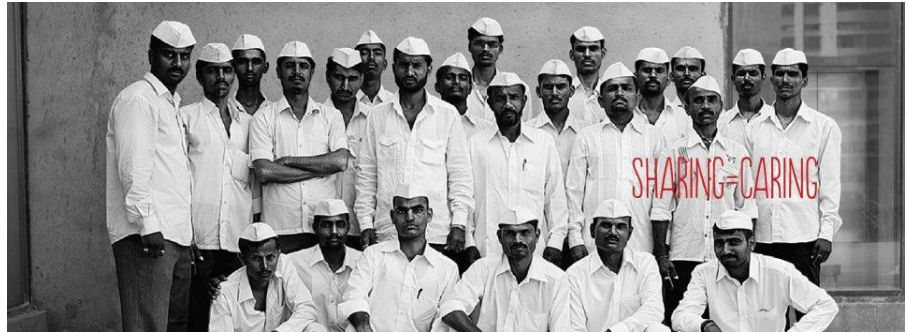


THE SUPPLY CHAIN OF DABBAWALA IN INDIA

GOOD HOME COOKED FOOD DELIVERED TO WORKERS

By Kim Assaël

Still in the digital age, an army of Dabbawala delivers 200,000 lunches to Mumbai's workers. Hot and healthy food are collected at a small price, in any season, from the residences of workers or from central kitchens, and daily provided to the customers in time.



A [Dabbawala](#) is someone who carries a Dabbas, an aluminium cylindrical tin, containing home cooked food. [The Dabbawala's organization](#) started with a hundred men who lunched the delivering service in the years 1890, a period when Bombay saw an influx of people from various communities and regions of India migrating to the city. This service not only managed to survive, competing with canteens and fast-food centres, but has also been extended to other cities on India.



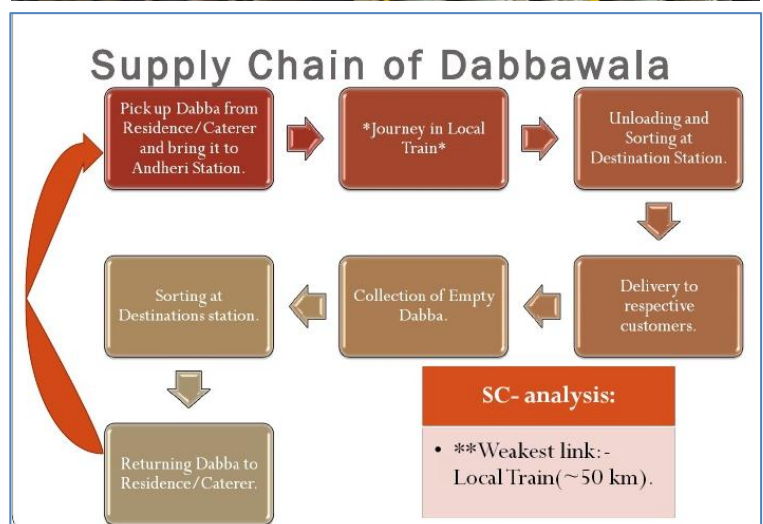
Today there are 5,000 Dabbawala in Mumbai, delivering lunch to 200,000 people every day (400,000 transactions every day). At an average of 200 rupees per lunch box per month, they have a turnover of 500 million rupees per year, despite relatively low in-kind investments in manpower and costs of transports.



The efficient sustainable service is a job daily done without any use of technology and with almost no errors. The Dabbawala service was registered as a commercial Association in 1968 (Mumbai Tiffin Box Supplier's Association). The [Dabbawala Foundation](#) provides medical cover and security conditions for its employees.

The supply chain of Dabbawala's organization is described in the [Swetha Reddy G. Anubhaw Kumar Shandilya Khurshid Alam Case Study](#).

The Dabbawala's system is organized with local teams of 20-25 persons supervised by a leader that assigns the dabbas for each



customer of the area. In the morning they come home by cycles to collect the dabba. They have standard time-schedules to charge dabbas on trains at the main stations and to sort them out at intermediate rail stations. The allotted time for picking a dabba at a particular house is not more than a minute. A small delay at a particular household could slow down thousands of deliveries. From collection points, where the dabbawala are organised according to the different destinations, dabbas are delivered to the workplace, and the empty boxes returned to the worker's residence during the afternoon or day after.



The lunch-boxes have distinguishing marks on them, a clear code such as a colour or group of symbols indicating collection points, starting station, number for destination station and markings for handling Dabbawala at destination, building and floor. These codes are mostly memorised by Dabbawala. Dabbawalla are trained to learn exactly the clear code marked on the boxes and gain trusts from their customers, who often are long lasting clients, because of the reliability of the system in any circumstances.



The success of the Dabbawala's organization has attracted the interest of universities and specialized centres on business organisation, as well as prestigious magazines of international level.



All of these studies and reviews give evidence of all different aspects that make exceptional this innovative experience:

- the Dabbawala's organization is managing an efficient supply chain to guarantee a social service and a cost-benefit advantage where different communities had different tastes and preferences that could only be satisfied by a home-cooked meal. India the multi coloured society favours a wide variety of diets and food traditions and most office workers prefer to eat home-cooked food in their workplace rather than eat at street level or outside in restaurants
- the service is based on a traditional know-how, a shared cultural background and a multi stakeholders approach. Dabbawala mostly come from the same community, operate in groups, and are a motivate workforce helping each-others. The Dabbawala's network employs women supplying genuine home-cooked meals, and cooperatives who all have a participative membership to their association and divide their earnings.
- the service is founded on a perfect functioning process based on the workers management and empowerment. The dabbawala set their



own prices and find their own customers. Nowadays the service is a symbol of honesty, hard work, time management and effectiveness. It is frequently claimed that Dabbawala, with their behavioural science, make less than one mistake in every six million deliveries.

From the point of view of local economies, the Dabbawala's organization shows that is possible to create employments opportunities by providing a sustainable efficient service to people, adapting ancient labours to the needs of modern life.

To know more

[Mumbai Dabbawala website](#)

[Article in PenumbraMag.com](#)

[Article in NDTV Food](#)

[Financial Times Video](#)

[Video in youtube](#)

[Dabbawala Foundation facebook](#)

[Mumbai Dabbawala Case study](#)

[Harvard University Case Study](#)

[Article in Phys.org](#)

[Article in Knowstartup.com](#)

[Article in Randomspecific.com](#)

[Dabbawala in Wikipedia.org](#)

[Video in youtube](#)

