

NAME: SHREYA KUNDU

**INSTITUTE: N L DALMIA
INSTITUTE OF STUDIES AND
RESEARCH.**

**EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION:
Mcom**

**CURRENT EDUCATION: Pursuing
PGDM in Human Resource
Management**

I declare that this essay is the work of my own creation as part of essays competition organized by Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. I transfer the ownership, title and rights of this essay to Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. may use this essay content in any way it seems suitable.

Name: SHREYA KUNDU

DATE: 15/08/2024

“MANAGEMENT LEARNING FROM DABBAWALLA”

The Dabbawala System also known as the tiffin system started in the year 1890 in Maharashtra's one of the populous city located in the west coast of India, known as Mumbai. It started when a crew of workers migrated to Bombay from different parts of India in search of work that would in return help them fetch sufficient cash for themselves and as well for their families. But however, shifting to city Like Bombay meant, leaving home early morning so that they could travel their workplace on time, leaving the very less time to consume enough

nourishment i.e. food. And the most important thing was, since all the workers belonged to different communities and had their different tastes when it came to food. In the initial few months, they all struggled to get food that satisfied their taste. That's when the "DABBAWALA SYSTEM" concept came in picture. This concept started when a banker wanted to have his home cooked food often in office and gave this responsibility to a dabbawala. Because back then, the notion of a lunchroom, or cafeteria, or of a refectory was not prevalent. When the banker appointed a dabbawala, it was the first initiative of starting the idea of dabba system in Mumbai which has now evolved and have become so ubiquitous in the city of Mumbai. Also, the reason of its widespread popularity in Mumbai was because of the creative Mahadeo Havaji. He noticed the gap and found the opportunity and hence started out the lunch delivery service as a business in a group delivery which approximately consisted of hundred people . In the 1930s, he informally tried to put together the dabbawallas as a team. Gradually as the population grew in Mumbai, the demand for dabba delivery grew too. Also, in the 1990s, Forbes International magazine conducted an evaluation and gave them a Six Sigma Rating.

The journey of the dabbawallas have been very fascinating and successful to the extent that a very thorough and extensive research was conducted by the scholars of the Harvard system. And to their surprise, it was observed in their study that, the accuracy rate of delivering the right dishes to the right person on the right time was phenomenally high. So high that their systems and various operations have been further studied by various logistic companies including UPS and FedEx and design schools as well. The dabbawala group actually proved their hard work and determination over the years , also delivering their services from one end of Mumbai to the other end safely braving the traffic jams, crowded local trains and as well the extreme harsh weather condition of Mumbai city. It's been also observed that a large number of dabbawallas come from the Varkari community of Maharashtra, a community where who undertakes a pilgrimage to the temple of lord Vithoba or Vitthala in the town of Pandharpur in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. However, the dabbawallas do not come with a high level of literacy and education. The group is not so well versed with technologies. Therefore the whole system depends on Symbols, signs and colours for organisations and delivery of lunch box. Dabbawalas have been appreciated for their service by famous personalities like Virgin's Richard Branson, Prince Charles etc. Many business schools teach their case study as a part of their management studies curriculum.

So here is how the whole system works. A dabbawalla collects the lunch boxes with freshly prepared meals from customers' homes or lunch places in the

morning. These lunch boxes are then taken to a sorting place where they are sorted based on their destination. Each lunchbox has distinct code, a combination of alphabets and numbers. This code indicates the destination and the recipient. Once sorted, the lunch boxes are transported using various types of transport services like bicycles, trains, or on foot.

One of the most remarkable features of the dabbawala system is the coding system where they use a mix of colours, numbers and alphabets that denotes various aspects like source and destination, ensuring each tiffin reaches its rightful owner.

The very important and the most important aspect of this concept is that, the entire system is human driven. All operational activities from collecting to delivering is done by the humans without the use of any digital tool and yet the food is delivered accurately on time and in the proper destination. And also the Dabbawalla System works in teams ensuring each members accountability and commitment to the service. The success of this system, beside its operational efficiency is also due to the values the dabbawallas hold. The trustworthiness, consistency and a strong sense of community and teamwork.

Nonetheless, the system do have weaknesses and have to face challenges. They have to depend upon the Local train system of Mumbai because that is the cheapest mode of transportation for them. And also a major weakness is that the system is subject to restricted access to educational limits. They also had to face major challenges during COVID pandemic which let their business experience a major downfall with thousands of dabbawallas retreating to their original homes. This henceforth affected the manpower of the system which actually is considered to be their biggest strength. It crippled the century old food supply chain. Almost 5000 plus work force suffered in strength what with some of them taking to different jobs. Also the major climate changes and shifts like extreme heat waves and floods are few of the major challenges faced by the dabbawallas. Sometimes breaking of vehicle like bicycle in the middle of the road is also a challenge which eventually can cause delays in delivery and thus getting poor ratings from customers.

However some solutions can be proved for some challenges that are still faced by the dabbawallas.

- 1) Creating a very colorful and artistic website and updating it from time to time can help them retain their customers and will help them continue the business for the future
- 2) Also opening new food supply chain stores of their brand can help them extend and grow starting from the neighboring states

- 3) During extreme climate changes, the company can restrict the delivery to certain areas. This way this would be safety measure for their manpower thus retaining their manpower which is their strength.
- 4) Training the dabbawallas and introducing to new technology which will make them more efficient and will help them save money.
- 5) Collecting feedback from time to time from the customers would help to keep check on the operations and its smoothness
- 6) Also, since it's a 125 years old business, an initiative can be taken to provide scooty to every dabbawala as they are the heroes doing their jobs as the employees of the enterprise.
- 7) Government can also take an initiative to provide a public transport dedicated to the dabbawallas which help the team improve time management.