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Characteristics of Competent Managers in the Letters of Nahj Al-Balāghah with an Emphasis on Spencer's Model

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT	
Article History: Received: 05 October 2024 Revised: 10 December 2024 Accepted: 02 January 2025		SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: The appointment of executive and administrative officials constitutes one of the most critical and necessary duties of an Islamic government, as the persistence of a system and government is contingent upon the competency of its agents. Should organizations be led by competent managers, the quality of organizational activities will be enhanced, given that appointing competent managers significantly influences the promotion of societal behavior and Islamic values, fosters trust between the populace and the rulers, and facilitates the resolution of social problems.	
Key Words: Competency Management Piety Trustworthiness Justice		METHOD & FINDING: Reflecting to both the internal and external competencies of managers during their selection is imperative. This study seeks to elucidate the concept of competency, models of competency, and the significance of meritocracy within Islamic management. Furthermore, it analyzes the criteria for appointing competent managers with reference to the letters of Imām 'Alī to His agents, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology and utilizing Spencer's model. This process culminated in the design of a logical model of managerial competency derived from Imām 'Alī's teachings.	
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/imjpl.2025.10969		CONCLUSION: The results indicate that managerial competencies, from the perspective of Nahj Al-Balāghah's letters, can be categorized into five components based on Spencer and Spencer's model: knowledge, skill, self-concept dimensions, personal traits, and motivation. These competencies were subsequently classified into two dimensions: hard and soft. Hard competencies encompass experience and expertise, reasoning, discipline, consultation, creating welfare, and communication with people. Soft competencies, characterized by an internal aspect in management, include self-control, justice, control and supervision, patience, humility, trustworthiness, honesty, adhering to the rights, and serving.	
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Introduction

One essential requirement for successful governance is the presence of efficient and committed human resources, particularly in managerial positions. Consequently, the effective execution of governmental duties depends on selecting competent personnel. Identifying and appointing qualified managers necessitates established criteria to ensure deserving individuals assume organizational roles. Furthermore, given the capacity of Nahj al-Balāghah to represent the life and governance model of Imām ‘Alī, the ideal paradigm of Islamic government under an infallible Imām, this text holds significant potential for extracting frameworks to manage contemporary Islamic societies, especially regarding managerial selection.

Managerial selection criteria vary across societies based on prevailing worldviews, governing values, and conceptions of humanity. In an Islamic society, where management is grounded in Islamic values, managers must similarly adhere to and prioritize these values. Moreover, selecting competent managers, which is a critical concern for any political system, requires explicit criteria to ensure qualified individuals assume responsibilities. A management system founded on sound principles and competence can address challenges and fulfill needs more efficiently. Since such management is exemplified in the *Sīrah an-Nabawiyyah* (the biography and life

story of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Infallible Imāms, their directives are indispensable for defining managerial competence. Imām ‘Alī’s letters to His agents contain moral, educational, and managerial subtleties, underscoring the need for their precise interpretation. Therefore, this article employs Spencer’s competency model to analyze Imām ‘Alī’s letters in Nahj al-Balāghah and elucidate the characteristics of competent managers as presented therein.

Conceptual Framework

To elucidate the characteristics of competent managers derived from the letters of Nahj al-Balāghah, a preliminary elucidation of foundational concepts, including Islamic management, competency, and meritocracy within Islamic management, is requisite.

1. Islamic Management

Management entails the effective utilization of material and human resources through planning, organizing, resource mobilization, direction, and control of operations to achieve predetermined objectives (Rezāeyān, 2000, p. 8). Islamic management facilitates human spiritual growth through adherence to the Holy Quran, Sunnah, and *Sīrah* of the Prophet and Imāms. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in integrating scientific, technical, and experiential dimensions toward systemic goal attainment (Sarmadi, 2002, p. 23).

In essence, Islamic management constitutes the examination of managerial issues through Islamic primary sources (i.e., the Holy Quran and Sunnah), extracting verses and Ḥadīths that explicitly address or allude to management principles. These textual evidences are subsequently interpreted as responses to managerial challenges. Concurrently, the *Sīrah* of the Infallible Imāms should be examined as a practical tradition; consequently, the compiled data must be systematized as religiously-derived managerial solutions, thereby establishing the foundational principles of Islamic management.

2. Competency Theory: Foundations and Key Models

Competency theory was first postulated by McClelland (1973) and later refined by Boyatzis, Spencer & Spencer, particularly for applied research. Notable competency models include those by Moura & Moxel, Cameron & Quinn, Griffin, Sills & Church, Cary-Fry, Hogan, Thomas International, and ultimately the Flushing Mind Consulting Group model (focused on IT competencies), along with the U.S. Department of Labor model.

In his seminal 1973 study, McClelland demonstrated that competencies such as interpersonal sensitivity, positive multicultural considerations, and multi-level managerial skills differentiate individual

performance. He positioned the multidimensional concept of competency against the unidimensional notion of intelligence, arguing that IQ alone cannot determine an individual's work capability (McClelland, 1973).

Boyatzis defines competency as an underlying characteristic in an individual that causally relates to effective behavior meeting job demands and organizational environmental components, yielding desired outcomes. He emphasized establishing a common managerial language to identify and differentiate leader performance (Boyatzis, 1982). Spencer & Spencer characterize competency as an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job (Sanghi, 2007, p. 10).

Schroder identified four core managerial competency domains: Cognitive competencies, Motivational competencies, Directive competencies, and Functional competencies. This framework proves particularly applicable to senior public sector managers operating in dynamic environments (Schroder, 1989, 25).

Dubois conceptualizes competencies as characteristics, including knowledge, skills, thought patterns, and similar attributes, that when applied individually or in combination, enable successful performance. (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006, p.52).

Hoffman contends that competencies are defined as observable performances,

performance output standards, or critical personal traits. Their purpose is to enhance human workplace performance (Sanghi, 2007).

Competencies represent attributes individuals employ to achieve expected performance. These include: Skills, knowledge, self-concept dimensions, social motives, personal traits, Thought patterns, and Emotional/behavioral methods (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006).

It is worth noting that competencies can be divided into different categories according to the type of use and goals. Competencies are classified into three primary domains:

- **Managerial Competencies:** Essential for supervisors/managers across all roles/services.
- **General Competencies:** Required for all employees regardless of position/level.
- **Technical/Functional Competencies:** Specialized competencies defined within technical domains for specific organizational roles.

3. Managerial Competency Models

A Competency Model serves as a descriptive instrument for identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors requisite for effective performance within an organization. The design of such models assists organizations in achieving strategic objectives through the development of human resource capabilities (Saeed Panah & et al., 2019, p.15) and

establishes a mechanism for aligning human resource systems with organizational strategies.

Mayer and colleagues define managerial competencies as the knowledge, abilities, skills, and behaviors necessary for effective job performance in managerial roles. Managerial competencies are fundamentally similar to competencies for other organizational positions; however, a significant distinction lies in the predominance of managerial competency frameworks within organizations. This emphasis arises from the critical nature of managerial roles, which demand highly competent individuals. (Bābāeī Zaklīlī, 2006, p. 15).

Another scholarly perspective identifies requisite managerial competencies as: influence, impact, social responsibility, research and investigative ability, achievement orientation, decision-making ability, interpersonal skills, initiative, self-confidence, and human resource management ability (Shah 'Alī, 2017, p. 229).

Porvaznik & Ljudvigova (2018), through their holistic competence model, delineated three core dimensions of leadership and managerial competencies: cognitive abilities, applied skills, and social maturity. This approach proves particularly salient for the public sector, as it emphasizes comprehensive managerial assessment to ensure capability in resource management and stakeholder engagement. According to this model, managerial

selection based on incomplete criteria can engender inefficiency. Specifically, social maturity (a cornerstone of this framework) entails constructive interaction and ethical decision-making within complex socio-political environments (Porvaznik & Ljudvigova, 2018, p. 62).

Recent international research indicates that attributes such as a clear vision, robust communication skills, effective management capability, and political acumen significantly enhance public trust in government (Nam & Lee, 2021, p.105). From the perspective of most scholars, managerial competencies resemble an iceberg: the substantial submerged portion represents latent elements, while the visible tip corresponds to observable skills and knowledge. The constituent elements of competencies are less discernible yet extensively govern and direct overt behavior. Social role and self-awareness reside at a conscious level, whereas specific traits and motives occupy the submerged stratum of the iceberg, embedded within the individual's core (Bordbar & Shakeri, 2011, p. 93). The Spencer and Spencer Iceberg Model constitutes one of the most seminal and widely recognized competency frameworks. They articulated five competency indicators: motives, traits, self-concept, skills, and knowledge. Analogizing these indicators to the Iceberg, knowledge and skills represent the visible, observable components above water. The remaining elements (motives, traits, and self-concept) constitute the

submerged foundation, hidden from view yet fundamental to competency. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that cultivating competencies such as skills and knowledge is relatively accessible, whereas developing core competencies like motives and traits presents considerable difficulty (Sanghi, 2007, p. 11).

The type or level of a competency holds significant implications for human resource planning. Per this model, knowledge and skills competencies are observable and surface-level, whereas self-concept, traits, and motives competencies are deeper, more concealed, central to personality, and critically underpin the competency profile of successful managers. In practical application, most organizations prioritize educational credentials and training courses during recruitment interviews. However, while cultivating skills-based competencies is feasible, nurturing core competencies—such as motives and traits residing at the iceberg's base—remains arduous.

From the perspective of the authors, managerial competencies are precisely those about knowledge, ability, skill, and other characteristics that engender efficient and effective managerial performance.

Literature Review

A review of the relevant literature reveals that few studies explicitly address the core qualifications for

selecting competent managers; crucially, no prior academic investigation has explored the specific focus of this article. For instance, Kamali and Ma'arif (2016, pp. 73–89), in their article *"Examining the Criteria of Managers from the Perspective of Imām 'Alī"*, identify general selection criteria using qualitative methods without engaging competency models. Also, Ahmad Reza Shah 'Alī and Mohammad Mahdi Devali (2017, pp. 223–254) analyze Imām Reza's lifestyle in *"Characteristics of Meritorious Managers in Imām Reza's Lifestyle"*. Moreover, Javadin et al. (2021, pp. 252–269) outline characteristics of competent managers in *"Characteristics of Competent Managers from the Perspective of Quran and Nahj al-Balāghah"*, employing an inductive-qualitative approach.

This article first examines the theoretical foundations of managerial selection, then explores characteristics of qualified managers within Imām 'Alī's letters, and finally presents concluding remarks.

Research Method

This research aims to identify competency indicators for managers utilizing a qualitative method grounded in the intellectual framework of Imām 'Alī as a paradigmatic model in Islamic governance. This qualitative research employs a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis constitutes a method for identifying, analyzing,

and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This method involves a process for analyzing textual data and transforms disparate data into rich and detailed information. Thematic analysis is not merely a specific qualitative method; rather, it represents a process applicable across most qualitative methods (Ābedī Ja'farī, et al., 2011, p. 153).

Accordingly, by reviewing the literature about the theory of managerial competence, the components of the managerial competence model were first articulated based on Spencer's model as a reference point. Subsequently, employing a purposeful sampling method, the effective components underpinning competent management were inferred based specifically on the teachings of Nahj al-Balāghah. Pursuant to this approach, after a careful review of the statements within Nahj al-Balāghah, a network of concepts was constructed. The most significant themes were positioned centrally, and associated themes were organized around these core themes.

Examining the Characteristics of Competent Managers in the Letters of Imām 'Alī

1. Knowledge

1.1. Experience and Expertise

Possessing requisite experience and expertise constitutes a fundamental criterion for selecting competent managers. Greater managerial experience enhances one's capacity to

effectively supervise and guide subordinates. As Imām 'Alī stipulated, "Do not appoint officials except based on *Khibrah* (expertise) and *Amānah* (trustworthiness)" (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1984, 20, p. 276). Beyond specifying selection criteria, this directive underscores a universal principle: the rejection of intermediary influence. Accepting external recommendations, prioritizing relational ties over regulatory standards, and favoring endorsements over competencies represents an insidious phenomenon. If pervasive within administrative systems, it precipitates institutional inefficiency and legitimacy crises (Kamālī & Ma'ārif, 2016, p. 84).

An experienced manager rectifies organizational disorders, whereas an inexperienced one undermines even pre-established systems. In the letter to Mālik Ashtar, Imām 'Alī commanded, "Appoint agents who are experienced and modest." (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53). Here, He couples experience with *Tawādu'* (modesty), acknowledging that expertise devoid of humility engenders greater detriment. Consequently, rulers lacking ethical commitment alongside experience may exploit legal ambiguities to betray public trust, disproportionately endangering communal assets (Sharīfī, 2005, p. 219).

1.2. 'Aql (Reasoning)

'Aql denotes an innate human faculty fortified and elevated through *Ma'rifah* (acquired awareness) and 'Ilm

(knowledge). When applied to affairs, it illuminates sound across cognitive, practical, and methodological dimensions. Imām 'Alī's discourses emphasized reason's *Ḥurmah* (sanctity), since He said, "No blessing surpasses reason" (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 777); and "One devoid of reason lacks religion" (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 783). Thus, the most prosperous and divinely proximate individual is *Ḥakīm* (the sage) (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 187). For Imām 'Alī, reason's flourishing hinges on knowledge and experience, with *Dirāsāt al-'Ulūm* (scholarly pursuit) paramount for cultivating *al-'Aql al-Nazarī* (theoretical reason). Even *al-'Aql al-'Amalī* (practical reason) necessitates knowledge for task execution. He affirmed, "Truly, you are measured by your reason; augment it through knowledge" (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 267). The Imām further underscored wisdom and discernment in societal leadership and said, "A leader requires a *Qalb 'Āqil* (reflective heart), an eloquent tongue, and unwavering commitment to truth" (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 340), as governance errors often stem from deficient wisdom in administrative matters (Iḥsānī & Anṣārī, 2017, p. 143).

Analysis of Nahj al-Balāghah Letters reveals that reason's refinement manifests through optimally leveraging personal and collective experiences, thereby bridging past and future. Imām 'Alī stated in Letter 31, "Reason preserves

experiences”, indicating that historical precedents offer instructive lessons for resolving contemporary challenges. Additionally, Letter 78 defines the truly destitute as one deprived of reason and experiential benefit. In Letter 63, He exhorts Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī then grappling with uncertainty to exercise reason.

2. Skill

2.1. *Naẓm* (Discipline and Order)

Naẓm lexically denotes to adorn or systematize (Mu‘īn, 1981, p. 382). Discipline signifies an individual’s intrinsic self-regulation, entailing control over impulses, comportment, and conduct. Order, conversely, implies alignment within collective action and readiness for communal engagement. Conceptually, order transcends discipline in scope, extending beyond individual behavior to encompass objects, structures, and institutions (Laṭīfī, 2013, p. 35).

Order in operations propels societies toward prosperity, while its absence diverts organizations from predetermined objectives. Organizational success materializes through structured efforts of principled, adaptable managers coupled with employee collaboration; disorder squanders opportunities and precipitates operational failure. Order fosters consistency, cohesion, and vigilance, whereas disorder engenders negligence and deficiencies. As organizational goals are implemented

by managers and agents, appointing undisciplined personnel must be rigorously avoided.

Discipline constitutes a core criterion for managerial selection, as Imām ‘Alī’s teachings affirm that establishing governance necessitates societal order and prevention of *Fitnah* (chaos) (Radi, 1000/2003, Saying 252). Systematization, planning, and scheduling are thus critical for managerial efficacy, given constrained timelines amid multifarious responsibilities. In the letter to Mālīk Ashtar, Imām ‘Alī emphasized methodical planning, “Discharge each day’s duties thereon, for every day bears its ordained tasks” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

From Imām ‘Alī’s perspective, task delegation and accountability are pivotal to institutional order. Inadequate delegation causes task accumulation, operational stagnation, and administrative confusion. Delegation proves effective only when coupled with accountability. As the Imām stated, “Assign each agent a defined duty for which you hold him accountable; this prevents mutual task avoidance and negligence” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 31).

2.2. *Mashwarah* (Consultation)

Consultation constitutes a fundamental skill principle for competent managers. This principle holds such significance within the Holy Quran that it is mentioned alongside divine response

to *Du'ā'* (supplications), *Ṣalāt* (ritual prayer), and *Infāq* (charitable expenditure) (Quran, 37: 38). Prudence in selecting qualified advisers signifies a manager's wisdom and administrative competence.

Consequently, Imām 'Alī cautions emphatically against consulting unqualified individuals, stating, "Do not include among those you consult a *Bakhīl* (miser) who would keep you back from being generous and caution you against destitution, nor a *Jabān* (coward) who would make you feel too weak for your affairs, nor a *Ḥarīṣ* (greedy person) who would make beautiful to you the collection of wealth by evil ways. This is because miserliness, cowardice, and greed are different qualities that an unfavorable opinion of Allah brings together" (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Effective decision-making processes within governance and competent management necessitate expert deliberation that is, decisions grounded in meticulous examination and consultation with '*Ulamā*' (scholars) in the relevant field and with *Ḥukamā*' (the wise). Imām 'Alī instructed Mālik Ashtar accordingly, "Keep on increasing your conversations with the scholars and discussions with the wise to stabilize the prosperity of the areas under you, and to continue with that in which your predecessors had established" (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

According to Imām 'Alī, the term *Akthar* (extensively) signifies that consultation with scholars and scholarly discourse with the wise must transcend episodic or intermittent practice, becoming instead a continuous endeavor and an institutionalized practice governing administrative conduct. Moreover, a comprehensive evaluation of affairs mandates examining diverse dimensions of issues, utilizing both specialists in *Mudārasat al-'Ulamā*' wa *Muthāfanat al-Ḥukamā*' (the pertinent domain and sages possessing mastery) over relevant matters. Stated differently, one must benefit from both specialized expertise and the discernment of sages profoundly versed in the issues (Delshād Tehrānī, 2016, p. 341).

2.3. *Tahqiq al-Rafāhiyyah* (Creating Welfare)

Providing *Rafāh* (welfare) and *Riyāḥah* (comfort), alongside realizing sufficiency in life for all, constitute fundamental objectives of competent management. Imām 'Alī guaranteed minimal subsistence needs for all citizens within his governmental policy, undertaking decisive measures toward poverty alleviation and livelihood provision, as evidenced by His assertion, "There is no one in Kufa who does not live in *Rafāh*. Even the poorest people consume wheat bread, possess shelter, and drink water from the Euphrates" (Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1959, p. 99).

Systemic welfare materializes through proper urban and territorial organization, their prosperity, augmented revenues, and equitable distribution of shares, benefits, and incomes. Imām ‘Alī accorded particular emphasis to these imperatives within his governmental objectives and strategic frameworks (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Disbursing the populace's financial entitlements fully and ensuring comprehensive livelihood provision represent core principles in competent management. This imperative is underscored in Imām ‘Alī's treaty to Mālik Ashtar, “Give them an abundant livelihood (by way of salary) because this gives them the strength to maintain themselves in order and not to have an eye upon the funds in their custody, and it would be an argument against them if they disobeyed your orders or misappropriated your trust” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53). Through these directives, the Imām mandates comprehensive subsistence provision, positing that such conditions foster individual rectification and ensure administrative integrity.

2.4. Communication with People Through al-Sulūk al-Mu’dab (Tactful Conduct)

Tactful conduct constitutes an indispensable component of successful management, as safeguarding *Huqūq al-Nās* (people's rights) and preserving their *Karāmah* (dignity) represent

foundational principles of Islamic administration. In His Letters to provincial agents, Imām ‘Alī consistently emphasized tactful comportment, prohibiting any deviation toward *Sulūk al-Mulūk* (monarchical conduct). In this regard, He instructed army commanders, “It is obligatory on an officer that the distinction he achieves, or the wealth with which he has been exclusively endowed, should not make him change his behavior towards those under him, and that the riches Allah has bestowed on him should increase him in nearness to his people and kindness over his brethren” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 50).

According to Imām ‘Alī's directives, maintaining distance from the populace, residing in detached seclusion, and assessing conditions remotely constitute erroneous practices; conversely, rulers must engage directly with communities, reside among them, and administer affairs collectively.

Mu’āṣarah (Companionship), *Mushārah* (participation), *Ta’āṭuf* (empathy), and *Musā’adah* (assistance) form the essential pillars of governance per Imām ‘Alī's paradigm. Consequently, He advised Mālik Ashtar, “Then, do not keep yourself secluded from the people for a long time, because the seclusion of those in authority from the subjects is a kind of narrow-sightedness and causes ignorance about their affairs. Seclusion from them also prevents them from the knowledge of those things which they do not know, and

as a result, they begin to regard big matters as small and small matters as big, good matters as bad and bad matters as good, while the truth becomes confused with falsehood. After all, a governor is a human being and cannot know things which people keep hidden from him” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Furthermore, Imām ‘Alī stressed that officials must eschew undue privileges in social interactions, particularly in matters of universal equality. He explicitly stated, “Do not appropriate to yourself that in which the people have an equal share” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53). Additionally, the Imām endorsed humble comportment among rulers and officials toward citizens, mandating service delivery with humility and approachability: “Bend your wings (in humbleness) before the subjects. Meet them with your face broad and keep yourself lenient (in behavior) with them. Treat them equally in looking at them with half eyes or full eyes, in signaling and in greeting so that the great should not expect transgression on your part and the weak should not lose hope in your justice” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 46).

3. Self-Concept

3.1. Self-Control

Self-control denotes self-restraint and regulation of behavior, actions, and thoughts, originating from psychological maturity and progression toward advanced human developmental stages (Sārūkhānī, 1997, p. 717).

Self-control effectively deters individuals from deviant behaviors. It constitutes the capacity to comply with reasonable demands, adapt behavior contextually, and defer gratification within socially sanctioned frameworks—absent direct external intervention or guidance. Within Nahj al-Balāghah’s discourse, the conceptual equivalent of self-control is *Taqwā* (piety). Piety may be regarded as the foundational criterion for selection; a truly pious agent substantially obviates the necessity for additional qualifications, since a defining characteristic of piety precludes individuals from assuming positions beyond their expertise and capability. Management and authority devoid of requisite temporal commitment, expertise, and capability incur *Bayt al-Māl* (public treasury) and societal damages, fundamentally incompatible with piety.

Consequently, Imām ‘Alī deems piety the primary condition for sound administration. Furthermore, in His treaty to Mālik Ashtar, a governance and management charter, he commences articulating managerial principles with faith and piety, instructing Mālik to prioritize obedience to God above all else and adhere to divine obligations and Prophetic traditions enshrined in the Quran and Sunnah, as human salvation is solely attained through divine obedience (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Imām ‘Alī thus persistently advised His ‘*Ummāl* (agents) to cultivate piety,

as articulated in a governmental decree, “He (Amir al-Mu'minin) ordered him to fear Allah in his secret matters and hidden actions, where there is no witness except He and no one watches save He.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 26).

Divine piety holds such centrality within Imām ‘Alī’s paradigm that it necessitates prioritizing divine obedience over all other obligations. Removing this principle from management renders violations of every kind conceivable, since regulatory frameworks inherently lack omnipresence and cannot perpetually oversee administrators (Delshād Tehrānī, 2016, p. 341).

3.2. *‘Adl (Justice)*

The necessity of justice in governmental affairs, particularly for selecting competent agents, constitutes a fundamental prerequisite, the compromise of which jeopardizes all other conditions, since Imām ‘Alī posits that justice sustains all matters, “Justice is *al-‘adl al-Ḥayāh* (life)” (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 26). Consequently, nothing proves more destructive than injustice in governance; even minimal injustice yields ruinous effects. Therefore, vigilance toward manifestations of justice among rulers remains imperative.

Imām ‘Alī regarded justice as the parametric standard and evaluative measure of political conduct and the basis for its stability. Consequently, he

exclusively adhered to the path of justice in political praxis (Tamīmī Āmadī, 1989, p. 702). He articulates a critical principle underscoring his sensitivity toward governors’ personal conduct and its impact on judicial equity, “If the actions of a governor follow the passions, he will be greatly hampered in justice.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 59).

Imām ‘Alī upheld absolute equality among all citizens regarding access to the public treasury, impermissibly tolerating injustice or discrimination under any circumstance. This principle is codified in his directive to Governor Musqala bin Habira Sheibani in Ardashir-Khwarrah, “Know that the right of those Muslims who are around you and those who are around me in this property is equal.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 43).

3.3. *al-Riqābah wa al-Murāqabah (Control and Supervision)*

Imām ‘Alī’s governance and management methodology centers on *Amānah* (trustworthiness) and *Khidmah* (service), fully actualized through stringent oversight mechanisms. Consequently, alongside emphasizing *Murāqabah Dākhiliyyah* (internal control) among agents, he implemented meticulous external supervision. When agents neglect *al-Ghāyah al-Wujūdiyyah* (existential purpose) of the administrative system and their fiduciary role in serving the populace, they may perceive themselves as sovereigns controlling public property and dignity, thereby enabling potential

corruption and oppression (Delshād Tehrānī, 2016, p. 183).

During the early caliphate of Imām 'Alī while still in Medina, Uthman bin Hunaif, a prominent Companion of the Prophet and Imām 'Alī, served as governor of Basra (Ibn Athīr, 1970, p. 40). Upon the governor's attendance at an inappropriate gathering, Imām 'Alī promptly dispatched a letter admonishing him (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 45). This exemplifies the Imām's supervisory rigor, wherein he addressed his Basran agent from Medina regarding managerial impropriety, mandating heightened caution and attentiveness.

Moreover, Imām 'Alī cautioned an agent submitting a false report that confirmed betrayal would incur severe retribution, "I truthfully swear by Allah that if I come to know that you have misappropriated the funds of the Muslims, small or big, I shall inflict upon you such punishment which will leave you empty handed, heavy backed and humiliated" (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 20).

Supervision, control, and accountability within Imām 'Alī's administrative system precluded even minimal impropriety or injustice, triggering immediate corrective action upon discovery. For instance, when Ziyad bin Abih, successor to Abdullah bin Abbas in Basra, engaged in misconduct, his servant Saad petitioned Imām 'Alī, alleging extravagance (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 21).

4. Traits

4.1. *Sa 'at al-Ṣadr* (Patience)

Competent management necessitates expansive capacity and profound *Ṣabr* (patience). Individuals lacking *Ḥilm* (forbearance) and *Tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) in affairs cannot serve the populace, uphold truth, or administer justice. Within Imām 'Alī's governance paradigm, patience constitutes the optimal managerial instrument, transcending narrow-mindedness and limited capacity: "Patience is the means of leadership" (Radi, 1000/2003, Saying 175).

Imām 'Alī counsels agents to exercise patience and forbearance regarding legitimate public demands, eschewing creditor mentality while embracing servitude. In this respect, Imam said, "Behave yourselves justly with the people and act with endurance concerning their needs, because you are the treasurers of the people, representatives of the community, and the ambassadors of the Imāms. Do not deprive anyone of his needs and do not prevent him from (securing) his requirements." (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 51).

When appointing 'Abdullah bin 'Abbās as governor of Basra, Imām 'Alī instructed, "Meet people with a broad face, allow them free audience and pass generous orders" (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 76). Per Imām 'Alī's teachings, cultivated patience minimizes errors, engenders *Rifq* (gentle) and *Raḥmah* (Merciful) conduct, and enables

universal benevolence. Such individuals merit governance, as emphasized to Mālik Ashtar, “Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Furthermore, Imām ‘Alī’s paradigm asserts that *Ṣābirūn* (patient individuals) neither humiliate others, expose flaws, nor reject valid excuses. Crucially, rulers require such patience more than others; its absence invariably precipitates intolerance, oppression, and malice.

4.2. *Tawāḍu* ‘ (Humility)

In Imām ‘Alī’s governance paradigm, humility occupies a foundational and indispensable position, whereas *Istibdād* (dictatorship) and *Kibr* (pride) represent the most perilous phenomena in administration. Imām ‘Alī instructed Mālik Ashtar, “Do not say: ‘I have been given authority, I should be obeyed when I order’” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Through this emphatic prohibition, Imām ‘Alī established that no individual may adopt autocratic pretensions nor assume their directives require unchallenged acceptance. Consequently, Imām ‘Alī neither appointed nor retained administrators exhibiting autocratic tendencies. This principle is codified in his early caliphal directive to Ash’ath bin Qais, Governor of Azerbaijan since Uthman’s era, “your assignment 1 is not a morsel for you, but it is a trust

round your neck, and you have been charged with the protection (of the people) on behalf of your superiors.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 5).

Accordingly, Imām ‘Alī dismissed Ash’ath immediately upon assuming leadership (Hāshemī Khoi, 1983, 17, p. 181).

4.3. *Amānah* (Trustworthiness)

Per Nahj al-Balāghah’s teachings, managerial suitability necessitates both piety and expertise in executive roles. In his Letter to Mālik Ashtar, Imām ‘Alī designates trustworthiness and competence as prerequisites for assuming responsibilities. He conceptualizes governance as a sacred trust vested in rulers, wherein administrators function as fiduciary custodians of public assets, obligated to restore this trust to its rightful beneficiaries.

In Letter 41, Imām ‘Alī reproaches a governor for violating this covenant, stating that his appointment derived solely from perceived trustworthiness, whereas the individual exploited this trust and committed betrayal.

4.4. *Ṣidq* (Honesty)

Dabt (precision) and *Amānah* (honesty) constitute essential attributes of competent managers, as *Fasād* (corruption) and *Ẓulm* (wrongdoing) predominantly originate in concealed activities and opaque governance. Imām ‘Alī’s administration exemplified *Ṣafā* (transparency) and imperviousness to injustice, as declared, “Beware, that it is obligatory for you on me that I should not keep anything secret from

you except during war” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 50).

He mandated that rulers embody piety, benevolence, and probity: “Associate yourself with God-fearing and truthful people” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Contemporary scholarship elaborates on managerial honesty: “Honest management necessitates those administrators recognizing their incapacity to fulfill duties or resist corrupt influences must resign immediately, preserving public trust. When trustworthiness becomes untenable, faithful and courageous restitution of this trust is obligatory” (Sharifi, 2005, p. 228). Imām ‘Alī demanded concordance between agents’ words and deeds, prohibiting unfulfilled promises: “Avoid ... making promises and then breaking them, because ... breaking promises earns the hatred of Allah and of the people.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

Letter 53 particularly emphasizes honesty. Articulating citizens’ rights to Mālik Ashtar, Imām ‘Alī identifies transparency as the optimal mechanism for structuring ruler-populace relations and a reformative benchmark for administrative affairs. Mutual trust between citizens and officials formed a vital governmental pillar in his paradigm. Consequently, whenever public suspicion arises regarding dismissals, appointments, contracts, or analogous matters, rulers must provide principled justifications to clarify

ambiguities, secure trust, and resolve doubts (Kohan Tarabi, 2013, p. 156).

A ruler accepting this justificatory obligation implicitly acknowledges popular sovereignty. This perspective enables governors to achieve self-mastery, thereby resisting temptations and illegitimate demands. Furthermore, disclosing realities familiarizes citizens with truth, engendering voluntary legal compliance and receptiveness to equitable implementation (Fazel Lankarānī, 1987, p.136).

5. Motives

5.1. *Iltizām bi al-Ḥaqq* (Adhering to the Rights)

Adherence to rights constitutes an indispensable managerial motive, requiring administrators to enforce equity universally. As Imām ‘Alī mandates in His treaty to Mālik Ashtar, "Enforce the right for everyone, proximate or distant, requiring its implementation."

Imām ‘Alī commanded agents to maintain equivalence in public affairs, about rights, communal interests, and legal provisions, irrespective of kinship, socioeconomic status, or influence. This principle is codified in his directive to Aswad Bin Qutaba, commander of the Hulwan garrison, "All the people should be equal in right before you” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 59).

Undoubtedly, implementing equality in public rights and legal contexts provokes opposition from rent-seeking elites. Relatives and associates of rulers

demanding privileges, alongside those achieving illicit gains through extra-legal networks, resist equality through multifaceted pressures. Steadfastness, divine conviction, and eschatological consciousness alone preserve adherence to equity, as the Imām emphasized, “Allow rights to whomsoever it is due, whether near you or far from you. In this matter, you should be enduring and watchful even though it may involve your relations and favorites, and keep in view the reward of that which appears burdensome on you because its reward is precious.” (Radi, 1000/2003, Letter 53).

5.2. *Khidmah* (Serving)

The ontological foundation of management resides in serving the administered populace. All functionaries across hierarchical levels must embody service orientation, constituting the cardinal principle of competent administration. When this ethos prevails, agents eschew proprietary or coercive conduct, instead perceiving their mandate as a divine trust and opportunity for service.

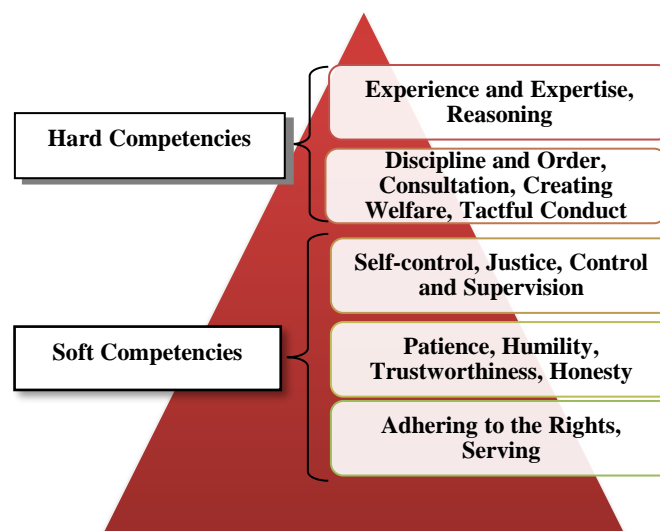
Within Imām ‘Alī’s paradigm, institutionalizing service as foundational reconfigures behaviors and functions favorably while mitigating burdens of responsibility and public misconduct. Under such conditions, competent management arguably advances toward objectives with maximal efficiency (Delshād Tehrānī, 2016, p. 341).

Conclusion

In this research, managerial competencies derived from Nahj al-Balāghah's epistolary corpus have been categorized into five domains according to Spencer & Spencer’s model:

- Knowledge: Experience and expertise, reasoning
- Skill: Discipline and order, consultation, creating welfare, tactful conduct
- Self-concept: Self-control, justice, control, and supervision
- Traits: Patience, humility, trustworthiness, honesty
- Motives: Adhering to the rights, serving

These competencies were further classified into two domains: ‘hard’ competencies, representing visible, surface-level attributes, and ‘soft’ competencies, constituting latent, submerged attributes. As analysis progresses from surface to depth within this metaphorical framework, competencies demonstrate increasing internality and resistance to modification. For instance, managerial knowledge and expertise may be developed through training and experience, whereas divinely-rooted motivations prove substantially more immutable. Consequently, internal competencies (self-concept, traits, motives) warrant greater emphasis than external competencies (skills and knowledge) in managerial selection processes.



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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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