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Dabbawalas Case Write-Up

*Dabbawalas*, translated to “one who carries a box”, references a system that coordinates a home-cooked lunch delivery service in Mumbai, India. For only $3-$7 a month, Indian workers located in the city can enjoy meals made by their families, reliably delivered every day. The stakeholders in this case are the Indian workers receiving meals, the family members cooking the meal, and the Dabbawala (delivery man/woman). Due to Dabbawala’s innovative infrastructure, the system executes its mission effectively without the use of complex technology.

Dabbawalas’ infrastructure relies on two resources: its logistics and its workforce. Logistically, Dabbawalas delivers Dabbas (tiffin boxed lunches) to offices in Mumbai using a color coding system. Each Dabbawala has a delivery route and the markings on each box indicates its destination. More importantly, the system relies on its workforce of Dabbawalas to execute its mission. About 5,000 to 6,000 Indians work for the service. Even though most of these workers are illiterate, the Dabbawala system is known for its effectiveness and rarely makes mistakes. This reveals the genius of the system’s infrastructure. To avoid reading issues, Dabbas are color coded and the vocabulary is learned by Dabbawalas during training. The logistics and labor force of Dabbawalas makes the system successful.

Because the Dabbawala system has few requirements, so the organization does not have to rely on technology to execute their mission. In the end, the system needs to pick up meals from suburban homes and deliver the meals to offices in the city. Many similar delivery systems, especially in Western culture, rely solely on technology to deliver meals (i.e. Postmates, Grubhub, EatBlue, etc.). But, Mahadeo Havaji Bachche founded the Dabbawala system in 1890. Technology at the time was not effective in facilitating the system’s purpose and was not used. And, as time went on, the requirements for the system remained the same and technology was still not needed. Technology is useful to solve problems within a system’s infrastructure. The Dabbawalas system has been successful for a long time, with no apparent problems in the infrastructure. Therefore, technology is not required.