The Mumbai Dabbawalas:
An Efficient and Sustainable Lunchbox Delivery System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study describes the operational sustainable process of Mumbai's lifeline Dabbawalas. It examines the key characteristics that have aided in their accomplishment. The Mumbai Dabbawalas are a special case study in efficient and trustworthy food delivery. The case examines a number of Dabbawala system components, including their mission, information management, material mobility, human resource management system, and processes. It also highlights constraints that the Dabbawala enterprise has in a volatile environment which is perpetually changing. The secondary data incorporated into this case study emphasizes that the approaches utilized by the Dabbawala is a crucial element. The challenges experienced by Mumbai Dabbawallas during COVID-19 are also highlighted as well as resolutions.

INTRODUCTION

Mumbai Dabbawalas regularly serve over two million individuals every day by delivering home-cooked meals from residences to workplaces across the city of

Mumbai. They nowadays function as a universal representation of Mumbai's unique culture along with their work ethic. Mumbai Dabbawalas have become recognised for their outstanding accomplishments and efficiency. The Mumbai Dabbawallas are trustworthy food delivery channel who transport home-cooked meals from the residences of customers to their workplaces. The service is primarily used by office workers who do not have access to a kitchen or prefer to eat home-cooked food. The Dabbawalas pick up the lunchboxes, known as "dabbas," from the customers' homes in the morning, and deliver them to their workplaces before lunchtime (https://hbr.org/2012/11/mumbais-models-of=service-excellence). After lunch, the Dabbawalas collect the empty dabbas and return them to the customers' homes in the afternoon. In the early days, the Dabbawalas used bicycles and later, they started using local trains for transport (https://store.hbr.org/product/the-dabbawala-system-on-time-deliver-every-time/610059?sku=610059-PDF-ENG). The Dabbawalas are arranged into more than 200 delivery teams, with anywhere from ten to fifteen deliverymen in each team. The organization's objective is to assist the local, illiterate employed population. They have a strong sense of social responsibility, creating decent jobs and supporting the families of their employees, and they source their food locally, helping out local farmers and cutting down on transportation emissions (http://www.dabewale.com/). According to the conditions of sale, there is a proper organisational arrangement from lower management to upper management. The Dabbawalas employ a special color-coding system to designate each lunchbox's recipient, assisting in making sure that the meals are served promptly to the right individual (https://mumbaidabbawala.in/) They have an effective supply chain management system. This secondary research explores investigating the neighbourhood residents of Mumbai and the surrounding areas' food delivery supply network. This case study analyses way Mumbai's Dabbawalas, with their workforce of less educated individuals, execute sustainable supply chains with effectiveness.

BACKGROUND

The Dabbawala system dates back to the late 19th century when a Parsi banker employed a young man to bring his lunch from home to his office. Therefore, with around a hundred workers, Mahadeo Havaji Bachche began a lunch delivery business in Bombay in 1890. This marked the beginning of the Dabbawala system, which was initially a small-scale operation consisting of a few individuals delivering food to their colleagues. Over the years, the Dabbawala system grew in popularity, and more people began to rely on it for their daily meals. In the early days, the Dabbawalas used bicycles and later, they started using local trains for transport.

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