

# Mumbai tiffin box suppliers association study



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## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5. 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize this thesis research and to suggest policy and research recommendations for further study. The first section of this chapter will discuss the objectives of the thesis research and the methodology utilized in conducting the analysis. This section also includes a summary of major results derived from the analysis. The second part of this chapter will consider implications of the research and propose recommendations for further research on both the dabbawalas and general organization theory.

### 5. 2 Findings and Interpretation

This study explored the Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers Association with an aim of establishing the factors that have facilitated their sustained six-sigma performance. However, while most literature on the subject focuses on how these practices can be applied to other organizations, this study focused on how these practices were constraining organizational prosperity and growth. At the end, I compared it to McDonalds India to derive recommendations on how the dabbawalas can adopt technology to improve their organizational financial outlook.

#### 5. 2. 1 Factors Responsible for the Dabbawala's Success

The literature review revealed several factors that are responsible for the dabbawala's success. First, their strong sense of community helps in simplifying organizational management as the employees all share the same

cultural and religious values. Having come from the same region and new recruits being relatives of existing dabbawalas, there is a strong shared of shared values, work ethic, and body language. As Carmelli et al. (2009) conclude psychological safety and high quality relationships help in minimizing employee errors. Additionally, Thomke et al. (2010) in their case study on the dabbawalas, confirm the role of organizational culture as it creates a strong sense of belonging. The second major factor responsible for their efficiency is their flat and decentralized organizational model where a supervisor is in charge of 25-30 dabbawalas. This is a manageable number that does not place undue load on the muqaddams. Additionally, it is easier to conduct quality checks and provide constructive feedback. Since each member knows the required time management skills and are aware of where each teams are located in each step of the delivery process, there is acute visibility that also helps in reducing errors (Bartlett et al., 2007). Since each dabbawala is also a partner in the organization, they all work together to ensure the success of the organization as a whole. Each dabbawala is responsible for acquiring and maintaining new customers. Past research has proven that engaging employees in the decision making process improves their engagement and desire to perform at their best. Therefore, the organizational structure improves employee performance.

#### 5. 2. 2. Organizational Practices that would facilitate expansion

While their practice of hiring relatives and trusted friends has worked to create a shared work culture and ethic, it has also diminished the potential for growth that the organization has. Workplace diversification is an important driver of innovation as each employee brings a different skill set

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and experiences to the organization. However, employee homogeneity, while reducing inefficiencies in the organization by creating a shared work culture, also results in stagnation of innovation since there is no inflow of new ideas into the organization. For the last century, the dabbawalas have operated largely unchanged which is reflected in their hiring practices, employee count, and client base.

Since most of the dabbawalas come from the villages and have low educational attainments, they have a strong aversion towards technology. This has reduced their scalability, as the supervisors need to have detailed mental maps of their delivery lines. The adoption of technology would ease the burden to have these mental maps as they could develop systems to track tiffin delivery from source to destination. Moreover, continued hiring from the same regions, while enhancing a sense of community in the organization, creates an issue of employee homogeneity, which stunts organizational innovation. They can improve their hiring policies to include a more diverse range of employees. Over time, this would bring new skills and perspectives that would spur innovation (Parotta et al., 2014). Technology would also help in expanding to other regions as members would not need to have travelled a particular route for years before promotion to muqaddams or to create a new delivery line.

### 5. 2. 3 Practices from McDonalds India

Considering the McDonalds India supply chain, it is clear how technology helps in running lean operations. McDonalds utilizes several ERP systems to run its global distribution network, which helps in increasing visibility and

automation. Therefore, the dabbawalas should not cite their low education attainment as hindrances to incorporating technology into their supply chain. Modern technological innovations allow for easier monitoring of supply chain performance and providing real-time updates on the movement of goods. The data collected through such avenues would also be useful in making resource allocation decisions. Additionally, modern innovations like social media allow for large-scale cheap marketing through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. These platforms offer an avenue to interact with their customers in a medium they are more familiar with while facilitating instantaneous communication.

### 5. 3 Recommendations

After the analysis and comparison of McDonalds India that is a competing food system, I provided recommendations on steps the Dabbawalas may take to increase their market share and consequently, profitability. Additionally, these recommendations would also help them in expanding to other cities other than Mumbai where the dabbawala services are in demand.

They should first aim to change the organizational attitude towards technology. Currently, the two top tiers of the organization are not motivated to drive the adoption of technology, as they do not understand fully how it could help them improve their operations. The dabbawala's Mukadams and the executive committee continue advising the dabbawalas to focus on food delivery rather than worrying about the specifics of supply chain management. The adoption of change in an organization is dependent on

managerial support and without such support, it would be impossible for the dabbawala to feature increased technology use. The change in the dabbawala organization has to begin with the management and then flow down to the lower level employees.

The dabbawalas can also revise their organizational strategy as they have traditionally undervalued their organizational potential. Their supply chain model is perfectly suited to the transport of goods and small packages within Mumbai and other metropolitan areas. However, the overall organizational sentiment is that the dabbawalas should stick with delivering food, as it is the core organizational objective. A change in this attitude would facilitate the expansion of the organization's activities to include other packages apart from food, which would rapidly expand their client base while also serving as a market penetration strategy to new markets. Additionally, the change would also facilitate greater collaboration with other catering and food services within the city to provide last mile delivery services that would also increase the dabbawala's exposure to additional potential clients.

The third recommendation is a change in the hiring practices of the organization. Currently, the only requirement needed to get employment in the organization is a vote of confidence for a proven record of honesty, and the physical strength needed to carry the tiffins. This helps in maintaining the organizational culture of honesty and increases consumer loyalty, as they are always sure their tiffins are safe. However, while homogeneity in the workforce eases managerial duties, it also results in a lack of diversity and a stagnation of innovation. The dabbawalas' focus on hiring from the same region and similar demographics means they have no new ideas in the

organization, which has stagnated their growth and adaptation to emerging trends. As shown by the analysis on McDonalds use of technology, recent innovations enable acute supply chain visibility while also offering both suppliers and consumers increased ease of use. However, since the dabbawalas have limited formal training, it is hard for them to understand how such innovations can change their operations. With a more educated workforce, the dabbawala can utilize platforms such as the Web and phone apps, to make registering and keeping up with their service more convenient for their users thus increasing consumer satisfaction.