

Professional Development, Training and Work-life Balance Role of Trade Unions

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Abstract: Trade unions are now a days a part and parcel of the society. Since its emergence its role is undergoing continuous changes to cope with the ever changing global scenario. In the past, the prime focus of trade unions was on bargaining related to wage and salaries. At present its role is diversified. In addition to their role as pressure groups, trade unions are concerned with issues like training, professional development, work-life balance and so on. To some extent, they play the role of shadow management. In this article, attempts will be made to explain the evolutionary history of trade unions and their role in terms of professional development, training and work-life balance. The main focus will be on the global scenario. Attempts will also be made to explain and analyse the situation that prevails in Bangladesh.

Introduction:

Trade union is, now a days, a part and parcel of a company with a great significant role at workplace in terms of training and development. It is a voice in favour of trade union members, company as well as sometimes of the employers. A company can achieve its goals; can be stable in the challenging global economy through its developed and competent workforce existing in the working area. If employees are well-trained and educated, they can give full effort to the company as they have the inner qualities but those should be utilised in the right way in the right position that depends on practice how they use their potentiality. Inner qualities can be improved by practicing in the workplace. Training makes a person to be coped with the environment developing their internal and external qualities. Employees have some qualities that need to develop, need to make useful for the environment. This is why they need training, need to upgrade skills. Trade union in the company helps employees to be trained in many ways that lead to develop the organisational performance, management skills, and employee capacity. Even trade union does for the welfare of employees that assists a lot for the people as well as for the company.

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Steps and initiatives are taken by the trade union to meet present and future challenges so that employees can sustain their job. This is why they are given sufficient training and skill oriented, need based knowledge is necessary in the workplace meeting the demand. This training is to be arranged by the trade union for union and non-union members for the company. As a result there is a good environment exists in the work place.

This essay aims to see the activities of trade union how it works in the company to develop in terms of training and development for the workers and management and what is the benefit brought to the company at the workplace and how they can the role developing skills, working environment correlating with the business strategies within the organisation. Moreover, there will be special focus on the role of trade unions in terms work-life balance.

Brief History of Trade Unions:

Cannell (2009) observes that there is a tendency to think of trade unions as products of the factory system. But they had their origins much earlier, in the mediaeval craft guilds which were established to control entry to crafts and ensure that artisans were not overwhelmed by numbers; and hence to ensure a degree of price control. In short, they were concerned with controlling the market. There are many recorded instances of strikes in various localities to increase wages or decrease working hours during this period, leading to pressure from employers to ban known as 'combinations': there were 30 pieces of legislation between 1720 and 1799 to ban combinations among specific groups of workers, culminating in two General Combination Acts in 1799 and 1800 outlawing combinations and strikes in England and Wales. So towards the end of the eighteenth century, the journeymen's societies had developed into trade unions.

1880 - 1914: Union Growth:

History reveals that by the beginning of the 1880s, the number of trade unionists has been estimated at around three-quarters of a million, most in skilled trades although the majority of the workforce was unskilled. There had been attempts in the past to organise unskilled and semi-skilled workers, including women, but recessions and the precarious nature of such employment meant that they had been mostly short-lived. However, in the 1880s, led by seamen, dockers and gas workers who held notably successful strikes, serious organisation of the unskilled and semi-skilled

began. Women too formed separate trade unions. The predominant ideology behind the craft unions had been Non-Conformism and self-help. During the period of the growth of new unions, socialism began to play a part and many young activists were inspired by it. But the climate tended towards the anarchic: these so-called 'new unions' competed with each other, often with intense inter-union rivalry (Geary, 2008).

1914 - 1945: War and Recession:

The First World War had a significant effect on working life generally. With resources needing to be diverted to munitions, and men needed for fighting, government had to intervene in manufacturing. Moves to replace skilled men by semi-skilled operatives ('dilution') meant that new workers, including women, entered the workforce. This was not without resistance. A significant side-effect was to enhance the power of shop stewards. Stewards had existed from around the 1870s to collect contributions and inevitably union members would take grievances to them. After 1915, because changes in munitions factories were job-specific, employers found themselves (not always willingly) increasingly dealing more and more with stewards to negotiate changes (Cannell, 2009).

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw similar issues arise as in the previous conflict. More women entered the workforce; dilution again became an issue; and under Order 1305, strikes were banned (although unofficial strikes continued to take place, they were usually of short duration). As in the First World War, collective bargaining and union membership made significant advances, membership rising by 1.5 million by the end of the war. Equal pay made ground in the public sector but not until 1950 did the TUC carry its first resolution for equal pay for women outside the public services (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2008).

1945 - 1979: the Growth of Union Power:

Unions sought to take advantage of the post-war boom, with full employment, and strikes steadily rose. So too did the power of shop stewards, the influence of the Communist Party and the incidence of the closed shop. Matters came to a head in 1959 when an anti-communist stood against the Communist general secretary of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), lost narrowly, and took the matter to court. The case showed widespread ballot-rigging and intimidation, and in 1961 the TUC expelled the ETU. More generally, the case highlighted what had been

evident for years: that unions were open to be taken over by unrepresentative minorities because of low attendance at branch and other meetings. Even in the ETU's leadership ballot following the scandal, only 13% of members voted (Reid, 2004).

1979 to date: Decline but not Fall:

The Conservative government that took power in 1979 introduced a series of laws that increasingly removed many of the rights and immunities possessed by unions. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 required seven days' notice of a strike to be given, tightened control over ballots for industrial action, and undermined the Bridlington Principles by granting individuals the right to join a union of their choice. The government's attitude was a complete change from the consensus which had existed for about half a century of including unions as part of the political system: the strategy was of deliberate exclusion aimed at reducing union power to improve productivity, often in the name of 'partnership' (Pelling, 1992).

Between 1979 and 1997, union membership fell to around seven million. The cause was not simply legal changes and high levels of unemployment, although many employers did de-recognise unions in this period and new greenfield sites were often kept union-free. Structural changes in the economy, most notably the move from manufacturing to services, meant that large concentrations of employment were fewer. Small employers have always been more difficult to organise than large employers, and white collar workers more difficult than industrial workers. The main concentrations of union membership are now in the public sector (Reid, 2004).

Labour's return to government in 1997 was never going to mean a return to the seventies. That had always been made clear. Nevertheless, some changes were brought about. The Employment Relations Act 1999 assists unions to claim recognition, while others brought in changes sought by unions such as a National Minimum Wage, and new rights to maternity leave and for part-time workers. Some of the pressure for such rights comes from the European Union, which British unions embraced enthusiastically in the nineties, realising that they were more likely to bring about change via the European route than through domestic policies. One consequence of the pressures on unions was a rise in amalgamations: in 2007 the TUC had 66 affiliated unions, compared with 109 in 1979. At around six and a half million TUC membership has fallen slightly since

the mid-nineties. The emphasis of trade unionism has changed gradually (Cannell, 2009).

Training & Development and Trade Union:

In a consumer society, unions seek to attract members not only through traditional means but through insurance and credit cards. Legal advice and representation of members at tribunals has grown in importance. Training has received much greater attention and with government funding a scheme of workplace learning representatives has been developed. Unions embrace the equality and diversity agendas. There is much less opposition than in the past to working with employers to improve productivity (Cannell, 2009).

Importance of Trade Union: 'Economists, educationists, sociologists and political scientists have all, in recent recognised the importance of different countries' education and training systems. They have brought to bear a range of analytical perspectives on education and training systems and on their links with economic systems in the advanced industrial world. In some cases this link is conceived in quite simple terms: conventional wisdom has emerged, wherein 'better' education or training is assumed to lead automatically to improved economic performance' (Ashton and Green, 1996). Trade union realises this importance of training. So trade union affects to training and development at the workplace enormously. Training is T.R.A.I.N.I.N.G. which is technological and technical reconciliation of achievable innovative new ideas, neo-logical but generalised. This knowledge gives a person to cope with the new environment. It is such kind of power received as an experience, where workers can learn being involved in the process of learning by doing. A person never feels himself isolated, never to be blown out off the main track. Employees earn a lot by doing, by learning, even imparting institutionalised structured knowledge. Trade union's main focus is on how to develop quality, capacity, working condition and employee-employer relation. These issues certainly related to training and workplace. Training is something different from the formal education but earning knowledge from the experience, by doing in hand on some specific issues, ideas and technology to fit for the company to meet its objectives in the competitive global market. It is inseparable from an employee. So it is one kind of wealth of a worker to be used or utilised for his own purpose. Trade union does for this reason and train workers. So trade union directly affects skill development at the workplace.

This is the age of technology competing with the world. The country or the company, if developed technologically, must have an edge on others. This is the age of training and experience, skill based everywhere. Training provides information and skills in the workplace or labour market. Trade union thought influence workers to rush to undergo training to be so. This is the credit of trade union to make the workers to be aware of training for their advancement. The article written by Heyes (2000) provides valuable information on trade unions at workplace. 'Trade unions may encourage job tenure by providing employees with a 'voice' as an alternative to expressing their grievances through 'existing' (quitting) employment (Freeman and Medoff, 1984 cited in Heyes, 2000). 'Low labour tenure will increase the probability of employees being able to secure a return on investments in training and should in turn lead to an increase in their propensity to train. Unions may close off routes to competitiveness based on the intensive use of low wage, low skill labour. The implication is that employers will be encouraged to upgrade their production techniques and invest more heavily in the skills of the employees' (Heyes, 2000). That is why trade union organises training for the workers. They also play an important educational role, organising courses for their members on a wide range of matters. 'Seeking a healthy and safe working environment is also a prominent feature of union activity' (www.oxbridgecareers.com).

How Training & Development is affected by Trade Union at the Workplace?

It is argued that formal education ends and informal learning i.e. training starts to learn around the whole life. Conceptual knowledge earned in institutions shunned in practical field. Trade union affects each and every sphere of employees' career. Trade union affects 6 Ps namely, pay, production, profit, providing employment, protection and perfect relationship between employee and employer. Based on these areas training goes year round at the workplace. 'If unions are going to have an impact on skills, then, given their lack of influence within Vocational Educational Training institutions, they need to be playing a significant role at the workplace' (Lloyd and Payne 2005, pp181). Training is the combination of industrial relations, business strategies and environment. Therefore, trade unions have significant influence on workers, employers and organisations in terms of training, development as well as work-life balance at the workplace.

Motivational Issues: In order to fulfil company's goals and objectives trade union motivates workers to play a vital role in the respective fields of their companies. It works as a standpoint of employees to bargain with the management for workers as well as for the management and employees to be motivated to fit as a part of the organisation. Based on some motivational issues, training is widely accepted. Trade union members influence workers to produce more and to get more financial benefit from the company. Some techniques are followed to do so. The same is done for motivating management to establish a stable workforce paying due attention to the workers. Training is always influenced by the situation it involves or to be associated with the environment. In fact, environment plays a decisive role in this regard. Therefore, motivation is very much important that affects training at workplace. Hoddincott (2000) emphasises that motivation for the trade union involvement is to secure greater quality of access to training opportunities for workers belonging to all classes.

Development of Organisational Capacity: Organisational performance leads the company towards the highest peak of success. It depends on every effort that comes from the management, from the workers even from the trade unions. Sustainable organisational capacity is the precondition to survival of the company. Trade unions can assist the company to develop organisational capacity in many ways. Wide range issues are involved in this connection. Organisational performance comes to a level that can easily meet its requirements to achieve the goals and objectives. It depends on the effective and full-time involvement of trade union in organisational performances in terms of training and development at workplace. 'If trade unions are to take their engagement in workplace learning partnership seriously, then it requires the development of new organisational capacity. Not only does it mean that shop stewards and officers will need to get grip with new range of issues on with to represent members' interests with new approaches to working with management representatives of the trade unions and their own members. This has consequences for union education departments and potentiality for the creation of new roles within branch structure' (Sutherland and Rainbird, 2000).

Financial System: Trade union fights for the benefit of the employee. Pay system should always be based on production and experience even that comes from training and one's skill with adequate knowledge. Enhanced pay enhances skills. But enhanced pay is often linked to better

performance. Effective training enables workers gaining new skills and thus improving performance. Skills may be formally recognised by linking training to financial rewards where training is job related. Unions are likely to be concerned that members secure financial compensation for their training efforts and the skills they develop.' (Industrial Relations Review Report, 1990 pp12). Trade union is not only concerned about the skill based employment but also about the reluctant members for their job and future. 'Trade unions are concerned how to protect the interest of the union members who are reluctant or unwilling to voluntarily undertake training and development. There are clear tensions between trade unions support for employer provided training goals such as greater equality in labour market.' (Heyes 2000, pp158-9).

Skill Development: Trade union does for the workers to improve their living condition, pay system developing their skills at the workplace. This is not only for the workers even for the organisation also. This skill development gives the security to the employees in the organisation and the company gets benefit from the skilled workers as well. While unions concerns regarding weak employer demand for skill are clearly evident from their wider economic analysis, they have tended to be kept somewhat separate from the generally enthusiastic response given to Labour's supply-side skills policy. By adopting such an approach, unions risk appearing complicit with a set of policy assumptions around the 'knowledge economy', skill shortage and the need for higher levels of publicly-subsidised employer training that they ought to be subjecting to more rigorous and critical security. (Lloyd and Payne 2005).

Lifelong Learning: It is true that worker may face many challenges day to day life. The global economy is also being changed. So there is no alternative to learn to cope with the environment. That is why learning ways is shown by the trade union. It is quite different from learning of educational institutions. Spreading the practice of lifelong learning clearly depends on findings that occur outside formal educational institutions (Rees, 2000). Lifelong learning protects employee's present and future job so that he can not be isolated or be out off the main track. So trade union influences the workplace learning for some reasons. First, their members are recipients of training and other learning opportunities in the workplace and it is in their interests that they should have skills which enhance their bargaining power and employability. Second, members are employed in educational institutions as teachers and support staff or as trainers and instructors in the other organisations. Third these

boarder citizenship issues which they need to address as the members of society. Forth some unions provide learning opportunities (Sutherland and Rainbird, 2000). Trade union thought affects in the working conditions. Trade union members help to understand that workplace is a vast source of knowledge and so on. Purcell (1988) argues that the workplace is site of socialisation including gender socialisation after family and school. There is no doubt that unions' learning initiatives have brought benefits to many members and that, in some case they can transform lives (Lloyd and Payne, 2005).

Building Relationship: Contribution from the both side leads the company to achieve its goals and objectives. Trade union tries to develop the relation between management and workers, among workers so that good working environment exists. This relation is sometimes vertical and sometimes horizontal as the situation demands. Trade union takes initiatives such as organising workshop, meeting to enhance the relationship that will lead the company to increase productivity. The goal of quality relates to features of management behaviour which include the management of investment in highly skilled employees in order to produce highly quality goods and services (Carey, 2000). Heyes (2000) argues that trade unions are forced to consider the relationship between training and labour utilisation. Now a days each and every organisation realises that human relation is one of the most important factors in the workplace for the sustainability of the company. This relation gives the mental support to the workers, sometimes it works more effective than financial benefits.

Global Market: Companies are at present in a competitive global economy for which they need good support from all sides. This is the age of globalisation. A company can think not only for the present benefit in the country but also think to cope with other countries. Trade unions have to respond to the work modernisation agenda and to employers' governments concerns with the development of a framework capable of responding to the challenges of competitions in an increasingly global economy (Sutherland and Rainbird, 2000). Trade union encourages workers to be trained for the company to be more effective in this context and trade union members try them to think the existence of company is the beneficial for them. So they need to learn technical skill.

Social Awareness and Protection: Trade union tries to make workers aware of the workers' benefit, social security. Workers being trained in

some social issues may raise their voice with the trade union members. Now they are very much concerned about their rights and benefits, their responsibilities, duties to the company duties to the society even to the country. Trade union takes steps to formulate some social policies by the company management in favour of workers rights and benefits. Trade unions are engaged in some innovative activities in the working area such as health and safety awareness building programmes, social work, workers welfare fund etc. Trade unions are proactive and do for the worker benefit as well as company profit in favour of management. They develop a new relation between employer and employees and workers and management. New dimension of knowledge are sometimes introduced by the trade unions members. Even sometimes they have played a role to formulate some rules and regulations for the benefit of workers. In Bangladesh the government has formulated about twenty acts and ordinances for the betterment of workers those are the outcome of trade union type organizations. Recently government has been forced to set minimum wage system for workers in readymade garments industries. This is the great success of the workers' movement in past twenty years in our country (Islam, 2009; Khatun and Moazzem, 2006; Rahman, 2010).

Trade Unions and Work-life Balance:

The term 'work-life balance' is getting more importance in Britain and eventually throughout the globe since the Labour Party has formed cabinet in that country in 1997 (Rigby and O'Brien-Smith, 2010). Among the more questioned elements of the current discourse is the focus on long working hours (Roberts, 2007). McInnes (2008) has commented upon the lack of realism of a government agenda to increase both the labour force and fertility, resulting in a focus on the work-life problems of women, assumptions about the desirability of women working full-time, a passive view of men in work-life debates (Ransome, 2008) and an acquiescence with the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989). Attention has also been drawn to the influence of the 'chattering classes' on the public discourse and the greater attention paid to managerial and professional groups (Warhurst et al., 2008). Similarly Taylor (2003) has emphasised the need to consider the concerns of those workers rooted to the 'sticky floor' as well as those of women seeking to break through the glass ceiling. Hochschild et al. (2001) have pointed to the need to consider that section of the labour force who have fallen behind in income share and are having to work more hours. Finally, writers have pointed to the need for the

examination of work-life issues to be located within a wider framework of analysis, including relevant structural factors (Warhurst et al., 2008).

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), the main union for staff in the media sector, represent the managerial categories of employee, which has been the focus of work-life balance literature. The newsprint sector from which were drawn the majority of NUJ respondents is at a difficult stage of the business cycle, facing severe competition from the electronic media and problems in maintaining advertising revenue. The newsprint sector is predominantly male. Women members of the NUJ tend to be concentrated in areas such as publishing and features. Although there are quite high levels of union density, up to 80% to 90% in some of the titles), the 1980s saw widespread union derecognition. The NUJ is still a long way from achieving its previous influence (Gall, 2005).

Employees of the second sector, retail supermarkets, represent a category of staff largely ignored by work-life balance literature. The retail sector as a whole has the largest number of low-wage workers in the UK (Lloyd et al., 2008) and, in contrast to the media sector, has a predominantly female labour force with a high proportion of part-time workers. Sixty percent of the membership of the main union, the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), are women, but at store level the proportion is higher, male union members being concentrated in the distribution and industrial areas. Retail supermarkets, although at a less difficult stage of the business cycle than newsprint, face a competitive environment. Retailing, because of high labour turnover and a fragmented structure, has a low union density of 11% according to Grainger (2006). However, in supermarkets, density is higher and averaged 40 percent in the stores.

Research on union involvement in work-life issues has tended to focus on national policies and agreements. The Workplace Employment Relations Surveys WERS 1998 and WERS 2004 (Kersley et al., 2006), found that unionised workplaces were more likely to have 'family friendly' policies, while Heery (2006b), using survey data collected in 2002, provides evidence of union involvement in negotiating agreements on work-life issues. However this research tells us little about how agreements emerge, the union and employer roles in their development, and their implementation.

Other research indicates the need for a cautious approach to data on the existence of policies and agreements. The 'empty shell' theory put forward by Hoque and Noon (2004) in relation to equal opportunities policies, that many written policies are not fully implemented, would seem also to apply to the work-life area (Gambles et al., 2006). It might also be expected that union approaches vary according to gender composition. Heery (2006a) points to the significance of the gender of full-time officials and lay representatives for the promotion of equality and work-life issues.

More demanding 'process' questions about trade union intervention were posed by Hyman and Summers's (2007) study of the financial sector in Scotland and Gregory and Milner's (2009) research in social work and insurance organisations. Both sets of data suggested work-life policies were largely management determined, recruitment and retention driven, and subject to managerial influence at an operational level, with union representatives having little impact on the management agenda. However, the scope of these studies was narrow. In the Scottish study, data were collected from independent workplace union representatives in only one organisation, while Gregory and Milner's private-sector workplace representative data were drawn from two insurance companies. In addition, the national discourse on work-life balance has become more prominent since these data were collected (in the case of Hyman and Summers, in 1999-2001, and Gregory and Milner, in 2001-5) with several further tranches of legislation in the area.

Union engagement with work-life issues connects with debates about union strategy. A competitive corporate environment and institutional adversity make it difficult for unions to make progress on distributive issues. Thus, we have seen a union engagement with qualitative areas where mutual gains might be identified for unions and management. Work-life issues fall into this category (Morris and Pillinger, 2007). Much of the literature on work-life issues and the associated government discourse suggest that the area facilitates the integration of employee and management interests. Work-life balance policies enable the employee to manage the interface between work and non-work and the employer to reduce labour turnover and increase employee commitment.

Work-life issues can be seen as a suitable area for partnership (Morris and Pillinger, 2007) and as a classical example of the articulation of union 'voice'. However other evidence suggests the need for caution in this

respect. Much of the traditional union compensation policy, with a focus on cutting hours, still remains in place, coexisting with a newer focus on family friendly benefits and worker choice over scheduling and duration of working time (Heery, 2006b). Lowe (2005) points to unions' emphasis on shorter work-weeks rather than individual flexibility.

Effects of Trade Union on Training & Development at Workplace in Developing Country like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is one of the least developed countries with large-scale poverty and widespread informal employment. It has a very low unionisation rate (9.2%). However, between 1990 and 2000 it experienced an increase in trade union membership. During this period, the rate of growth of membership was 1.63 per cent and that of registered trade unions 5.3 per cent (Mondal, 2002, p. 14). Trade unionism has not developed to a significant level in the garment industry, the major foreign exchange earner of this country in spite of violation of workers' rights in this sector (Sukti, 2002).

Like developed countries trade union can not play important role in training and development at workplace in developing country like Bangladesh. Still it is in the forming position far away from structured organisation. So it can not play any role for the company or for the workers' development. In last few years some group shaping trade union type did something for the employee including social security, structured wages system, developed working condition, human relation, on the job training, minimum wage, social and global awareness etc. For some assignments of foreign buyers few companies introduced trade union system in the company and the government has agreed to institutionalise the trade union system in the industrial sector. But as a matter of fact this trade union is little bit worker concern, mostly politically or management biased. Devarajan, et al (1997) remarked in their essay that Unions and union federations are very active in Bangladesh's political and economic life. So the workers can't get proper due. But what happens, workers are at least aware of their rights, pay system, working condition. Just a web of trade union news in EPZ (Export Promotion Zone) gives enormous positive impact on the working people. But still they are not getting their proper due. In the recent past garments owners were forced to determine minimum wage for workers due to pressure from donors, government, world bank and demand of organized workers which played a vital role in disguise of trade union (Khatun and Moazzem, 2006).

Conclusion:

New opportunities for trade unions have opened up in workplace learning, but there are also some dangers associated with relying too heavily on the state for support (Lloyd and Payne 2005). If the training is not imparted to the workers at the working place there are some negative consequences in the company, such as economic decline, industrial accident, worker illiteracy, industrial dispute, management inefficiency, declining buyer-management relation above all threatening to existence of the company. Sometimes many identifiable learning disabilities may be in the company. If they are not trained or overlooked by the trade union or the company problem may come up. So it is seen that if trade union does not take initiatives for training and development some negative consequences may be taken place in the workplace. On the other hand positive impacts are also seen on the whole company that lead to good internal relation, profit rising company and employee satisfaction. Nevertheless trade union can not play a significant role affecting training and development in the company of the developing countries like developed countries such as UK, USA. Though British trade unions have a long history of supporting the education and training of working people, particularly in relation to activists and officials, some of whom have gone on to take up prominent positions within the labour movement (Holford, 1993; Shelley, 2005). But in developing country like Bangladesh does not have remarkable deeds of trade union. Sometimes it is just for its own, not for the company even not for the workers. So union members of such companies of the developing countries should be trained or given opportunities to pay industrial visit to foreign companies to gain practical knowledge so that they can compare the responsibilities and can do better in their respective companies. Because there is no other alternative to training. And training is a continuous process and develops the organisation continuously. Keeping this concept in mind trade union does a lot for the workers that affect training and development at the workplace.

It is evident from the contemporary examples particularly from Britain that trade union intervention in terms of work-life balance has ensured mutual benefits for both employers and employees (Gregory and Milner, 2009). For a better working environment in an organisation, management and trade unions should consider each other as partners, not rivals or enemies.

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