

Name: Sakshi Asawale

Educational Qualification: BCom

Present Educational Status: PGDM (Finance)

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 Dabbawalla Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. may use this essay content in any way it deems suitable.

Name: Sakshi Asawale

Date: 15-08-2024

Management Learning's from Dabbawala's and Vision Ahead

In Bombay, a Dabba is a steel tiffin box with a width of approximately 15 cm and a height of 30 cm, that people carry to their offices from home. The ones who are occupied with gathering, sorting, and moving these dabbas between homes and workplaces are known as the dabbawalas.

Lakhs of Mumbaikars depend upon these men for their daily office meals.

Mumbaikar dabbawalas are so reliable that they have never neglected or missed delivering the right Dabba to its rightful owner. Their superior management skills have gathered attention from all across the globe.

Any reasonable person would agree that Dabbawalas are the lifesavers of Mumbai. Every day, several individuals residing in Mumbai travel to their workplaces, starting from one area of the city, then onto the next, while battling the gridlocks, crowded trains, and other transport challenges.

Meanwhile, respective homemakers start to prepare wholesome meals to be served by lunchtime to their husbands. The motto of Dabbawalas is to deliver the tiffin box at a fixed hour. At the moment, there are at least 5,000 active dabbawalas. They are part of a well-organised corporation that provides several job opportunities.

The Varkari people of Maharashtra constitute a large number of the dabbawalas. It is a community united by common interests and strong bonds. As a result, future generations are influenced to follow in their footsteps.

LEARNINGS FROM DABBAWALA'S

Organization: A Clockwork Design

The dabbawalas operate within the framework of the Mumbai Suburban Railway, an extensive commuter rail network. The city's crowded trains create demand for their services as office workers prefer home-cooked meals delivered by dabbawalas. The organization comprises small, autonomous groups of dabbawalas, which keeps costs low. The railway system sets a tight schedule that synchronizes their operations and maintains discipline, with immediate feedback for any delays.

Management: A Self-Organized Democracy

The dabbawalas are essentially self-managed, handling hiring, logistics, pricing, and customer relations themselves. Each Dabbawala negotiates prices with customers, ensuring long-term, trusting relationships. New members are trained on the job, and after a probationary period, they can buy into the business. Experienced workers serve as supervisors, overseeing various aspects of operations. The organization's committees address operational and organizational issues.

Process: Simplicity, Flexibility, and Rigor

The dabbawalas emphasize simplicity in their processes, using a basic symbol-based coding system on lunchboxes to manage deliveries. They maintain buffer capacity with extra workers who can fill in where needed. Cross-training is key to their flexibility. The adherence to processes and standards minimizes variations that could disrupt their operations.

Culture: A Strong Sense of Belonging

The dabbawalas' strong ties to their teams, shared identity, and homogeneity contribute to their success. Workers remain in their groups for their entire working lives, fostering deep connections. Their dedication to a simple mission — delivering food on time — creates a sense of purpose and unity.

A Self-Reinforcing System

The dabbawalas' success lies in the synergy between these pillars. For instance, their simple coding system enables a hub-and-spoke organization, reducing the need for centralized management. This holistic approach ensures that changes in one aspect consider the impact on the entire system.

In the corporate world, the dabbawalas' model offers valuable lessons for achieving extraordinary results with an ordinary workforce. Rather than relying solely on exceptional talent, organizations can align their organization, management, process, and culture to maximize performance. However, maintaining this harmony is an ongoing challenge, as exemplified by companies like Dell, which faced difficulties when market dynamics shifted.

Strength

- Teamwork, honesty, and discipline
- Ownership, time management
- Low cost, customer satisfaction
- A service commitment, process consistency

Weakness

- It depends on Mumbai's local train service
- Restricted access to education limits

Opportunities

- Have a tie-up with caterers to serve varieties of food
- Expanding to other cities

Threat

- Flexible timing
- During high alerts in the city, Dabbawalas face a lot of issues

CHALLENGES AND VISION AHEAD

EXPANSION

EDUCATION OF THE FAMILIES OF DABBAWALA'S MEDICAL AND HEALTH INSURANCE

EXPANSION

Expansion is one of the biggest problems for the dabbawalas because they depend on the Mumbai's local train for their delivery. If at all they try to expand their business outside of Mumbai city, it would be really difficult for them for the delivery of the dabbas and the time crunch that follows.

But if the dabbawalas would invest in a mode of transportation (one initially) they would likely be able to expand their business to Pune, as well further more in Mumbai. As they would then allocate this resource of theirs in the places where there are a greater number of dabbas to be delivered which would also benefit them with a smaller number of manpower that could be used for delivery of the dabbas elsewhere.

They would then monitor the profitability (considering the cost of the mode of transportation i.e. fuel, maintenance, etc) and efficiency of their business based on the investment that they have made and would decide further more if they want to continue in this direction and would consider investing in such assets further.

Considering the limited funds, we can make use of the second-hand vehicle initially. Also, it would be better if we consider only Pune initially (as there are offices and IT sector) apart from Mumbai and see how it works.

NOT LIMITING THEMSELVES TO OFFICES

It is observed that the students in the school take their lunchboxes either early in the morning or they don't take their lunch from home and have to eat outside food sometimes.

The dabbawalas could expand their services among the school students. They could consider circulating the google forms among the students and then interpret if at all this would work in their interest. And if it does, it would be beneficial for the kids as well as the dabbawalas, as they would provide bulk tiffin in a single location.

IDENTIFYING THE CUSTOMERS

Old age people who don't have the strength and energy to cook everyday can be identified and tiffin can be supplied to them at any time of the day. The bachelor's and the crowd that stays away from home can be identified and tiffin can be provided to them at a low cost on everyday basis better than Zomato and Swiggy rates, also considering not so healthy food offered by them.

OBSERVING THE CUSTOMERS

1. Observe from which places do they receive the greatest number of orders.
2. Circulate google forms among the people who are associated with dabbawalas
3. The google form may have following questions
 1. Do they get tiffin from home

2. Would they like to opt for the services provided by the dabbawalas. If no, then why?
3. How do they find the pricing of dabbawalas
4. Food Preferences (Home cooked or not the home cooked food)

Knowing the food preferences would help to know the dabbawalas to know their customers.

They would then collaborate with those tiffin providers or caterers that are **NOT** associated with Swiggy or Zomato. This would help the business of both the parties as well as the consumers because then this will be more cost effective.

ADVERTISING

Advertising has a major impact in the expansion of any business.

The dabbawalas considering being low on budgets, can mail a few of the popular influencers who would be ready to promote the services offered by them at a very low to zero cost.

EDUCATION OF THE FAMILIES OF DABBAWALA'S

Another one of the major problems that came into notice was the education of the children's of dabbawalas.

4. Help/ certain initiative from the Government can be taken.
5. Special permission for the approval of Education Loans can be taken from Government for the children of dabbawalas.
6. Reduction of School fees in Private institutes by the Government.
7. The help of certain organisations can be taken as most of the organisations are active in doing CSR activities (Corporate Social Responsibilities).
8. Help could be taken from the educational Institutes for reduction in the fees for dabbawalas.

MEDICAL AND HEALTH INSURANCE

Reserve should be created for the families of dabbawalas considering the unpredictable future.

CONCLUSION

Considering the above factors would help to some extent. We need work on these factors in order to get results. It is a continuous process and needs constant evaluation. The solution provide must be tracked and the impact must be noted down considering if it actually increases the profitability.