Digital Storytelling as a Tool for Employee Engagement: A Literary Approach to HR Communication in the Age of AI

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Abstract

This article delivers an analytical piece on the concept of digital stories as an employee engagement tool in information-overloaded workplace environments and suggests an ethical, empirically testable model of HR communication in an AI world. The secondary qualitative review will synthesize peer reviewed and practitioner literature published between 2010 and 2025 and will involve illustrative analysis of publicly available internal artifacts. At work, stories have seven themes that describe their functioning. Stories construct meaning by connecting tasks to strategy, voice and co creation, more autonomy, and a sense of belonging, decisions in literary craft, character, setting, conflict, arc, motif, and tone determine identities, platform affords determine reach and depth, AI can enhance ideation, captions, and localization, and authenticity demands the provision of disclosure, consent, provenance, and accessibility, and the role of measurement is triangulation of pulse items, qualitative comments, and behavioral traces. A Literary HR Communication Model is presented in the paper that fits storycraft, engagement levers, channel and cadence, AI workflow and human editorial stewardship, and governance and ethics. A five-stage roadmap is used to guide Diagnose, Design, Develop, Deploy, and Measure. The review relates the literary studies, HR and internal communication, and HCI and AI, elucidates the mechanisms, and provides practical guardrails that help to present credible, inclusive stories.

Key Words: *Digital Storytelling*, *Employee Engagement, Communication in the Age of AI*

1. Introduction

Problem and context

Digital workplaces are saturated with tools and messages, yet many employees experience attention fatigue, cognitive overload, and declining trust in official communication. Information overload is associated with reduced comprehension, decision quality, and well-being, which undermines the goals of internal communication and employee engagement initiatives (Arnold et al., 2023). At the same time, organizations continue to invest in engagement programs, while evidence reviews show uneven definitions and measurement practices that make outcomes difficult to compare across settings (CIPD, 2024). The rise of artificial intelligence brings new capabilities for speed, clarity, accessibility, and language support within internal channels, but these affordances arrive alongside concerns about authenticity, bias, and disclosure in workplace narratives (Ateeq, Al Fadhel and Alkhawaja, 2024).

Gap in the literature

Storytelling is widely promoted as a solution for low attention and weak emotional resonance in internal communication. However, much of the guidance remains descriptive and tactical, with limited integration of established mechanisms from narrative research such as transportation, identification, and norm signalling that explain why stories change attitudes and behaviour (Bosone, Chiesi and Del Chiappa, 2023). The craft dimension of storytelling, including plot, character, conflict, setting, and tone, is rarely treated as an explicit and testable design choice in human resources communication. A second gap concerns governance in the age of artificial intelligence. While policy and legal scholarship warn that synthetic media can erode institutional trust without provenance and consent safeguards, many engagement playbooks omit concrete standards for disclosure, rights management, and accessibility in internal channels (Chesney and Citron, 2019; Partnership on AI, 2023). A third gap is methodological. Reviews often blend external brand narratives with internal communication, which obscures context specific constraints such as power dynamics, psychological safety, and voice. As a result, practice advice risks being appealing but under specified, and scaling through artificial intelligence risks amplifying sameness rather than credibility if guardrails are not defined (Arnold et al., 2023; Ateeq, Al Fadhel and Alkhawaja, 2024).

Aim

This article synthesises secondary evidence on digital storytelling for employee engagement and

proposes an actionable and ethical framework for human resources communication in the age of artificial intelligence.

Research questions

RQ1: How is digital storytelling conceptualised in workplace human resources and internal communication literature and practice

RQ2: Through what mechanisms does storytelling influence engagement outcomes

RQ3: How do artificial intelligence tools reshape authenticity, equity, and trust in internal narratives

RQ4: What design and governance principles enable effective adoption

Contribution and structure of the paper

The paper contributes in three ways. First, it integrates narrative theory with human resources and internal communication by mapping literary devices to engagement mechanisms such as meaning, voice, belonging, and efficacy, thereby turning appealing advice into design choices that can be tested in practice (Bosone, Chiesi and Del Chiappa, 2023). Second, it consolidates evidence on artificial intelligence as a mediator of communication effectiveness and translates this into implementable safeguards for transparency, consent, provenance, and accessibility within internal channels (Ateeq, Al Fadhel and Alkhawaja, 2024; Partnership on AI, 2023). Third, it delineates the workplace specific boundary conditions that are often under examined in generic storytelling guidance, namely information overload, trust deficits, and measurement inconsistency that shape what counts as credible communication inside organizations (Arnold et al., 2023; CIPD, 2024). Section two develops the theoretical and conceptual background. Section three explains the secondary qualitative method. Section four reports thematic findings. Section five presents a practitioner ready model with governance guardrails. Section six outlines implications. Section seven discusses limitations and future research. Section eight concludes.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Narrative foundations

Workplace communication is often framed as information transfer, yet employees make sense of work through stories that establish cause, character, and consequence. Fisher's narrative paradigm argues that people evaluate messages by narrative coherence and fidelity rather than by formal logic alone, which implies that internal communication must read as a good story to be persuasive in practice (Fisher, 1984). Sensemaking research adds that employees stitch cues from ambiguous

situations into plausible accounts that guide action; stories are the currency of that process, especially during change and uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Narrative transportation studies show that when people are absorbed in a story world, attitudes and intentions can shift, although effects depend on relevance, identification, and credibility of the source, which are not guaranteed in organizational hierarchies (Green and Brock, 2000).

Communication and motivation lenses

Media theories pose questions of whether the channel undertaken is appropriate in the complexity of message and the social requirements as well. The media richness theory argues that channels with a higher degree of richness can better communicate equivocal messages, but empirical studies indicate that the norms, training and audience preference are equally important to fit and a well-polished video might fail to communicate it well when it is deemed both inauthentic and top down (Daft and Lengel, 1986). The social presence theory reminds an individual that all perceptions of warmth and immediacy define the reception of the message, an issue that applies when the leaders are featured in digital story format yet may not be trusted by all audiences equally (Short, Williams and Christie, 1976). The elaboration likelihood model explains that stories can work through peripheral cues such as emotion and identification or through central processing when content is personally relevant; internal communication must decide when to invite reflection and when to aim for quick resonance, and then test those choices transparently (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Self Determination Theory predicts that communication that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness will energize motivation; stories that highlight voice, mastery, and community should therefore outperform transactional announcements, but only if employees recognize their own context in the narrative (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Social Exchange Theory explains engagement as a reciprocal response to perceived organizational support; if digital storytelling consistently signals care and fairness, employees are more likely to reciprocate with discretionary effort, although reciprocity collapses when stories are read as spin without follow through (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). The Job Demands Resources perspective integrates these ideas by treating communication as a resource that can buffer demands and build engagement, while warning that the same channel can become a demand if volume or tone increases strain (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Employee engagement constructs

Engagement has been defined as cognitional, emotional and behavioural interest in role

performance. The conditions proposed by Kahn to engage with the psychological safety, meaningfulness and availability are in line with those of narrative strategies that provide line of sight to purpose and welcome voice without fear (Kahn, 1990). Later studies attribute engagement as being dependent on antecedents including perceived organizational support and meaningful communication but it also records possible inconsistency of measurement among organizations (Saks, 2006). In practice, this implies the use of mixed indicators. It is possible to monitor clarity, voice, and belonging with pulse items. Triangulation occurs through use of behavioral signals like attendance of change activities and the rate of accomplishing story linked activities. Headline metrics such as employee net promoter score are popular but should be considered as a single application of many as it is a construct overlap and is not very diagnostic with regard to communication design. The theoretical implication is apparent. The effectiveness of a story should not be measured using just one number but it should be measured using a basket of measures that indicate cognition, emotion and behavior aspects.

Literary toolkit for HR communication

The literary prism interprets abstraction as making craft choices. Character gives attention to the one speaking and the one being perceived. Peer amplification offers greater chances of identifying and gaining credibility and exclusive focus on leadership may come at the cost of estranging. Plot is beneficial to cause movement by creating conflict and resolution. Honest narrations of setbacks and fixes tend to be more successful than blindly successful reels since they bring about knowledge and effectiveness. Location Grounding stories in locations and communities that the employees are familiar with. Tone governs trust, poor language used with solemnity can go further within organizations as compared to melodramatic slogans. The recurring motif, the recurring image or phrase, can tie the serial content into a familiar story world. These machines are non-window idealizing. They are controlling variables which can be designed and experimented. Micro stories are befitting mobile attention and can be published in a routine frequency. Serialised story worlds have the ability to scaffold the complex change by the fact that each episode further a through line that can be predictable by employees. A critical caveat follows. Philosophical exquisiteness in literature without scholastic background appears as acting. Craft should go in hand in hand with willing involvement and on-screen follow-ups to matters demanded in the tale.

AI era dynamics

The ability to write copy, caption video, and localize content in a speedy manner has been

demonstrated by generative systems and reduces the production barriers and makes content more accessible to multilingual and neurodivergent audiences. Meanwhile, it has been noted that large scale language models reproduce majority patterns and smooth stylistic variation: potentially resulting in a sameness of voice that undermines credibility when it is excessively deployed (Bender et al., 2021). The studies conducted at the level of foundational model offer the opportunity and risk scale with the increase in sensitivity to prompts and facts grounding difficulty and worse performance across languages and dialects, all of which would be relevant in achieving a fair internalized communication (Bommasani et al., 2022). Synthetic media raises a different set of threats. Audio or video that looks and sounds real can be generated without consent, which means employees need clear disclosure, provenance, and rights management inside the firewall, not only in external brand work (Mirsky and Lee, 2021). Accessibility standards provide a positive counterweight. Captioning, transcripts, alt text, and contrast guidelines improve reach and trust when applied consistently to stories across channels (W3C, 2023). The critical point is governance. Without disclosure of AI assistance and without inclusive review, the efficiency of generation may amplify bias and reduce perceived sincerity. With disclosure and inclusive review, the same tools can increase clarity and access while preserving human voice.

Proposition: an initial program theory

The program theory that guides this review is as follows. Digital storytelling improves engagement when narrative craft produces transportation and identification, when channel choice supports the intended depth of processing, and when the story satisfies psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Effects are strengthened when employees perceive reciprocity and support, and when communication functions as a resource that buffers demands. AI assistance can increase reach and speed, and it can lower accessibility barriers, but only under clear governance that preserves human voice, secures consent, and signals authenticity. Absent these conditions, increased volume and machine like sameness will add to cognitive load and erode trust. This theory treats literary devices and AI workflow as design levers that HR can specify, test, and iterate within the engagement system that the organization actually has, rather than the one it imagines.

3. Methodology

Design

This study uses a secondary qualitative design that combines a systematic and narrative review with an illustrative document analysis of publicly available organizational artifacts. The review

identifies and synthesizes peer reviewed and practitioner sources that address digital storytelling for employee engagement. The document analysis focuses on open access internal communication artifacts such as leadership memos, intranet blog posts, campaign microsites, and policy pages to ground the synthesis in practice examples. No primary data are collected. The approach follows current guidance for transparent evidence synthesis and reporting to strengthen credibility and replicability (Page et al., 2021; Popay et al., 2006).

Search strategy

Searches will be run in Scopus, Web of Science, Business Source, PsycINFO, and ACM or IEEE Xplore for the period 2010 to 2025 in English. Search strings will combine controlled vocabulary and keywords for employee engagement, internal communication, narrative or storytelling, and artificial intelligence. Grey literature is included to capture practice guidance and standards that are often not published in journals. Sources will be drawn from professional bodies and research institutes such as CIPD and SHRM, and from methodologically clear practitioner reports. The inclusion of grey literature is justified because internal communication practices are shaped by policies and playbooks that are not always indexed in academic databases (Paez, 2017). A PRISMA style flow diagram will be provided in the appendix to document identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion decisions (Page et al., 2021).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Included items must address workplace contexts or internal communication with explicit links to employee engagement outcomes or mechanisms. Studies that focus on external brand or customer storytelling are excluded unless the authors report clear transfer to internal audiences. Items must provide enough methodological detail or descriptive clarity to support appraisal. Non English publications, opinion pieces without method, and items that only describe tools without communicative use are excluded.

Data extraction

A structured template will capture the following fields. Context and audience. Channels and formats. Story devices such as character, plot, setting, conflict, arc, motif, and tone. Reported use of artificial intelligence for drafting, editing, localization, or accessibility. Safeguards on disclosure, consent, provenance, and bias mitigation. Outcomes including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicators as well as line of sight, voice, and belonging. Equity and accessibility notes including captioning, alt text, and language support. The template and an example extraction

matrix will be shared as supplementary material to support reuse and critique (Page et al., 2021).

Quality appraisal

Academic sources will be appraised with the appropriate Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklists to assess clarity of aims, methodology, analysis, and value (CASP, 2018). Grey literature will be appraised with the AACODS checklist that evaluates authority, accuracy, coverage, objectivity, date, and significance (Tyndall, 2010). Appraisal decisions will be recorded and will inform sensitivity analyses rather than simple exclusion wherever possible.

Synthesis

Thematic synthesis will be used to integrate diverse qualitative findings. First order codes will capture author reported concepts. Second order codes will develop higher level themes that explain mechanisms and conditions. The procedure follows established steps of coding, developing descriptive themes, and generating analytical themes that answer the research questions (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Where studies are heterogeneous in design or audience, narrative synthesis will be used to compare patterns and contextual moderators and to surface contradictions for discussion (Popay et al., 2006).

Limitations and reflexivity

The review is limited by database coverage, language restriction to English, and reliance on reported outcomes which may omit negative findings. Including grey literature improves ecological validity but introduces variability in quality. The authors acknowledge positionality as researchers and practitioners in communication and human resources. Reflexive notes will be maintained to record assumptions about authenticity, accessibility, and artificial intelligence use, and to make visible how these assumptions are challenged by the evidence base (Popay et al., 2006; Page et al., 2021).

4. Findings: Thematic synthesis

Theme 1. Story as meaning making.

Across the recent literature, narrative is framed as a vehicle that helps employees connect enterprise purpose with their own work by transporting audiences into a coherent story world that clarifies strategy, trade offs and resolution of tensions. Meta analytic and review evidence shows that transportation and related narrative processes increase attention, reduce counterarguing and can shift attitudes and intentions, which are necessary precursors to engagement behaviours at work (van Laer *et al.*, 2014; Hamby *et al.*, 2018). Newer work also links emotional shifts during a

story to downstream sharing and behaviour, which matters for diffusion of internal messages in networked workplaces (Schmidt *et al.*, 2023). The mechanism is not automatic. When stories are poorly aligned with lived experience, identification and meaning break down. Identity focused research indicates that people use self narratives to make sense of role transitions; organizational stories that offer credible arcs enable that identity work, while generic hero tales do not (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). A brief vignette illustrates applied meaning making: the GitLab public handbook weaves values into narrative explanations of why practices exist, making line of sight explicit rather than rhetorical. This exemplifies narrative as governance, not decoration, although it depends on consistent practice to avoid perceived spin (GitLab, 2025). (van Laer *et al.*, 2014; Hamby *et al.*, 2018; Schmidt *et al.*, 2023; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; GitLab, 2025).

Theme 2. Employee voice and co creation.

The engagement literature since 2010 emphasises that voice climates and psychological safety are enabling conditions for participation, sensegiving and uptake of strategy. Speaking up to authority depends on beliefs about consequences and fairness; climates that invite challenge increase constructive voice and reduce silence (Detert and Treviño, 2010). A meta analysis finds psychological safety positively related to learning and performance outcomes that underpin engagement, but it is sensitive to leadership behaviour and team norms (Frazier *et al.*, 2017). Internal social platforms can widen participation but only when norms and moderation guard against dominance by a few, which otherwise reproduces offline hierarchies (Men, O'Neil and Ewing, 2020). A practical pattern is to institute editorial boards drawn from employee resource groups and frontline roles to commission and review stories. The guidance on content design provided by GOV.UK reflects the approach of open contributions in quality standards and demonstrates the ability of rulesets to facilitate credible scale participation. The threat is tokenism, in which there are no decision rights to match invitations to co create; in which case, trust collapses and withdrawal occurs (Detert and Treviño, 2010; Frazier *et al.*, 2017; Men, O'Neil and Ewing, 2020; GOV.UK, 2024).

Theme 3. Literary craft in practice.

Recent narrative studies elucidate that particular narrative devices are relevant. The topics that are capable of reinforcing transportation include concrete characters, believable settings, conflict, and resolution and arcs that permit emotional movement but not flat messaging (van Laer *et al.*, 2014; Hamby *et al.*, 2018). Serialised narratives can sustain engagement over time, especially when

episodes connect to real decision points and show obstacles honestly. Tone consistency is essential: if executive updates sound polished while employee pieces feel censored, audiences read that inconsistency as inauthentic. External style guides used by communications teams illustrate craft codification. Mailchimp's guide is influential for plain language, reader benefit and voice control; its application to internal posts can reduce cognitive load and increase uptake. The critical caution is sameness. Over standardised tone can drain specificity and flatten difference, which undermines identification in diverse workplaces. Balance is achieved when craft rules protect clarity while story ownership remains with the people closest to the work (van Laer *et al.*, 2014; Hamby *et al.*, 2018; Mailchimp, 2025).

Theme 4. Platform and format affordances.

Four affordances, which define internal storytelling, are identified by enterprise social media studies: visibility, persistence, editability and association. These affordances can contribute to improving meta knowledge about who knows what and cross silo travelling of stories in cases when the leaders are already on the ground and are willing to have their comments on stories (Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Leonardi, 2014). What the format evidence of learning and communications demonstrates is that brief videos and brief and well structured visual formats can result in greater completion and recall in the asynchronous setting, whereas longer audio formats such as podcasts may be used to facilitate reflection and emotional connection during commutes or daily activities (Lackmann *et al.*, 2021; Okonski *et al.*, 2022). The critical point is fit: stories that demand nuance or vulnerability may perform better in moderated live sessions or small group channels than in viral, comment heavy spaces. Buffer's transparency posts demonstrate how a blog like format can sustain depth, but that approach relies on active moderation and a clear commenting code to manage risk of pile.

Theme 5. AI augmented storytelling.

Since 2022, organizations have adopted generative tools for ideation, first drafts, captioning, versioning and multilingual localization. The production gains are real, especially for small teams and for accessibility features like transcripts and alt text generation. Risks include homogenised voice, hallucinated facts and uneven model performance across dialects and accents, which can marginalize contributors and damage trust if undetected (Bender *et al.*, 2021; Koenecke *et al.*, 2020). Accountable use requires documentation of intended use and limitations, with model and data transparency notes that reviewers can check; model cards and risk taxonomies provide

templates for that scrutiny (Mitchell *et al.*, 2019; Weidinger *et al.*, 2022). A practical pattern is to name the editor as a story steward who uses AI as a drafting aid but retains factual verification and tone adaptation, with clear disclosure of synthetic or heavily assisted media. Partnership on AI's framework offers concrete disclosure and consent practices that can be adapted for internal contexts (Partnership on AI, 2023). Without these controls, AI assistance can accelerate output while quietly amplifying bias or error (Bender *et al.*, 2021; Koenecke *et al.*, 2020; Mitchell *et al.*, 2019; Weidinger *et al.*, 2022; Partnership on AI, 2023).

Theme 6. Authenticity, trust and ethics.

Trust in internal stories depends on truthful representation, respectful consent and accessible delivery. Accessibility standards such as WCAG 2.2 set minimums for headings, contrast, captions and keyboard navigation that directly affect whether people can consume stories in mobile and low bandwidth contexts (W3C, 2023). Synthetic audio and video raise provenance challenges; content credentials and cryptographic provenance standards like C2PA can help signal when assets have been edited and by whom. Organizations can begin with policy pilots on disclosure watermarks for composed media and establish consent pathways for likeness and voice (C2PA, 2023; Partnership on AI, 2023). Evidence from misinformation and deepfake research underscores that even labelled synthetic media can still influence attitudes; therefore governance should combine transparency with friction such as verification pauses for sensitive topics (Vaccari and Chadwick, 2020). A document vignette: several public sector and civil society guidance notes now include plain language explanations of synthetic media risks that internal comms can adapt for employee education. The critical evaluation is that tool based provenance is helpful but not sufficient; culture and process do most of the work (W3C, 2023; C2PA, 2023; Partnership on AI, 2023; Vaccari and Chadwick, 2020).

Theme 7. Measurement and learning loops.

Recent evidence reviews advise triangulation of indicators rather than reliance on a single metric. Combining pulse items that test understanding and trust, qualitative comments that capture narrative resonance, and behavioural traces such as completion, sharing and replies can provide a fuller view, but causal attribution remains hard in open systems (Bailey *et al.*, 2017; Welch, 2012). Enthusiasm for simple indices like eNPS persists, yet research and practitioner analyses question its reliability and validity for complex employee outcomes. The score may be a single input, although it is noisy in small samples and is ineffective in diagnosis; applied by itself it may give

false assurance or undue alarm (Baehre *et al.*, 2022; Drive Management, 2024). One of the practical practice-based loops is an operation of running pre thru post tests on lightweight stories in and around story campaigns and carrying out qualitative debriefs with representative groups to investigate how the campaign is being interpreted, read between the lines and equity impacts and get ready to scale. A case study GOV.UK, the content community on the site posts viewpoints on what we learn openly that is then refined into guidance to illustrate how evidence is invested in standards again. This is a crucial warning not to get down to metric theatre; it is the point of measurement on stories and systems to get better, but not to pursue vanity statistics.

5. Discussion

The findings show that narrative works in organizations when it produces transportation and identification that make strategy personally meaningful, which aligns with evidence that well formed stories increase attention and reduce counterarguing, thereby priming attitude and intention change that can precede engagement behavior (van Laer et al., 2014; Hamby et al., 2018). This mechanism connects directly to Self Determination Theory. Stories that surface employee voice, mastery, and community support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which increases intrinsic motivation when employees recognize their own context in the narrative (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Social Exchange Theory adds a reciprocity lens. When storytelling reliably signals care and fairness and when follow through is visible, employees are more likely to reciprocate with discretionary effort. When polish replaces delivery, reciprocity weakens and cynicism increases (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). From a Job Demands Resources perspective, story based communication can function as a resource that buffers strain by clarifying purpose and by celebrating problem solving, but the same channel becomes a demand when volume and tone add cognitive load (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Channel choices shape how much effort an audience will devote to a message. The elaboration likelihood model implies that leaders should match message complexity to the expected depth of processing and then test the fit. Enterprise social media afford visibility, persistence, editability, and association, which can support both quick resonance and reflective engagement when norms are clear and leadership models participation (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Leonardi, 2014). This supports an integrated framework for practice.

Layer A is storycraft. Specify plot, character, conflict, arc, motif, and tone, and write in plain language. Codified style guidance helps distributed authors keep quality steady while leaving room

for local detail, as seen in GOV.UK content guidance and the Mailchimp style guide (GOV.UK, 2024; Mailchimp, 2025). Layer B is the engagement lever set. Design for meaning, voice, recognition, belonging, and efficacy, and use participatory formats that move beyond leadership only narration. Layer C is channels and cadence. Choose short video, audio, or interactive posts when the goal is reach in asynchronous and mobile contexts and reserve live or small group formats for issues that require nuance or vulnerability, then publish a predictable schedule so employees know where stories live and when they arrive (Lackmann et al., 2021; Okonski et al., 2022). Layer D is the AI workflow. Use assistive tools for ideation, captioning, and localization, while assigning a named human editor as story steward to verify facts, protect voice, and ensure inclusion. Document intended use with model cards or similar notes and maintain prompt libraries and red teaming routines to avoid sameness and hallucination risks (Mitchell et al., 2019; Bender et al., 2021; Weidinger et al., 2022). Layer E is governance and ethics. Disclose assistance, secure consent and likeness rights, adopt provenance and accessibility standards, and escalate sensitive content for additional review (Partnership on AI, 2023; C2PA, 2023; W3C, 2023).

Three paradoxes require managerial judgment. First, speed versus authenticity. AI can accelerate production, yet authenticity requires slow verification and human voice. Second, personalization versus privacy. Tailored stories can increase relevance, but data use must be minimal and transparent. Third, polish versus sincerity. Over produced assets can decrease trust if they mask conflict. Boundary conditions include culture, leadership modeling, and distributed authorship capacity. Voice climates and psychological safety amplify the benefits of co creation but collapse under punitive or performative regimes, a pattern consistent with recent evidence on voice and safety (Detert and Treviño, 2010; Frazier et al., 2017). Finally, the credibility challenge of synthetic media remains real even with labels, which justifies provenance standards and employee education about risks and verification pauses for sensitive topics (Vaccari and Chadwick, 2020; C2PA, 2023).

6. Implications

Managerial and HR practice should adopt a five phase roadmap. Diagnose by auditing current stories, channels, and equity gaps and by mapping attention pain points. Design by setting a narrative north star, creating an editorial charter, and agreeing an accessibility and disclosure checklist. Develop by building a storybank, codifying consent and likeness workflows, and preparing AI guardrails with model documentation and prompt libraries. Deploy by piloting two

serials that mix leadership and peer voice and by resourcing a named story steward who verifies accuracy and tone. Measure by combining pulse items on clarity and trust with qualitative comments and behavioral traces such as action completion and constructive replies, while avoiding over reliance on single indices such as eNPS given known diagnostic limits (Bailey et al., 2017; Welch, 2012; Baehre et al., 2022).

Theoretical implications include a bridge between narrative persuasion, motivation, and engagement research. The framework positions literary devices as independent variables that can be tested against SDT and JD R outcomes and it links platform affordances to elaboration likelihood predictions. Policy and EDI implications are concrete. Accessibility by default through WCAG practices should be non negotiable. Representation balance and consent pathways should be monitored with periodic equity reviews. Anti deepfake protocols should include content credentials and escalation for high risk topics as well as employee education that explains what labels and watermarks mean in plain language (W3C, 2023; C2PA, 2023; Partnership on AI, 2023).

7. Limitations and Future Research

This synthesis is limited by database coverage, the English language restriction, and dependence on reported outcomes that may omit null or adverse results. Grey literature improves ecological validity but varies in quality despite structured appraisal. Future research should test storycraft levers with randomized field experiments, diary studies that follow employees through change episodes, and longitudinal designs that link story exposure to behavioral adoption and retention. Comparative studies across cultures and job types can clarify boundary conditions. Method work is also needed on communication provenance and employee understanding of disclosure labels, on the fairness of AI assisted workflows across dialects and accents, and on the balance between cadence and cognitive load in remote and shift settings (Koenecke et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2017).

8. Conclusion

Well-crafted and ethically governed digital storytelling can raise engagement by restoring meaning, voice, and belonging while making line of sight to strategy tangible. The evidence suggests that stories work when design choices invite transportation and identification, when channels match the expected depth of processing, and when leaders follow through on what narratives promise. AI can widen access and speed, but only within a workflow that protects human

voice and that is transparent about assistance and rights. The proposed model translates these insights into practical layers that organizations can specify, test, and iterate. The next step is rigorous evaluation in live settings that treats measurement as a learning loop rather than a scoreboard.

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