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In a recent video interview with the Canadian collaborative, Social Innovation Generation, John McKnight tells the story of the origins of asset-based community development and how it emerged out of his anger at the predominant research then being conducted on neighbourhoods, especially low-income neighbourhoods.

He found the research influencing those concerned about such neighbourhoods zeroed in on a community's deficits – from the number of teenage pregnancies and lead poisoning stats to the prevalence of low-income housing. People who said they cared about these places were led to think about them “as though there was nothing there that was useful,” says John.

Coming from a former role as a neighbourhood activator and knowing a different story existed, John says he felt offended enough to undertake a different kind of research. He began documenting what existed in the neighbourhoods, what people had themselves and in the community that they used to solve problems and get things done.

That defiant decision to research in a different direction has since bloomed into a worldwide community of practitioners and researchers dedicated to a similar approach.

Some years back this approach also found resonance with Axiom News founder Peter Pula who created his company because he wanted to read a different kind of news and was already heading in the direction of journalism that surfaced a community's strengths rather than its deficits.

By all I know of asset-based community development, today we are practicing a form of it – as journalists rather than consultants. Where we depart, somewhat radically, is in focusing on the communities found in workplaces as opposed to place-based neighbourhoods. But isn't it true that, just like that of low-income neighbourhoods, the dominant story of business, in particular, has become one about deficits?

Like asset-based community development, we are intent on telling a different story – not by green-washing or whitewashing — but by making a constant effort to amplify many different voices that make up these workplace communities. In amplifying those voices, we intentionally aim to highlight people's gifts, to show what's energizing them right now and to invite them to think about new possibilities.

We do so with the hope and intent of sparking new connections and activity in those communities. We think John's premise that you can measure the growth of social capital by counting new relationships and the number of new people engaged in voluntary associations (as opposed to institutions), is just as relevant in workplace communities as neighbourhoods.

We also seek to shape our editorial decisions — including what we cover, what we provide an opinion on and what that opinion is — from an asset-based perspective. And we see our own team as a community and have made attempts to work from the same approach.

"If you have enough small stuff that's right, the big stuff will change; we know that from movements," John says in the Social Innovation Generation interview, recounting the story of the university students who made the seemingly small decision to eat at a whites-only diner in 1960, precipitating a "massive amount of experience and understanding" that had been bubbling at the local level, under the radar, so to speak. "All of a sudden they provided the trigger that brought all that small growth into public view," says John, referring to the civil rights movement.

Everything important that changes is from small stuff, but it usually needs a precipitator, John says.

At Axiom News, we see ourselves as engaging in the "small stuff" – hunkering down with the rest of the community members with which we have become affiliated. If you read many of our stories, you will understand what I mean. They are not the big, global stories of the day; they are not even, in most cases, appearing to be linked to

or cognizant of those stories.

But you could say this has become our operating principle in a way – that if we keep focusing on getting the small stuff right, the big stuff (in our case the world of organizational life and business) will eventually change – and who knows what will be the precipitator?