



'Identifying team roles for Life Long learning'

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Abstract

The term life-long learning means, the emphasis is on the ability to keep learning for a lifetime and this term implies to both teachers and students. The teacher acts as a facilitator who facilitates learning for the students. Thus today's educational institutions are the hub of the nation's aspirations and growth and are crucial as a contributor to life-long learning. But we cannot but forget that the institutions' important backbones are their human resources and the quality of staff is a very important key to institutional effectiveness. Employers in the job market are always on the lookout for efficient staff who can deliver the best results and of the various skills and abilities expected by the employers one of the most desired one is working effectively in a team.

This research paper concentrates on the different team roles that are required for effective functioning of the team. The data has been gathered from the responses given by the undergraduate students of B.A. using a rating scale.

Key Words: Team roles, Life Long Learning

Introduction:

Lifelong learning is the "lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. The emphasis is actually on *learning to learn* and

the ability to keep learning for a lifetime. It is thus the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual and it occurs through various experiences encountered during the course of a lifetime and can take place through formal, non-formal or informal education. We cannot but neglect the fact that a learning society is an educated society and is always committed to active citizenship. Thus for the overall development of our society we need to convert ourselves into life-long learners.

There are 5 key areas for countries to consider when seeking for lifelong learning for all.

- Recognise all forms of learning, not just formal courses of study.
- It is important to develop the wider foundation skills more than the ones which are traditionally identified as central
- Emphasis is on the reformulation of access and equity in the opportunities available to individuals across their life cycle and in different settings where learning can occur.
- Consider resource allocation across all sectors and settings
- There is a requirement for collaboration in policy development and implementation among a wide range of partners including ministries other than education.

A key focus area in life-long learning is on the employee learning needs in various sectors. Considering the education sector we can categorise the employees into basically 3 professional stages – Fresher or newly qualified, probationers and experienced. Given our population we need to consider on how to retain these professionals i.e. our teachers into the professions and at the same time motivate them to perform better and give effective results. Though there are various such skills required by our teachers to perform but there are some top rated skills which the graduates of today are found to be short of. Some of them are Leadership, Subject knowledge and competence, Time Management, Decision making skills, Problem solving skill, Creativity, Tolerance to stress, Commercial awareness, Ability to work in team, etc. In this paper we shall concentrate on the various team roles that individual in a team play.

Team Work: A good team shall motivate the team members by encouraging team work. Team work achieves personal recognition, raises self-esteem and increases motivation and commitment. It is stimulated by trust, support, completion, acknowledgement, communication and agreement.

C's for Team Building: A successful team building that creates effective and focussed work teams requires attention to each of the following.

Clear Expectation: Leaders should clearly communicate its expectations for the team's performance and expected outcomes so that the team members understand why the team was created and understand their roles in it clearly.

Context: The team members need to understand why they are participating in the team and define the team's importance, goals, principles, vision and values.

Commitment: The team members need to feel that the team mission is important and the team should be excited and challenged by the team opportunity.

Competence: The team should be comprised of members having the knowledge, skill and capacity to address the issues for which the team was formed. The team should also have the access to the resources needed to accomplish its mission.

Control: The team should have the necessary freedom and empowerment on each team member to feel the ownership necessary to complete its work. Each team member should understand their boundaries and how far they need to go in pursuit of solutions.

Collaboration: All team members should work together effectively and understand and respect each other's roles and responsibilities. The team should use appropriate strategy to meet its action plan.

Team Roles:

Merdith Belbin (1993) based on his research proposed 10 roles that successful teams should have:

Shaper: The shaper is full of drive to make things happen and get things going. In doing this they are quite happy to push their own ideas forward.

Plant: This member is the one who is most likely to come out with original ideas and challenge the traditional way of thinking about things.

Resource Investigator: The resource investigator is the group member with the strongest contacts and networks and is excellent at bringing in information and support from the outside.

Implementer: He is a worker and effective at turning big ideas into manageable tasks and plans. Such individuals are both logical, hardworking and disciplined in their approach but may have difficulty in being flexible.

Team Worker: He is the one who is the most aware of others in the team, their needs and their concerns. They are sensitive and supportive of other people's efforts, and try to promote harmony and reduce conflict. Team workers are particularly important when the team is experiencing a stressful or difficult period.

Completer: He is the one who drives the deadlines and makes sure they are achieved. He usually communicates a sense of urgency, which galvanizes other team members into actions. They are effective at checking the details.

Monitor evaluator: The Monitor Evaluator is good at seeing all the options. They have a strategic perspective and can judge situations accurately. The ME can be overcritical and is not usually good at inspiring and encouraging others.

Specialist: This person provides specialist skills and knowledge and has a dedicated and single – minded approach. They may sometimes fail to see the whole picture.

Finisher: He is the person who sticks to deadline and likes to get on with things. They may get irritated by the more relaxed members of the team.

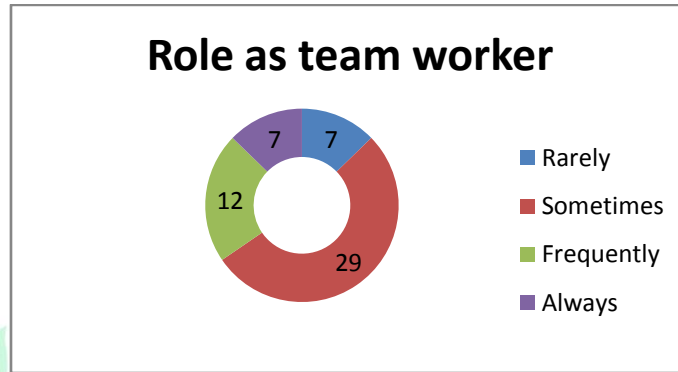
Thus if we expect our students and the teachers to be truly effective in what they do then they need to identify their roles in a team and meet up to their expectations. There are various and extensive researches going on around the world on cooperative and collaborative learning where the focus is on using teamwork in the classroom setting. The objectives of these teaching methods can be fulfilled only if the students have a positive attitude towards teamwork. Attitude towards teamwork has been defined as the individual willingness to continue working together with the same team as well as in other teams. (*Gardner and Korth, 1998*). The purpose of this study was to determine what team roles the group under study feel that they play in a team. The sample for the study was 55 students of Third Year B.A. from one of the college in Pune city.

Procedure of the study:

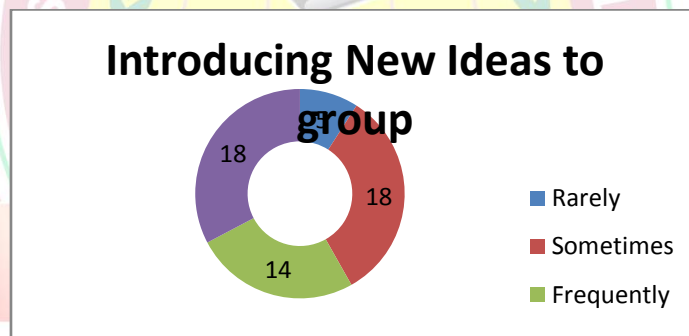
An online rating scale consisting of 28 statements, for assessing the awareness of team roles was modified by the researchers and given to the respondents. This rating scale was given to 55 students (Incidental Sample) of Third Year B.A. which was then analysed in a tabular form. The major observations from the statements were then presented graphically

to give a clear picture of the results and the conclusions from the remaining statements were also mentioned in points.

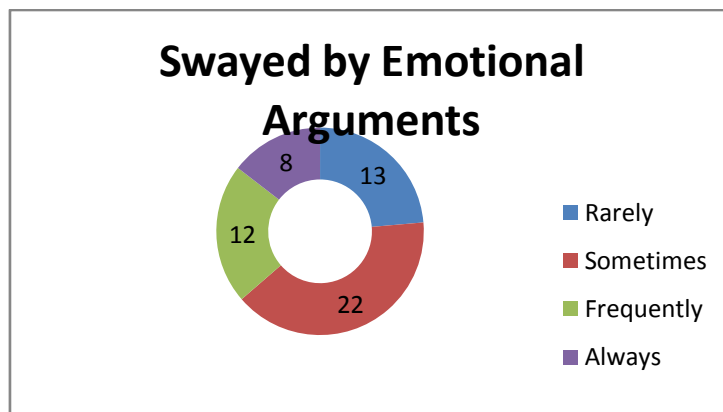
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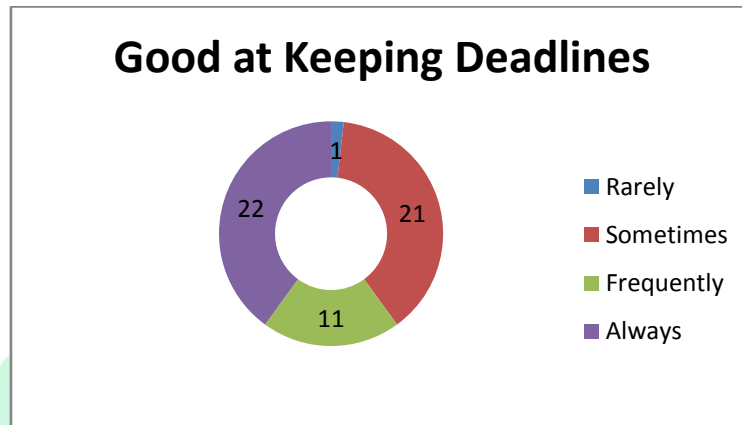
Observation: Majority of the students would only sometimes help the other students to find compromises between varying view-points which shows that the students are not ready with their roles as at team worker.



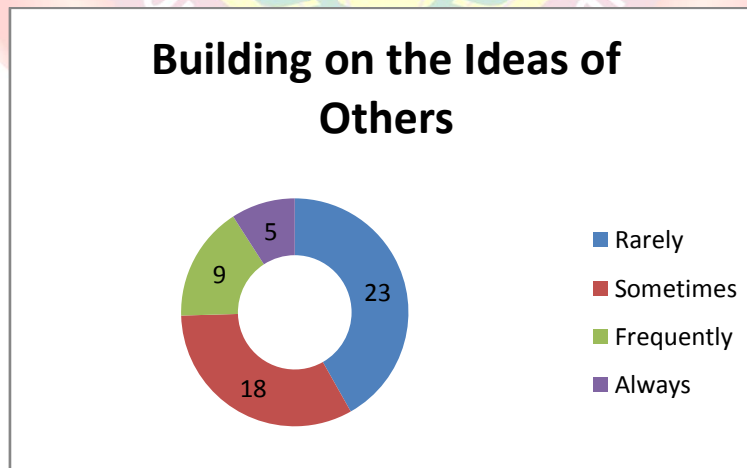
Observation: Equal number of the students felt that they either sometimes or always helped in introducing new ideas to the group in which they work. This is a very positive sign as most of the students are ready to take up their role as the 'Plant' in the team.



Observation: Very few numbers of students (8) felt that they are most of the times swayed by emotional arguments from team members. Majority of the students felt that they are very firm on their decisions in a team which again may not always be in favour of the team as all decisions should be agreed upon only after proper negotiations.

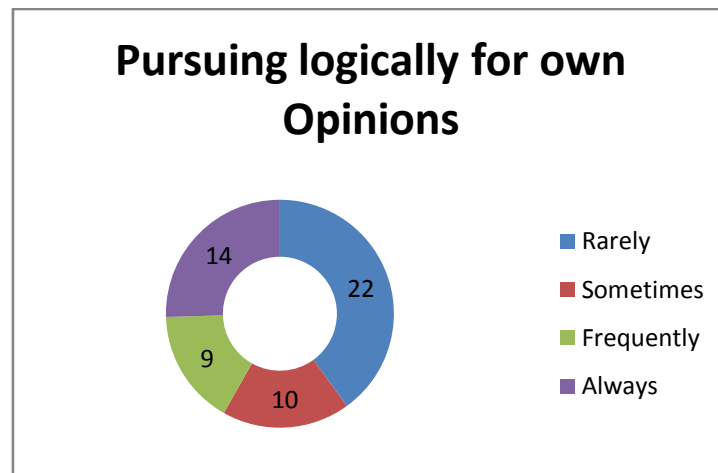


Observation: The results reveal that the students are very particular about meeting deadlines which in itself is a very positive sign as a team. Thus majority of the students are very alert about their roles as a 'Completer' in a team. Almost equal (21) number of students also believe that they are only sometimes particular at maintaining deadlines thus raising the requirement of training these students so that stick to their given deadlines for their team to accomplish the task and get positive results.

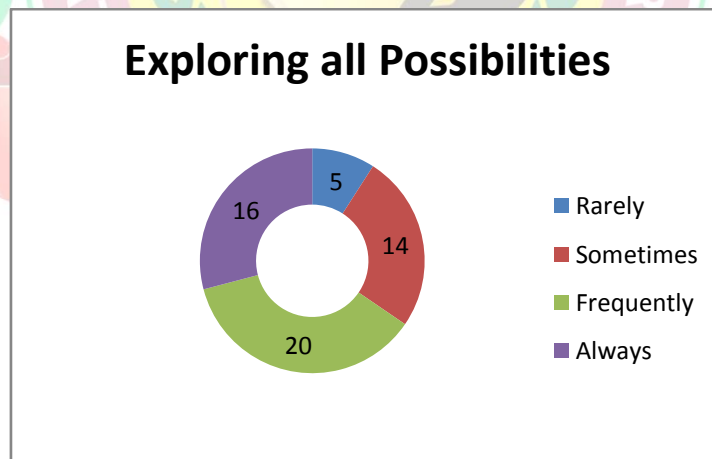


Observation: A major number of 23 students felt that they could rarely turn big ideas into manageable tasks and plans which is an area which needs to be concentrated while training the students for their team roles. Only 5 students out of 55 felt that they could actually build

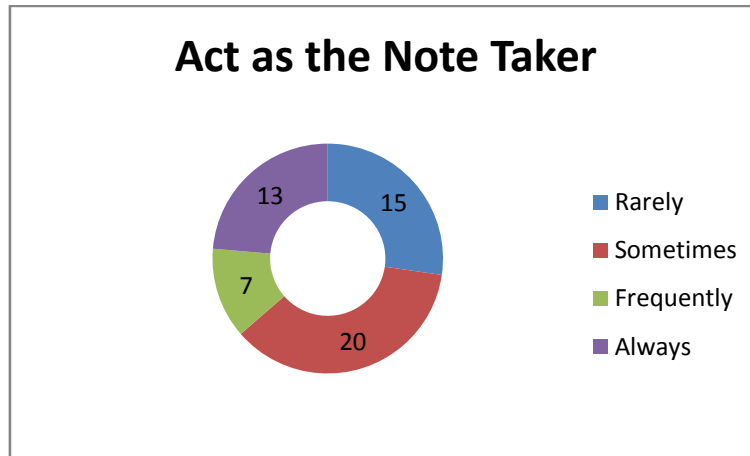
on ideas of others. Thus team building exercises should include more of activities for the team role of an 'Implementer'.



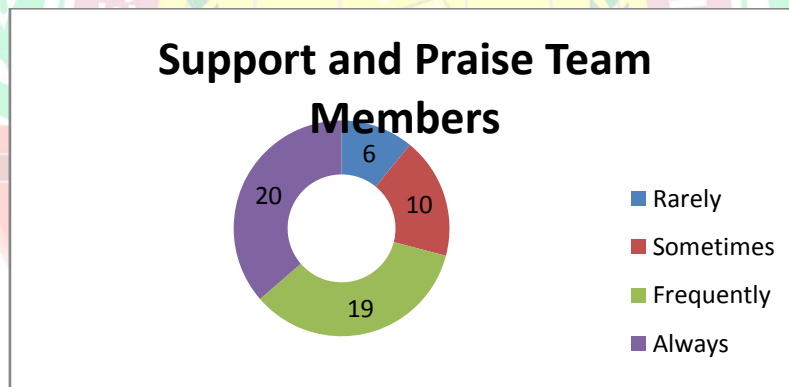
Observations: Majority (22) students did not know how to stick to their opinions and argue persuasively with proper logical arguments in favour of them. This shows that the students have a lack of logical approach which may be a disadvantage for the team because some very good and innovative ideas may not see the light of the day due to improper way of presenting them and also inability to convince the team members logically.



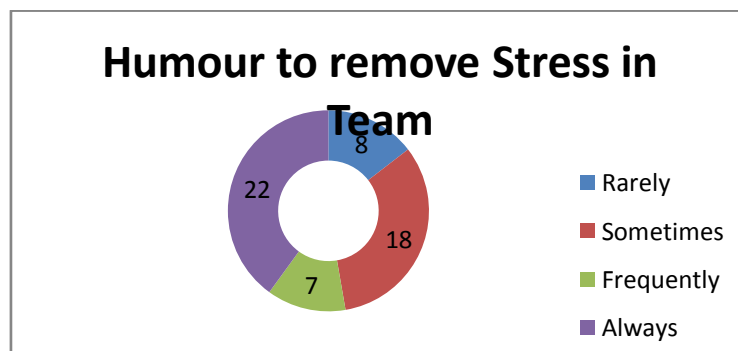
Observation: Most of the students take up the role of 'Monitor Evaluator' in a team where they judge all situations open to them accurately and then explore all the possibilities that are available to the team though they can be overcritical at times.



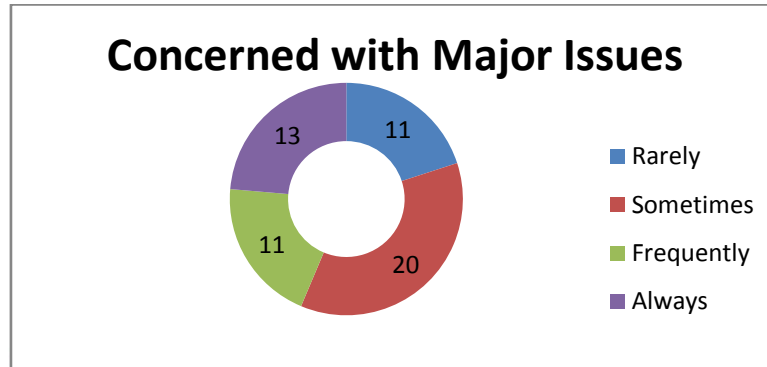
Observation: There is a mixed opinion here although 20 students feel that sometimes they do take on the role of the note taker in the group but almost 15 students also feel that they rarely acted as a note taker. This shows a matter of concern as until and unless you are ready with the details of the plan and the brainstorming in the group, on the paper it may sometimes be difficult to work out on the plan as some important points may be missed out and the importance of the task may be diluted.



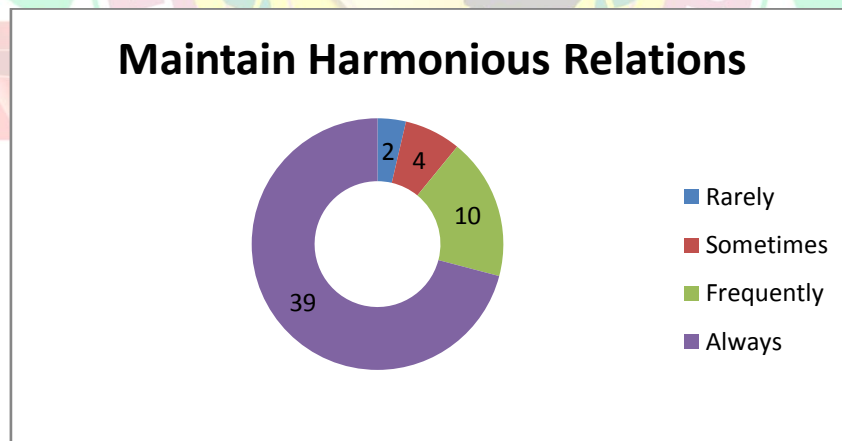
Observation: Most of the students say that they always praise their team members and support them as a team.



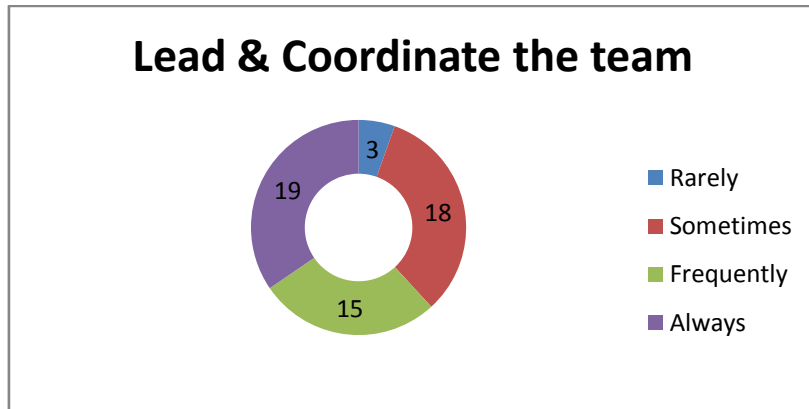
Observation: A much required element in any kind of group work is the inclusion of fun and humour so that the tense moments in the team can be released and majority of the respondents felt that they could add humour to the team always such that it reduces stress in the team.



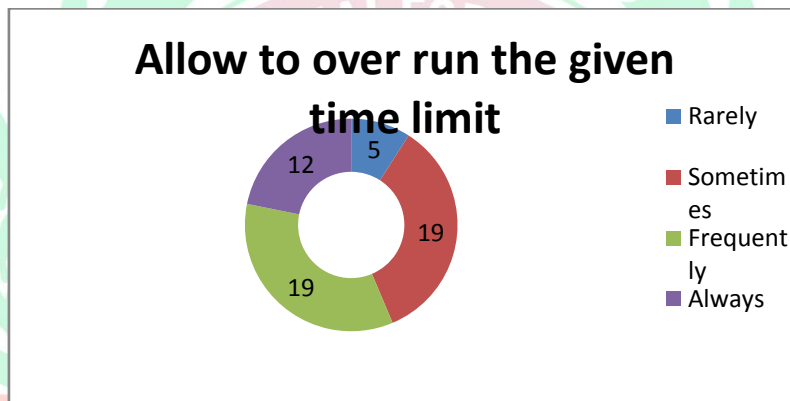
Observation: A moderate number of respondents (13) feel that they are always playing the role of a specialist in the team which means they are more concerned with the major issues bothering the team rather than the details. This also means that they have a single minded approach and they in turn may fail to see the whole picture. Although a majority of students felt that they are concerned with the major issues only sometimes.



Observation: 39 respondents out of 55 feel that they always maintain a harmonious relation among group members which is a very positive thing for any group. They carry out their roles as a 'Team Worker' and try to reduce conflict in a team.



Observation: Most of the respondents have taken on the role of being the team leader at some or the other time which is indeed a very positive sign in the youth.



Observation: The results show that in a team the role of a 'Finisher' is not played so rigidly by the respondents as they sometimes or frequently feel the need to stick to the deadlines given. The sense of urgency regarding the work at hand is not considered to be so important in a team performance by these respondents.

In addition to the very significant observations that have been mentioned above graphically there were other facts that the rating scale highlighted which are stated below.

- 28 of the respondents felt that they are very optimistic when it comes to looking at the positive side in a team work.
- 18 respondents stated that they are willing to compromise their own view to obtain a group consensus.
- 70.90 % of the respondents state that they clarify other peoples contributions in a team
- Almost 80% respondents say that they try hard to keep up the energy level of the group frequently or always.

- 22 respondents say that they rarely use dispassionate or critical analysis to make decisions in a team

Findings: Considering the limitation that we need to believe in the responses given by the respondents to be true we can say that the students have shown a very positive attitude towards their team roles.

Few Team Building Tips:

- Leaders of the team need to be a role model.
- Be authentic and honest with your team members.
- Give respect to your team and be a good listener.
- Remember that every person in your team is different.
- Begin your discussions in the team with a positive tone.
- Plan carefully before assigning work in the team and make the work challenging and interesting.
- Show a genuine interest in your team.
- Define team roles and see that the stronger the presence of different skills the effective shall be the team.

Team Building Activities:

There are various activities and exercises that can be played to engage the team and build in team development, employee motivation, personal development, etc. These activities can be in the form of ice breakers, energisers, and so on. It is although very important to run the activities in a proper way as that is crucial for its effectiveness. These games and activities help in stimulating the brain, improving retention of ideas, seeing things differently, using different thinking styles and also increasing fun and enjoyment. We need to keep in mind that these activities can be of varied nature but it should be acceptable to all the team members and be fair to all.

Conclusion:

Thus if we are keen to build a nation of strong individuals then we need to help them to be able to work in teams which in turn requires them to identify their team roles. This requires a change in attitude of our youth and the readiness to accept different roles in different teams which again requires them to be a life-long learner. Thus the lifelong,

voluntary and self – motivated pursuit of knowledge and skills should continue in the course of the lifetime of every individual as that would lead to a stronger and united India.

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