
COMMUNICATIONS AS A CHANGE INTERVENTION

A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS BLUEPRINT FOR
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

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ABOUT CHRISTINA

COMMS + OD



Internal and HR Communications Leader
Consumer and Brand Communications Executive
C-Suite Executive Communications Lead
Culture Transformation Communications Strategist
Narrative Architect
Corporate & Community Sponsorships and Partnerships
Masters in OD, Change Consultant
Strategic Planning Facilitation
Manager & Leader Development Programs
Team Design & Assessments
ICF Certified Executive Coach



NORDSTROM



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OBJECTIVES & TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Understand the Role Comms can Play in OD Change**
- 2 Introduce Three Proven Comms for Change Frameworks**
- 3 Discuss Ways OD/Comms Can Partner Better**

The Opportunity: Change Comms for Change

70%+

**OF CHANGE
EFFORTS FAIL**

McKinsey, Kotter, and others consistently find poor communications at the root

Zero

**RECOGNIZED
STANDARDS**

No published standard for change **communications** exists within academic research and MSOD doesn't teach it

Gap

**IN COMMS FOR
CHANGE
PLANNING**

Groups develop change strategy but pull in communications too late AND Communications Teams let them or aren't contracted to join early

"Communication is frequently cited as essential, yet literature provides limited guidance on how to operationalize it as a core intervention rather than a downstream activity." – OD Review, Watt, 2026

Why We Need to Think About Communications in New Ways Now

01

A Divided World

Organizations are more diverse, distributed, and politically complex than ever. Creating shared vision across genuine difference requires more than messaging - it requires skilled dialogue, co-creation, and the ability to build meaning across competing perspectives.

02

An Urgent Need for Adaptability

The pace of change demands organizations that align quickly. The time between 'strategy decided' and 'people moving' must compress, and that happens more quickly when people feel genuine authorship and agency.

03

A Flattened Communications Landscape

AI has flooded organizations with content that looks right but lands flat. Audiences feel the difference between information and meaning, even when they can't name it. The premium is now on communications built with purpose and with people - not broadcast at them.

The organizations that will move fastest can build genuine alignment across differences and distances.

Brene Brown on Transformation Communications

“I have seen internal communications tank a transformation effort, and I have seen internal communications elevate a transformation beyond what we thought was possible. I’ve seen it slightly diminish our effort and slightly contribute.

What I’ve never seen is net neutral communications.

We’ve come to the point in our work that our initial assessment includes understanding how an organization invests in and thinks about their internal communications practices. It’s critically important.”

Strong Ground: The Lessons of Daring Leadership, the Tenacity of Paradox, and the Wisdom of the Human Spirit.

Defining Communications

Big "C" Communications

What most people mean by Communications:

- ✓ Narratives and messaging
- ✓ Campaigns, platforms, and materials
- ✓ Change/crisis communication
- ✓ Content strategy and channels
- ✓ Brand and external communications

Essential work. Communications teams do this brilliantly.



little "c" communications

The skills that activate transformation:

- **Facilitating dialogue across difference**
- **Helping people make sense of ambiguity**
- **Co-creating shared vision and meaning**
- **Building consensus and collective buy-in**
- **Holding space for resistance and emotion**

Requires a different mindset and capabilities.

**What becomes possible when we think
about communications this way?**

Collaborative Communications

A proven communications for change approach using Appreciative Inquiry and Purposeful Narrative strategy that drives meaningful alignment and momentum.

FRAMEWORK 1

The Comms Change Map gives us the big planning picture.

- ✓ Whole System, Global Scale & Adaptable
- ✓ Comms-First Perspective
- ✓ Built-in Best Practices for Change
- ✓ Appreciative Inquiry Principles

COMMS CHANGE MAP

COMMS CHANGE MAP: GTM APPROACH

COMMS – Develops for All Employees, All Managers, All Leaders, reviews all others
HR/OD – Program Team Develops for HR to HR, Exec Comms, and smaller audiences
 ○ Both

**HR/
OD**

- Data-driven
- Contextualize & create urgency
- Proof of concept + systemic needs
- Listening: focus groups/interviews
- Develop Problem Statement/Objectives

- HR Teams/Partners Engaged
- Develop “preview” background materials for key stakeholders
- Learning solutions readied
- Embed into the whole system
- Design launch plan to end audiences including key timing

- Deliver materials for HR & Exec Launch Readiness:
- SLT & BOD
 - Chiefs of Staff & HRLT
 - In-Business Comms & Leads

- Showcase quick wins
- Monitor feedback & data and adjust messaging and channels as needed
- Deliver planned storytelling as program and budget allows
- Ongoing Change Management

COMMS

Phase 1 Define/Program Planning

- Discover/Dream Workshop
- Develop Master Narrative & Messaging
- Socialize narrative & gain buy-in
- Approve messaging

Phase 2 Discover & Dream/ Narrative Architecture

Phase 3 Design/GTM Plan/HR Engagement

- Design/Approve Bill of Materials (BOM) with program team
- BOM may include Branding, Microsite, Talking Points, Overview Deck & One-sheet, FAQ, Videos, Playbook, etc.

Phase 4 Design/GTM Materials Developed

Phase 5 Deliver/ Stakeholder Readiness

Phase 6 Deliver/Launch

Phase 7 Deliver/Sustainment

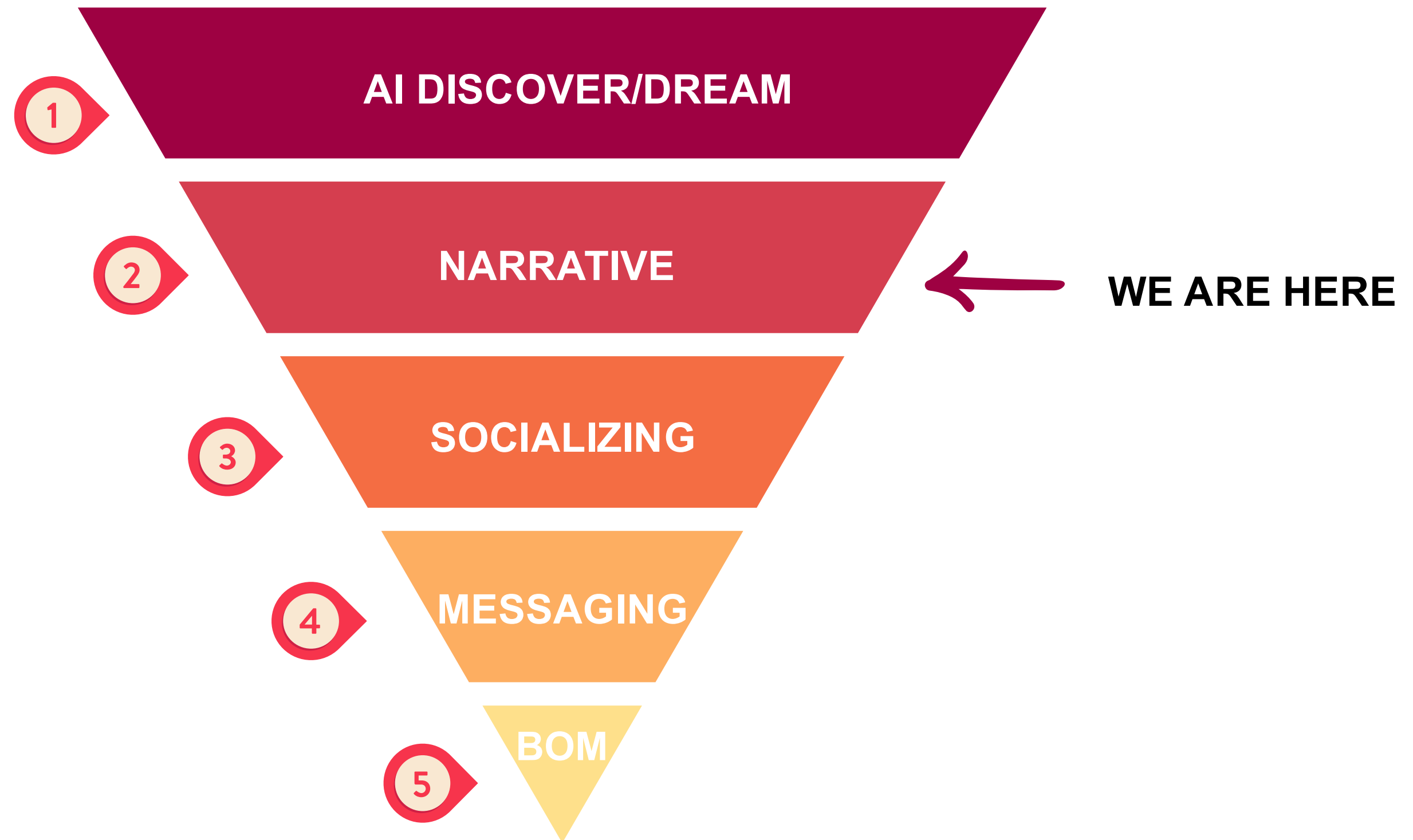
Launch delivery may include:

- SLT Sponsor Email
- Sponsor Videos
- Internal Microsite
- All-Employee Town Hall/In-Org All-Hands
- SLT Email Cascade
- New Program Branded Email/Comms

COMPLEMENTS KEY CHANGE MODELS

Comms Change Map Phases	AI 5 D's	Planned Change	Kotter	Lewin	Real Time Strategic Change (A Whole Systems Change Approach)
Phase 1 – Define Problem & Program Planning	Define	Entering & Contracting Diagnosing	1. Create Urgency	Unfreeze	Scoping Possibilities
Phase 2 – Narrative Architecture & Socialization	Discover & Dream	Diagnosing	2. Form a Powerful Coalition 3. Create a Vision for Change 4. Communicate the Vision 5. Remove Obstacles 8. Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture	Unfreeze	Scoping Possibilities
Phase 3 - GTM Plan and HR Engagement	Design	Planning & Implementing	2. Form a Powerful Coalition 5. Remove Obstacles	Change	Developing and Aligning Leadership and Followership
Phase 4 – GTM Materials Developed	Design	Planning & Implementing	3. Create a Vision for Change	Change	Creating Organization-Wide Congruence
Phase 5 – Stakeholder Readiness	Deliver/Destiny	Planning & Implementing	2. Form a Powerful Coalition 4. Communicate the Vision	Change	Developing and Aligning Leadership and Followership Creating Organization-Wide Congruence
Phase 6 - Launch	Deliver/Destiny	Planning & Implementing	4. Communicate the Vision	Change	Creating Organization-Wide Congruence
Phase 7 - Sustainment	Deliver/Destiny	Evaluating & Institutionalizing	6. Create Short-Term Wins 7. Build on the Change	Refreeze	Creating Organization-Wide Congruence

BUILDING A NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE



CASE STUDY

MICROSOFT HYBRID/FLEXIBILITY WORK

PROGRAM GOALS:

- 
- Help employees understand the company's expectations of them
 - Launch and clarify new flexibility policies
 - Position MSFT as a company that cares and has a great culture
 - Reinforce the mission of empowerment
 - Ease return to the office anxiety
-

A Narrative is most valuable when the altitude of change is high and you need alignment you can use as a filter to measure change progress:

- ✓ Enterprise Level — Shifts to culture, values, or mission that affect the whole company
- ✓ Program Level — Large initiatives that require sustained behavior change or umbrella messaging
- ✓ Team/Project Level — When groups are stuck, need clarity, or must build consensus

And especially when:

- ✓ The stakes are high for change to succeed
- ✓ You need to create shared energy and momentum across audiences
- ✓ You have to keep stakeholders moving in the same direction

WHEN SHOULD I BUILD A NARRATIVE?

Truly great narratives ignite hope, belonging, and agency.

- ✓ Purposeful - Ties to Meaning: Culture, Mission
- ✓ Emotional Resonance
- ✓ Rhythmic & Repetitive: Cadence Counts
- ✓ Contain Commitments & Beliefs
- ✓ Aspirational & Achievable - PUSH HERE
- ✓ Build Internal Momentum & Alignment
- ✓ Co-Created and Fits on a Single Slide

**WHAT MAKES
A TRULY
GREAT
NARRATIVE?**

THE SCIENCE OF PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVES

Purpose makes narratives matter. Rhythm makes narratives stick. Together, they create momentum for change.

Purposeful Narratives

- **Tap into people's innate desire to seek meaning/make a difference (WIFM)**
- **Promote trust, empathy & connection**
- **Create Memorability, Anticipation, & Signals Importance**
- **Align head (think), heart (feel), & hands (do).**
- **Release oxytocin, cortisol, dopamine, serotonin & adrenaline**
- **Increase connection, urgency & focus**
- **Engage emotion & drive behavioral impact**

“Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.”- JFK

In the rapidly changing world of work, our mission—to empower every individual and every organization on the planet to achieve more—is more important than ever. This is as true for our employees as it is for our customers. Empowered employees reward their employer with loyalty and passion. They collaborate and innovate. They feel a deep sense of purpose and seek to bring it to life through their work.

We are committed to empowering employees through bold new ways of working that shifts paradigms, embraces flexibility, creates enduring connections, promotes inclusion, and drives innovation. It is imperative that we design a work environment that is effective, productive, and collaborative in meaningful ways for both individual and collective impact. Most importantly, we are committed to respecting both individual workstyles and business needs while living our culture. We believe in impact, not hours worked, and we know that accountability is key to rewarding and recognizing hard work. We trust our employees to make informed decisions and choose to do what is best for their individual and our collective success.

We know that designing a global hybrid workplace will take time. As always, we will learn, grow, and innovate. We will evolve over time with intention—guided by data, sound policies, and fiscal responsibility. We know our customers look to us to lead the way and we take pride in this honor and responsibility. When we empower our people to define how they do their best work, we will empower the planet to achieve more.



**Resonance/Rhythm x (Purpose/Mission + Context + People + Proof + Commitments + Desired Outcome/Impact)
= Momentum & Change**

- **Resonance/Rhythm** (AI WORKSHOPS/Think–Feel–Do–Say and rhythmic cadence applied to all elements)
- **Purpose/Mission** (WHY)
- **Context** (WHY NOW: Urgency/journey/desired future state)
- **People** (WHO: audiences, stakeholders, individual & collective)
- **Proof** (WHAT: data & insights, external & internal)
- **Commitments** (HOW: Beliefs, behaviors, expectations, principles)
- **Outcome/Impact** (SO WHAT: What's possible now?/Re-align mission)

COMPONENTS OF A PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVE

Our mission is to **[state purpose/mission]**. In a world of **[context/challenge]**, this mission is more important than ever.

We know that success depends on **[who/people]**. Research shows **[external proof]**, and internally we see **[internal proof]**. This tells us that **[key insight]**.

To live our mission, we commit to **[behavior 1]**, **[behavior 2]**, and **[behavior 3]**. This means we must **[specific expectations or principles]**.

When we do this together, we will **[outcome/impact]**, and in doing so, we will realize our mission to **[impact on mission restated]**.

COACHING COMMS LEADERS: A CASE STUDY

The Challenge: Helping a Comms Leader Expand their Role from Order-Taker to Meaning-Maker

Approach: Combined Change Theory, Facilitation Guidance, and Appreciative Inquiry Principles with Purposeful Narratives Elements introduced through Coaching and Co-Created Design Work

Two-Step Process for Company Integration Post-Acquisition

Define Stage: Key Stakeholder Interviews to Build the Problem Statement

Discover/Dream Stage : A One-Hour Workshop with Sr. Leaders

- **Peak Experience:** Think of time when this (situation) worked exceptionally well. What made it work?
- **Great Future State:** What would great look like here (our program) – and what would it make possible?
- **Think/Feel Do:** What do people need to feel and believe for this to succeed?
- **Systems/Commitments/Next Steps:** What do we need to change or commit to now to make this possible?

Results: A road map for Whole Scale Change Work with a clear future state narrative backbone, commitments, and a filter to measure progress and ensure ongoing alignment.

COMMS LEADER:

"It was so nice to truly sit in coach mode with this senior team. We're so oriented towards the STUFF, that I think it will be important for me to use my role to keep bringing people back to the experience/emotional connection throughout our work, so this is an exercise we will keep coming back to. A key sentiment that emerged is that our teams need to feel we are developing something WITH them, not forcing it on them, so they are committed to walking that talk as a leadership team, which is the best outcome we could have hoped for. I really appreciate the new ways this is helping me to think and work, and I know I will continue to apply it. Thank you!"

CHRO:

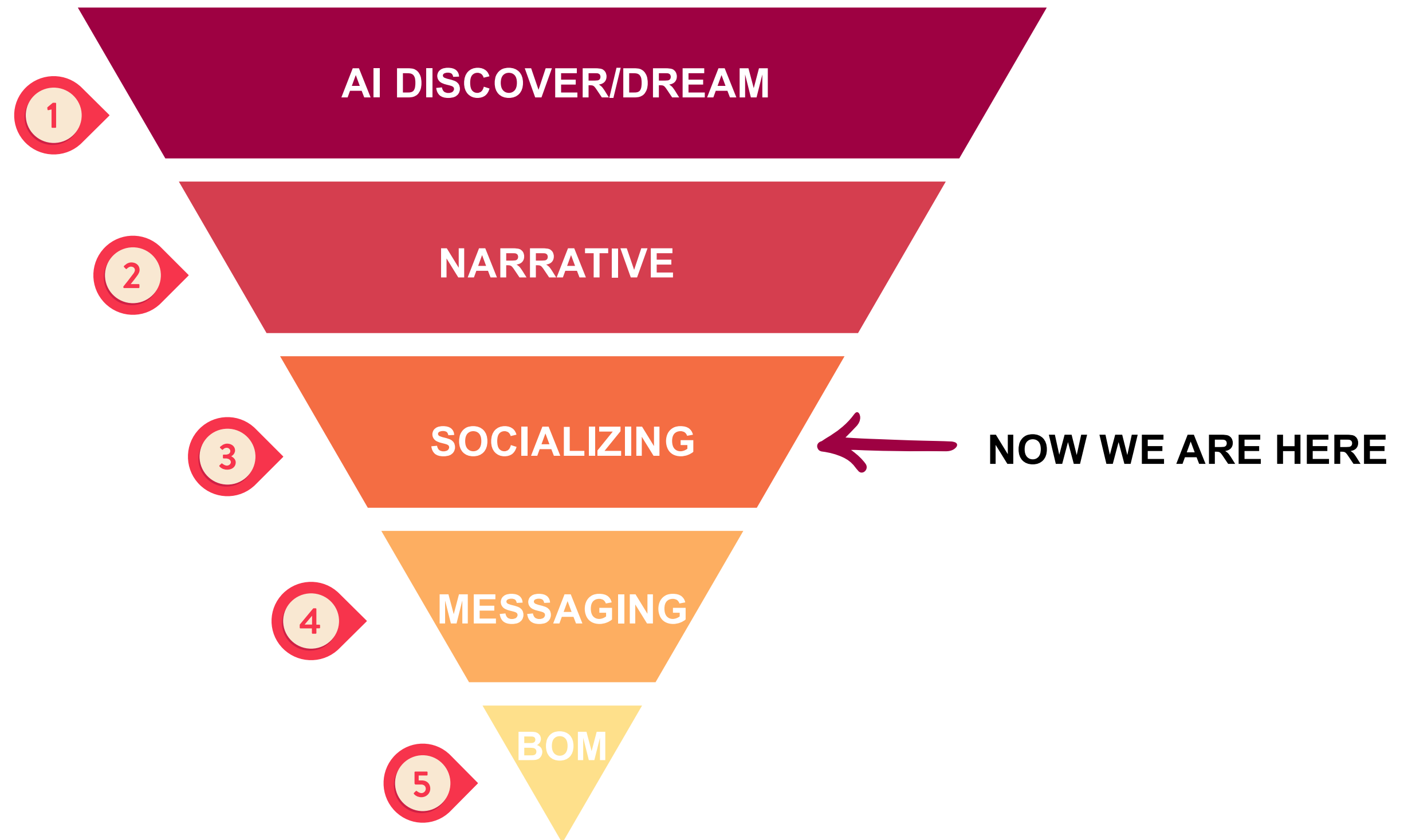
"A great comms team helps leaders make the connection between communication, engagement, and change adoption. That requires holding space for conversations that may feel more emotional - recognizing the very human elements necessary to drive change. It takes a strong comms lead to guide that conversation and help leaders step out of execution mode, into envisioning the future they want to create, and how they show up alongside the communications. It's about engaging leaders in the messaging so they see how their actions, behaviors, and words really bring the comms to life. That's exactly what our comms leader did here, with a group that doesn't always want to go there, and it was great to see it land so positively."

MESSAGING AND MOVEMENT

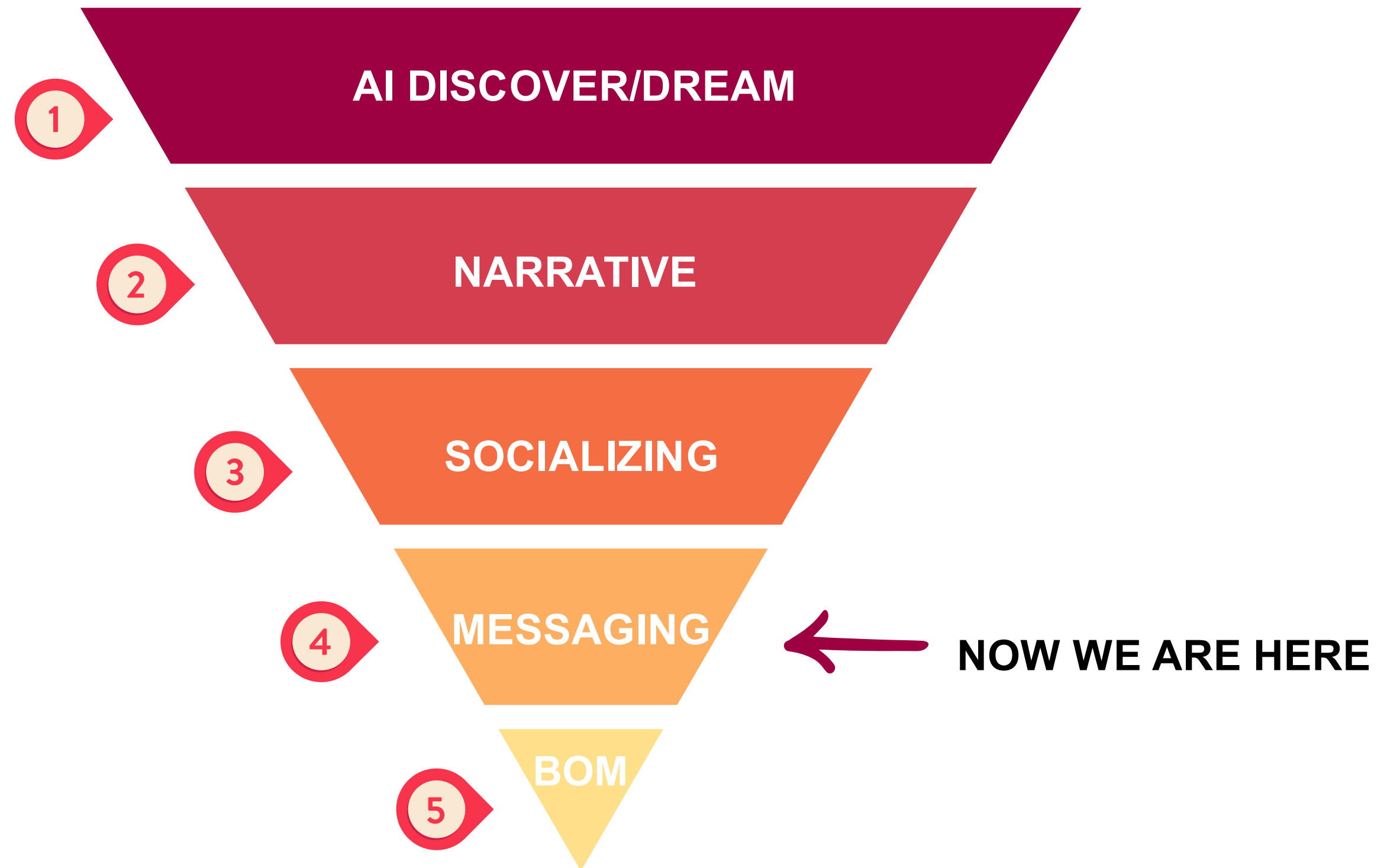
BRINGING IT TO LIFE

BUILDING A NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE

FRAMEWORK 2



BUILDING A NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE



RECOGNIZING MEMORABLE KEY MESSAGES

GOALS:



- Help you understand how to bridge from the Master Narrative to Key Messaging
- Confidence in recognizing memorable messages that move people to action
- Show you how to get started

KEY MESSAGING PRINCIPLES:



- Clear
- Compelling
- Credible
- Customized (For Internal AND External Audiences)
- Consistent

KEY MESSAGING FRAMEWORK EXAMPLE

FRAMEWORK 3

Master Narrative Themes	No-one-size-fits all - Offer as much flexibility as possible – Learn and grow over time - Empowerment - Trust – Culture + Business/Individual + Collective		
Messages	We will offer as much flexibility as possible to support individual workstyles while balancing business needs and ensuring we live our culture.		
	Flexibility can mean different things to each of us, and we recognize there is no one-size fits-all solution given the variety of roles, work requirements, and business needs we have at Microsoft.		
	We will learn, grow, and innovate. We will evolve over time with intention, guided by data and employee input.		
	We are committed to exploring new ways of working that shift paradigms, embrace flexibility, create enduring connections, promote inclusion, and drive innovation.		
	We have learned that now more than ever, flexibility, trust, and empowerment are key to delivering success.		
	We will, together as One Microsoft, build a hybrid workplace that empowers our people to do their best work so that we can empower everyone on the planet to achieve more.		
Supporting programs/initiatives	Include work site, work hours, and work location descriptions as needed.		

KEY MESSAGING FRAMEWORK (CHAT GPT)

FRAMEWORK 3

Master Narrative Themes	Empowerment as the Core Mission – New Ways of Working – Balancing Individual and Collective Needs – Continuous Learning & Evolution		
Messages	Empowered employees create loyalty, passion, collaboration, and innovation.		
	We are committed to flexible workstyles balanced with business needs.		
	Accountability and outcomes define success, not time at a desk.		
	We trust employees to make informed choices for individual and collective success.		
	Our hybrid workplace will grow over time, guided by data and responsibility, to lead customers and the world.		
Supporting programs/initiatives	Include work site, work hours, and work location descriptions as needed.		

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK MESSAGE FROM KATHLEEN HOGAN, MICROSOFT CHRO (SHARED EXTERNALLY)



The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged all of us to think, live, and work in new ways. As a company, we have proven that we are agile in the face of adversity, rising to meet business and customer needs while caring for loved ones and ourselves. Through all of this, we have learned that—now more than ever—flexibility, trust, and empowerment are key to delivering success.

We are committed to exploring new ways of working that shift paradigms, embrace flexibility, create enduring connections, promote inclusion, and drive innovation. We will offer as much flexibility as possible to support individual workstyles, while balancing business needs, and ensuring we live our culture.

This guide is a starting point to help both employees and managers understand our policies and guidelines and make informed decisions. It's important to keep in mind that options around where and when employees work may differ based on role or region, but my expectation is that we continue to enable a hybrid workplace where individuals, teams, and our business can be successful.

As always, we will learn, grow, and innovate. We will evolve over time with intention, guided by employee input. We will—together, as One Microsoft—build a hybrid workplace that empowers our people to do their best work so we can empower the planet to achieve more.

Kathleen Hogan

Chief People Officer, Microsoft

OFFICIAL MICROSOFT BLOG MESSAGE FROM KATHLEEN HOGAN, MICROSOFT CHRO (SHARED EXTERNALLY)



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Source

Embracing a flexible workplace

Oct 9, 2020 | Kathleen Hogan - Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer



Over the past few months, we have learned so much about productivity, flexibility, resilience, and compassion. We have been working in ways we never thought possible, including managing necessary safety precautions, learning to connect with small or large teams while presenting to a screen, taking care of family and friends while being in the next room on calls, adjusting hours to address new demands and so much more. And I am deeply empathetic that this is on top of navigating the emotional toll of all that we are witnessing and experiencing.

At the same time, the pandemic has raised questions about what our employees can expect in the future, so we provided some guidance this week to employees on our thinking about work flexibility. Moving forward, it is our goal to offer as much flexibility as possible to support individual workstyles, while balancing business needs and ensuring we live our culture.

Flexibility can mean different things to each of us, and we recognize there is no one-size-fits-all solution given the variety of roles, work requirements and business needs we have at Microsoft. To address this, we have provided guidance to employees to make informed decisions around scenarios that could include changes to their work site, work location, and/or work hours once offices are open without any COVID-19 restrictions. Our step-by-step guidance includes considerations like office space, salary and benefits, local law, personal taxes, expenses and more.

Our guidance includes:

- **Work site (the physical space where you work, e.g. office, center, home, mobile):** We recognize that some employees are required to be onsite and some roles and businesses are better suited for working away from the worksite than others. However, for most roles, we view working from home part of the time (less than 50%) as now standard – assuming manager and team alignment.
- **Work hours (the hours and days when employees work, e.g. workday start and end times, full- or part-time):** Work schedule flexibility is now considered standard for most roles. While part-time continues to be subject to manager approval, our guidance is meant to facilitate an open conversation between a manager and employee regarding considerations.
- **Work location (the geographic location where you work, e.g. city and country):** Similarly the guidance is there for managers and employees to discuss and address considerations such as role requirements, personal tax, salary, expenses, etc.

Our guidance is to help employees plan ahead for the future. For now, returning to many of our offices around the world is still optional for employees, except for essential onsite roles. While we've shared that we will challenge long-held assumptions and seek to be on the forefront of what is possible leveraging technology, we have also communicated that we are not committing to having every employee work from anywhere, as we believe there is value in employees being together in the workplace.

We will continue to evolve our approach to flexibility over time as we learn more.

Tags: [COVID-19](#), [employees](#)

FROM MANIFESTO TO MANIFESTED

Inc.

WORKING FROM HOME

Microsoft's New 6-Word Remote Work Policy Is Brilliant. Here's Why Your Company Should Steal It Microsoft's new policy is great because it recognizes its employees as individuals. And that's empowering. 

[Microsoft](#) recently announced new guidance for [remote work](#), and it has potential to change how the company works for years to come.

The biggest change: making work from home, at least part of the time, the new permanent standard. [Also](#) standard is "work schedule flexibility," which gives employees more freedom to choose the hours and days when they work, along with their workday start and end times.

Microsoft's announcement, which [you can read here in full](#), **does a great job of leading with empathy**. But I'd like to zoom in on a single sentence, because it reveals a major key to keeping employees happier and more productive:

"Moving forward, it is our goal to offer as much flexibility as possible to support individual work styles, while balancing business needs and ensuring we live our culture."

These six words advocate a brilliant business strategy founded on [emotional intelligence](#), the ability to [make emotions work for you, instead of against you](#). Let's break down why every company should implement it.

Why flexibility is invaluable

To understand why Microsoft's new policy is so great, you **have to** acknowledge a fundamental truth:

Your employees aren't just workers, they're individuals. Real people with different working styles, tastes, and preferences. This applies as much to the topic of remote work as to anything.

For example, one employee may prefer to work from home, so they can easily take their children to school. Another, also with children, may prefer working in the office for the opposite reason--so they can get away from the chaos of home.

Or, consider a single employee who lives alone. If more introverted, they may prefer to work from home where they don't have to have more than necessary contact with others, and can focus on their work. In contrast, a more extroverted person may prefer to come into the office, where they can have social contact and enjoy collaboration.

Of course, there are many who prefer a hybrid approach, with the choice to work in the office or at home, depending on the circumstances or simply how they feel that day.

So, how do you keep **all of** these employees happy?

Offer as much flexibility as possible.

"Flexibility can mean different things to each of us, and we recognize there is no one-size-fits-all solution given the variety of roles, work requirements, and business needs we have at Microsoft," writes Kathleen Hogan, Microsoft's chief people officer. In other words, you treat your employees like adults and give them the freedom to make the choice that's best for them--and allow them to take responsibility for those choices.

When adopting this policy, though, it's important you not constantly subject your employees to comparison. Managers will be tempted to look at the surface, judging the "stay-at-home" employee as more or less productive than the "office" employees. But remember: These aren't just workers, they're people. Each is an individual, with a unique personality. A unique set of strengths and weaknesses. A unique set of circumstances.

By providing **each individual** with flexibility, i.e., options to fit their circumstances, you provide them with the environment that allows those individuals to become the best version of themselves.

And that's empowering. So, for all you companies out there who are trying to figure out your own remote work policy, take a page from Microsoft's playbook and:

Offer as much flexibility as possible.

By doing so, you'll be using [emotional intelligence to build stronger relationships with your people](#). You'll give them the freedom they crave and need. You'll prove that you see them not just as cogs in a machine but as individuals. And that will put your people--and your company--in the best position to succeed.

1. What are you seeing differently now about the role Communications can play in whole scale change? What's possible?
2. What is one thing you want to experiment with or apply?
3. What questions or areas would you still like to explore more deeply?

**GO FORTH AND
COMMUNICATE.**

