Unlocking collaboration for exceptional customer experience

By Liezel Jonkheid

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Delivering exceptional customer experiences has become a top priority for companies across industries, particularly in highly competitive environments where there is a relatively level playing field when it comes to product features and pricing.

Liezel Jonkheid, director and founder of the Consumer Psychology Lab. Image supplied

As a result, it becomes challenging for companies to differentiate themselves based on these traditional factors alone. Customer experience is what allows businesses to stand out by offering exceptional service, support, and personalised experiences that go beyond the basic product attributes.

In many cases, CX is often the primary, if not singular competitive differentiator.

However, despite their best efforts, many organisations continue to face a significant silent, but potent killer to achieving their CX ambitions: silos!

A business challenged by silos has a direct impact on customer experience and in turn on the morale and empowerment of the teams at the front and back end whose collaborative service delivery efforts are fundamental to delivering those customer experiences.

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Breaking down silos

Siloed service delivery manifests in various ways, ultimately leading to fragmented customer experiences. These symptoms can be detrimental to a company's growth and reputation and hold significant implications for customer experience, as well as employee experience.

Symptoms of siloed service delivery and its impact for customer experience include:

- **Lack of information sharing**

  When different teams or departments hoard information, failing to communicate crucial insights, it creates gaps in knowledge across the organisation. For the customer, it typically means having to repeat their issues or information, leading to frustration and time wastage.

  For the business, it means that individual teams possess only a partial view of customer interactions and there is no single view of the customer across different divisions – making it challenging to provide personalised, targeted experiences, resulting in missed opportunities for upselling or cross-selling.

  This is most keenly experienced in the banking sector where a customer may have a home loan, personal credit card, a cheque account and small business current account – in every instance their experience across these divisions is completely disparate due to the siloed nature of banking service offerings.

- **Inconsistent customer experiences**

  Silos result in disjointed processes, inconsistent messaging, and conflicting approaches to customer service. Customers who interact with different teams or departments may encounter a lack of continuity in their experiences. For example, a customer may receive a great experience in-store but a poor experience when trying to contact customer support.

  Customers may have a great experience when they purchase the product, only to realise that after the sale, the experience of trying to solve issues or get support is a nightmare.

- **Inconsistent messaging**

  Teams operating in silos may use different messaging, which can be confusing and frustrating for customers. For instance, a sales team may promise something that the customer support team is unable to deliver, leading to a gap in the customer experience.

  For example, a car dealership promises the offer of an equivalent loan vehicle whenever the car is serviced during the sale, but in reality this promise is not sustainable with the number of loan cars they have available.

- **Slow response times**

Silos hinder the free flow of information and collaboration, causing delays in response times. Customers who encounter these delays may perceive the company as unresponsive, leading to reduced satisfaction and potentially lost business.

For example, if a customer reports an issue with a product or service, but the support team or customer service agent must bring in other departments for a resolution, this can cause delays in response time and leave the customer feeling ignored.

If every department is chasing their own workflows, it ends up in a dissatisfied customer and a disempowered service agent unable to resolve a customer's query timeously or satisfactorily.

- **Duplication of efforts**

When work is duplicated due to silos, it is time-consuming and frustrating for both employees and customers. For instance, a customer may be asked the same question multiple times by different teams, making them feel under-valued and frustrated. This is often evident when dealing with call centers to resolve a query.

When agents don't have a single view of the customer, the time spent to repeat the same information not only wastes customers' time but also the overall time that agents engage on calls.
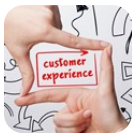
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The impact of siloed service delivery on employee experience

Imagine being the salesperson in-store dealing with customers, but the marketing and merchandising teams launching a new product with promotions, advertising and other activations have not let the frontline people know about it, or the tele-sales or reception staff are unaware of the launch or the starting date of a promotion.

Or a campaign is activated on social media, but the PR team have no knowledge of it, and the IT department is none the wiser that a major promotion is about to send web traffic to the online store into overdrive. It's a recipe for poor customer experience, but these silos also have a profound impact on the morale and engagement of employees.

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Here's how and why:

- **Lack of collaboration**: Silos can lead to a lack of collaboration between different teams. This can cause employees to feel isolated and disconnected from their colleagues. Moreover, when employees don't work together and have little accountability, productivity may decline.

- **Inefficient processes**: When departments or teams don't communicate effectively and work in isolation, it can develop into inefficient processes. These can create a lot of extra work, compounding frustration and reducing employee satisfaction.

- **Low morale**: Employees in silos often feel separate from others in the company, fighting their own lonely battles resulting in low connectedness to the organisation and a lack of motivation. When employees lack a sense of motivation, productivity and output may decrease.

  This can be seen when the customer support team bend over backwards to assist customers, but the technical team do not have any sense of urgency. Support teams often feel disheartened when they get the brunt of the angry customers when the other teams seem not to appreciate their 'hot seats'.

- **Limited career progression**: Silos restrict opportunities for career development within an organisation. Teams working in isolation don't provide employees with a wider view of the organisation's goals and overall strategy, stifling creative ideas and a collaborative approach.

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Breaking down the silos and achieving collaborative service delivery and CX

To overcome the challenges of siloed service delivery, organisations must prioritise collaboration. Effective remedies for improved collaborative service delivery include:

- **Foster a culture of collaboration**: Create an environment where collaboration is valued and encouraged. This can be achieved by promoting open communication, establishing cross-functional teams, and organising regular meetings or workshops that bring together employees from different departments.

- **Invest in technology and tools**: Implementing robust communication and collaboration tools can significantly enhance information sharing and streamline processes. Utilise project management software, internal communication platforms, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems to facilitate seamless collaboration across teams and departments.

- **Define shared goals and metrics**: Align teams around shared objectives and establish metrics that encourage collaboration. When everyone is working towards a common goal, silos are less likely to impede progress. Foster a sense of collective ownership and reward collaboration to incentivise cross-functional cooperation.

- **Encourage cross-functional training and knowledge sharing**: Offer opportunities for employees to gain insights into other teams' roles and responsibilities through cross-functional training sessions or job rotations. This fosters empathy, understanding, and the ability to collaborate effectively across departments.

Breaking down silos and improving collaborative service delivery holds significant benefits for customer and employee experience, from enhanced operational efficiencies, greater productivity, faster and better decision-making, opportunities

for up-sell and cross-sell, happier and more engaged employees, all of which culminate in delivering exceptional customer experiences no matter who or when your customer engages with your brand.

To improve customer experience, focus on breaking down silos and promoting cross-functional collaboration by implementing shared platforms, fostering open communication, and aligning teams around a common customer-centric vision to deliver a seamless and exceptional customer experience.

The companies that invest in building an outside-in approach to customer experience, rather than being constrained by their internal and operational silos, are more likely to adapt and evolve with changing market trends and customer preferences, ensuring long-term and consistent success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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