

***An Overview of Challenges faced by Women HoS in Delhi Government Schools and proposed solutions***

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**Abstract:**

The present paper is an attempt to explore the challenges, faced by the female Head of schools, who are always challenged to create the climate, structure and practices for academic success and personality development of all the students of their school, and the possible solutions of the imposing challenges. As principals they struggle within their institutions to communicate the need and commitment to improve the quality of administration and execution of policies. With their experience, hard work and innovative mind, the glaring disasters could be changed to gleaming opportunities. The tasks assigned to them would be easy if these major leadership challenges being a female are addressed. It is observed that multitude of institutions headed by female HoS have taken a flip turn from a low performing to exemplary status because of innovative art of handling challenges and providing practical solutions.

**Key words:** *Challenges, Female HoS, Quality of administration, Execution of policies, Government Schools*

**Introduction**

The role of HoS of an educational organization is complex and even become more demanding for female head. Being the overall supervisors of their schools is a real challenge. Here, the general psyche existing in society about gender comes into play. It has been observed that male staff sometimes does not cooperate with female head. Not only this, the HoS is even made to face same-gender rivalry. Even after giving her best her devotion for work is not duly credited. Such behavior inflicted upon them may be based on gender based chauvinistic mental make-up or egoism and could be difficult experience for them. Researchers have consistently identified the difficulty women face in gaining recognition as technical and intellectual equals to men (Recinieilo, 1999). Gender inequality in the workplace is exhibited in various forms, such as occupational segregation, discrimination and harassment. Laff (2006) finds that women are inhibited in the workplace because of their limited access to capable mentors. It causes roadblocks for development of healthy work environment. Such negatively charged environment could prove nerve wrecking for any one. There are certain reasons which obstruct women from chasing their professional progress. Burton (1991) and Bierema and Opengart (2002) agree that equal access to career advancement of women remains a problem. Leadership styles are closely associated with common perceptions and stereotypes of women leaders (Goff, 2005; Henderson, 2004). Numerous challenges obstruct the pathway to success for a female leader of any school.

Few of them are enlisted as follows:

- **lack of awareness**
- **Gaps in understanding the responsibilities towards organization**
- **Obstacles in shaping a productive, efficient and motivated team**
- **Improvement required in management skills, understand human behavior to get maximum performance**
- **Difficulty in understanding and organization of objectives and designing strategies in r/o academics and co-curricular activities**
- **Need of effective communication skills so as to connect and maintain meaningful relationship with all the stakeholders and supporting team**
- **Inculcating a feeling of acceptance among staff members especially male colleagues**
- **Improvement required in delegation skills**

**and many more...**

Above mentioned challenges or obstruction could be paving stones for head of school if strategies are designed keeping in mind the following attributes:

### **Reflections about the role of female Head of School**

A sense of optimism and commitment must prevail to facilitate conducive environment within school so that teaching/ learning process must be positive, encouraging, and inviting for teachers, students and their families. A good leader should facilitate and nurture human relationships among educators, teachers and administrators, among educators and students, and among educators and families. Head of the school is charged with the task of establishing and nurturing relationships that collectively should have a positive impact on the quality of any educational program in the school. As observed by Maxi-field (2005) women found networking challenging and thus lacked an important tool. As a matter of fact, the issue of relationships is extremely significant to be catered by efficient leadership. According to Ogden et al., (2006), for career enhancement networking is great enabler.

As female principals, leadership may face another challenge for allowing time for groups of teachers to define their roles and to establish rules that support partnerships. HoS have to set the example, provide ample opportunities for communities to form, celebrate successes of communities, provide

support to fledgling ones and guard the concept constantly. The vision and mission of the school should be installed at the main entry point for every individual to read the future expectations of the school.

At times, the educational institution may develop contradicting philosophies, visions, and missions that cause friction in the school...what should one do then?

The best bet is to take people in confidence to sort out the friction by discussion and conversation. As a female *transformational leader* they could engage themselves in multiple roles as described aforesaid;

### **As a Communicator**

As effective principals, they should listen and communicate their views and workable visions to their teacher members, non-teaching staff, students, and outside world. They should personally deal with all stakeholders through interaction speaking and listening to the people, and also by observing and sharing their experiences.

They must try to understand the psychology of their staff. Their interactions with the school community could be treated as benchmark for the institution. As effective principals have open-door leadership that welcomes anyone with complaints or ideas. This strategy would help them to change their schools' images and performance. Most school communities and parents are concerned with their children's performance and want their schools to be effectively managed. These needs can be met when head along with the teachers concerned have an established vision. A vision is the deepest expression of what a school wants to achieve. It is a declaration of a desired future, which creates the conditions for having an aligned team and is also seen as an expression of hope for a bright future. A principal should encourage and support the teachers to participate in the development of the school, academically, physically, and morally. When teachers feel they are part of the school, they become committed to curriculum delivery that brings about the required academic standards. Head of school especially female should try to create good relationships with teachers on the core activity of teaching, and the more they communicate goals and expectations about quality teaching and learning for each student, the more effective they are likely to lead their schools towards improved students' performance (Hughes, 1994; Kiwi Leadership for Principals, 2008).

### **As collaborators**

A good principal listens and accommodates teachers and nonteaching staff constructive ideas which may be used to solve a problem improve the existing school facilities or raise school's academic standards. A lady head of school may at times feel constrained to use power-based approach to reinforce her decisions to her employees. As administrators, they should learn from their leadership experiences to be effective, sometime to use the authority and power to persuade and influence the students, faculty members and other stakeholders to make them realize that they are all accountable for the achievement of the stated school objectives or the goals they developed. It should always be kept in mind that every teacher in the school has the potential which could be fully utilized if there is encouragement and appreciation from HoS.

*Hughes (1994) observed that a principal who is task or achievement-oriented sets goals that are challenging yet attainable, and encourages goal attainment by expressing confidence in subordinates' abilities to reach those goals individually or collaboratively.*

### **As Role Model**

Stakeholders have more expectations female principal to develop a strong culture at the school that includes a safe and orderly work environment. They should strive for a strong staff collaboration and cohesive relationship among the teachers and students. When cohesive relationship exists and exhibited by teachers in a school, creates a feeling of oneness, harmony, and ownership. These aspects create good working environment that encourages the attainment of the school goals.

Unity, Truth and Openness are the essential personality traits of a good leadership. They have to be open-minded and speak with clarity to the school communities in order to avoid conflicts.

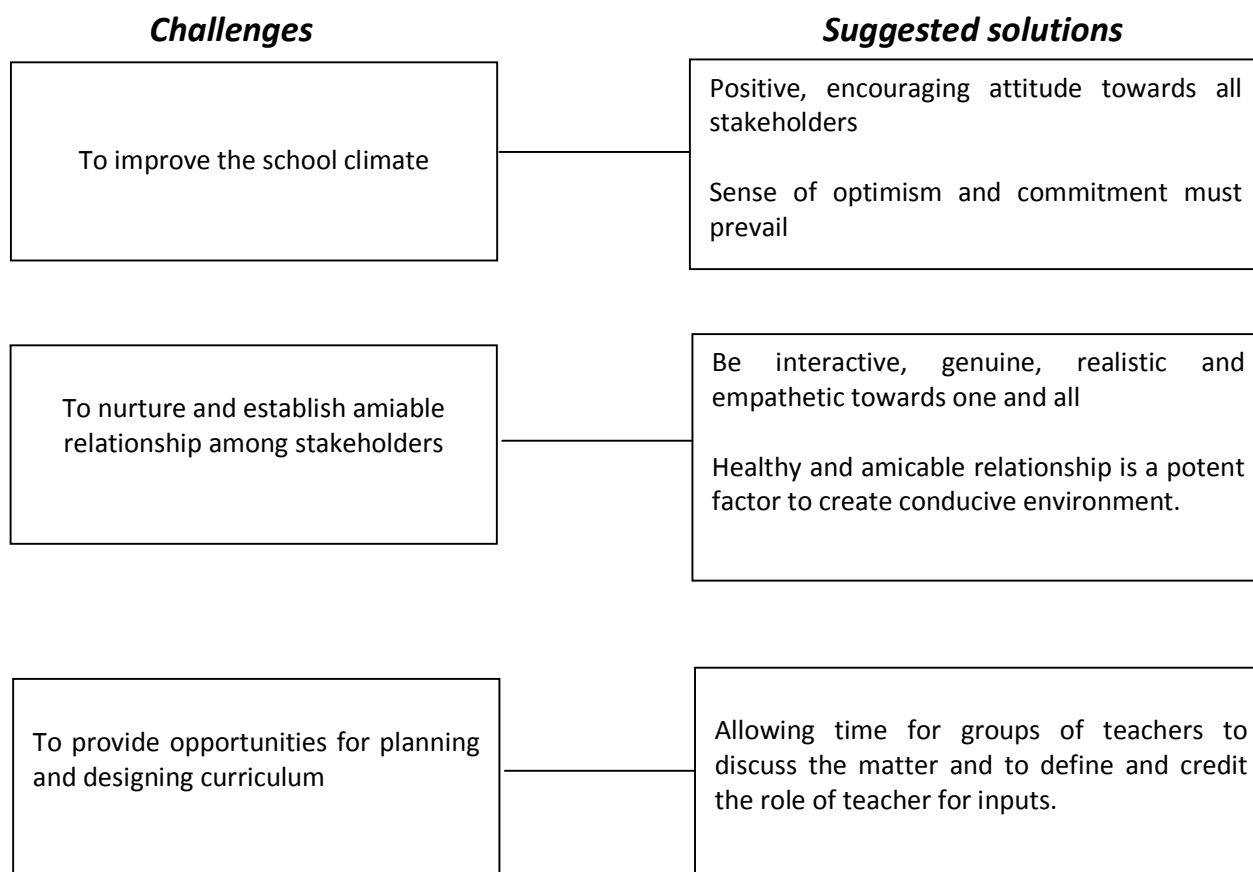
*According to Roe & Drake (1980) principals should have the ability to serve as coordinators, mediators, and arbitrators in their schools.*

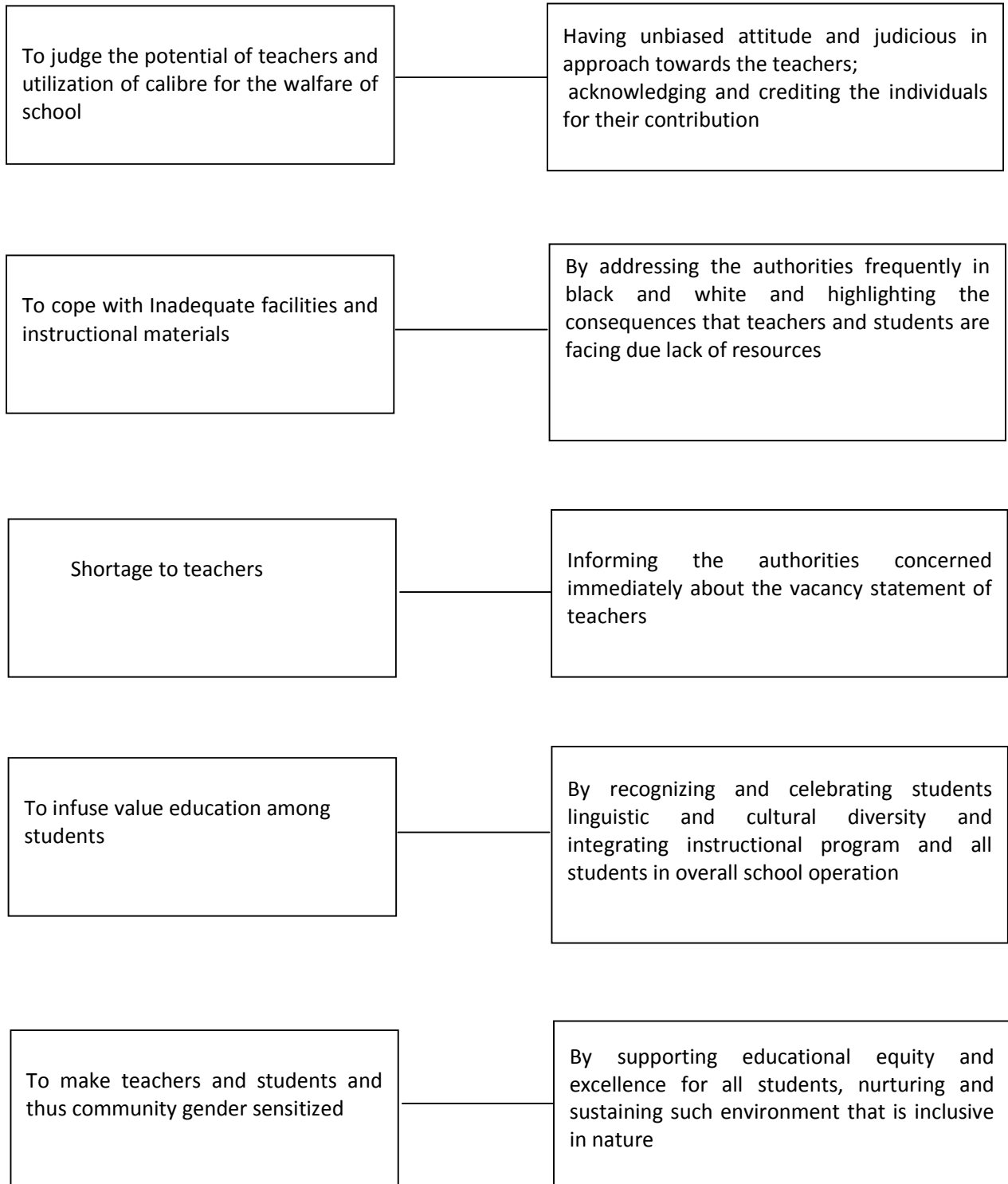
Being the manager, an administrator and the supervisor of all the school functions a female HoS may face conflicts while delegating duties to teaching and non-teaching staff. Failures should be viewed as an opportunity to learn...of course, it is tough task. However, many leaders realize their mistakes and recover from them.

Female HoS can change the dress culture of schools or communities if they exhibit neatness and appropriateness in their dress. As other members of school are to conform to a defined norm of personal appearance and institutional image.

*Cunningham and Gresso (1993) wrote that culture building requires that school leaders give attention to the informal, subtle, and symbolic aspects of school life which shape the beliefs and actions of each employee within the system and a female head could do so very well.*

**Henceforth, the challenges faced by female HoS or anyone leading an institute and possible solutions could be summarized with aid of following diagrammatical representation for easy and quick grasp:**





The table is just like a ready reckoner for not only the female heads of school but anyone in need who desire so. Problems may come, they may simply vanish. The way how one deals with them and implements the plans countering the disturbing factors defines the strong character and strength of mind. Side by side, the innovative leadership style and approach would help female HoS to change the working climate in their schools. The simultaneous learning would also acquaint and equip them with knowledge and skills that are required to motivate the teachers and staff for effective implementation of curriculum. Promoting gender assortment and leadership variability are significant strategies to be implemented by department concerned. Depending on the prevailing situations in the schools, they should be seen as agents of change and are expected to focus on healthy teaching-learning transaction and to facilitate the learning community in the schools. Being partners in collaborative inquiry around teaching and learning they have to supervise teachers and other staffs. Leading and supervising teachers who are knowledgeable and skilled in their areas need a principal who is able to appreciate and encourage them to do better that too willingly. Such a leader could foster staff development and communicate important values with aid of meetings, workshops or seminars in her area of specialization. Such initiative reflects care and concern for teachers, staff and students. A broad knowledge base about the system and the school community will assist them. As professional, they are expected to be conversant with both the psychology of learning and administrative skills in order to effectively monitor and supervise teachers' implementation of curriculum. Women leaders should be provided with training and formalized mentoring to carry out their leadership roles and grow in their position. Only then the female leaders could be are expected to make meticulous schedules, communicate with parents, inspire teachers, observe classes, monitor and supervise the implementation of curriculum, and also articulate the instructional goals.

**Above suggestions could be easily percolated to school system by HoS by implementing these simple concepts in concretized form:**

- Respect for each other within the school system
- Pleasant Working School Environment
- Provision of Relevant Teaching Materials and availability of it to Teachers

- Encouragement of the feeling of empowerment and ownership among teachers.
- Encouragement of team Work and unity among teachers
- Management of Conflicts.
- Innovation of Special Skills
- Good Listening Skills (that help them incorporate the meaning of messages from teachers, students, non-teaching staff, and parents)
- Good Communication Skills (through effective communication, principals modify the attitudes and behaviors of their school communities)
- Proper Utilization of Good Administrative Skills that include planning, organizing, coordinating, budgeting, controlling.

A caring and responsive school head is the best guarantee of any schools' output thus bright future of entire society. Such commitment ensues a firm understanding for educational renewal and community enrichment in almost all possible aspects. Communities regard school principals as engineers that keep the schools' machinery working through facilitation and viable strategies. To develop visionary outlook strength and assets should be acknowledged and problem areas should be critically analyzed both ways to make schools strength-propelled and asset-driven.

There are obvious limitations to this study like many more issues are left unaddressed. This study could act as a base from which additional studies could spring. It represents a beginning than an end. More research is required in this area.

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