in the quality of relationships. It is not limited to foundations, institutions, or large-scale initiatives. It can also emerge through small, concrete changes in how people support, notice, and connect with one another.

Second, Japanese society appears to have a substantial foundation of kindness and mutual care, but that potential does not automatically translate into everyday support. The issue is not a lack of goodwill, but the lack of visibility, safety, and social design needed to activate it on a regular basis.

Third, when social contribution is separated from core business, it tends to weaken. Corporate social value becomes much more meaningful when it connects directly to

employee pride, family participation, community relationships, and the company's deeper sense of purpose.

Fourth, enjoyment, pride, and accessibility are not superficial additions. They are essential conditions for sustaining social action. People do not continue acting only because something is morally correct. They continue when it also feels meaningful, human, and engaging.

Fifth, dialogue itself is a source of social impact. When people from different backgrounds speak honestly without rushing to solutions, hidden assumptions become visible, dormant values are reawakened, and new possibilities begin to take shape. The design of this event demonstrated that clearly.

12. Implications for the Future

Several implications follow from these insights.

To begin with, social impact needs to be reframed from something exceptional into something that can be embedded into everyday life. It should not be limited to large, formal projects. The more important question may be how ordinary work, community activities, and human relationships can be designed to include mutual support and social meaning from the outset.

Visibility also matters. Social issues do not create engagement simply by existing. People need to understand what is happening, who is affected, and how they can be meaningfully involved. This requires not just data, but narrative, context, and emotionally understandable pathways into participation.

For companies, the challenge is to move from treating social contribution as a separate department or obligation to treating it as part of organizational identity and business design. That means making such roles meaningful and attractive, connecting them to employee motivation, and allowing them to influence the company's broader culture and strategy.

For communities and event organizers, the implication is that "lightness" and "depth" do not have to be opposites. This event showed that it is possible to create a setting that feels open and casual while still engaging people in profound and difficult questions. Designing such spaces may be one of the most important practical tasks for future social innovation.

13. Practical Suggestions for Moving Forward

Based on the insights from the event, several practical directions can be proposed.

The first is to make the value of small actions more visible. Instead of letting the term “social impact” remain overwhelming and abstract, organizations and communities can create ways to recognize and share the small acts of support, care, and connection that already exist in daily life. Internal storytelling, local sharing circles, and informal case examples may all help.

The second is to build more participatory models that connect companies with communities and charities. Rather than focusing only on donations or sponsorship, companies can create opportunities for employees and families to engage directly, feel pride, and understand the meaning of what they are supporting.

The third is to rethink the language used to describe social action. As several participants suggested, labels matter. If existing terms feel too large, too formal, or too detached, more human and relatable language may be needed in order to broaden participation.

The fourth is to create more spaces where people feel safe asking for help and talking honestly about difficulty. Changing the culture around support requires not only services, but also relationships and settings where vulnerability becomes possible without shame.

The fifth is to document and share practical case studies. Examples like the Kitakyushu festival are valuable not only because they succeeded, but because they show how social, emotional, and economic value can be linked in practice. Sharing these models can help others imagine what is possible in their own context.

14. Closing Reflections

This event succeeded in bringing the idea of social impact back down to human scale. Through stories of disaster, kindness, corporate responsibility, regional practice, family pride, and everyday action, the conversation made it clear that social change does not begin only with heroic leadership or large institutional initiatives. It begins when overlooked kindness, hidden difficulty, dormant resources, and human curiosity are brought into meaningful relationship.

What society needs is not simply more people trying to do something “good.” It needs better ways of designing relationships so that care can move, participation can grow, and meaning can circulate. That requires not only good intentions, but structure. Not only moral urgency, but accessibility. Not only seriousness, but joy.

One of the final messages of the event captured this clearly: social impact is not just a big idea. It is concrete action. And because of that, it can begin with something very small.

In that sense, this YORIMICHI-Club session did more than discuss social impact. It created the conditions for it. By bringing together people across sectors, cultures, and life experiences in an open and thoughtful conversation, it made visible the very kind of connection that can become the starting point for lasting social value.