



The banner features the 'wec 2012' logo in red and black, with 'World Education Congress' and 'July 28-31 • St. Louis, Missouri' in black text. To the right is the MPI logo with a globe icon and the text 'Continue to mpiweb.org' with a red arrow. Below the banner is a dark navigation bar with buttons for 'Education', 'Schedule', 'Information', 'Events', and 'Travel'. The 'Register for WEC 2013' button is highlighted in purple.

Harvard Professor and Bestselling Author of *Connected*, [Nicholas Christakis](#) spoke to a full house at the closing general session of the Meeting Professionals International 2012 World Education Congress. The following article was posted by Jason Hensel on July 31, 2012 on the MPI's WEC website.



Social Networks Transmit Behaviors and Emotions

Face-to-face social networks have been around for tens of thousands of years and have a profound impact on the way people think, feel and behave, Harvard University professor Nicholas Christakis told participants at the closing general session of MPI's 2012 World Education Congress.

Christakis distinguished a social network from a random group of unrelated people, noting that "a network has ties, and specific ties" that enable it to function in many different ways. "A network, in addition to having the constituent individuals, also has the connections between those individuals," and the connections fall into two categories, artificial and natural.

The simplest example of an artificial network is a bucket brigade. If 100 people are lined up in a row, they have 99 ties among them, and "the group now has properties it didn't have before, like the ability to put out a fire," he said. The same hundred people, organized as a phone tree in which each individual phones two others, "is now optimized for the efficient, accurate, rapid transmission of information."

But natural social networks have a different look and a very different function.

"To my eyes, these social networks are intricate things of beauty," Christakis said. "They are so elaborate, so complex, and so ubiquitous that one has to wonder what purpose they serve," how they form and how they affect the people they bring together.

Christakis and a colleague studied patterns of obesity dating to the 1970s to search for any evidence that social networks influenced individual behaviors. They concluded that weight gain or loss spreads within social systems, between spouses, siblings, friends or co-workers. The same dynamic could apply to people who attend a meeting and hear the same thing at the same time: "It can ripple through the network and affect you."

The same applies to the spread of emotions through networks and in crowds, with people who are happy or unhappy tending to cluster together.

"Being in the center of things, organizing things, being able to connect to other people, confers certain emotional advantages," he said.