

# HEALTH SYSTEM NETWORKS FOR INTERACTION, INSIGHT, AND INNOVATION

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## INTERACTION, INSIGHT, AND INNOVATION IN ACTION: CHNET-WORKS! AND CHAIN

CHNET-Works! is an infrastructure to support a network of community health professionals – practitioners, researchers, and decision makers – from diverse jurisdictions and groups across Canada. The goal of CHNET-Works! is to advance evidence-informed service delivery, planning, and policy models in community health. ([www.chnet-works.ca](http://www.chnet-works.ca))

CHAIN (Contact, Help, Advice and Information Networks) are informal, overlapping networks for people working in healthcare who share interests in research, evidence-based healthcare, workplace-based learning, and innovation and improvement. (<http://chain.ulcc.ac.uk/chain/>)

Providing a network is the first step in encouraging interaction among diverse individuals and groups. In understanding interaction within CHNET-Works!, it has been observed that individuals are more likely to commit to a brief, regular period of time to interact. CHNET-Works! has also concluded that a network animateur is absolutely necessary for optimal interactions.

CHAIN reveals three interesting paradoxes with respect to the interaction of its members:

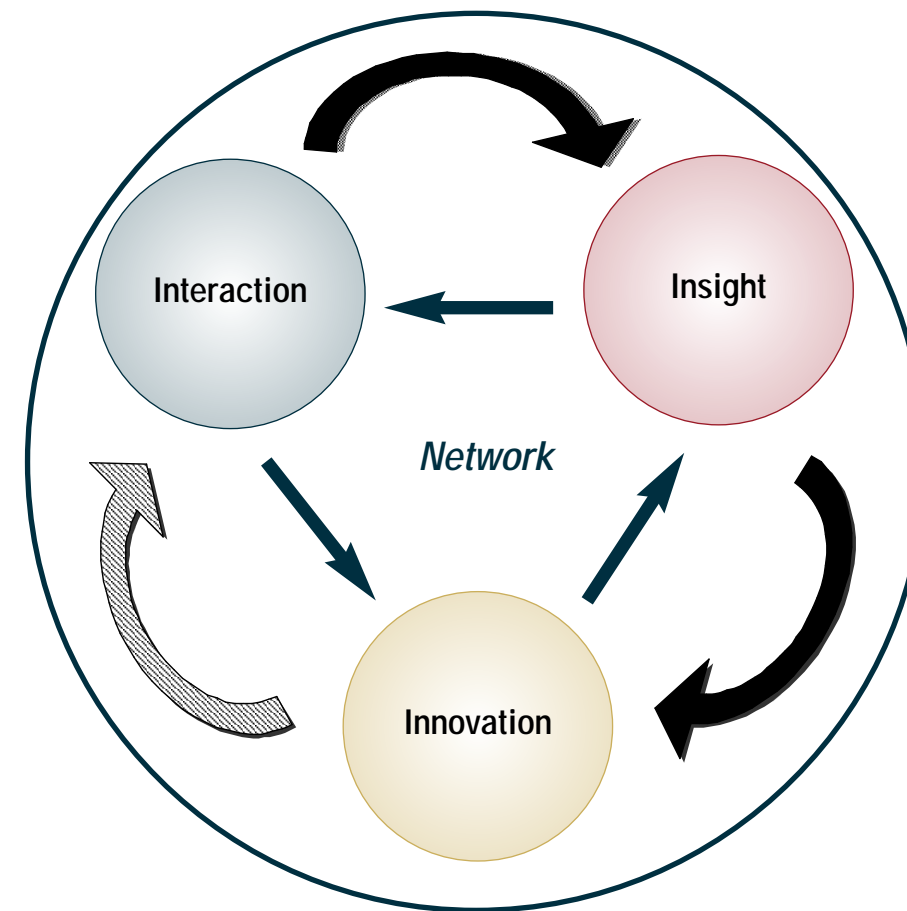
**LESS IS MORE** - Receiving a small number of messages about things that are really of interest is much more valuable than receiving many messages which are irrelevant or only vaguely interesting.

**PASSIVE CAN BE PARTICIPATIVE** - Not all members of CHAIN are pro-active in their use of the network. Many CHAIN members prefer just to receive an occasional e-mail message about things in which they are particularly interested. Using CHAIN in this way can, however, be participative. This is because recipients of targeted messages frequently respond to requests or invitations to give advice or to collaborate.

**WEAKNESS IS STRENGTH** - Social cohesion can be enriched by the proliferation of loose linkages, whereas it may be weakened by over-dependence on strong relationships. With a membership spanning geographies, organizations, professions, and hierarchies, CHAIN is a truly diverse network.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Although often credited as being the inventor of the light bulb, Thomas Edison relied heavily on his network consisting of people from across the electric, telegraph, and gas industries. It was through this interaction and the insight he gained into other industries that he was able to apply existing ideas in new ways to come up with his invention (Hargadon, 2003).



This diagram is representative of the link between insight, interaction, and innovation within a network. Most commonly, innovation is sparked by interaction that over time (or perhaps at just the right time) triggers insight resulting in something new. This is depicted by the dark arrows. Other formulas are also possible: sometimes it is innovation that leads to interaction and then insight; or insight that inspires interaction and results in innovation. The idea is that these three elements seem to work together in various ways within networks; the cycle has many entry points and can rotate in multiple directions.

CHNET-Works!, as a knowledge exchange intervention to promote interactions, is indeed able to attract a variety of health professionals who are able to gain insights into each other's problems and solutions.

By bringing together expertise and experience across networks, jurisdictions, and professional boundaries within community health, CHNET-Works! opens doors for the transfer of knowledge among groups and individuals who would not otherwise have this opportunity.

CHAIN provides an alternative communication infrastructure to enable ideas and experience to flow freely across multi-professional, non-hierarchical, and cross-organizational infrastructures. Membership of the three interconnected networks is based on interest and willingness to share, rather than by profession, status, organizational, or geographical identity. Using simple, online databases and facilitated targeted e-mails, CHAIN enables and encourages individuals to share their experience, knowledge, and aspirations.

## INTERESTING HISTORICAL FACT

Isaac Newton may never have become known as the world's greatest scientist had it not been for the insight of another man within his social network of peers. In the late 1600s, Edmund Halley and Sir Christopher Wren were grappling with trying to find mathematical proof for explaining planetary orbits. Halley recalled that Newton had claimed to have this proof and sought his help with their problem. Newton, being quite disorganized, took months to finally find the document that Halley was after, and it was only after Halley urged him to publish that the world was introduced to *The Principia*, which is widely recognized as the greatest scientific book ever written (Ward, 2005).

- By bringing together people with an interest in research, evidence-based practice, workplace-based learning, innovation, and improvement, CHAIN has created a hotbed for innovation in healthcare. Likewise, CHNET-Works! is doing the same by giving its members the opportunity to think outside of the box.
- CHAIN and CHNET-Works! support "early adopters" by enabling and encouraging those with enthusiasm for a topic to learn from each other.
- Both networks deliberately blur boundaries and provide a mechanism for natural, rapid, and informal communication, improving the integration of research with the needs and opportunities of practice and policy contexts.
- Anticipated outcomes include improving the fit of research outputs to practice priorities; increasing the receptiveness of practitioners and managers to emerging research evidence; and an enlightenment function, such as encouraging members to think about ideas and strategies they may not have otherwise considered.