

Changing more than a name

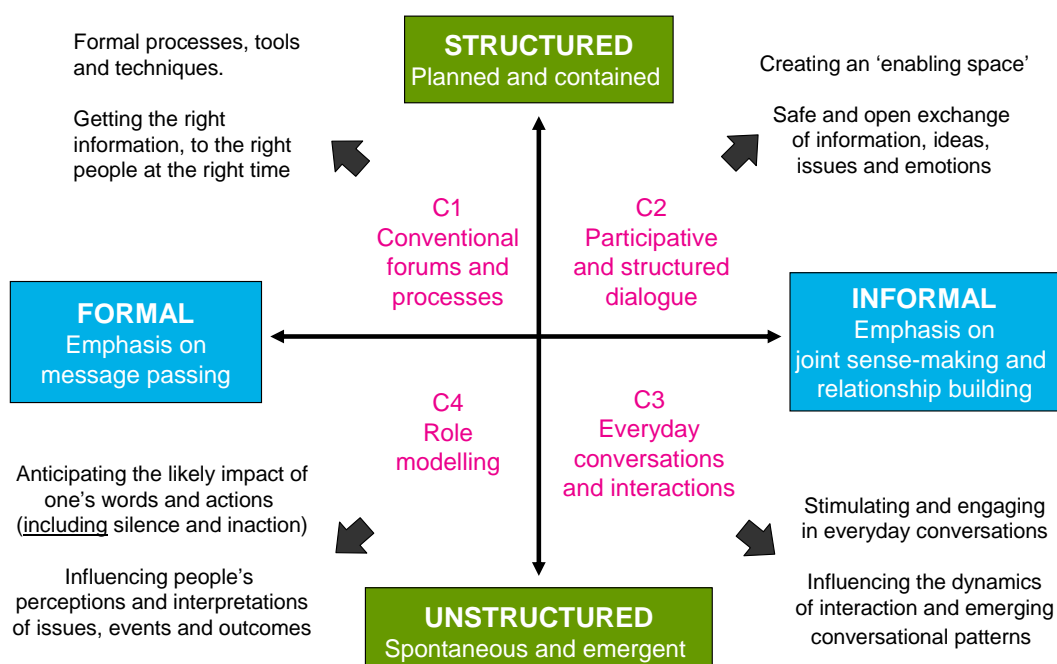
## Four-channel communications - the *Leadership Communications Grid*

Research and experience suggests that at times of significant change, effective communication is vital in order to maintain engagement and focus and to secure constructive outcomes. Yet the ineffectiveness of internal communication within organisations is one of the most common criticisms to emerge from many employee opinion surveys and the like.

When delving further into the topic, what most people tend to immediately think of when asked to describe communications channels within their organisation are formal, structured, planned processes and tools such as:

- Presentations
- Team meetings
- All-employee-bulletins
- Internal magazines
- Departmental newsletters
- e-mails
- Intranet sites

All of these make an important contribution to the overall effectiveness of communication, yet they by no means represent a comprehensive toolkit. The Leadership Communications Grid (Rogers, 2007) is a helpful way of considering the much broader spectrum of communications channels at play in the workplace - planned and unplanned, formal and informal - as illustrated below:



The examples identified earlier pretty much all fall within Channel 1 (C1) – formal and structured.

C2 activities (informal and structured) might include the type of interactive session you've taken part in on this programme, where we've provided an overall structure or framework for you to work within (setting up tasks and exercises) but where those conversations exactly go, and how you work with the prompts you've been given, is actually very emergent and largely uncontrolled. Other examples could include team away-days, question and answer sessions, e-dialogue sessions/webinars, or reflective discussions within meetings.

C1 and C2 encompass many of the classical approaches to leadership and communication, yet there are also two other channels that are equally worthy of attention from the leader's perspective and yet which tend to receive much less attention.

C3 (informal and unstructured) activities are those spontaneous events - perhaps best symbolised by the term 'water cooler' moments - where people connect with others in relatively free and unguarded ways and share whatever is on their minds. This is where people truly make sense of what's going on around them, and shape each other's interpretation of events.

C4 (formal and unstructured) in Roger's model is essentially all about the micro-signals that you transmit all day, every day - some conscious, but many unconscious – that combine together in other people's minds to subtly impact the overall success, or otherwise, of the messages you are trying to transmit.

In a way, C4 helps to explain what lies behind well-used expressions 'it's not what you say but what you do'; or 'you have to walk the walk as well as talk the talk'. The way in which other people interpret your actions (or inactions) is a huge part of how they receive and interpret the overall message you are attempting to send.

The following exercise will help you to reflect on the relative 'mix' of communications channels you are currently using in the workplace, and to start to consider how you might refine your approach to secure more consistent and positive outcomes in the future.

**Exercise:**      **Finessing your message**

**Stage 1:**

Identify a significant piece of communication that you are currently engaged in.

Identify how you are currently 'getting the message across' by placing examples in each of the quadrants below:

C1 (Formal, structured)	C2 (Informal, structured)
C4 (Formal, unstructured)	C3 (Informal, unstructured)

What insights does this give you?

**Stage 2:**

Thinking specifically about Channel 4, how good a job are you doing right now at **'being the message'**? In particular...

What behaviours are you demonstrating that are supportive?

What behaviours are you demonstrating that may be getting in the way?

What are you going to do to more of/less of/differently to improve the clarity and impact of the 'message' you are sending?

**Recommendation:** Whilst the above exercise is designed for you as an individual to reflect on how well you are personally 'being the message', it is equally possible for a group to use a similar process to reflect on the way it communicates with key stakeholders.

**Why not use part of a forthcoming team meeting to review how your team might adjust the mix of communications channels it uses to improve impact and effectiveness?**