



Main Article: The Connected Age

In today's world, we can video chat with family, collaborate with colleagues long-distance, and research potential business partners on the other side of the world. We can monitor our dairy herd health on our laptops, control irrigation systems with our smart phones, and plant and harvest our fields without even being in the tractor. The technology explosion over the past 10 years has yielded The Connected Age, a time when the increasing connections between people and data are changing how we interact and how we do business. This new era takes us beyond The Information Age.

"The connectedness we're experiencing is offering a host of opportunities for agile organizations, at the same time that it presents challenges to the way we're used to operating," Scott Binder, FCC Services CEO. "We need to stay connected to the changes happening in the world so we can focus on the right things and are very intentional in where we invest time and energy as we develop our business plans and our employees."

Connectedness is allowing businesses to access better resources at lower prices; it's enabling them to facilitate more efficient knowledge sharing and collaboration; it's supporting better product development and idea generation; and it's creating a greater level of virtual collaboration and a growing number of remote employees.

"This connected world offers enormous potential for sharing ideas and perspectives, and for garnering resources, human and otherwise," says Jean Cantey Segal, Senior Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting for FCC Services. "Businesses need to be thinking about how to support a new approach to working, and what tools will be needed to help their employees work together and even benefit from the new paradigm."

The ability to work remotely has another implication: "Because we live in a globally connected world and people themselves are more mobile because they can stay connected to family wherever they are, job seekers are effectively competing with the entire world," says Jean.



Businesses should recognize this as an opportunity: technology has grown the talent pool exponentially and they can now hire the most talented individuals without concern for where they're located. As they're considering new hires, businesses should also be looking for a new set of skills in order to thrive in this Connected Age: literacy in the new media, the ability to search out and make sense of large amounts of information, and the ability to virtually collaborate.

A flexible work environment supported by today's connectedness can present challenges to managers as they need to find new ways to manage. "Historically, a manager saw his or her staff every day, and could literally watch what they were doing," says Jay Lux, Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting. "In the future, they'll need to be able to connect in a different way using new technologies, and grow comfortable with managing results rather than managing activities."

Other skills and attributes are also becoming more important given the increasing speed of change and technological advancement, one of the most important being adaptability. "The things employees are asked to do are changing a lot more quickly and the strongest employees are those who are flexible and willing to enhance their skills to embrace the changes," says Jay.

Today's environment also requires the ability to analyze the wealth of information that's available almost immediately, and make complex decisions more quickly. Analytical skills are, of course, important attributes in the executive suite, where leaders are analyzing more complicated data streaming in faster than ever; these skills are growing equally important on the front line, as loan officers are now responsible for making larger and more complex loans than as recently as five years ago, says Jay.

Even as technology evolves more and more rapidly, and as we're all inundated with an increasing amount of information and being required to adapt more quickly to new ways of doing things, there's another influence at hand: we're living longer and it's expected that we'll be working longer as a result. This means that to remain relevant, we're going to need to continue to learn new technologies and new skills.

"We all need to develop a natural curiosity and the desire to be life-long learners because our skills are going to have to develop and change," says Scott. "Not learning is not an option anymore. To do this with intention, FCC Services rolled out our 2017 initiatives in January, and investing in employee development is one of them."

Businesses, too, will need to become learning organizations. "As organizations plan their strategies for navigating the new connected age, it's essential that they pay attention to what new technologies are being developed and how they'll impact their businesses," says Scott. "It's difficult to predict where and how the changes will come, but it's undeniable that things are changing faster and faster, and it's



incumbent upon businesses to keep their antennae up, identify the changes that are coming, develop the skills to meet the new demands, and implement the right strategies to capitalize on the opportunities the technologies present.”

In 2017, the FCC Services Conference theme is *The Connected Age*. Join us at a conference to explore many of the points raised above and more!