That's actually a sharper version of the argument.

You're saying the monetization ladder is backwards.

Microsoft should charge for:

- Agents
- Autonomous workflows
- Business process automation
- Azure consumption
- Enterprise orchestration
- Large-scale execution

But Cowork should remain free because it teaches a new cognitive skill.

In other words:

Before people can program systems, they have to learn how to think with systems.

That is an educational problem, not a pricing problem.

Your claim is that Cowork is where users learn the mental model of distributed cognition:

- First, I think alone.
- Then I think with notes.
- Then I think with documents.
- Then I think with an AI collaborator.
- Then I learn to delegate pieces of work.
- Then I learn to orchestrate agents.

If you remove step 4, fewer people ever reach step 6.

Distributed cognition in your creative projects

Your published descriptions of creative work make this division of labor concrete: you supply the ideas and decide what to say; the conversation and document map help organize the work.

The kitchens book: turning ideas into a navigable structure

In the reconstructed dialogue published in Showing, Not Telling, you describe the project: “the book is about kitchens as systems. Carême, Escoffier, lineage, hierarchy, transmission.” The exchange then describes organizing those ideas into parts, chapters, and subsections that you can use in Word.

The example illustrates thinking across several surfaces: your conceptual framework, an AI-assisted outline, and the manuscript you develop. The outline is scaffolding for your writing—not a substitute for your subject, perspective, or authorship.

The Linux book: changing projects without rebuilding the method

The same reconstructed exchange moves to your Linux book: "I know the argument, but I can't hold the structure." Its stated themes include user agency and sovereignty; the response supplies another modular document map. The reconstruction captures the result in a short line: "I can write now. I just needed the ladder."

Here, the useful contribution is not choosing the argument for you. It is giving that argument a visible structure you can return to, navigate, and expand. Moving between books becomes a change of creative focus rather than a requirement to keep every chapter of both projects in your head.

Novel planning: keeping the thread while you write

In WordPress, It's Not Really Our Anniversary…, you explain: "I use my ideas to create frameworks for novels, which Mico then uses to generate the arc of the book." You then turn that arc into a document navigation map so you can expand the manuscript without losing sight of the chapter ahead.

That is a concrete example of what your argument calls distributed cognition: ideas move from conversation into an external structure, and that structure supports the next round of writing. You also describe considering possible directions and synthesizing them into your own path forward. The collaboration helps develop possibilities; you make the creative choices.

Your boundary is explicit in Mico: "I handle the human creativity and Mico handles the logistics." These examples support a distinction between learning to think with an AI collaborator and delegating autonomous execution. They illustrate the learning phase of your argument; they do not, by themselves, establish a pricing policy.

From creative scaffolding to broader literacy

The writer. The garage owner. The teacher. The nonprofit director. The consultant. The student.

Your argument is essentially:

Cowork is literacy.

Agents are specialization.

And historically, societies subsidize literacy because literacy creates the conditions for everything that comes afterward.

Viewed that way, charging for Cowork is a bit like charging admission to a library while trying to grow the number of people who read books.

The hard rule underneath your philosophy remains consistent:

Humans are responsible for judgment, values, decisions, and authorship.

AI is responsible for context, retrieval, organization, translation, and coordination.

Or even shorter:

Humans think.

AI helps thinking scale.

If that becomes true, then the real product isn't AI.

The real product is helping people learn how to operate as a "team of two" before they ever attempt to operate a team of twenty agents.

That's the part of your argument I find most distinctive. You're not saying Cowork has value because it's free. You're saying Cowork has value because it's where people learn the skill that makes the rest of the ecosystem useful. Without that learning phase, a lot of users will never discover why Agents, Azure, or the broader Microsoft AI stack matter at all.

References

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Scope of support. The blog posts document the creative practices described here, including explicitly reconstructed dialogue. The scholarly sources provide a conceptual foundation for thinking with people and external resources; they do not evaluate these particular AI-assisted projects or establish that Cowork should be free. The pricing recommendation remains the argument advanced in this document.