Due to the presence of the organization “Dabbawalas”, the burden of carrying lunch boxes in Mumbai is now unheard of. Dabbawalas facilitates the delivery of lunch boxes, or dabbas, to customers, as well as the return of empty lunch boxes to their respective homes. The customers, a major stakeholder, benefit from the ability to easily consume healthy and home-cooked meals and leveraged time constraints. Impressively, without the use of technology, this system has been coordinating the delivery of meals, at low cost, for about 100 years.

The delivery of meals to customers follows a ‘hub and spoke’ process. Walking, or using bicycles, Dabbawalas are arranged in different locations to insure efficient distribution and return of the lunch boxes. Dabbas are sorted based on final destination and assigned a train route, on which dabbawalas will retrieve the dabbas and complete the interaction. This infrastructure allows for a repetitive and systematic process that ensures successful delivery and reduces the risk of error. This system allows workers, another stakeholder, to easily complete their tasks.

Although dabbawalas owes much of its success to non-information infrastructure, such as employee organization, color-coding plays a major role in the system. Using symbols to represent crucial information such as ‘destination’, ‘origination suburb’, ‘whose responsibility’, etc., dabbas are easy to read, independent of any local languages. This coding enables dabbas to be put back on track even if they get lost or misplaced en route. Many dabbawalas take requests via text messaging, taking advantage of cellular infrastructure and reducing the burden of requesting delivery.

The ease of information processing for all involved stakeholders is key to reducing ambiguity and preventing mis-communication, or information overload. Each part of the dabbawalas system plays a key part in creating a whole. The effective coding schemes, knowledge of the dabbawalas, and the efficiency of the train system, allow this organization to rarely make mistakes. This proves to be a great example of how infrastructure can be successfully implemented to meet a goal, even prior to technology.