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Administrative Rigidity in Organizations: A Sociological Approach to the Concept and Organizational Dynamics

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of administrative rigidity from a sociological perspective by examining its organizational and social nature and explaining the mechanisms through which it emerges and persists within organizations. The study views administrative rigidity as a complex phenomenon that is not limited to procedural complexity or centralized decision-making, but rather results from the interaction of organizational structures, formal rules, organizational culture, patterns of authority, actors' behavior, communication networks, and informal practices. The study adopts a theoretical and analytical approach, drawing on several sociological perspectives, particularly Max Weber's bureaucratic model, functional analysis, Alvin Gouldner's contributions, and the strategic analysis developed by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg. It also examines the manifestations and causes of administrative rigidity, with particular emphasis on the specificities of the Algerian administration, including its historical and structural legacy and the limitations of organizational reforms. The study concludes that overcoming administrative rigidity requires moving beyond limited procedural reform toward a participatory approach based on flexibility, the development of organizational culture, procedural simplification, enhanced communication and accountability, and the promotion of organizational learning.

Keywords: Administrative Rigidity; Bureaucracy; Organizational Culture; Organizational Change; Algerian Administration.

Introduction

Administration is one of the most important organizational structures responsible for implementing public policies, providing services, and regulating relations between the state and society. Its efficiency and flexibility are therefore closely related to its ability to keep pace with social, economic, and institutional transformations. However, administrative organization does not always operate according to a logic of responsiveness and adaptation. Patterns of behavior, rules, and practices may develop within it that make procedures more rigid, organizational relations more closed, and decisions less amenable to modification. This is what is referred to as administrative rigidity. Such rigidity should not be viewed merely as a delay in processing transactions or an excessive number of procedures; rather, it should be understood as an organizational phenomenon produced through the interaction of structural, cultural, and behavioral factors related to the distribution of authority, patterns of communication, the nature of rules, and the position of actors within the organization. The concept of administrative rigidity is particularly significant from a sociological perspective because of its direct relevance to the study of organizations and bureaucracy. Max Weber contributed to establishing the theoretical foundations for analyzing bureaucratic organization by highlighting its characteristics based on specialization, division of labor, hierarchical structure, and formal rules. Historically, these elements have been associated with the rationalization of administrative work and the enhancement of organizational control over performance. However, when the stability of rules and procedures shifts from being a means of organizing activity to becoming an end in itself, it may constrain the organization's ability to adapt to changes in its surrounding environment. This has consequently raised questions in sociological and organizational studies concerning the tension between the need for rules and stability, on the one hand, and the requirements of flexibility and innovation, on the other (Qarafi, 2008, p. 22).

The development of the sociology of organizations has contributed to moving beyond approaches that view the organization as a neutral formal structure. Organizations have increasingly been understood as social spaces in which different interests, positions, and roles interact, and where formal relationships intersect with informal ones. From this perspective, administrative rigidity cannot be explained simply by the existence of written rules and procedures, since the way these rules are implemented is influenced by actors, patterns of authority and communication, organizational culture, and the strategies adopted by individuals and groups within the organization. Accordingly, studying rigidity from a sociological perspective makes it possible to move beyond the question, “**Why do procedures become complicated?**”, toward deeper questions concerning how these practices are formed, which actors contribute to their persistence, what functions they may perform within the organization, and the conditions that make some organizations more prone to rigidity than others (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 35).

The significance of this approach becomes even greater in the Algerian context, given the transformations experienced by public administration over recent decades, accompanied by efforts to reorganize administrative work, modernize management practices, and improve relations between the administration and citizens. Despite these efforts, practices associated with administrative routine, centralization, procedural complexity, and delays in decision-making have remained present in discussions surrounding the performance of public administration. Some studies have shown that the modernization of administrative work in Algeria faces a number of obstacles related to organizational structures and established modes of administrative practice, indicating that administrative reform cannot be reduced to changing laws and procedures but also requires addressing the social, cultural, and organizational dimensions that influence actors’ behavior within institutions (Khaled & Hadidan, 2021, p. 574). Consequently, the persistence of certain manifestations of rigidity should not be understood solely as direct resistance to reform; rather, it should be analyzed in light of organizations’ capacity to reproduce existing patterns of work even when new legal or technological changes are introduced (Khaled & Hadidan, 2021, p. 577).

The importance of examining administrative rigidity sociologically derives from the complex relationship it reveals between organizational structure and social action. Formal rules may be necessary to ensure discipline and stability, yet under certain circumstances they may become a source of reproducing routine practices. Similarly, centralized decision-making may ensure the standardization of procedures, but it may also restrict initiative and rapid responses to problems. Informal relationships, meanwhile, may sometimes contribute to overcoming procedural complexities, while in other situations they may reinforce unofficial patterns of influence and power distribution. Administrative rigidity thus emerges from an ongoing interaction between formal structures, actors, strategies, and organizational culture rather than constituting a fixed characteristic that can be reduced to a single factor.

Against this background, the central research question of this study is as follows: **How can a sociological approach explain the phenomenon of administrative rigidity through the interaction between organizational structures, actors, and social practices within administration?** This central question gives rise to several subsidiary questions: What is meant by administrative rigidity, and how is it related to neighboring sociological and organizational concepts? What are the main theoretical approaches that can explain the production and persistence of rigidity within organizations? What are its major manifestations and its organizational, cultural, and behavioral determinants? How can these approaches contribute to understanding certain characteristics of Algerian administration? Finally, what mechanisms may contribute to moving from rigid management patterns toward an organization that is more capable of adaptation, participation, and innovation?

Accordingly, this study aims to provide a sociological and analytical reading of the concept of administrative rigidity by relating it to bureaucratic structures and internal organizational dynamics and by identifying the various factors that contribute to its production and reproduction. To achieve this objective, the first section examines the conceptual framework of administrative rigidity and its relationship with related organizational concepts. The second focuses on the main sociological approaches explaining the phenomenon, ranging from Max Weber’s bureaucratic model to approaches concerned with relationships, strategies, and power within organizations. The third section examines the manifestations of administrative rigidity and its organizational, cultural, and behavioral determinants, while the fourth is devoted to analyzing selected dimensions of the phenomenon within Algerian administration. The fifth section addresses possibilities for overcoming rigidity from a sociological perspective centered on participation, organizational flexibility, and the development of actors’ roles.

First: The Conceptual Framework of Administrative Rigidity

1. The Concept of Administrative Rigidity

The concept of administrative rigidity refers to a state of stability and inflexibility affecting certain components of administrative organization, thereby limiting its ability to respond to changes occurring in its internal and external environment and leading to the persistence of patterns of procedures, rules, and practices even when they become no longer fully compatible with new objectives or with transformations taking place in the organizational environment. From this perspective, administrative rigidity should not be reduced to delays in processing transactions or an excessive number of documents and procedures; rather, it should be understood as a complex phenomenon related to the way an organization operates, the relationships structured within it, and the manner in which actors deal with formal and informal rules. An organizational rule, in itself, does not constitute a manifestation of rigidity; it becomes so when compliance with it shifts from being a means of ensuring discipline and achieving objectives to becoming an automatic practice that persists even

in situations requiring discretion and adaptation. In this context, Qarafi argues that administrative organization cannot be understood solely through its formal structures and rules, but also through the actual practices that develop within it and the stable patterns of behavior and management that may emerge from them (Qarafi, 2008, p. 47). Accordingly, rigidity emerges when procedures become ends in themselves and employees become more concerned with formal compliance with instructions than with achieving the purpose for which those instructions were established. Rigidity may also be viewed as a pattern of organizational behavior characterized by adherence to rules, preference for familiar practices over initiative, and caution toward any change that may rearrange roles, authorities, or balances of influence within the organization. This makes the phenomenon related not only to the administrative structure but also to actors' attitudes, perceptions, interests, and positions within the organizational system (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 112). From a sociological perspective, the concept acquires broader significance when it is viewed as the outcome of reciprocal interaction between organizational structure and social action. Employees do not act in a vacuum; rather, they operate within formal rules, professional expectations, collective pressures, and patterns of organizational socialization through which they gradually learn what is accepted and rejected within the institution. Thus, behavior that initially emerges as an individual response may develop into a collective pattern and eventually become an implicit rule guiding everyday practices. This makes it possible to distinguish between situational rigidity, which may emerge in response to a transitional phase or a particular organizational crisis, and structural or chronic rigidity, which becomes embedded in the organization's mode of operation and organizational culture. This distinction is particularly important because situational rigidity may be addressed by modifying a procedure or redistributing a task, whereas structural rigidity requires a deeper transformation affecting patterns of authority, communication, organizational socialization, and actors' attitudes. In the latter case, rigidity is no longer merely an individual behavior that can be easily changed; rather, it becomes an inherited pattern within the occupational group. New employees learn both explicit and implicit rules of work and may gradually develop cautious attitudes toward initiative and change, allowing the organizational pattern to persist even after the departure of individuals who contributed to its emergence. This makes administrative rigidity a phenomenon capable of being reproduced over time and justifies studying it through the concepts of organizational culture, professional socialization, authority, and informal relations rather than limiting its explanation to legal texts or administrative procedures. Accordingly, administrative rigidity may be operationally defined as an organizational condition characterized by the persistence of familiar rules, procedures, and behavioral patterns in ways that constrain the ability of the administration and its actors to adapt, take initiative, and respond to transformations as a result of the interaction of structural, behavioral, and cultural factors within the organization. This definition makes it possible to move beyond the superficial description of rigidity toward an analysis of the mechanisms through which it is produced and reproduced within the institution.

2. Dimensions of Administrative Rigidity

Administrative rigidity takes multiple and interconnected forms, making its sociological analysis necessarily move beyond a one-dimensional explanation that attributes it solely to employee shortcomings, procedural complexity, or administrative centralization. For analytical purposes, it is possible to distinguish between a structural and organizational dimension, a behavioral and actor-related dimension, and a cultural and symbolic dimension, while emphasizing that these dimensions do not operate independently but continuously interact in producing and sustaining the phenomenon. The first dimension concerns organizational structure, namely how authority, powers, and responsibilities are distributed, the nature of the hierarchical order, the degree of centralization, and the extent to which decision-making is distributed across different levels. The more an organization concentrates decisions at higher levels and the greater the distance between those who possess decision-making authority and those who carry out daily work, the more the scope for initiative at the operational levels may be reduced, making recourse to superiors a recurring practice even in matters that could be addressed locally. Mohamed Ali Mohamed emphasizes the importance of organizational structure in understanding bureaucratic behavior and the associated adherence to rules and procedures, indicating that rigidity does not result solely from individual intentions but may also be embedded in the way the organization itself is designed (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 120). The second dimension concerns the organizational actor and their behavior. Employees may adopt highly cautious attitudes toward change, not necessarily because of an inherent rejection of reform, but as a result of previous experiences or fears of responsibility, loss of privileges, or disruption of stable professional positions. In such circumstances, strict adherence to instructions becomes a means of reducing personal and organizational risks, while the expression "following instructions" may function as a defensive mechanism protecting employees from assuming responsibility for decisions. This is consistent with Blerneb's discussion of certain forms of administrative behavior in the context of administrative development, where prevailing management patterns and work practices may influence actors' readiness to take initiative and embrace change (Blerneb, 1988, p. 88). Related to this dimension is the concept of trained incapacity, which refers to a condition in which experience and specialization—both essential elements of organization—may become sources of limitation when they make individuals more capable of performing familiar tasks but less prepared to deal with unfamiliar situations. Excessive specialization may narrow an individual's perspective on work, leading employees to adhere to accustomed patterns even when circumstances require their modification (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 152). The third dimension is cultural and symbolic and encompasses the values, norms, and unwritten expectations that define what the occupational group considers acceptable or unacceptable behavior. Employees may find themselves operating within an organizational culture that rewards caution more than initiative and

regards strict procedural compliance as a sign of discipline, while viewing experimentation and discretion as potential sources of risk. In such an environment, rigidity does not need to be continuously imposed by senior management because the occupational group itself may reproduce it through indirect social pressure, reciprocal expectations, and the transmission of professional habits from senior employees to newcomers. The significance of this dimension is evident in studies of resistance to change within Algerian organizations, where actors' attitudes toward change are shaped by a range of organizational, social, and cultural factors rather than merely by the nature of the proposed reform (Ben Wahiba, 2022, p. 66). A symbolic dimension may also be added, relating to the meanings that actors attach to their positions and to the rules governing their work. An administrative procedure does not necessarily have the same meaning for all parties: management may perceive it as an instrument of control, an employee may view it as protection against responsibility, while a citizen may experience it as unjustified complexity. Administrative rigidity therefore emerges from the interaction of structure, behavior, culture, and meaning, which helps explain why some reforms fail when they focus on changing structures or regulations without addressing patterns of thinking and everyday practices. Consequently, confronting rigidity requires a multi-level approach combining the revision of organizational structures, the expansion of opportunities for initiative, the reconsideration of socialization and training practices, and the development of an organizational culture that is more open to change, since addressing one dimension while leaving the others unchanged may allow rigidity to be reproduced in a new form.

3. Administrative Rigidity and Related Concepts

The sociological meaning of administrative rigidity cannot be accurately determined without situating it within the network of closely related organizational concepts that help establish its theoretical boundaries and distinguish it from phenomena that may intersect with it without being identical to it. **Bureaucracy** is foremost among these concepts, given that rigidity has historically been associated with certain dysfunctions that may emerge within bureaucratic organizations when rules and procedures shift from being means of organizing work and achieving objectives to becoming patterns detached from the goals for which they were established. Rigidity is therefore not synonymous with bureaucracy, because the existence of hierarchy, specialization, and formal rules does not necessarily imply rigidity. Rather, rigidity emerges when these elements lose their flexibility, become incapable of responding to change, or obstruct the achievement of organizational objectives. From this perspective, the study of bureaucracy makes it possible to understand one of the structural conditions in which rigidity may emerge, whereas the concept of rigidity focuses on the organizational outcome represented by reduced capacity for adaptation and responsiveness. Rigidity also intersects with the concept of **administrative routine**, although the two are not identical. Routine primarily refers to the repetition of procedures and practices in a familiar manner and may be necessary in activities requiring stability and standardization. It becomes an element of rigidity, however, when it persists despite changing circumstances or replaces reflection on organizational objectives. The problem, therefore, does not lie in the existence of routine itself, but in its transformation into a practice that is no longer open to review. In this context, studies of bureaucracy within the Algerian administrative apparatus highlight the importance of procedures and organizational patterns in shaping everyday practices, thereby contributing to an understanding of the relationship between formal rules and their actual implementation (Obaish, 2019, p. 29). Rigidity is also related to the concept of **resistance to organizational change**, although resistance generally represents one of the mechanisms through which rigidity may manifest itself rather than being synonymous with it. Some actors may resist a particular change at a specific stage, whereas rigidity may become an established organizational pattern even in the absence of a direct change initiative. Literature on organizational change in Algerian institutions indicates that actors' attitudes toward change are influenced by a range of organizational and social considerations, making an understanding of resistance an important entry point for analyzing the persistence of existing practices (Ben Wahiba, 2022, p. 64). Rigidity is also connected to the concept of workplace alienation from another perspective, particularly when employees lose a sense of meaning associated with their work and their activity becomes reduced to the repetitive implementation of instructions in whose formulation or objectives they do not participate. However, alienation is not necessarily a direct consequence of rigidity, nor does rigidity inevitably lead to alienation. Rather, the two may interact when administrative work becomes mechanical and repetitive and actors' sense of participation in and influence over decisions related to their work is weakened. Sociological studies of workplace alienation have addressed it as a phenomenon related to the individual's relationship with work and with the organization to which they belong, highlighting the importance of viewing the employee as a social actor rather than merely an executor of instructions (Maadan & Al-Amari, 2018, p. 277). In addition to these concepts, administrative rigidity should be distinguished from centralization. Centralization concerns the distribution of decision-making authority, whereas rigidity concerns limited flexibility and adaptive capacity, although excessive centralization may constitute one of the conditions contributing to the production of rigidity. Similarly, rigidity should be distinguished from organizational stability. Stability may have positive consequences when it ensures continuity of work and clarity of responsibilities, whereas rigidity becomes problematic when it prevents the organization from reviewing its methods and responding to changing circumstances. This highlights the analytical value of the sociological approach, which does not treat these concepts as separate phenomena but examines the relationships among them within the organizational context. Bureaucracy may provide a structure of rules; routine may provide a repetitive pattern of practice; centralization may constrain the distribution of decision-making; resistance to change may hinder reform; and alienation may reflect weak integration of the actor into the meaning of work. Administrative rigidity, meanwhile, emerges as a possible outcome of the interaction of these elements under particular organizational conditions. It thus

becomes an analytical concept linking formal structure and everyday practice, rules and actors, and organization and its social environment. This distinguishes it from approaches that reduce the problem to legislative deficiencies or procedural weaknesses, since changing regulations may not necessarily change practices unless accompanied by transformations in organizational relationships, professional culture, and patterns of exercising authority. Accordingly, addressing administrative rigidity from a sociological perspective requires understanding it as a phenomenon produced within the organization and reshaped through the actions of its actors, rather than as a merely technical dysfunction that can be corrected through a single administrative decision (Qarafi, 2008, p. 52).

Second: Sociological Approaches to Administrative Rigidity

1. Max Weber's Bureaucratic Model: From Rationalization to Organizational Rigidity

Max Weber occupies a central position in the sociology of organizations because he was among the first to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing authority, organization, and bureaucracy. He viewed bureaucracy as the most fully developed expression of the rational-legal form of authority, which was associated with the development of the modern state and capitalist economy and with the growing need to organize social activity on objective and stable foundations. Weber formulated what he called the **ideal type (Idealtypus)** of bureaucracy, a theoretical construct designed to highlight the essential characteristics of rational organization, including the precise definition of areas of responsibility, hierarchical authority, division of labor, merit-based recruitment, reliance on written rules, and the distinction between office and person, as well as between private ownership and the means of work (Weber, 2015, p. 215). Weber considered these elements necessary conditions for achieving administrative stability, ensuring continuity of work, and limiting personal and emotional considerations in decision-making, thereby making administration more predictable and more capable of treating citizens equally. From this perspective, bureaucracy was not, in Weber's view, synonymous with complexity or routine; rather, it represented the outcome of a long historical process of rationalization through which modern societies moved from traditional and personal relationships toward relationships based on abstract rules and functional specialization.

However, the sociological significance of Weber's thought lies not only in his description of the advantages of bureaucratic organization but also in his recognition of the paradox embedded within it. Rules established to ensure discipline may become constraints that limit initiative; specialization intended to enhance efficiency may result in fragmented knowledge; hierarchy designed to clarify responsibilities may impede the speed of decision-making; and impersonality, which promotes equality, may turn into a detached relationship between administration and service users. Weber expressed this paradox through the metaphor of the "iron cage," referring to the possibility that modern rationalization may ultimately produce new forms of indirect control, whereby individuals become subject to the logic of rules and procedures rather than to particular persons (Weber, 2015, p. 240). From this perspective, administrative rigidity, within a Weberian analysis, is not necessarily an external deviation from bureaucracy but a potential embedded in its internal logic when means become detached from ends and organization shifts from being an instrument for achieving objectives to becoming an end in itself. This possibility increases as the administrative apparatus expands, its levels multiply, and specialization intensifies, making coordination among units more complex and potentially causing the preservation of the existing order to become a priority over the search for new solutions to emerging problems.

Contemporary sociological interpretations of the Weberian model also reveal that bureaucracy is not merely a system of rules but also a system of authority and knowledge. Possessing administrative and procedural knowledge may give certain actors privileged positions within the organization, and such knowledge may become a resource for influence and control. Administrative rigidity therefore results not only from the abundance of rules but also from the relationship between rules and authority, and between administrative knowledge and actors' positions within the organization. This idea is particularly relevant to contemporary administrations experiencing increasing digitalization and technical specialization. The introduction of technology does not necessarily reduce rigidity if the same relationships and patterns of control are reproduced in a new digital form. Accordingly, the Weberian approach remains a fundamental entry point for understanding the complex relationship between rationalization, organization, authority, and rigidity, as it demonstrates that the problem does not lie in the existence of rules as such, but in the manner in which these rules may become independent ends detached from the objectives for which they were established.

2. The Functionalist Approach: The Latent Dysfunctions of Bureaucracy in Robert Merton

While Weber focused on the positive functions of bureaucracy in achieving rationalization and stability, functionalist sociologists, particularly Robert K. Merton, turned their attention to the unintended consequences that may result from bureaucratic structures. Merton started from the premise that every social system performs intended manifest functions while simultaneously generating latent functions or unexpected dysfunctions that may affect its performance. From this perspective, he argued that bureaucracy, despite its role in organizing work, may generate patterns of behavior that hinder the achievement of its original objectives (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 145).

One of Merton's most important concepts is "goal displacement," which refers to the transformation of organizational means into independent ends. A rule established to facilitate work becomes an end in itself, and compliance with the procedure becomes more important than achieving the intended outcome. In such circumstances, employees no longer assess their performance according to their ability to solve problems or respond to citizens' needs, but rather according to the extent to which they comply literally with regulations and instructions (Mohamed Ali Mohamed, 2016, p. 148). Merton also pointed out that continuous training in respect for rules may produce what he described as the "bureaucratic

personality,” characterized by caution, preference for familiar patterns, and avoidance of initiative that might expose its holder to accountability.

The importance of this analysis lies in shifting the explanation of rigidity from the level of individual intention to that of organizational socialization. Employees are not inherently rigid; rather, they gradually learn that certain behaviors are safer than others and that strict adherence to instructions may involve fewer costs than exercising personal judgment. Over time, these practices become part of a general organizational culture transmitted from one occupational generation to another. Excessive control, originally designed to ensure discipline, may also unintentionally weaken individual initiative. The more levels of monitoring and scrutiny increase, the more employees may tend to avoid risk and seek protection in formal rules, producing a closed cycle of caution and routine (Ben Sahal & Ouadj, 2019, p. 216).

The functionalist approach also adds an important dimension concerning the relationship between stability and change. Organizations require a certain degree of rules to achieve stability, but excessive regulation may reduce their capacity for self-learning and adaptation to their environment. Administrative rigidity therefore represents, from a functionalist perspective, a dysfunction arising from the tension between the requirements of system maintenance and those of adaptation. This analysis is particularly significant for contemporary administrations facing rapid transformations associated with digitalization, globalization, and rising citizen expectations. An administration that continues to operate according to outdated patterns may find itself unable to keep pace with these transformations, not necessarily because of a lack of resources, but because organizational and behavioral mechanisms that are no longer appropriate continue to operate.

3. Alvin Gouldner: Organizational Rules between Consensus and Conflict

Alvin W. Gouldner made an important contribution to the development of the sociology of organizations by moving from abstract theoretical analysis toward the empirical study of actual relationships within institutions. In his well-known study of a gypsum plant, he demonstrated that organizational rules do not have the same meaning in every context and that their effects depend on the nature of the social relationships governing their implementation (Gouldner, 1954, p. 23). He distinguished between **mock bureaucracy, representative bureaucracy, and punishment-centered bureaucracy**, showing that acceptance or rejection of rules depends not only on their content but also on the degree of legitimacy attributed to them by organizational actors.

The significance of this perspective lies in demonstrating that administrative rigidity does not arise solely from the abundance of rules but also from the way in which those rules are imposed and the meanings actors attribute to them. A rule that enjoys collective acceptance may serve as an instrument for organizing work, whereas a rule imposed without consensus may become a source of tension and resistance. Gouldner also indicated that excessive rule-making may sometimes result from previous conflicts within the organization. Each violation or dispute may lead to the introduction of a new rule; that rule may then generate further problems requiring additional rules, until the organization becomes burdened with accumulated procedures, many of which have lost their original function (Gouldner, 1954, p. 52).

This analysis demonstrates that administrative rigidity is not merely a technical phenomenon but also an expression of power relations, negotiation, and conflict within the organization. Rules are not entirely neutral instruments; rather, they may reflect existing power balances and be used to preserve positions of influence or restrict the autonomy of certain actors. Understanding rigidity therefore requires examining informal relationships, social networks, and reciprocal interests that develop within the institution, because many organizational phenomena cannot be adequately explained solely on the basis of formal regulations.

4. The Strategic Analysis of Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg

The strategic analysis developed by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg represents one of the theoretical frameworks most capable of explaining administrative rigidity in modern organizations. Crozier began by criticizing approaches that viewed organization as a closed system governed exclusively by rules, emphasizing instead that organization is a space of action, negotiation, and conflict, and that actors always possess margins of maneuver even within highly rigid structures (Crozier, 1963, p. 15).

One of Crozier's key concepts is **“zones of uncertainty” (Zones d'incertitude)**, referring to areas that rules cannot completely control, such as specialized information, technical expertise, external relationships, or control over procedural processes. These zones constitute sources of power because actors who control them can influence others. Rules therefore do not eliminate power; rather, they redistribute it in different ways (Crozier, 1963, p. 238).

Crozier also developed the concept of **“bureaucratic vicious circles,”** which explains how organizations continuously reproduce their rigidity. Centralization reduces initiative; weakened initiative leads management to increase control; increased control produces greater caution; caution generates additional rules; and the resulting expansion of rules further reinforces rigidity. The importance of this argument lies in explaining why certain administrative reforms fail: an attempt to solve a particular problem by introducing additional rules may produce other, more complex problems.

In *The Actor and the System*, Crozier and Friedberg expanded this analysis by emphasizing that each actor behaves according to a strategy aimed at protecting their interests and strengthening their position within the organization (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977, p. 87). Administrative rigidity therefore results not only from formal rules or structures but also from the interaction of multiple strategies that may complement or conflict with one another. This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of Algerian administration, as the concepts of zones of uncertainty and actors' strategies make it possible to understand how certain procedures may become instruments for preserving influence or controlling resources,

and how particular practices may persist despite repeated legal and organizational reforms (Ben Sahal & Ouadj, 2019, p. 219; Balnour, 2024, p. 498).

5. A Synthetic Reading of the Theoretical Approaches

The sociological approaches discussed above reveal a clear development in the understanding of administrative rigidity. Weber focused on the rational structure of organization; Merton subsequently analyzed the unintended dysfunctions of rules; Gouldner emphasized the social relationships governing their implementation; while Crozier and Friedberg placed power, strategies, and actors at the center of their analysis. This development demonstrates that administrative rigidity cannot be explained by a single factor, as it is a multidimensional phenomenon produced through the interaction of rules, power, culture, interests, and informal relationships.

Accordingly, the approach most capable of explaining rigidity is one that brings together different levels of analysis. The Weberian model explains the impact of structure; the functionalist approach explains the impact of organizational socialization; Gouldner highlights the importance of social interactions; while strategic analysis reveals the role of power and actors. This theoretical integration makes it possible to understand administrative rigidity as the outcome of continuous interaction between formal organization and actual practices, between rules and actors, and between stability and change. It therefore enhances the capacity of the sociological approach to explain the persistence and reproduction of the phenomenon compared with approaches that reduce it solely to legislative deficiencies or procedural dysfunctions.

Third: Manifestations and Causes of Administrative Rigidity

1. Manifestations of Administrative Rigidity

Administrative rigidity within public organizations takes multiple and interconnected forms. It does not appear in a single form that can be reduced to delays or excessive procedures; rather, it is manifested through a set of practices, structures, and relationships that make the organization less capable of adapting to changes and responding to emerging problems. One of its most prominent manifestations is **excessive centralization of decision-making**, whereby authority is concentrated at the upper levels of the hierarchy, while the scope for initiative at the operational and local levels becomes increasingly limited. This prolongs the processing of files and links everyday decisions to multiple approvals that may not be functionally necessary. In this situation, centralization becomes more than a technical mechanism for distributing authority; it becomes a pattern for organizing relationships within the institution that reinforces dependence on higher authority, weakens the sense of individual and collective responsibility among lower-level employees, and limits their ability to respond rapidly to exceptional circumstances. In the Algerian context, some characteristics of administrative organization have historically been associated with the accumulation of hierarchical levels and multiple approval procedures, causing administrative decisions to pass through successive stages before reaching the implementation phase (Chetab & Keliouat, 2022, p. 372). Centralization is closely associated with **administrative routine**, which represents one of the clearest manifestations of rigidity when procedural rules shift from being instruments for organizing work and ensuring equality and transparency to repetitive practices applied automatically without assessing their suitability to changing circumstances. Routine does not in itself constitute rigidity, since procedural regularity is necessary for organizational continuity; it becomes a source of rigidity when actors lose either the ability or the willingness to review procedures that no longer achieve the purposes for which they were established. This may be manifested in the repeated submission of documents, the involvement of multiple departments, repeated endorsements and approvals, and adherence to a fixed procedural sequence even in circumstances requiring flexibility, causing the administrative means to take precedence over the ends they are intended to serve (Obaish, 2019, p. 33). Related to this is **excessive formalism**, whereby adherence to procedural form becomes more important than examining the substance of a decision or its actual effects. Documents, stamps, and endorsements become indicators of the validity of an administrative process regardless of its practical effectiveness. This may create a form of separation between law and practice, since the literal application of a provision may sometimes produce outcomes inconsistent with the purpose originally intended by the regulation (Obaish, 2019, p. 36). Rigidity is also manifested through **slow administrative responsiveness**, as new initiatives or unfamiliar cases may require considerable time before decisions are made because mechanisms for dealing flexibly with exceptional situations are lacking. Employees therefore tend to refer files to higher levels rather than assume responsibility for interpreting them or making decisions concerning them. In such circumstances, avoiding mistakes becomes more important than achieving results, and a strategy of “administrative safety” prevails over a strategy of initiative. Actors consequently prefer strict adherence to familiar procedures over proposing alternatives that might expose them to accountability. Rigidity is also evident in the **weakness of individual and collective initiative**, as employees may learn through everyday experience and organizational socialization that adhering to established practices is safer than introducing new ideas, particularly when the work environment does not reward initiative or provide sufficient organizational protection for those who assume responsibility for innovation. Rigidity thus ceases to be merely a characteristic of the formal structure and becomes an acquired pattern of behavior. **Resistance to organizational change** is another major manifestation of rigidity. It may take an explicit form, such as rejecting a new project or questioning its usefulness, or an implicit form manifested through delay, procrastination, and formal compliance, whereby reform appears to have been implemented officially while old practices continue in reality. Such resistance demonstrates that change affects not only procedures but also actors’ positions, interests, working methods, and the amount of authority they possess, which helps explain differences in the degree of response from one actor to another (Mahrez & Fakroun, 2019, p. 15). Closely related to this is **workplace alienation**, which may emerge when employees feel that their work has

lost its meaning or has become merely a repetition of specific tasks that do not allow them to express their abilities or influence work outcomes. They may consequently limit themselves to performing the minimum required duties without actively participating in organizational improvement. Alienation should not be viewed here as a purely individual problem, since it may result from the nature of the organization itself and the professional relationships it imposes. This has led sociological studies to employ various approaches, ranging from Marxism to existentialism and symbolic interactionism, to understand the worker's relationship with work, others, and the institution (Maadan & Al-Amari, 2018, p. 283; Bouchlaghem & Koussa, 2024, p. 363). Another manifestation of rigidity is **weak organizational communication and fragmented information**. When knowledge is distributed among departments and individuals without effective mechanisms for sharing it, each department may retain part of the information required by others, thereby obstructing coordination and reproducing dependence on the hierarchy. This situation may develop into a form of **organizational information withholding**, when some actors retain information or share it selectively, not merely because of weak communication but because knowledge itself may become a source of influence within the organization. Possession of information in such circumstances gives its holder greater capacity to control the course of files and relationships, linking administrative rigidity to the distribution of power within the institution (Ben Wahiba, 2022, p. 70). Rigidity is also manifested in **weak coordination between units and departments**, whereby each department operates according to its own internal logic rather than according to a shared organizational vision, resulting in duplication of tasks, conflicting instructions, and delays in processing files. This is compounded by **adherence to traditional practices despite the availability of modern technological and organizational alternatives**. Some paper-based methods or outdated procedural sequences may continue even after digitalization has been introduced. Technology may sometimes be used merely to modernize the means without reconsidering the organizational logic governing the process, making technological transformation alone insufficient to eliminate rigidity. From a sociological perspective, these manifestations collectively demonstrate that administrative rigidity is not merely a technical dysfunction of procedures but rather the outcome of interaction between formal structures, organizational culture, behavioral norms, actors' strategies, and the distribution of authority and information within the organization. Addressing it therefore requires moving beyond a focus on simplifying documents and procedures toward a deeper understanding of the social mechanisms that allow rigid practices to persist even when they have become inappropriate to prevailing circumstances.

2. Causes of Administrative Rigidity

Administrative rigidity cannot be explained by a single factor, as it is a complex phenomenon produced by the interaction of **organizational, structural, human, psychological, cultural, political, and training-related factors**, which contribute to varying degrees to the reproduction of rigid work patterns within organizations. From an organizational perspective, rigidity is associated with the expansion of structures, the multiplication of hierarchical levels, and the proliferation of approval stages. The more stages a decision passes through, the greater the likelihood of delays and the transfer of responsibility from one level to another, leading to what may be described as **"diffusion of responsibility,"** whereby it becomes difficult to identify the party actually responsible for delays or poor performance. Ambiguity or overlap in areas of responsibility also contributes to rigidity because employees may hesitate to make decisions when the boundaries between their authority and that of others are unclear, prompting them to refer matters upward or request instructions rather than take initiative. The structural factor is also associated with the existence of rules, legislation, and procedures that are not reviewed rapidly enough, particularly when organizational provisions become relatively disconnected from the technological, social, and economic transformations taking place in society. Blerneb emphasized the importance of addressing issues related to administrative development and improving work methods and structures in accordance with the requirements of administrative modernization (Blerneb, 1988, p. 98). The problem, therefore, does not lie in the existence of rules as such, since rules are necessary for stability, equality, and clarity, but rather in their transformation into independent ends detached from the functions for which they were established. At the human and psychological level, resistance to rigidity and change is related to employees' sense of security. Employees may perceive reform as a source of uncertainty, particularly when it threatens skills they have acquired, their occupational status, or privileges to which they have become accustomed. Fear of the unknown and anxiety about losing established gains may consequently become motives for resisting change, especially when the objectives of reform are unclear or when communication channels are unavailable to help employees understand its rationale and anticipated outcomes. This highlights the importance of participation in formulating change. Employees who feel that they are merely the objects of a decision imposed from above may be less willing to adopt reform than those who participate in discussing problems and proposing possible solutions. Literature on resistance to change has emphasized that poor communication and limited employee involvement may reinforce various forms of resistance (Awatif Matraf, 2019, p. 74). **Fear of responsibility** is also an important factor in reproducing rigidity. Administrative actors may sometimes prefer not to make decisions for fear of making mistakes or being held accountable, making strict adherence to instructions a means of organizational self-protection. This tendency becomes stronger when the work environment is highly punitive toward mistakes and provides insufficient room for initiative, experimentation, and learning. Employees gradually learn that "not making a decision" may be less costly for them than making an innovative decision whose consequences are uncertain. From a cultural perspective, **organizational culture** plays a central role in explaining the persistence of rigidity because institutions operate not only according to formal laws and structures but also according to a system of unwritten values, norms, and expectations that individuals learn through everyday interaction. If the prevailing culture values obedience over initiative,

stability over innovation, and compliance over critical thinking, reform will face resistance even when formal regulations encourage it. Studies of organizational culture and change in Algerian organizations have shown that prevailing culture is an influential factor in shaping responses to change and determining the degree to which it is accepted or resisted (Hicham Hassan & Rahima Ghedbane, 2016, p. 109). Conservative organizational culture becomes even more capable of reproducing rigidity when it is transmitted from one occupational generation to another through **organizational socialization**. New employees learn, formally and informally, “how things are actually done,” and this unwritten knowledge may be more influential than formal regulations themselves. Employees may learn, for example, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom to consult, how to avoid responsibility, and which procedures to follow even when they are unnecessary. In this way, rigidity becomes inherited organizational knowledge, which helps explain its persistence despite changes in personnel. In the same context, **weak administrative leadership** may reinforce rigidity when managers limit their role to monitoring compliance with instructions rather than creating an environment that encourages initiative, coordination, and organizational learning. Leadership style influences employees’ willingness to participate and their openness to new ideas. The absence of a clear reform vision may also make change appear as a series of fragmented instructions rather than as an integrated organizational project, increasing the likelihood of a return to previous practices. On the other hand, rigidity may be associated with certain political and institutional dimensions, particularly when complex procedures become resources of influence or means of controlling access to decision-making and information. Some actors may find organizational advantages in procedural complexity because it gives them an intermediary position between service seekers and decision-makers and makes it more difficult to bypass them. Some Algerian literature has discussed the relationship between bureaucracy and governance and administrative practices, highlighting the fact that procedural structures cannot always be separated from power relations within organizations (Laboukh & Houssini, 2014, p. 119). This does not mean assuming that every instance of rigidity results from a conscious intention to preserve influence. Rather, sociological analysis requires examining how organizational structures may generate interests and positions of power that allow certain practices to persist even without an explicit decision to maintain them. Another contributing factor is **weak continuing training**. Modernizing structures and regulations is insufficient if employees continue to rely on rigid procedural knowledge that does not evolve alongside changes in the nature of work. Continuing training should therefore not be limited to technical skills but should also include problem analysis, communication, teamwork, change management, and decision-making in non-routine situations. Modern administration requires employees capable of understanding and consciously applying rules rather than merely executing them mechanically. Blerneb linked administrative modernization to the development of human resources and work methods in ways that enhance the capacity of the administrative apparatus to respond to development requirements (Blerneb, 1988, p. 105). Accordingly, administrative rigidity can be understood as the outcome of a cumulative process in which hierarchical structures interact with rules and procedures, organizational culture, actors’ fears and interests, leadership patterns, and levels of training. The more these factors reinforce one another, the more capable rigidity becomes of reproducing itself, transforming from a temporary administrative problem into an established pattern of organization and practice. This explains why it is difficult to overcome rigidity merely by issuing new instructions or introducing partial procedural modifications.

Fourth: Administrative Rigidity in Algerian Administration: A Sociological Reading

1. Historical Legacy and Structural Context

Administrative rigidity in Algeria cannot be understood independently of the historical trajectory through which the state and its administrative apparatus were formed, since Algerian administration did not emerge in an institutional vacuum. Rather, it resulted from the accumulation of successive historical stages that left their marks on organizational structures, management practices, power relations, and patterns of interaction with citizens and employees alike. At independence, the Algerian state inherited an administrative apparatus shaped under colonial administration, which was characterized by centralization, hierarchy, and procedural strictness. Part of this structure was subsequently incorporated into the construction of the national administration, before the first decades following independence witnessed the adoption of approaches associated with central planning and state dominance over broad areas of economic and social activity. This contributed to consolidating the position of the administrative apparatus as a major instrument for implementing public policies, managing resources, and directing society (Qarafi, 2008, p. 58). This does not mean that Algerian administration remained unchanged since independence. It has undergone successive legal, organizational, and institutional transformations. However, some patterns of organizational thinking and practice have persisted through processes of adaptation, whereby certain practices have moved from one historical stage to another even when the legal frameworks within which they operated changed. It is therefore possible to speak of an institutional administrative legacy that extends beyond texts and structures to include ways of thinking about authority, responsibility, discipline, and decision-making. Employees do not deal with the law merely as a set of abstract rules; rather, through professional socialization, they learn how authority is actually exercised within the organization, who possesses decision-making power, how files move through the administrative system, and what limits are placed on initiative. The accumulation of regulations, procedures, and structures over time has contributed to the emergence of an overlap between the old and the new. Previous mechanisms are not always eliminated when modern mechanisms are introduced; instead, they may continue alongside them. This creates a duality between the logic of modernization and the logic of preserving inherited practices and may produce what can be termed “compound rigidity,” that is, rigidity resulting not from a single factor but from the historical

accumulation of organizational structures, rules, and habits interacting with contemporary requirements (Blerneb, 1988, p. 112). From a sociological perspective, the persistence of these manifestations should not be interpreted merely as a technical inability to modernize administration, because social organizations possess a degree of self-continuity and operate through mechanisms of socialization and reproduction that make established practices more capable of surviving than new ones, particularly when they are supported by power relations, interests, and occupational expectations. Algerian administration therefore constitutes a space in which the formal structure intersects with a network of informal relationships. While the legal text may determine the formal course of work, professional relationships, personal trust, and organizational status may influence how it is actually implemented. In this context, the sociological dimension of rigidity becomes apparent through its relationship with power relations. Rules and procedures do not always operate in a completely neutral manner; rather, they may grant some organizational positions greater influence than others, particularly when decision-making is highly centralized or when information is distributed unequally across organizational levels. A sociological reading of Algerian administration has demonstrated that the administrative apparatus cannot be reduced to a mechanism for implementing decisions; it is also a field in which actors' interests, positions, and strategies interact, making administrative reform a social process that requires the reorganization of certain relationships and roles rather than merely changing legal texts (Qarafi, 2008, p. 73). This dimension becomes particularly important when examining the persistence of the classical hierarchical model. Administrative structures at various levels continue to rely on vertical chains of authority and the distribution of powers according to defined ranks, despite attempts to introduce decentralization, delegation, and modern management practices. Studies of administrative organization in Algeria have pointed to the continuing influence of the classical model on relations between central and local levels, which may constrain decision-making speed and limit the scope for initiative among certain structures closer to citizens (Chetab & Kelouat, 2022, p. 381). Accordingly, the historical legacy should not be regarded as a fixed destiny that permanently determines Algerian administration. Rather, it represents an explanatory resource that helps clarify the persistence of certain organizational patterns, while rigidity remains the outcome of the interaction between this legacy and the institutional, economic, technological, and cultural transformations experienced by Algeria. Overcoming rigidity therefore depends on the capacity of reform to address the deeper structure of organizational practices rather than merely modifying their external forms.

2. Manifestations of Rigidity in the Algerian Administrative Apparatus

Administrative rigidity in Algeria appears through a set of practices affecting the relationship between administration and employees, citizens, and other institutions, while simultaneously revealing the contradiction that may exist between the declared objectives of administrative reform and the persistence of certain traditional management patterns. One of the most prominent manifestations is procedural complexity, reflected in the multiplication of documents, departments, intervening actors, approval levels, and endorsements. Consequently, a relatively simple administrative procedure may become a lengthy process requiring passage through multiple stages, causing citizens or those dealing with the administration to encounter the administrative organization as a network of procedures rather than as an apparatus designed to provide public services. A study of the reality of bureaucracy in Algeria demonstrated that, in practice, the concept of bureaucracy has shifted from meanings associated with rationalization and organization toward meanings associated with complexity, slowness, and excessive procedures (Obaish, 2019, p. 27). This is also evident in the multiplication of required documents, the repetition of identical information across different files, and the continuation of certain procedures even after the circumstances that originally justified them have changed, revealing difficulties in periodically and systematically reviewing organizational rules. Rigidity is also associated with the multiplication of signatures and approvals, reflecting the persistence of a hierarchical logic in which decisions remain linked to a chain of authorizations. This may delay the processing of files and weaken individual responsibility, since each level may refer a decision to a higher level rather than assume responsibility for making it. Obaish pointed to manifestations of complexity associated with the practical application of bureaucracy in Algeria, including the proliferation of procedures and the multiplicity of intervening actors (Obaish, 2019, p. 41). Another manifestation is weak horizontal coordination between administrations and departments. Each department may possess part of the information required for decision-making without effective mechanisms for exchanging it in a timely manner, resulting in duplicated work, conflicting instructions, and delayed responses. This situation demonstrates that rigidity results not only from the number of rules but also from the way information is distributed within the organization and from weak horizontal links between its units. Rigidity is also manifested in limited administrative delegation, as some powers may remain concentrated at higher levels despite the possibility of exercising them at the local level. This reduces the ability of structures close to citizens to respond to the actual needs of the areas in which they operate. Continued reliance on the center, even in matters requiring rapid decision-making and flexibility, may therefore limit the practical impact of decentralization when it is not accompanied by a genuine redistribution of powers, resources, and responsibilities. Rigidity can also be observed in the relationship between employees and citizens, when procedural rules become a communicative barrier rather than a means of organizing service delivery. Employees may focus on completing documents and fulfilling formal requirements rather than understanding the problem that brought the citizen to the administration. This does not mean assigning individual responsibility for rigidity to employees, since their behavior is often influenced by the organizational framework in which they work, the nature of supervision, and the limits of their available authority. Another manifestation is the persistence of certain negative representations of administrative authority, whereby the manager is viewed as the ultimate decision-

maker rather than as a coordinator and manager of resources and capacities. This may restrict participation and encourage dependence on instructions. Rigidity is also reflected in weak initiative and organizational innovation, particularly when employees feel that proposing new solutions may impose additional responsibilities without providing support or recognition, leading them to continue using familiar methods. Furthermore, rigidity is associated with manifestations of workplace alienation, whereby employees may lose their sense of the value of their work when they are confined to repetitive procedures whose immediate outcomes they cannot see or whose objectives they do not participate in defining. Some studies have identified this phenomenon in Algerian economic organizations and linked it to limited participation and weak organizational belonging (Ibrahimi & Mebarek, 2014, p. 89). The analysis of alienation has also extended to universities, where a field study identified levels of workplace alienation among faculty members associated with the nature of workloads and organizational and institutional conditions (Bouchlaghem & Koussa, 2024, p. 372). Taken together, these manifestations demonstrate that administrative rigidity in Algeria is not merely a matter of delays in processing files. Rather, it is a complex pattern manifested in decision-making structures, procedural pathways, relations between departments, leadership patterns, employees' relationship with their work, and the nature of the relationship between administration and citizens. Understanding it therefore requires moving from direct administrative description toward a sociological analysis of how structures, rules, culture, and actors interact in producing and reproducing these practices.

3. Administrative Reform Efforts and Their Limitations

Since independence, Algeria has witnessed successive efforts to reorganize its administrative apparatus, modernize management practices, and improve the efficiency of public services. At different stages, these efforts have been associated with the construction of the national state, the training of administrative cadres, the development of structures, and the improvement of administrative performance. They have gradually incorporated more modern concepts such as results-based management, procedural simplification, decentralization, improvement of public services, and digital transformation. Administrative development constituted an important component of the process of state-building and modernization of the administrative apparatus. However, the transition from legal and organizational reform to actual change in practices has continued to face a range of structural, cultural, and human difficulties (Blerneb, 1988, p. 140). Administrative reform does not simply mean changing texts and structures; it also requires reconstructing the relationship between authority and responsibility, developing communication patterns, expanding participation, modernizing work culture, developing human resources, and reconsidering methods of performance evaluation. Consequently, some reforms may achieve clear results at the technical level without necessarily producing profound changes in organizational culture or actors' behavior. This problem becomes particularly apparent when new digital tools are introduced into an organizational environment that continues to operate according to a traditional paper-based or hierarchical logic. In such circumstances, digitalization may become merely a transfer of old procedures from paper to an electronic system without genuine reengineering of the service process. Thus, digitalization does not necessarily eliminate rigidity, because technology may change the means while decision-making rules, organizational culture, and patterns of authority remain unchanged. Studies of administrative modernization have indicated that some reforms may have limited effects when they focus on technical and formal aspects without addressing the human, cultural, and organizational dimensions (Asmaa Khaled & Sabrina Hadidan, 2021, p. 580). This becomes even more evident when reforms are successive but not integrated, with a new organizational arrangement being introduced before the previous one has stabilized or its results have been adequately evaluated. This may lead to a form of formal adaptation in which actors officially comply with new instructions while continuing to use previous practices informally. This separation between formal organization and actual organization may reproduce rigidity within the reform itself. An institution may possess electronic systems, a new organizational structure, and modern instructions while remaining dependent on centralized decision-making, weak coordination, and a culture of fear of mistakes. In this context, resistance to change becomes an important element in explaining the limitations of reform. However, reducing resistance to employees' rejection of innovation would be insufficiently complex. Resistance may result from lack of information, inadequate training, unclear reform objectives, fear of losing status, weak trust in the continuity of the project, or insufficient participation in its formulation. Studies of resistance to organizational change in Algerian institutions have emphasized the importance of communication, organizational, and leadership factors in explaining actors' attitudes toward reform (Ben Aissa, Quraishi & Maghazi, 2021, p. 251). Middle management also plays an important role in the success of reform because it represents a link between higher-level decisions and everyday practices. It can translate reform objectives into daily practices while transmitting field-level problems to decision-makers. If reform remains confined to the central level without involving intermediate and operational levels, it may remain a textual or formal reform that does not easily translate into practice. This issue is particularly evident in universities, where a study of resistance to organizational change in Algerian universities during the implementation of the LMD system identified reservations among faculty members regarding certain aspects of reform when participation and consultation were insufficient (Samati, 2018, p. 187), demonstrating that academic institutions are not immune to the dynamics of rigidity and resistance. Institutional continuity should also be viewed as a condition for successful reform, because repeated reform initiatives without clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation may create a perception among employees that reforms are temporary. They may consequently prefer to wait until the direction of reform becomes clear rather than engage actively with it. Conversely, reform accompanied by clear objectives, appropriate training, continuous communication, actor participation, and indicators for measuring

outcomes is more capable of transforming change from an administrative decision into a stable organizational practice. The limitations of administrative reform in Algeria therefore cannot be attributed solely to a shortage of laws or an absence of projects. They are also related to the capacity of reform to penetrate the informal level of organization, namely the values, perceptions, relationships, and strategies that shape actors' actual behavior. Overcoming rigidity consequently requires moving from reforming administration as a structure toward reforming administration as a social system. This means combining modernization of rules and structures with the development of organizational culture, human resources, leadership patterns, communication, and participation, so that reforms do not become merely formal modifications that reproduce old practices in a new form.

Fifth: Toward Overcoming Administrative Rigidity: Sociological Approaches

If administrative rigidity, as demonstrated by the preceding analysis, is not merely a deficiency in procedures or a delay in implementing decisions, but rather the outcome of a complex interaction between organizational structures, formal rules, prevailing culture, actors' strategies, power relations, and communication patterns, then overcoming it likewise requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond narrow technical reform toward reconstructing the conditions of organizational action itself. From this perspective, reform should not begin with the assumption that employees constitute an obstacle to change. Rather, they should be viewed as organizational actors possessing practical experience and detailed knowledge of everyday work problems, and they can be transformed from objects of reform into essential partners in its design and successful implementation. One of the main possible approaches is therefore the adoption of participatory strategies in organizational change, based on involving senior management, middle managers, and operational employees in diagnosing dysfunctions, identifying priorities, formulating solutions, and monitoring implementation. Participation helps reduce feelings of exclusion and makes it possible to transform change from a decision imposed from above into an organizational project in which different levels participate in its formulation. It may also reduce resistance to change when actors feel that their interests, concerns, and experiences are taken into consideration (Mahrez & Fakroun, 2019, p. 20). The importance of participation is not limited to its psychological dimension; it also extends to the reorganization of power relations within the institution. From the perspective of strategic analysis, actors within organizations do not operate as passive executors; rather, they seek to mobilize the resources they possess and the zones of uncertainty they control in order to achieve their objectives. Participatory reform can therefore reduce some actors' monopolization of information, expertise, or procedures and make zones of uncertainty more amenable to collective regulation rather than allowing them to become sources of individual influence (Ben Sahal & Ouadj, 2019, p. 222). This approach also requires strengthening the role of middle managers, as they represent an essential link between the strategic and operational levels. They can translate reform objectives into everyday practices while transmitting field-level problems to decision-makers. If reform remains confined to the central level without involving intermediate and operational levels, it may remain a textual or formal reform that does not easily translate into practice. A second approach concerns the development of organizational culture, since changing structures and regulations is insufficient if the informal values governing behavior continue to be based on fear of initiative, avoidance of responsibility, and excessive dependence on instructions. Reform programs should therefore seek to transform patterns of thinking and professional practices and to promote values of initiative, openness, cooperation, responsibility, and continuous learning, without implying the elimination of discipline or diminishing the importance of respecting rules. The objective is rather to move from a culture of mechanical compliance toward a culture of conscious compliance that balances respect for rules with the ability to interpret and apply them in ways consistent with the organizational purpose for which they were established. Organizational socialization is particularly important in this regard because new employees learn, from the moment they enter the institution, not only formal rules but also acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and ways of dealing with authority, colleagues, and responsibility. Cultural change should therefore target these informal mechanisms through which behavior is reproduced and should introduce new professional models that make initiative, cooperation, and critical thinking part of everyday practice. This is consistent with the call to develop organizational culture as an approach to understanding change and resistance to it (Ben Wahiba, 2022, p. 74). A third essential approach is procedural simplification and structural rationalization, through the periodic review of administrative processes, elimination of repetitive and unnecessary procedures, reduction of the number of intervening actors when their participation does not provide added value, clarification of responsibilities, expansion of administrative delegation, and redistribution of powers so that decisions can be made as close as possible to the location of the problem. Continued centralization of matters that can be handled locally weakens effectiveness and reinforces dependence on instructions. Digitalization should also be accompanied by the reengineering of procedures because simply converting the same paper-based procedure into an electronic procedure may result in "digitalizing rigidity" rather than eliminating it. Effective digital transformation should therefore begin with a fundamental question concerning whether the procedure itself is necessary before considering the appropriate technological means for implementing it. This also requires training employees and citizens in the use of digital systems, providing technical support, and taking differences in digital capabilities into account, so that complexity does not simply move from the paper environment to the electronic one (Ben Aissa, Quraishi & Maghazi, 2021, p. 258). This approach is closely linked to reconstructing organizational communication, because reform that does not explain its objectives, clarify actors' roles, or allow them to express their concerns may generate silent resistance or formal compliance. Open communication, by contrast, can transform information from a resource monopolized by certain actors into a collective resource serving the organization as a whole. Another important approach involves reconsidering systems of evaluation,

promotion, and motivation, so that career advancement is not based exclusively on seniority or formal compliance but also takes into account quality of performance, responsible initiative, problem-solving capacity, teamwork, and contributions to improving public services. Objective and transparent criteria are necessary, however, so that rewarding initiative does not itself become a new field for favoritism. The objective is not to replace discipline with initiative but to establish a balance between them, enabling employees to recognize that compliance with rules is not incompatible with thinking about how to improve them or develop their implementation. Some studies concerning organizational change in educational and administrative institutions have shown that limited participation and a lack of recognition of effort may reinforce resistance to change, making evaluation and motivation policies part of the social environment of reform rather than merely technical administrative instruments (Samati, 2018, p. 195). This should be accompanied by strengthening accountability and transparency, not merely for purposes of punishment but also to clarify responsibility and link authority to outcomes. Ambiguity in the distribution of responsibilities may sometimes allow rigid practices to continue without identifying the source of dysfunction. Transparency also requires making information concerning procedures, deadlines, and responsibilities available so that the relationship between administration and citizens becomes clearer and the scope for personal interpretation of procedures is reduced. Accountability should be accompanied by protection for responsible initiative because employees who fear punishment whenever they experiment with a new approach will tend to preserve the status quo. A work environment that distinguishes between professional error resulting from negligence and responsible judgment that fails to produce the expected outcome may be more capable of encouraging organizational learning. Overcoming rigidity also requires establishing mechanisms for continuous evaluation of reform, because reform should not be viewed as a final decision but as an ongoing process of institutional learning based on diagnosis, implementation, measurement, and adjustment. Every reform requires indicators capable of determining whether processing times have decreased, service quality has improved, employee and citizen satisfaction has increased, digital tools are being used more extensively, and coordination between departments has developed. Reform thus moves from the logic of issuing instructions toward the logic of learning from outcomes. From a broader sociological perspective, overcoming administrative rigidity also requires redefining the relationship between administration, employees, and citizens. Citizens should not be viewed merely as passive recipients of services, employees merely as executors of instructions, or managers merely as sources of decisions. Instead, administration should become a space for cooperation, coordination of interests, and pursuit of collective objectives. Accordingly, overcoming rigidity cannot be achieved through a single measure but through an interconnected package of interventions involving structural simplification, expanded participation, development of organizational culture, improved communication, human-resource training, rationalization of evaluation and motivation systems, strengthened transparency and accountability, and reengineering procedures before their digitalization. The persistence of any one element of rigidity may allow other elements to be reproduced. Genuine reform therefore requires treating administration as an integrated social system and simultaneously changing rules and structures on the one hand and patterns of thinking, interaction, and actors' strategies on the other, thereby making organizational flexibility a sustainable institutional capacity rather than a temporary response to a particular reform project.

Sixth: Concluding Remarks on the Limits of the Sociological Explanation

The sociological approaches that have addressed administrative rigidity reveal considerable explanatory potential, but they do not permit the production of a single and definitive explanation of the phenomenon. Administrative rigidity operates at multiple levels in which organizational structure intersects with culture, power, individual and collective action, and the historical and institutional context. The Weberian approach provided an important foundation for understanding rationalization, hierarchy, specialization, division of labor, and formal rules. It demonstrated how rule-based organization can provide a degree of stability and predictability, while also showing that when respect for procedure becomes an end independent of organizational objectives, it may produce effects associated with delay, formalism, and rigidity. However, restricting the analysis to this structural level does not adequately explain variations in the behavior of actors within the same organization. Two employees may operate within the same legal and organizational structure, while one limits himself to literal execution and the other attempts to identify flexible solutions within the available boundaries. Here lies the importance of approaches that restored the actor to the center of analysis, particularly the strategic analysis of Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, which views organization as a field of action, negotiation, and strategy rather than merely a structure mechanically imposed upon individuals. Actors always possess a certain margin of freedom, although it is limited, and they use the resources available to them to pursue their objectives, while organizational structures determine the conditions and limits within which these strategies are exercised. Excessive emphasis on the actor, however, may in turn reduce the importance of the historical and institutional structures that determine in advance part of the available resources and the rules of the game. The most appropriate explanation of administrative rigidity therefore appears to lie in combining the level of structure with the level of action, that is, examining how rules and structures influence actors' behavior while simultaneously examining how actors reproduce or modify these rules through their everyday practices. Gouldner's approach also makes it possible to understand the plurality of bureaucratic forms more precisely and to move beyond the assumption that rules perform the same function in all organizations. Rules may serve to organize work, but under certain circumstances they may become instruments of control or resources used by occupational groups to pursue their interests. Accordingly, rigidity should not automatically be attributed to the existence of bureaucracy. The existence of clear rules, division of labor, and administrative hierarchy

does not necessarily imply rigidity. The problem emerges when rules lose their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, when respect for them becomes detached from organizational objectives, or when they become resources for influence and conflict among actors. Caution is also required when treating the concept of resistance to change as a complete explanation of rigidity, because resistance itself requires explanation. It may result from fear of losing interests, poor communication, unclear reform objectives, previous unsuccessful experiences, inadequate training, or a lack of confidence in the continuity of the reform project. Therefore, describing an employee as “resistant to change” does not represent the end of analysis; rather, it constitutes the starting point for a sociological question concerning the conditions that produced such a position. Applying these approaches to Algerian administration raises another methodological issue related to context. These theories emerged in different historical and institutional environments, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. Their use in analyzing Algerian and Arab organizations should therefore be critical and adaptive rather than treating their concepts as ready-made tools that can be mechanically applied to the local context. Algerian administration developed within a specific historical trajectory associated with colonialism, the construction of the national state, and subsequent economic, social, and political transformations. The relationship between citizens and administration and between employees and authority is likewise influenced by the local institutional and cultural context. Attention to the specificity of these conditions is therefore necessary when interpreting organizational phenomena. This does not mean rejecting Western sociological theories or considering them invalid. Rather, it means transforming them into analytical tools capable of engaging with the empirical context by testing their concepts against local realities and adjusting their explanatory relevance according to the nature of the organization and its context. From this perspective, the concept of “zones of uncertainty”, for example, may be useful for understanding informal sources of influence within Algerian administration, but it requires empirical investigation to identify the nature and actual sources of these zones rather than assuming their existence in advance. Likewise, the concept of organizational culture can help explain the persistence of certain practices, but it should not become an all-encompassing concept that explains everything without specifying the values, norms, and socialization mechanisms through which that culture is formed. Furthermore, although sociological analysis has considerable capacity to explain power relations, meanings, and everyday practices, it cannot by itself address every dimension of administrative rigidity because the phenomenon is also connected to law, economics, technology, public policy, and financial and human resources. The sociological approach is therefore stronger when it opens itself to these dimensions without losing its analytical specificity. Accordingly, the principal value of the sociological approach does not lie in providing a ready-made formula for eliminating rigidity but in revealing the social mechanisms that make rigidity possible, persistent, and reproducible, and in demonstrating that changing procedures does not necessarily change practices when power relations, organizational culture, socialization patterns, and communication remain unchanged. This approach also helps move beyond an individualistic explanation that places sole responsibility for rigidity on employees, as well as beyond a purely structural explanation that portrays actors as merely victims of a rigid structure. Instead, it views them as actors possessing a degree of choice, while exercising that choice within specific organizational and historical conditions. Administrative rigidity in the Algerian context therefore requires a multilevel explanation combining the historical legacy, organizational structure, administrative culture, actors’ strategies, power relations, and technological transformations. Overcoming it requires simultaneous institutional, cultural, and human reform. In this sense, the objective of reform is not to eliminate organization, rules, or hierarchy, since these elements remain necessary for administrative stability and the continuity of public services. Rather, the objective is to redirect them so that they serve effectiveness, flexibility, and the public interest, provide actors with sufficient room for responsible initiative, and simultaneously ensure clarity of responsibility, transparency, and accountability. The central sociological conclusion is that administrative rigidity is not a fixed characteristic of administration; rather, it is an outcome that can change when the conditions producing and reproducing it change. Overcoming rigidity therefore begins not only with modifying regulations but also with reconstructing the relationship between structure and actor, authority and responsibility, rules and initiative, and administration and citizen. This makes it possible to move from an administration primarily concerned with preserving the status quo toward an administration capable of learning, adapting, and responding to social and institutional transformations.

Conclusion

This sociological approach reveals that administrative rigidity cannot be reduced to mere procedural delays or temporary technical shortcomings, nor can it be sustainably overcome simply by issuing new legal texts or redistributing structures and powers. Rather, it represents a complex organizational and social phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of formal structure, organizational culture, actors’ behavior, power relations, patterns of communication, and the institution’s historical legacy. The analysis has shown that rigidity begins when rules and procedures lose their flexible organizational function and gradually become fixed practices that continue to be reproduced even when the circumstances that originally generated them have changed. It is further reinforced when centralization, hierarchy, fear of responsibility, weak initiative, and conservative organizational socialization become interconnected elements that mutually support one another. Accordingly, rigidity should not be viewed as an inherent characteristic of bureaucracy itself, since bureaucratic organization may perform necessary functions related to stability, clarity, and equality in the application of rules. Rather, it becomes a source of rigidity when means become detached from ends, when compliance with procedures becomes more important than achieving objectives, and when rules become independent ends or resources that some actors may use to preserve their organizational positions. In this context, the theoretical approaches examined in the study, beginning

with Max Weber's bureaucratic model, passing through the functionalist approach and Merton's critique of dysfunctions resulting from rigid adherence to rules, followed by Gouldner's analysis of the plurality of bureaucratic patterns, and culminating in the strategic analysis of Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, demonstrate that understanding rigidity requires moving beyond viewing the organization as a fixed structure toward understanding it as a field of interaction, action, negotiation, and the reproduction of power. Structure imposes constraints and limits on actors, but it does not eliminate their capacity to maneuver and adapt. Likewise, actors do not produce rigidity independently; rather, they act within specific organizational, cultural, and historical conditions.

In the Algerian context, the analysis has shown that administrative rigidity is associated with a long historical and institutional trajectory through which patterns of centralization, hierarchy, and procedural approaches to administrative work have developed and some of which have subsequently been reproduced within new organizational contexts despite successive reform and modernization projects. This does not mean that Algerian administration has remained unchanged or that all of its practices are characterized by rigidity; rather, it points to a gap that may emerge between formal reforms and actual transformations in everyday practices. Successive reforms have introduced important modifications to structures and procedures, while digital transformation has created new opportunities for simplifying services and improving relations between administration and citizens. However, the organizational impact of these transformations remains dependent on their capacity to reach administrative culture, patterns of thinking, and professional behavior. Thus, the modernization of tools does not necessarily lead to the modernization of practices if decision-making mechanisms, communication patterns, power relations, and organizational socialization remain unchanged. The analysis has also shown that rigidity is not confined to a particular administrative sector but may appear in varying degrees and forms within economic institutions, universities, and other organizations. This reinforces the need to understand it as a phenomenon associated with mechanisms of social organization rather than with any particular institution. In this regard, resistance to change should not be interpreted merely as individual refusal or a lack of employees' readiness for renewal. Instead, the organizational and cultural conditions that produce such resistance should be examined, including limited participation, ambiguity surrounding reform objectives, fear of losing acquired benefits, insufficient training, weak communication, unclear responsibilities, and previous reform experiences that may affect actors' trust in new projects.

Accordingly, the importance of the sociological approach to administrative rigidity lies in its ability to move beyond a technical and reductionist interpretation and to reveal that administrative reform is essentially a process of social and organizational change affecting values, relationships, roles, positions of authority, and patterns of interaction, rather than merely a process of rearranging legal texts and organizational structures. Overcoming rigidity therefore requires an integrated approach based on simplifying procedures and reengineering administrative processes, expanding participation in decision-making, developing organizational communication, supporting continuous training, encouraging responsible initiative, linking evaluation and promotion to competence and performance, and strengthening transparency and accountability, alongside developing an organizational culture in which change and organizational learning become integral parts of everyday practice. Digitalization, despite its importance, should not be treated as a solution in itself but rather as part of a broader reform project that reconsiders procedures before converting them into electronic formats, prepares employees and citizens to benefit from them, and ensures that paper-based complexities are not transferred into the digital environment in a new form. Reform also requires achieving a balance between discipline and flexibility. Effective administration is neither an administration that abandons rules nor one that adheres to them mechanically; rather, it is an administration capable of applying rules consciously, revising them when they lose their relevance, and granting actors an appropriate margin for initiative within a clear framework of responsibility and accountability.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that overcoming administrative rigidity does not require abolishing bureaucracy or completely replacing it with another organizational form. Rather, it requires redirecting its functions toward serving the objectives for which it was established and achieving a balance between organizational stability and adaptive capacity, between clarity of authority and broader participation, and between respect for rules and the encouragement of initiative. Sustainable reform also requires moving from a logic of change management toward a logic of continuous organizational learning, whereby the organization becomes capable of identifying areas of dysfunction, reviewing its procedures, benefiting from employees' experience, and periodically assessing the outcomes of its interventions. From this perspective, an organization that learns from its practices, reviews its rules, and invests in its human resources is better able to prevent stability from turning into rigidity and better able to respond to the social, technological, and economic transformations surrounding it.

In light of this, the findings of the present study remain theoretical and analytical in nature and do not claim to provide a comprehensive empirical explanation of all forms of rigidity that may characterize Algerian organizations. This opens the way for subsequent field studies to test the various dimensions identified by the theoretical approach through comparisons among institutions, administrations, sectors, and organizational levels, as well as by examining the relationship between centralization and initiative, between organizational culture and resistance to change, and between digitalization and the transformation of administrative practices. Future research may also analyze the role of formal and informal actors in reproducing rigidity or limiting it. In this way, future research can move from asking "Why does administrative rigidity persist?" to the more complex question of "How is rigidity produced within organizations, how is it reproduced, and under what conditions can the mechanisms that produce it be transformed into mechanisms of adaptation and renewal?" Such an approach can enrich the sociology of organizations and administration in Algeria,

contribute to developing knowledge more closely connected to the specificities of the local institutional context, and support reform approaches grounded in a deeper social understanding of organizations rather than being limited to legal or technical responses to the phenomenon.

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