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Smaller than the sum of the parts

We all want top customer and employee experiences. However, what most organisations do to maximise performance often ends up spoiling the “wow” effect they are trying to create. In the end, poor experiences mess up business outcomes.

Imagine building a house. A team deals with the design, another one buys supplies and other teams sort out plumbing, electrics, structure, decoration and so on. Each team (and people within them) has quarterly KPIs so they can focus their work on results.

However, although the “sum-of-the-parts-is-greater-than-the-whole” approach works in engineering settings, it does not when we are building experiences.

For an experience to work, individual components have to align well, reinforcing the same mental models. This is the only way to drive behaviours such as choice, loyalty, recommendation, upselling and permanence.

We cannot design Journeys as linear, drawing them along engineering-style timelines. People do not cognitively process life in straight lines. An amazing meal at a top restaurant can be quickly ruined by a dirty toilet, by a throw away comment made by the guy at the valet parking or even by an angry online review.

Experiences are organic, systemic and messy. To design them, we need to upgrade the tools in our toolbox.

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