Accountability in Some Government Executive Agencies

MEHDI DARWISH, State Organization for Administration and Employment Affairs
Islamic Republic of Iran

Preface

ACCOUNTABILITY is an attractive and fascinating concept and bespeaks of sound thinking, reform and fairness. In the government history of Iran, this word has been used occasionally in the administrative literature after the establishment of parliament. However, in practice it was only limited to the accountability of ministers before the parliaments. In other words, only members of government were obliged to explain their deeds, and, this explanation was carried out only before the parliament. If the parliament members were not the real deputies of the people, accountability did not take place in practice.

Until two or three decades ago, this concept was not known in Iranian society. The ordinary people did not think they could question the officials of the State. In other words, society did not consist of people who put forward their claims and demands; passivity was the second nature of a considerable number of people.

After the victory of the glorious Islamic revolution of Iran, the concept of accountability gradually found its place with more clarity and became an issue publicly discussed in lectures, gatherings, rules and written administrative documents. The governments after the revolution put it into their policies, and with the establishment of the new government, particular attention has been paid to issues such as powerful and accountable administration, promotion of administrative justice, spiritual renovation of people’s relation with government, sympathetic delivery of service, and actualization of an accountable government. A major duty of government now is to make people familiar with their legal rights in relation to the administrative system and to develop a spirit and strong will to demand the vindication of these rights in administrative referrals and business orders. It also became necessary to employees and executives aware of their legal duties against the people and to introduce the fact that the reason for being of the administrative system is to lead the way towards the attainment of the social, cultural and economical goals of the society. Bringing this potentiality into effect is among the major policies of the government. Therefore, officials believe that administrative system does not exist for itself; it has been created only a means for the realization of the above goals. This viewpoint is what all the government employees especially the President should believe in and take serious actions towards it.

If we believe that administrative system is a set of relations the purpose of which is creating facilities for actualization of the goals of different sectors of the society, and if its activities lead to promotion of their efficiency and their economic, cultural and political growth, all of these efforts should eventually lead to competent government actions. Such actions consist of issues like promoting and strengthening of religious values, people’s
participation in administrative affairs, socio-political development, expanding and deepening of democracy and creating a government serving a thoughtful nation that is benevolent, well-aware of his rights and committed to the human society.

Undoubtedly, as administrative scholars say, approaches like transparency, developing communication network among organizations and agencies, whether governmental, non-governmental, or private sector, promoting public awareness and the like, affect the accountability of administrative behavior. We in the Islamic Republic of Iran agree with this idea, but we think that what is more effective than these procedures is participation of people in administrative affairs. This participation in government actions should be so expanded that people feel themselves influential in administrative circumstances in such a way that if they see an offense in the government they blame themselves rather than criticize the government.

For actualizing the goals of such a government we need both, accountable employees and accountable administrative systems. In designing the organizational machinery, the mind of the designer should be overwhelmed by structures that facilitate accountability. In the same way, while enacting laws and regulations and selecting managerial styles, accountability should be the main mental disturbance of the decision-makers.

Considering this mental disturbance, determining the degree of accountability of an executive agency and presenting a measure for evaluating and judging it in this respect is a major primary step. We should always look for answers to question as, are the administrative behaviors and performance of an agency desirable enough from the point of view of accountability? if it is not, what is the degree of its weakness and inadequacy? The answers can help managerial advisers and organization designers and law makers do their job better, in a way that they avoid dogmatism and talking only in general points, and instead, try to present new procedures, rules and administrative structures adaptable to the real needs of the agencies and commensurate with their climate, strength, and indigenous managerial characteristics.

The present project, that is, accountability in some government executive agencies has been assigned to the writer by the State Management Training Center, the leading body in managerial and administrative techniques training in the Government. In this research we have elaborated on the common meaning of the accountability in Iranian administrative culture. We have also tried to identify some factors affecting it, and specify the behaviors caused by it, and eventually develop a measure for its assessment. This research may provide some useful tools for training purposes in development of human resources and improvement of accountability spirit in managers and employees. It may also pave the ground for future studies that try to find appropriate ways for actualizing the goals of administrative systems.

Introduction

Reviewing the administrative literature of the last 2 or 3 decades shows that issues of ethics and values have been paid more attention than before. It seems that managers, officials, and administrative scholars and analysts have come to the conclusion that without considering the ethical aspects of administration, talking about the sound management of an organization will not be fruitful. So the major transition in administration is from less attention to ethics to serious consideration of ethics.
Among the ethics and values in civil service there are some attributes which characterize professionalism, such as, knowledgeability, creativity, innovativeness, neutrality, intellectual honesty, impartiality and accountability (Shafie and Sta. Maria, 1996). Without accountability none of the other attributes can prove to be eventually beneficial to the organization.

Because of the great importance attached to the accountability in management the researcher has launched a comprehensive research in the last 6 months. Major issues and problems of this research have been, the definition, the goal, the hypotheses, and the accountability measure. The remaining part of this report consists of the activities carried out to solve these problems.

**Activities**

**Definition**

Accountability is an elusive term. Scholars define it according to their experiences and impressions from administrative behavior. A good sample of these definitions has been gathered by Professor Prachyapruit:

- Public accountability is the responsibility to explain why a certain thing has to be done (policy objective), how it was done (execution and management), and what result has been achieved (management and financial report).
- Administrative accountability is a device for countering abuses of power.
- Public accountability means answerability for one’s actions or behavior.
- Public accountability is the obligation to carry out responsibility and exercise authority in terms of performance standards established (Prachyapruit, 1995).

In our culture, accountability means giving explanation for one’s job vis-a-vis interrelation. I think to make the concept more clear in Persian we should add the word feeling in front of it and try to say an accountable person is a man who feels accountable.

The feeling of accountability is a matter of relativeness. So, there are people who have a strong feeling of accountability and there are some who have a weak or very weak feeling of accountability.

**Goal**

Our goal in this research is (1) to guess the degree of accountability in a number of personnel of some agencies, that is, to know why are they weak, moderate, or strong in their feelings and (2) to possibly make clear the relations between this feeling with some factors. Naturally if we succeed in our study we will be able to pave the ground for strengthening the feeling of accountability by reinforcing the enhancing factors and removing the inhibiting factors.
Hypotheses

For developing hypotheses the researcher followed two ways. One, reviewing the literature and finding appropriate theories, and two, using common sense, imagination, and logic. Eventually he came up with six major factors which seemed to have an effect on feeling of accountability.

These are:

(1) Lack of awareness from one’s job duties.
(2) Lack of job satisfaction.
(3) Disregarding the rights of clients.
(4) Lack of punishment for offensive behavior.
(5) Unstability of positions.
(6) Commitment limited only to “self” and “family”.

These are the independent variables of the research. The last variable, that is, (7) accountability, is the dependent variable.

Accountability Measure

A major problem in this research was that the researcher could not find a measure of accountability which might be prepared by other researchers.

He searched through computer (internet) and some other possible ways, but it was useless. So, he thought that he should prepare it himself. Researchers usually use the technique of factor-analysis for developing a scale or a measure for measuring a complex concept. The researcher conducted interviews with many qualified people and after explaining the goal of the research and defining the concept of accountability he asked them this question: what is the administrative behavior of a man who has a strong feeling of accountability? or how does an accountable person behave towards his subordinate, his colleagues, and the clients, and how does he use the available physical and non-physical resources?

More than 200 behaviors were stated. At the time of preparation of this report the researcher was busy reviewing and adjusting these items and putting them in the process of factor-analysis to find some clusters. To make the concept clearer, Diagram 1 is prepared to show the independent and dependent variables and the assumed relations among them.

The study is expected to be finalized before the end of September. If everything goes well the researcher will be pleased to present the result of said study in a future seminar.
Diagram 1. Factors Affecting Accountability

REFERENCES
