5 The Leader as Architect:
Creating an Enabling Organizational Infrastructure

Leaders who have steeped themselves in new media will testify that it requires them to navigate between potentially conflicting goals: they must strive to establish an organizational and technical infrastructure that encourages free exchange but also enforce controls that mitigate the risks of irresponsible use. This is a tough organizational-design challenge.

Most companies have a defined formal organization, with explicit vertical systems of accountability. But below the surface of org charts and process manuals we find an implicit, less manageable "informal organization," which has always been important and now gets amplified through social media. The leader's task is to marry vertical accountability with networked horizontal collaboration in a way that is not mutually destructive.

This challenge is reflected in GE's policies, which embrace the value of sharing expertise and perspectives with family, friends, colleagues, customers, and other stakeholders around the world. With this openness comes a shared responsibility: employees must observe GE standards of transparency and integrity, refrain from speaking on behalf of the company without authorization, and be clear in their social messaging that their views are personal.

In this spirit, creating a social architecture that provides a meaningful space for internal and external interactions has been an ongoing mission for Andrew Way, vice president of GE's Oil & Gas Drilling & Surface Division. "I love the social-media stuff," he says, "so I surround myself with an organization that supports it."

In Way's last role in the division, he and his team launched a video project about the history and current timeline of the business. Since the videos are shared with customers, team members must make choices about which content can cross external boundaries. "It's an evolving thing. Every quarter, the team adds a new segment that features important things that happened in the last three months. It has resulted in a continuing story, and people look forward to every new version."

Way says that the videos have united division members around common goals, helping to bring new employees on board and making everyone more proficient in using new media. "Three years ago, an effort like this would have used PowerPoint with a standardized font. It clearly has created a new culture." Boosting engagement with stakeholders such as customers is an added benefit, since videos often include them in segments to help tell stories.