

The Methods of Efficient Supervision in Imam Ali's (PBUH) System of Management

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Abstract: Efficient supervision is a key element in every systemic management. It is evidently essential for managing human resources and making a proper use of facilities. Therefore in various organizations, managers always attempt to have an efficient supervision and use effective methods for a better conduction of plans and the performance of those being supervised. This topic has been salient in Imam Ali's (PBUH) life who elaborated on the matter through certain recommendations, rules and regulations and use of effective supervising methods. The present research has attempted to investigate Imam Ali's supervision style. His supervising system was found to be based on three major methods explicit supervision, implicit supervision and creating and improving a self-control. Due to its proven success and efficiency, this supervision system can be introduced as an excellent and actual example in the field of supervision.

Key words: Efficient supervision, supervision methods, supervising the authorities, Imam Ali's management, conduction of plans, systemic management, supervising methods

INTRODUCTION

A key requirement in all organizations for the management of human forces is an efficient supervision. Along with the wide development of organizations and an elaboration of affairs and their management, a desired supervision is getting more and more important to those in charge. The range of activities covered by the supervision team has been extended as well. What has led human societies and collective systems to use different supervision techniques for their development is the essentiality of preventing goal dis-orientation and being ensured of the fact that all the society members keep moving towards the same goal (Bell and Sonis, 2014).

Evidently no collective organization or system is capable of using all the facilities and equipment within an organization optimally without proper methods of supervision. There would be no guarantee for its development. Therefore in different communities and organizations, this matter made managers find ways to monitor their employees so that all duties could be performed in the best way possible.

A significant issue is that the idea of supervision does not only appeal to scientific and managerial authorities. It has already been considered as significant and been emphasized in divine religions and by honorable and esteemed religious men. A brief look at the instructions of the Jew, Christians and Moslems reveals

that supervising the performance of those in charge has been long rooted in religious instructions and the value-system of all divine religions. This issue is of a great significance in Islam. In the management system of all celebrated Islamic figures, especially during the reign of Imam Ali, this issue has been taken into account more than ever before. Overall it can be inferred that Imam Ali was very conscious and precise in management and attempted seriously to supervise every attempt. He not only paid a special attention to employee's practices and those in charge but also commanded all his highly successful managing assistants to supervise and monitor workers and employees both explicitly and surreptitiously.

As an instance, part of a letter he sent to Malik Ashtar reads: Examine the employee's behavior and think of one or two reliable spies who could monitor their performance without them knowing. Constant and imperceptible monitoring would encourage them to be trustworthy and helpful to the layman (Dashti, 2000). There were other supervising methods Imam Ali used as well which will be examined in detail in the following sections.

Methods of supervising the authorities: A review of Imam Ali's quotations, practical life and advice to governors has indicated that his supervising attempts could be made in three ways which will be described in the following sections.

Explicit supervision: What an explicit supervision means is the one directly conducted by the manager who either monitors everything in person or hands it over to selected forces. Therefore, this form of evaluation can be of two types: Occasionally, the supervisor monitors everything directly and with no mediator. In other cases he hands this duty to others who should obtain the required information (Nabavi, 2009). In both, those in charge are aware of being monitored by the manager or else. In Imam Ali's management system both have been used.

Direct supervision: In this supervising method, the manager would directly and in person monitor the staff's performance. This direct monitoring either known or unknown to the staff, would have great effects on an organization. It would motivate them to get more active and avoid misbehavior (Claridge *et al.*, 2011). In case this form of supervision becomes a routine, the staff would always see it probable that the manager inspects on their performance with or without informing them in advance.

This would motivate them to work with more caution and attention. Therefore, the whole community would be more productive (Carlson *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, a regular monitoring by the managers would cause the employees feel they are seen as worthy of attention and therefore they get more motivated and satisfied with their career (Rialon *et al.*, 2013). An investigation of Imam Ali's management system reveals that he has paid a great attention to this kind of supervision and has attempted to monitor the authorities' behavior in person. With this concern, Imam Baqer (PBUH) stated: Imam Ali used to visit all bazars in Kufa early in the morning and supervise all salesmen and merchant's. This Hadith would refer to one example of Imam's direct supervision on authorities' performance, here that of the businessmen. According to this hadith, it was part of Imam Ali's life to have a close and constant monitoring of those under his reign. He also controlled the activities of all tradesmen working in bazars where there is a wide range of business involved.

However, despite the significance and essentiality of a manager's supervision and monitoring of the working staff, sometimes due to the extensiveness of the organization and its activities, managers are not capable of having a direct and inclusive control on everybody and everything. Moreover, provided that the manager is willing to monitor all the staff directly he might be unable to carry out his other duties. Therefore, supervising the more important activities and sections of the organization should be prioritized (Barakat and Hussainey, 2013). In a comprehensive management instructional advice, Imam

Ali draws attention to the essentiality of prioritization: he who deals with minor matters would for sure miss the major one's (Amadi, 1987).

These narratives draw attention to a key principle in management especially the issue of staff supervision. This principle is the act of prioritization. It is similar to the instructions proposed by Imam Ali and Imam Baqer (PBUH) and is close to their own behavior too. As we read, Imam Ali would monitor the activities of businessmen in bazars which were the primary sub-sections of the government.

Indirect supervision: It refers to a mediated kind of supervision conducted by deputies of the government over the subservient (Vermeul *et al.*, 2014). In this method, either a certain force or unit is chosen to take this duty or certain sections of the organization would supervise their own staff and report on it on a regular basis (Vermeul *et al.*, 2014). In very big companies, especially those which are complex and huge, it is impossible for the manager to directly control all the sub-sections. Under such circumstances an indirect supervision seems to be the best and most effective supervising method (Kruger *et al.*, 2010). Another point which needs to be mentioned is that top-ranking managers have other important responsibilities too besides supervision.

These might include an overall guidance and direction of the organization, planning its prospects and goals as well as strategic programs. Considering all these limitations, it is not possible for the manager to monitor all the staff or units, since that would impede him from dealing with other important duties. With this regard, Imam Ali draws attention to a manager's restricted abilities and the essentiality of dealing with key tasks and duties: In fact your mental capacity is restricted so you should keep it fresh for key issues (Amadi, 1987). Appointing those qualified to supervise the staff while the manager is busy dealing with more important tasks is one realization of the kind. Therefore, the highly successful managers in order to have a proper supervising coverage, prioritize more important tasks while a team is appointed for supervising others. In Imam Ali's practical life this issue has been closely practiced. Due to the expansion of the Islamic reign at his time, Imam Ali had selected efficient individuals to represent him in monitoring others' performance. Among them was Malik-Ibn-Ka'ab-Irhabi who was assigned to travel to Iraq to inspect on the local governor's performance. Part of Imam's letter to this deputy reads: appoint someone as your substitute and travel with some of your friends to Iraq (to inspect on the governor's behavior and

performance in there). Search all over the land region by region to come to know about how they behave to the layman's (Mianji, 2005).

This command to Malik approves the essentiality of a careful supervision of the staff. Concerning the fact that Iraq was a vast country Malik was evidently unable to monitor it all on his own. Therefore, Imam had advised him to select some others to assist him.

Surreptitious supervision: Here, supervisors are asked to do their job in a way not perceptible to the staff. Reports of the employee's performance and behavior are to be sent to the manager (s) (Pellerin and Saury, 2015). In this form of supervising, those being monitored are not aware of what is going on. They are unaware of the presence of the inspectors or they might simply not know them at all.

Conducting this type of supervision is of a great significance. That is because in an explicit supervision, some disqualified workers might pretend to behave otherwise. They might attempt to deceive the supervisors and show as if they were efficient. This way, the authenticity and precision of the reports would be reduced. In the surreptitious manner, however, one is unaware of being monitored and is not able to pretend anymore (Ferretti *et al.*, 2013). This issue has been taken into account in Imam Ali's supervision system and he reminded it to his deputies several times. Similarly in his letter to Malik-Ashtar he emphasized: The seemingly clever and deceitful would pretend to be subservient to their governors while there is no altruism and good will behind this. Nor is any sign of trustworthiness (Dashti, 2000).

Imam would order his governors to monitor their employees with the help of unidentified agents. Similarly, in part of a letter to Malik-Ashtar he recommends: Examine how the governors behave. Select trustable spies. Their hidden inspection and care will contribute to trust worthiness and kindness to the layman' (Dashti, 2000; Radi and Hossein, 2000). In this letter, besides suggesting the use of surreptitious agents, Imam Ali emphasizes on the spie's honesty, trustworthiness and loyalty. If they are not reliable, their report could be far from factual. Once there is no truth reported to the manager, improper decision-making will follow. If the spies are not faithful they might reveal their role and mission to others. Even such a person might abuse his position and begin to oppress those inferior to him. If he does not react properly to those against him, they might become revengeful.

Imam Ali's practical life reveals that he always used this method to monitor the behavior and performance of

authorities as the ruler of the Islamic reign. For this aim he would dispatch many groups, whose identity was unknown to local people to various districts to precisely monitor the governor's affairs and behavior and provide full accounts of them. This can be inferred from the letters Imam used to send to his governors. One such letter was addressed to Mosghalah-Ibn-Hobairah who was the governor of a city in Fars: I have received an account about you that if true, would elicit God's wrath against you. It would be a sign of your disobedience towards your Imam. I have been informed that you give away Moslem's booty gained at wars at the cost of much bloodshed to your Arab relatives and those who had helped you reach your position' (Dashti, 2000).

Another evidence for this latter issue is in Imam's letter to Monzar-Ibn-Jarood who had committed an economic treason. The letter reads: I have been informed that you went to extremes of caprice and there is no good deed left for your after life' (Dashti, 2000). Moreover, when the governor of Basra, Osman-Ibn-Hanif attended a luxurious party, Imam got informed by a spy and reprimanded him in a letter: 'You the son of Hanif, I was informed that a wealthy man in Basra invited you to a party and you attended wholeheartedly' (Dashti, 2000).

CREATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF SELF-CONTROL

When all the staff of an organization do their best to fulfill their duties without any external monitoring they are said to have a satisfactory level of self-control. In other words they have it from within (Laughlin *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, there would be no need for any external supervision. Due to their inner care they would fulfill all their tasks and duties. They would avoid any sort of illegal or abnormal action without any supervision or control from outside.

Undoubtedly, this sort of commitment felt by the staff would lead to a better performance of manager's job too. In a given organization, a manager has got a great many tasks and duties at hand which take a lot of time. One such duty is supervising all the staff's behavior and performance. This has always been a serious obsession. That is because many of the employees would not perform as they are supposed to if they are not monitored (Duckworth *et al.*, 2015). That would make the manager take time monitoring them constantly. Otherwise, this time could be spent on doing other stuff.

It also needs to be mentioned that a constant monitoring of high ranking people and experts not only does not lead to their higher productivity but also lowers

their self-confidence and motivation (Kim and Choi, 2015). Monitoring human forces would annihilate creativity, feeling of responsibility and contribution to common goals (Smith *et al.*, 2015). This would endanger the organization's goal attainment. Nevertheless, this would not mean there is no value in supervision. Once gone to extremes, negative consequences would follow. To be secure from these problems, another type of supervision should be applied to avoid the side effects of explicit supervision or use them as supplementary to the latter type. That is to say that every employee should have a sort of self-control besides being controlled from outside. If this manner is followed it would be more effective and productive than any explicit supervision. Since the latter is senseless without the former. In other words, certain misbehavior that has not been noticed by supervisors could be left unsupervised forever without being corrected. This is the ineffective form of supervision in Imam Ali's words. Concerning the fact that an explicit supervision is deemed as useless without self-control, he mentioned: mind you that he who does not help himself to hear a voice from within to stop him from the wrongdoing there will be no advice at work from outside' (Dashti, 2000). This statement makes a reference to human being's inner faith which if empowered, would keep one away from sins and deviations and if is weakened would make other's advice fruitless. Therefore, other's supervision does only work if there is an internal inhibiting power within them.

On the other hand in the case of external supervision, there has always been the question of validity and authenticity or there might be other purposes behind that. It could be overloaded with friendship or enmity. Therefore, there is a need for monitoring those who monitor others and this cycle would go on as this. However if the supervisors have the inner self-control, this obsession would be reduced to a great extent and the truth of their reports could be established more. Consequently as an external supervision of employees is not completed without an inner control, supervisor's task is not efficient without the existence of inhibiting factors from inside them. With this regard in Islamic texts, there is the term inner care which has been documented by hard evidence. One extract of Imam Ali's quotation says: "take care of yourself" (Amadi, 1987).

A further point to consider is that self-control and inner care is not exclusive to the employees and workers. Managers should not go astray either; should not discriminate among the staff; should not get down to defalcation, bribery, wasting the sources and so on. What doubles the significance of self-control among managers is their role in setting an example and affecting the

employees. For the same reason, Imam Ali first of all made it incumbent on all his own governors. In a letter to Malik Ashtar, Imam stated: This is the command of Ali, the inferior to God to Malik the son of Haris. Firstly, I order you to have virtue, sacrifice in obeying God and the Holy Quran. Then I order you to rid of all your improper desires and to show abstinence in the face of bodily caprice (Mianji, 2005).

Part of Imam's letter to Mohammad-Ibn-Abibakr (the governor of Egypt) also advises him to have virtue and self-control: This is the promise Mohammad-Ibn-Abibakr has made to Ali the inferior to God once he was elected to rule over Egypt. He has promised to follow virtue and obey God in both the inside and outside of every little task (Harrani, 1983). Similarly, part of Imam Ali's advice to Ibn-Abbas is: 'Ibn-Abbas you should follow divine virtue and justice in behaving towards people you rule over (Mofid, 1992). Taking advantage of this method as compared to external supervision is also less costly besides being more efficient. Using highly precise surveillance systems is very expensive in an organization. Great amounts of sources and facilities should be allocated to this aim. Therefore, creating and improving self-control is economical.

CONCLUSION

As reported, a key managerial issue is having a complete and precise supervision system. It is essential for a better fulfillment of plans and the staff's performance. However, due to the high expansion of organizations and their sub-sections, managers are not capable of monitoring everybody and everything. On the other hand an external and open monitoring of employee's performance would lower their self-confidence and trust in their employer(s). They would be demotivated and their productivity would be reduced as well. During his reign, Imam Ali used various effective supervising methods which was to monitor the employee's performance efficiently. What can be inferred from his comprehensive supervision system is that he showed a significant interest in an explicit supervision of his employees and deputies. When it was not possible to monitor everybody and every plan due to the wide range of activities, Imam would appoint certain agents to indirectly supervise people, plans and governmental organizations. In order to fight back the employee's pretention he made use of spies. He also invited his executives to follow the same route. Still another surveillance technique used in Imam Ali's management system was self-control and inner care. Once born and developed, this self-care would help each

employee to monitor his own behavior and do his best to fulfill his tasks and duties. Therefore, this type of supervision can be more efficient and effective than external supervision.

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