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Fiqh-Based Requirements and Limits of Managerial Oversight of Employees' Task Performance: An Analysis of Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explains the fiqh-based requirements and limits governing a manager's oversight of employees' task performance and derives managerial implications from Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** An applied qualitative design was used. Letter 53 of Nahj al-Balagha was examined through directed qualitative content analysis. Relevant passages were coded, compared with Qur'anic verses, hadith, and classical and contemporary fiqh sources, and classified as indicating obligation, prohibition, conditional permissibility, or an ethical-managerial recommendation. **Findings:** Four categories and fourteen rules were identified: managerial responsibility and the legitimate scope of oversight; information channels and observer qualifications; limits, verification, and protection of information; and action after oversight. A manager is responsible for reasonable follow-up, credible information sources, verification proportionate to the contemplated decision, and a fair response to established misconduct. Yet oversight must remain task-related and satisfy necessity, proportionality, the prohibition of unwarranted spying, protection of dignity, confidentiality, and the employee's opportunity to respond. Even a report from an honest and trustworthy observer is not equivalent to conclusive proof. **Originality/Value:** The study moves beyond a general inventory of management teachings in Letter 53 by jointly analyzing the affirmative duty to oversee and the fiqh constraints on managerial access to and use of information. It proposes a framework of responsible and bounded oversight linking legitimate purpose, task-related scope, proportionate method, credible source, verification, fair decision, and lawful action.

Keywords

managerial oversight, employee task performance, Islamic management, Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant, workplace privacy, fiqh

1. Introduction

Oversight is a basic condition of organized action. Planning, delegation, and division of labor do not by themselves assure that assigned work is performed correctly. Managers need reliable information about implementation in order to identify delay, negligence, deviation, and possible abuse, and to decide whether corrective action is required. The issue is especially significant in public organizations, where managerial inattention may affect public rights, shared resources, service quality, and confidence in administration.

Oversight is not a neutral activity, however. Decisions about what to observe, how to collect information, who may access it, and how it may be used can influence employees' privacy, dignity, perceived fairness, and trust. Organizational research suggests that monitoring is more likely to be regarded as fair when it is connected to work, applied consistently, and supported by an intelligible justification (Alge, 2001; Stanton, 2000). The object and method of monitoring also need separate evaluation: observing a work outcome differs from continuous observation of conduct or personal characteristics (Jeske & Santuzzi, 2015). Organizational benefits such as security, coordination, and asset protection therefore do not justify every degree or form of observation (Martin & Freeman, 2003).

Islamic jurisprudential reasoning makes the tension particularly clear. On one side, managerial authority is held as an amanah, or trust. The Qur'an links the discharge of trusts with just judgment (Qur'an 4:58), which makes indifference to assigned duties difficult to reconcile with fiduciary responsibility. On the other side, the Qur'an prohibits unwarranted suspicion and spying (49:12), requires verification before acting on unreliable reports (49:6), and rejects following that of which one has no knowledge (17:36). A managerial duty to become informed cannot therefore be converted into a general license to enter employees' private lives, accept rumors, or damage their standing.

Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant, preserved as Letter 53 of Nahj al-Balagha, brings both sides of this problem into a single administrative text. Imam Ali instructs Malik to inspect the work of officials and

appoint truthful and loyal observers. Elsewhere in the same letter, he warns against fault-seekers, uncovering concealed matters, and hastily believing an informer (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, Letter 53, pp. 429, 435). The Covenant therefore addresses not only the need for oversight but also its informational, ethical, and executive boundaries.

Existing Islamic management studies have discussed control, self-control, prevention of deviation, and responses to misconduct (Hajian & Mokhtari, 2024; Ismailpour, 2007; Mohaghghigh, 2021). A separate fiqh literature has examined privacy, the primary prohibition of spying, and narrowly framed exceptions based on necessity or overriding interests (Dargahi & Rezaei, 2022; Kariminia et al., 2021; Kazemi et al., 2023; Shokri et al., 2026). These two streams have rarely been connected as one decision process. The first tends to ask how managers should oversee, whereas the second concentrates on why intrusion is prohibited or exceptionally permissible. As a result, the practical boundary between the instruction to oversee and the instruction not to spy remains insufficiently specified.

This study asks: What fiqh-based requirements and limits govern managerial oversight of employees' task performance, and what implications does Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant provide for defining them? Three subsidiary questions guide the analysis: Which propositions and categories concerning oversight can be extracted from the Covenant? What normative status—obligation, prohibition, conditional permissibility, or ethical-managerial recommendation—can reasonably be assigned to them? What operational rules follow for oversight before information is collected, while it is being gathered, and after a report is received?

The inquiry is deliberately bounded. It concerns the relationship between managers and employees under their authority and information connected to organizational duties. It does not attempt to design a specialized performance appraisal system, nor does it address recruitment, compensation, financial auditing, security surveillance, criminal investigation, or the technical regulation of particular monitoring technologies. Its contribution lies in treating oversight as a sequence of normatively distinct acts: obtaining information, assessing its credibility and sufficiency, and deciding whether and how to act.

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1. Conceptual and Fiqh Foundations of Managerial Oversight

Managerial oversight is defined here as the purposeful acquisition, assessment, and use of information concerning employees' performance of organizational duties. The definition contains three elements. First, oversight must serve an organizational purpose. Second, its object is conduct or an outcome connected to an assigned role. Third, the information is gathered because it may inform a managerial judgment or response. Mere observation, detached from responsibility and decision, is not necessarily managerial oversight.

Oversight is related to, but not identical with, control and performance appraisal. Oversight emphasizes continuing awareness of work in progress. Control adds comparison with a standard and correction of deviation. Performance appraisal usually refers to a formal human-resource system used for decisions such as promotion, reward, or development. The present study concentrates on how managers obtain and validate information and respond to possible weakness, negligence, or misconduct; it does not propose a comprehensive appraisal architecture.

Contemporary literature directs attention to procedural justice, transparency of purpose, work relevance, employee voice, and proportionality. Stanton (2000) found that knowledge of performance, consistency, employee control, and justification shape perceptions of fairness. Ball (2010, 2021) shows that workplace surveillance is embedded in organizational power and in the policies surrounding a technology, not only in the device itself. Ravid et al. (2020) similarly argue that the technology, purpose, context, and consequences of electronic performance monitoring need to be considered together. Their later meta-analysis cautions against assuming that more observation automatically improves performance outcomes (Ravid et al., 2023).

The ethical unit of analysis should therefore be a particular oversight practice rather than an instrument in the abstract: who gathers what information, about which duty, for what purpose, through which method, for how long, and with what consequence? A camera, a supervisor's report, a workflow record, or a complaint may be necessary in one context and excessive in another. Kayas's (2023) systematic review likewise identifies a persistent tension between organizational benefits and unintended

employee consequences and shows that outcomes vary with individual, organizational, and environmental conditions.

Three sensitizing concepts were drawn from this literature for the initial reading of the Covenant: work relevance, the justifiability of the method, and fairness in the use of findings. They guided attention without being treated as predetermined conclusions. This is important because directed content analysis uses earlier theory to orient coding but must still allow the text to modify or extend the initial categories (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

2.2. Previous Research and the Research Gap

The first foundation is fiduciary responsibility. Qur'an 4:58 places the performance of trusts beside just judgment. Within the manager's lawful authority, resources, powers, and the rights of stakeholders are entrusted rather than owned. Delegating work without reasonable attention to its performance may therefore amount to a failure of amanah. This foundation distinguishes oversight from personal curiosity: its legitimate origin is responsibility for an entrusted matter.

The second foundation is the prohibition of unwarranted spying and fault-seeking. Qur'an 49:12 connects avoidance of sinful suspicion with the prohibition of tajassus and backbiting. Hadith sources strongly condemn pursuing believers' hidden faults. Al-Kulayni reports traditions concerning those who search for the slips and concealed vulnerabilities of believers (1407 AH, Vol. 2, p. 355), and Ibn Babawayh records a related warning against exposing what God has concealed (1406 AH, p. 288). These reports do not abolish oversight of an accepted organizational duty whose effects concern the organization or the public. They do, however, prevent managers from converting task oversight into the hunting of faults, curiosity about concealed personal affairs, or the accumulation of irrelevant weaknesses.

The third foundation is verification before harmful reliance. Qur'an 49:6 requires tabayyun before acting on a report from an unreliable person, while 17:36 prohibits following what is unsupported by knowledge. In his analysis of the verse of verification, al-Ansari distinguishes actionable assurance from mere supposition and treats scrutiny of the report as necessary before reliance (1419 AH, Vol. 1, p. 275). Hekmati Yaraziz (2023) likewise identifies accurate information as a condition of effective supervision and justified reliance in Islamic administration. In an organization, a colleague's report, a user complaint, system data, or an observer's account may justify a preliminary inquiry, but the quality and sufficiency of each must be assessed in relation to the contemplated decision. A report that warrants a confidential check may not warrant a sanction.

The fourth foundation is justice, dignity, and confidentiality. Qur'an 5:8 prohibits bias from displacing justice. Fairness is not limited to matching a sanction with misconduct; it also concerns the selection of the person monitored, the collection criterion, the opportunity to explain, the scope of disclosure, and the competence of the decision-maker. Khomeini's discussion of prohibited disclosure includes revealing concealed matters in ways that injure a believer's honor (1410 AH, Vol. 1, p. 261). Information and reputation entrusted to a manager must accordingly be confined to a legitimate administrative need and to persons competent to act on it.

Fiqh prohibitions are not transformed into absolute administrative passivity. Classical discussion of warning a believer against a concrete harm illustrates that disclosure may be exceptionally justified where protection from harm requires it, while the exception remains tied to a valid purpose and the amount necessary for that purpose (al-Najafi, n.d., Vol. 22, p. 410). Contemporary studies similarly discuss necessity, a superior collective interest, limitation of scope, and non-disclosure as conditions for exceptional access (Dargahi & Rezaei, 2022; Kariminia et al., 2021; Kazemi et al., 2023). Such exceptions do not create a general managerial privilege. They place the burden of justification on the person who seeks to cross the ordinary boundary.

Together, these sources yield five initial criteria: a legitimate responsibility and purpose; a demonstrable link between information and duty; necessity and proportionality of method; verification proportionate to the proposed consequence; and justice, confidentiality, and lawful competence in reliance on information.

The relevant literature falls into three streams. Organizational studies explain the functions and effects of monitoring, especially its relationship with privacy, procedural justice, trust, and employee responses. Islamic management studies derive general principles and methods of supervision from the

Qur'an and Nahj al-Balagha. Fiqh studies examine spying and privacy and the conditions under which access to protected information might exceptionally be justified. Table 1 summarizes the most relevant contributions and the gap addressed here.

Table 1
Selected Literature and the Position of the Present Study

Studies	Focus	Relevant Contribution	Remaining Gap
Stanton (2000); Alge (2001); Jeske and Santuzzi (2015)	Procedural justice, privacy, and monitoring design	Work relevance, consistency, justification, and the distinction between object and method shape fairness.	No fiqh appraisal of managerial authority.
Martin and Freeman (2003); Ball (2010, 2021); Kayas (2023); Ravid et al. (2020, 2023)	Ethics, context, and outcomes of workplace surveillance	Benefits must be weighed against effects on trust, autonomy, and privacy; outcomes depend on context.	Does not classify obligation, prohibition, and conditional permission.
Ismailpour (2007); Mohaghghigh (2021); Hajian and Mokhtari (2024)	Islamic supervision and control	Oversight is central to Islamic management and includes multiple internal and external methods.	Does not integrate information limits, verification, and reliance.
Gorji and Ganjbakhsh (2024); Mohammadi (2024)	Letter 53, governance, and HRM	Accountability, confidentiality, justice, dignity, and merit are emphasized.	Oversight is one element in broader governance or HRM analysis.
Kariminia et al. (2021); Kazemi et al. (2023); Dargahi and Rezaei (2022); Shokri et al. (2026)	Fiqh, privacy, and spying	The primary prohibition of spying may admit narrowly justified exceptions based on necessity and superior interests.	Limited attention to the manager's affirmative duty and report validity.
Present study	Directed content analysis and fiqh analysis of Letter 53	Connects duty, access, verification, confidentiality, and lawful action in one process.	Proposes a framework for later empirical testing.

Note. Compiled by the authors from the cited studies.

The gap is not a lack of writing about oversight. It is the separation of its affirmative and restrictive dimensions. Managers are told both to oversee and not to spy, but they are given less guidance on how the two instructions interact across an actual decision process. Four initial categories were therefore taken into the analysis: necessity and object of oversight; methods of obtaining information; limits on oversight; and action after oversight. During coding, observer competence, convergence of reports, the employee's explanation, confidentiality, and the legal competence to act emerged as more specific concerns.

3. Methodology

The research has an applied purpose and uses a qualitative documentary design. Its principal strategy is directed qualitative content analysis. This approach begins with categories informed by earlier theory or research while allowing categories to be revised and new codes to emerge from the material (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012). It was selected

because the study addresses a defined managerial problem but seeks to preserve the distinctive normative structure of the Covenant.

The primary text was Letter 53 of Nahj al-Balagha, commonly known as Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant, in Subhi Salih's edited Arabic edition (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH). Qur'anic verses, hadith, classical fiqh works, and contemporary fiqh studies were used to analyze the normative character of issues generated by the text. A deliberately limited management literature clarified the concept, consequences, and procedural design of oversight; it was not used to impose a complete external model on the Covenant.

A passage was included when it bore a direct or close relation to at least one of the following: following up officials' work; determining an information source; specifying observer qualities; limiting inquiry into personal affairs; evaluating a report; protecting dignity and confidentiality; or responding after negligence or betrayal had been established. Passages on appointment, remuneration, taxation, adjudication, or war were included only when their connection to oversight was clear. The textual unit of analysis was a meaningful phrase or passage, varying from a short expression to several sentences as required to preserve context.

Analysis proceeded in six stages. First, the Covenant was read repeatedly with attention to the relationship between the governor and appointed officials. Second, relevant passages were extracted together with their surrounding context. Third, meaning units were coded with the initial categories, while incongruent or novel codes were recorded separately. Fourth, overlapping codes were merged into four final categories. Fifth, each code was restated as a fiqh question, such as the scope of information gathering, the ruling on tajassus, the probative value of reports, the degree of verification, protection of reputation, or the manager's competence to act. Sixth, textual and fiqh findings were translated into managerial rules for the periods before, during, and after oversight.

Entry and exclusion rules were used to reduce the risk of forcing the initial framework onto the text. A general statement about trust entered the analysis only when it affected follow-up or the use of information. A concealed method was not automatically coded as prohibited spying; the object, purpose, work relevance, and necessity were examined first. For passages with several implications, the primary procedural function determined the principal category and secondary links were retained in analytic notes. This kept textual coding, fiqh appraisal, and managerial translation analytically distinct.

Fiqh analysis in this article is not presented as a fatwa for every organizational case. For each issue, the object and scope were first specified; relevant Qur'anic, hadith, and fiqh evidence was then examined; and the resulting implication was classified as obligation, prohibition, conditional permissibility, or an ethical-managerial recommendation. An imperative or prohibition in the Covenant was not treated, without context and corroboration, as a universally applicable fiqh ruling. Table 2 records the operational definitions that guided the analysis.

Table 2
Operational Definitions of the Initial Categories

Initial Category	Entry Rule	Exclusion Rule	Guiding Question
Duty and scope	Follow-up duty or definition of a legitimate object	General virtues unrelated to task follow-up	Would non-follow-up endanger a trust or right, and how is the information linked to duty?
Information acquisition	Observation, records, reports, complaints, or source qualities	Appointment advice unrelated to information production	Through whom and by what channel does information reach the manager?
Limits and verification	Fault-seeking, hidden matters, hasty belief, corroboration, or confidentiality	Secrecy alone, without examining object, purpose, and need	Is a less intrusive method available, and is the evidence sufficient for the proposed consequence?

Initial Category	Entry Rule	Exclusion Rule	Guiding Question
Action after oversight	Fair response, proportionality, competence, or referral	Judicial or governmental powers not attributable to an ordinary manager	What response is justified after verification and within whose authority?

Note. Developed for the directed content analysis.

Trustworthiness was addressed through an audit trail connecting passage, meaning unit, code, category, fiqh issue, and managerial implication. Arabic expressions were retained for the central findings, and adverse or apparently conflicting evidence—particularly the combination of confidential observation and the prohibition of uncovering faults—was included rather than discarded. Credibility was supported by repeated return to textual context; dependability by recording coding and decision rules; and confirmability by retaining primary textual evidence for every central rule (Elo et al., 2014). A fiqh specialist reviewed the logic connecting categories and normative classifications, and revisions were made to avoid treating ethical advice as equivalent to an obligatory ruling. Because one researcher conducted the principal coding, no claim of intercoder reliability is made; expert review functioned as a check on jurisprudential reasoning rather than as independent recoding.

4. Findings

Four categories and fourteen rules were derived. The first category defines managerial responsibility and the legitimate scope of oversight. The second addresses information channels and the qualifications of observers. The third concerns limits, verification, and protection of information. The fourth concerns judgment and action after information has been assessed. Table 3 presents the complete chain from the Covenant's wording to the fiqh appraisal and managerial implication.

Table 3
Final Matrix of Textual Evidence, Fiqh Appraisal, and Managerial Implications

Category and Rule	Textual Basis	Fiqh Appraisal and Managerial Implication
Duty and scope — 1. Follow up performance	ثم تفقد أعمالهم — inspect their work (Letter 53, p. 435).	Where omission foreseeably causes loss of trust or rights, reasonable oversight becomes obligatory; delegation does not remove accountability.
Duty and scope — 2. Limit the object to duty	The command concerns أعمالهم, their official work (p. 435).	Ordinary oversight covers task-related conduct, results, resources, and rights, not unrelated personal affairs.
Duty and scope — 3. Legitimate corrective purpose	حدوة لهم على استعمال الأمانة والرفق بالرعية (p. 435).	The purpose is fidelity to trust and protection of people, not humiliation, retaliation, or curiosity.
Information — 4. Use plural channels	Observers, complaints, and accessibility to the public are addressed in Letter 53.	Direct observation, records, observer reports, and stakeholder complaints may be combined; repeated rumor is not independent corroboration.
Information — 5. Qualify the observer	من أهل الصدق والوفاء — truthful and loyal persons (p. 435).	Competence, honesty, confidentiality, impartiality, and conflicts of interest affect evidential weight.

Category and Rule	Textual Basis	Fiqh Appraisal and Managerial Implication
Information — 6. Conditional confidential oversight	تعاهدک فی السر لأمورهم — confidential attention to their affairs (p. 435).	Non-public oversight is conditionally permissible only for a legitimate, task-related purpose and to the necessary, proportionate extent.
Limits — 7. Prohibit fault-seeking	أطلبهم لمعائب الناس — those who most seek people's faults (p. 429).	A reporting system must not reward hunting slips or personal dossier-building; source motives must be assessed.
Limits — 8. Do not uncover concealed irrelevant matters	فلا تکشفن عما غاب عنک منها — do not uncover what is hidden (p. 429).	The presumption is non-entry. A concrete exception needs valid authority, clear necessity, and a narrowly limited scope.
Limits — 9. Do not convert ambiguity into fact	وتغاب عن کل ما لا یضح لک — overlook what is not clear (p. 429).	Suspicion or ambiguity does not justify expanding oversight or taking action against an employee.
Verification — 10. Reject hasty belief	ولا تعجلن إلی تصدیق ساع — do not hasten to believe an informer (p. 429).	An initial report is a lead, not final proof; tabayyun and proportionate scrutiny are required.
Verification — 11. Test convergence and independence	اجتمعت بها علیه أخبار عیونک — observers' reports converge (p. 435).	Reports must be checked for independence, consistency with records, possible collusion, and sufficiency for the proposed decision.
Protection — 12. Preserve confidentiality and dignity	فاستر العورة ما استطعت — conceal faults as far as possible (p. 429).	Apply need-to-know access, data minimization, limited retention, and no public disclosure of unverified allegations.
Action — 13. Decide fairly and proportionately	Letter 53 joins verification, justice, and response after betrayal is established (p. 435).	Distinguish error, incapacity, negligence, and betrayal; hear the employee and select a proportionate lawful response.
Action — 14. Act within lawful competence	The historical addressee is a governor with public authority.	An ordinary manager may use only contemporary legal powers and must confidentially refer matters outside those powers.

Note. Arabic passages are from al-Sharif al-Radi (1414 AH). Normative classifications are the findings of this study.

4.1. Managerial Duty and the Legitimate Scope of Oversight

The first rule is that a manager may not remain indifferent. The instruction thumma tafaq-qad a'malahum, "then inspect their work," appears after guidance on the selection and adequate support of officials (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 435). Sound appointment and fair remuneration do not replace follow-up. Where omission of reasonable oversight would foreseeably permit loss of entrusted resources, violation of rights, or failure of a public duty, oversight acquires an obligatory character grounded in amanah. The required intensity is not uniform: it varies with the importance of the task, the likelihood and consequence of deviation, the reversibility of error, and prior evidence. The obligation is therefore one of reasonable and risk-sensitive attention, not constant observation of every employee.

The second rule concerns scope. The grammatical object of the command is a‘malahum—the officials’ work—not every aspect of their lives. The textual context connects inspection to the discharge of delegated public duties. Ordinary managerial oversight is consequently confined to conduct, outputs, resources, and rights reasonably related to the role. Information about a personal matter cannot be brought within the legitimate scope merely by invoking “organizational interest.” As the connection with assigned work weakens, the justification required for access becomes stronger.

The third rule concerns purpose. The Covenant explains that confidential attention to officials’ affairs encourages fidelity to trust and gentleness toward the people (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 435). Oversight serves the proper performance of responsibility and protection of those affected by administration. It loses this normative foundation when used for humiliation, retaliation, factional advantage, or curiosity. The legitimacy of the end is therefore a threshold question, not an afterthought.

4.2. Information Channels and Observer Qualifications

The Covenant does not reduce managerial knowledge to a single channel. It refers to appointed observers, the ruler’s accessibility to complaints, and the need to avoid a barrier between authority and the public. In modern terms, managers may draw on direct observation, organizational records, reports from designated observers, and complaints from stakeholders. Using several channels can reduce dependence on one closed information network, but numerical multiplicity alone is not corroboration; repeated transmission of one rumor remains one informational origin.

The observer must be selected from ahl al-sidq wa al-wafa, “people of truthfulness and loyalty” (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 435). Sidq concerns accuracy and honesty in reporting. Wafa adds fidelity to the entrusted purpose: confidentiality, absence of manipulative use, and adherence to the limits of the assignment. A modern appointment process should therefore consider professional competence, impartiality, conflicts of interest, record-keeping, and accountability. A report from an anonymous, interested, or untested source does not necessarily have no value, but its evidential weight is not equal to that of a credible and accountable source.

The phrase ta‘ahhudaka fi al-sirr li-umurihim indicates that non-public oversight of official conduct is not categorically excluded (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 435). Yet secrecy does not independently establish permissibility. Confidential observation is conditionally permissible only for a legitimate purpose, within a task-related field, where there is a real need and the method and duration are proportionate. This reading brings the passage into coherence with the prohibition of tajassus: what is allowed is bounded attention to entrusted work, not an open-ended search through concealed personal affairs.

4.3. Limits, Verification, and Protection of Information

Several passages impose negative limits. The Covenant advises the ruler to keep habitual fault-seekers at a distance, for people have faults that the ruler should be most disposed to conceal. It then states: fa-la takshifanna ‘amma ghaba ‘anka minha—“do not uncover what is hidden from you of them”—and instructs him to overlook what is not clear (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 429). These expressions prohibit the design of a reporting system that rewards the hunting of slips or the creation of personal files unrelated to work. They also require attention to an informant’s motives, history, and possible conflict of interest.

The prohibition of uncovering concealed matters establishes a presumption against entry into hidden, non-work domains. Khomeini’s treatment of exposing concealed matters and injury to honor strengthens this protective reading (1410 AH, Vol. 1, p. 261). Crossing the boundary requires a specific and defensible basis, not a general appeal to managerial authority. A concrete threat to public rights may justify narrowly tailored inquiry when there is no less intrusive effective route, but the exception remains limited to the protective purpose (al-Najafi, n.d., Vol. 22, p. 410). An overt method may still be excessive if it is humiliating or collects unnecessary information, while a confidential method may be permissible when it is tightly tied to a serious work-related risk.

The Covenant also provides an epistemic rule: wa-la ta‘jalanna ila tasdiqi sa‘in—“do not hasten to believe an informer” (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 429). An initial report is a reason to consider inquiry, not a final determination. This is consonant with tabayyun in Qur’an 49:6 and the requirement to

move beyond unsupported supposition before reliance (al-Ansari, 1419 AH, Vol. 1, p. 275). The apparent goodwill or institutional position of the reporter cannot substitute for scrutiny of the account.

Elsewhere, the Covenant speaks of a case in which akhbaru ‘uyunika, the reports of the ruler’s observers, converge against an official (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 435). Convergence matters only if the sources are sufficiently independent and their accounts fit records, circumstances, or other evidence. Credibility of the observer is a necessary feature of a sound system, but it is not always sufficient evidence for a decision that harms reputation, employment, or other rights. The more serious and less reversible the consequence, the stronger the required basis and the more complete the procedure should be.

Three informational levels follow. At the first level, a single report or indicator permits only preliminary and confidential examination. At the second, independent convergence or consistency with records may justify seeking an explanation or taking a limited precaution needed to prevent immediate harm. At the third, after verification proportionate to the decision and a fair opportunity to respond, the manager may take a corrective or administrative measure within lawful competence. These levels do not purport to reproduce judicial standards of proof; they prevent an organization from equating an allegation with established misconduct.

Protection continues after information has been obtained. The instruction fa-stur al-‘awrata ma istata‘ta, “conceal faults as far as you can,” makes containment rather than circulation the default (al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH, p. 429). The hadith warnings against pursuing and exposing believers’ faults reinforce that conclusion (Ibn Babawayh, 1406 AH, p. 288; al-Kulayni, 1407 AH, Vol. 2, p. 355). Access should be limited by administrative need; irrelevant details should be masked or removed; and an unverified allegation should not be publicly announced. In contemporary information systems, the same principle entails data minimization, differentiated access, a defined retention period, and deletion or anonymization once the legitimate purpose ends.

4.4. Judgment, Action, and the Responsible and Bounded Oversight Framework

Oversight is not justified merely to accumulate data. When weakness or misconduct is reasonably established, the manager must distinguish mistake, inadequate capacity, negligence, and betrayal. The employee’s explanation is relevant not only as a courtesy but as part of tahqiq al-mawdu‘, accurate determination of what occurred. It may change the understanding of the source, context, responsibility, or consequences of the act. Early notice may exceptionally be delayed if it would enable destruction of evidence or continuation of immediate harm, but that exception cannot eliminate a later opportunity to respond before a harmful final decision.

Fair action must be proportionate to the conduct, its effects, the strength of the information, and the possibility of correction. Ignoring verified serious misconduct may perpetuate a breach of trust; a rash or excessive response may itself constitute injustice. The applicable hukm is therefore not a single automatic sanction. Depending on the case, the response may be correction of a process, guidance, a lawful administrative measure, or confidential referral to a competent body.

The historical form of every measure in the Covenant cannot be transferred directly to an ordinary contemporary manager. Letter 53 addresses a governor exercising public authority within the legal and political structure of its time. Its enduring implication is that established betrayal should not be ignored and that the response must be just. A present-day manager may act only within statutory, contractual, and organizational authority. Matters outside that authority must be referred, with confidentiality, to the legally competent administrative or judicial body.

The findings converge in a framework of responsible and bounded oversight. “Responsible” indicates that a manager must obtain reasonable awareness of assigned work, establish credible information channels, and respond to verified deviation. “Bounded” indicates that this responsibility is exercised within legitimate purpose, work relevance, necessity, proportionality, verification, confidentiality, justice, and lawful competence.

The logical sequence is: legitimate purpose → task-related scope → necessary and proportionate method → truthful and trustworthy source → verification and subject determination → fair decision → lawful and confidential action. A defect at any link can compromise the legitimacy of the process. A goal

such as preventing corruption does not justify unlimited collection of personal information; similarly, a lawful way of receiving a report does not make the report sufficient for a sanction.

Two cumulative tests operationalize the sequence. The first tests the legitimacy of access: purpose, scope, necessity, proportionality, and source competence. The second tests the sufficiency of reliance: credibility, corroboration, opportunity to respond, proportionality of the decision, and managerial competence. Passing the first test does not entail passing the second. Information may have been obtained legitimately yet remain insufficient for a harmful decision.

5. Discussion

The central answer is that managerial oversight is neither an unrestricted prerogative nor a merely optional technique. It is a bounded fiduciary duty. Where failure to follow up creates a material risk of continuing negligence, loss of entrusted resources, or violation of rights, oversight may acquire the taklifi status of obligation (wujub) to the extent reasonably required. The same authority is restricted by prohibitions (hurmah), most clearly unwarranted tajassus, fault-seeking, unjust injury to honor, and harmful reliance on unverified allegations. Between these poles lies conditional permissibility (jawaz mashrut): a non-public or otherwise intrusive method may be allowed only when its purpose, object, necessity, proportionality, and safeguards are established.

This classification matters because the Covenant contains both directive and restraining language. Treating every directive as a universally fixed legal ruling would disregard context; treating the text as only ethical counsel would understate its normative force. The study therefore distinguishes legal-moral status from managerial recommendation. Choosing a truthful and loyal observer, for example, expresses a strong fiduciary requirement. The precise number of observers or the technical channel used remains a managerial design choice. Likewise, the prohibition of spying establishes a boundary, while data-minimization rules translate that boundary into a contemporary administrative practice.

The distinction between tafaqqud and tajassus resolves an apparent contradiction. Tafaqqud is task-oriented attention grounded in responsibility for entrusted work. Tajassus is the unjustified search for concealed matters beyond that responsibility. The difference cannot be reduced to whether employees know they are observed. Purpose, object, need, method, and later use must be considered together. Confidential inspection of a high-risk public process may be permissible under strict safeguards, whereas a publicly announced demand for unrelated personal data may exceed legitimate authority.

The findings also clarify the hujjiyyah, or actionable evidential value, of reports in organizational settings. The integrity of a reporter affects credibility, but a credible report is not identical to proof sufficient for every consequence. The Qur'anic requirement of tabayyun, the Covenant's warning against hasty belief, and its reference to converging reports together establish an epistemic progression: indication, examination, corroboration, subject determination, and only then reliance proportionate to the contemplated decision. This progression is especially important where a decision may affect dignity, livelihood, or professional standing.

Finally, the principle of satr, or protective concealment, is not an instruction to hide organizational wrongdoing. It governs unnecessary disclosure and exposure after the manager has gained access. A manager may have a duty to correct or refer verified misconduct while simultaneously having a duty to restrict who sees the information and to avoid public humiliation. Amanah therefore governs both the decision to collect information and its subsequent custody.

The results are consistent with organizational justice research on work relevance, justification, consistency, and employee voice (Alge, 2001; Stanton, 2000). The duty-related scope derived from a'malahum extends Alge's work-relevance finding from employee perception to a normative limit on managerial authority. The distinction between object and method also supports Jeske and Santuzzi (2015), but adds that a minimally intrusive method is still impermissible if used for an illegitimate purpose or irrelevant subject.

Kayas (2023) and Martin and Freeman (2003) identify the tension between organizational benefits and costs to trust, autonomy, and privacy. The present framework does not resolve that tension by giving categorical priority to either side. It assigns a different burden of justification at each stage. The manager must first justify access and then separately demonstrate that the information is sufficient for the

proposed decision. This also qualifies an assumption sometimes implicit in monitoring practice: the managerial duty is to secure reasonable, defensible awareness, not to maximize visibility.

The study agrees with Islamic management research on the importance of oversight, varied information channels, and prevention of deviation (Hajian & Mokhtari, 2024; Ismailpour, 2007; Mohaghghigh, 2021). Its addition is to connect method with informational boundaries, report validity, and the conditions for action. Unlike typologies that treat covert observation chiefly as one monitoring method, the present analysis makes its permissibility dependent on purpose, object, necessity, and proportionality.

The findings also align with analyses of Letter 53 that emphasize accountability, confidentiality, justice, dignity, and merit (Gorji & Ganjbakhsh, 2024; Mohammadi, 2024). Those studies operate at the level of good governance or human-resource principles. Here, the same values are traced across a narrower managerial process, from selecting the object of oversight through verification, disclosure, and response. Justice is consequently not only a quality of the final outcome; it structures the whole informational procedure.

Compared with fiqh studies of privacy, the article accepts both the primary prohibition of unwarranted spying and the possibility of narrowly justified access where a serious legitimate interest requires it (Dargahi & Rezaei, 2022; Kariminia et al., 2021; Kazemi et al., 2023; Shokri et al., 2026). It adds the manager's affirmative duty to the analysis and translates general conditions of necessity into a staged organizational test. "Organizational interest" is not left as an unlimited label; it must be demonstrated through work relevance, lack of a less intrusive effective method, limitation of data, and controlled disclosure.

The theoretical contribution is fourfold. Oversight is recast as a multistage normative process. Task-oriented tafaqqud is distinguished from fault-seeking tajassus. Managerial access is explained as a fiduciary and limited authority, not ownership of employee information. Finally, the credibility of a report is separated from its sufficiency for action. These elements form the concept of responsible and bounded oversight.

The framework can guide oversight protocols in public organizations. Before introducing a tool or reporting form, an organization should answer three questions: What legitimate purpose and work-related object justify oversight? Through whom and by what proportionate method will information be collected and verified? Who has the legal competence to decide after information is received? Table 4 summarizes the operational requirements and red lines at each stage.

Table 4
Operational Rules for Responsible and Bounded Oversight

Stage	Control Question	Required Safeguards	Red Lines
Before	Why and what should be overseen?	Legitimate purpose; direct work relevance; necessity; proportionate scope; clear criteria; conflict check.	Personal curiosity; vague blanket monitoring; discrimination; unrelated private matters.
During	How and by whom is information obtained?	Least intrusive effective method; truthful and trustworthy observer; source recording; limited data; confidentiality; independent corroboration.	Unwarranted spying; fault-seeking; mass collection; rumor as proof; humiliating observation.
After	Is the information sufficient, and who may act?	Proportionate verification; employee explanation; distinction among error, negligence, and betrayal; fair decision; competent referral.	Rash reliance; reputational harm; sanction on an unverified report; action beyond authority.

Note. Developed from the study findings.

Every oversight process should document its purpose, basis of access, source, corroborating indications, employee explanation, decision, and authorized decision-maker. Documentation improves accuracy and makes managerial judgment reviewable. An anonymous or informal report need not be automatically discarded, but it should be treated as an initial lead and verified before any detrimental action.

Access should follow a need-to-know rule. An observer, direct manager, legal unit, and adjudicating authority do not necessarily require the same information. Tiered access, defined retention periods, and deletion or anonymization reduce the risk of secondary use and disclosure. An avenue for explanation and challenge should also be integrated into the procedure, because subject determination and procedural justice remain incomplete if relevant contextual information is excluded.

Historical rulings in the Covenant must be translated by separating enduring implication from historical form. The lasting implication of the passage on betrayal is the prohibition of managerial indifference after adequate verification. Its historical punitive form does not confer disciplinary, physical, or public-shaming powers on an ordinary manager today. Lawful action is confined to permitted correction, administrative measures, or confidential referral to a competent body.

6. Conclusion

Malik al-Ashtar's Covenant presents oversight in two inseparable dimensions. A manager is accountable for officials' performance and cannot substitute unexamined trust for reasonable follow-up, assessment of reports, and response to established negligence or betrayal. At the same time, the manager is instructed to avoid fault-seeking, uncovering concealed matters, hastily believing informers, and exposing people's faults, and to obtain information from truthful and trustworthy persons.

The resulting fiqh structure is neither abandonment of oversight nor unlimited visibility. The manager must oversee to the extent required by organizational responsibility and public rights, but must do so through a legitimate, task-related, necessary, and proportionate process. The normative chain comprises a legitimate purpose, work relevance, credible sources, verification proportionate to consequences, confidentiality, fairness, and action within lawful competence.

The responsible and bounded oversight framework offers a way to address both administrative neglect and intrusive accumulation of information. A competent manager is not the one who possesses the most information about employees, but the one who obtains the necessary and relevant information through a permissible route, tests its evidential value, protects it as an amanah, and acts only within justice and authority.

The study is documentary and its framework has not yet been tested in organizational practice. Letter 53 was the central text, and the analysis does not claim an exhaustive derivation of rulings for all technologies or regulatory settings. Criminal, security, financial, and judicial oversight require separate legal and fiqh analysis. Future research could test the framework through interviews or focus groups with managers, employees, administrative-law experts, and fiqh scholars; audit public-sector policies against its criteria; and examine electronic and AI-enabled monitoring through the specific tests of purpose, necessity, data minimization, verification, and the right to respond.

In practical terms, this study provides public organizations with a practical basis for designing and reviewing managerial oversight procedures. Before oversight begins, managers should document its legitimate purpose, work-related scope, necessity, and the reasons for selecting a particular method. During information gathering, organizations should use accountable sources, collect only relevant data, distinguish allegations from verified findings, and restrict access on a need-to-know basis. Before taking action, managers should corroborate information in proportion to the possible consequences, give the employee a fair opportunity to respond, distinguish error or incapacity from negligence or betrayal, and act only within their lawful authority. The framework can be applied to complaint procedures, observer appointments, access permissions, data-retention rules, and disciplinary referrals. Its practical value is to reduce both administrative neglect caused by insufficient oversight and injustice caused by intrusive, disproportionate, or unverified monitoring, while creating a reviewable record of why information was collected, how it was verified, and why the response was proportionate.

Use of AI

OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5, accessed September 2026) was used as an assistive tool for organizing draft material, preparing the English translation, language editing, and consistency checks. The authors reviewed and revised all outputs, verified the cited evidence against the referenced sources, and obtained specialist review of the fiqh reasoning. The AI tool did not independently determine the jurisprudential classifications. The authors accept full responsibility for the analysis and final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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