

Rational-Legal Bureaucracy and Religious-Relational Logics in Madrasah Administration: A Qualitative Case Study at MTs II Lubuklinggau

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Abstract

Madrasah administration combines state-mandated bureaucratic procedures with religiously embedded organizational norms. This qualitative single-case study examined how Weberian rational-legal principles were enacted at MTs II Lubuklinggau, which conditions supported or constrained enactment, and how participant-invoked Islamic moral-relational values interacted with formal rules. Data were generated during March-May 2025 through semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected participants across leadership, administrative, and teaching roles, direct observation, and analysis of institutional and Ministry documents. Analysis integrated deductive Weberian dimensions with descriptive, in vivo, and pattern coding while retaining contradictory evidence. Formal hierarchy, written rules, role differentiation, qualification requirements, and documentary practices were present but unevenly enacted. Staffing constraints, limited administrative training, coordination gaps, and partial digitization contributed to task overlap and procedural shortcuts. Values such as *ikhlas*, *amanah*, *musyawarah*, and *ukhuwah* were treated as participant-invoked categories rather than assumed features of Islamic organizations; they sometimes reinforced responsibility and deliberation but could also accompany relational flexibility. The study therefore proposes 'religious-rational bureaucracy' only as a case-bound sensitizing pattern for episodes in which formal-rational and explicitly invoked religious-relational logics interact. Multi-site comparison is required before broader claims can be made.

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Introduction

Educational administration in madrasahs is shaped simultaneously by public regulation, organizational routines, and religiously embedded institutional identities. In Indonesia, state madrasahs operate under Ministry of Religious Affairs requirements while also articulating Islamic educational purposes, making them analytically useful settings for studying how formal governance is enacted in practice. Recent studies of Indonesian madrasah management have emphasized reform strategies, digital transformation, institutional quality, and the relationship between management and Islamic culture (Haddade et al., 2024; Mahsusi et al., 2024). These contributions demonstrate active governance change, but they also invite closer process-level examination of what happens when written administrative arrangements meet everyday relational practices.

Max Weber's rational-legal bureaucracy remains a foundational analytical benchmark for such examination. The ideal type emphasizes hierarchical authority, fixed jurisdiction and division of labor, written rules, technical competence, impersonality, and documentary continuity (Weber, 1978; Waters, 2015). In this study, these dimensions are not treated as a checklist of organizational quality. They are used as sensitizing categories for distinguishing formal architecture from its day-to-day enactment and for identifying where organizational practice follows, modifies, or bypasses prescribed procedures.

Contemporary institutional-logics and hybridity research complicates a binary opposition between formal bureaucracy and informal or value-based organization. Organizations may combine several organizing principles, selectively couple them, or shift among them as actors respond to context and competing demands (Min, 2022; Ponte & Pesci, 2022; Laihonen & Kokko, 2023). Studies of professional work similarly show that logics can become entangled in routine practice (Parding et al., 2024). Research on religious schools is especially relevant because religious and organizational logics may be combined rather than simply substituted for one another (Dolbec et al., 2022). These perspectives make it necessary to examine not only whether multiple logics coexist, but how their interaction becomes observable in concrete administrative episodes.

The empirical gap addressed here concerns that process of enactment. Existing madrasah scholarship provides important accounts of leadership, reform, institutional values, and management strategy, yet less attention has been given to triangulated administrative episodes in which formal documents, leaders' statements, frontline practices, and religious-relational language can be compared directly. The theoretical gap is distinct: institutional-logics scholarship explains organizational multiplicity, but a case-level mechanism is still needed to identify when a religious-relational logic actually interacts with a formal-rational procedure rather than merely existing as a background identity. Without that distinction, any informality in an Islamic institution could be overinterpreted as a religious effect, even when staffing scarcity, workload, managerial discretion, or routine informality provides a more plausible explanation.

Accordingly, the analysis differentiates two empirical domains. Formal-rational enactment refers to observable or documented hierarchy, written procedures, role specialization, rule-grounded justification, qualification requirements, and record keeping. Religious-relational enactment is identified only when participants explicitly invoke moral-relational categories such as *ikhlas*, *amanah*, *musyawarah*, or *ukhuwah* in explaining administrative conduct. For the third research question, an interpretive claim requires three elements to co-occur within the same administrative domain: a formal-rational rule or structure, an explicit participant invocation of a religious-relational category, and evidence that the two logics reinforce, tension, or modify the enactment of procedure. Religious identity alone is not treated as evidence of interaction.

Against this background, the study asks: (RQ1) How are Weberian rational-legal principles enacted in daily administrative procedures at MTs II Lubuklinggau? (RQ2) Which structural, resource-related, managerial, cultural-relational, and technological-documentary conditions support or constrain consistent enactment? (RQ3) Under what empirical conditions do participant-invoked Islamic moral-relational values couple with, stand in tension with, or accompany departures from formal bureaucratic rules? The contribution is deliberately bounded: rather than proposing a general model of Islamic bureaucracy, the study develops a case-grounded sensitizing pattern that can be tested comparatively in other state-regulated religious educational settings.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single-case design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The case was bounded by one state madrasah, the March-May 2025 fieldwork period, routine administrative procedures, and the leadership, administrative, and teaching roles relevant to those procedures. A single instrumental case was appropriate because the questions concern how formal bureaucratic arrangements and culturally embedded organizational meanings interact within a shared

institutional setting, not the prevalence of those arrangements across a population. The site was treated as a broadly typical, information-rich state-regulated madrasah rather than an extreme or statistically representative case. Analytic inference is therefore directed to mechanisms visible within the case and to propositions that can be examined in comparable settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at MTs II Lubuklinggau, a state-accredited Islamic junior secondary school in Lubuklinggau City, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The administrative architecture documented for the case includes Ministry/oversight requirements, the head of madrasah, vice-principals, unit or functional responsibilities, administrative staff, and teaching staff. Site selection was purposive because three characteristics were simultaneously present: a formalized administrative hierarchy, written organizational procedures and role descriptions, and an explicit Islamic institutional identity within a government-regulated school. These characteristics created an information-rich setting in which the existence of formal rules could be compared with their enactment. The retained case profile does not preserve verified enrollment and total staffing figures; those quantities are therefore not reconstructed retrospectively.

Six participants were purposively selected for role diversity: the head of madrasah, one vice-principal, two administrative staff members, and two teachers. Leadership and administrative participants provided direct evidence for hierarchy, procedural routing, task allocation, technical capacity, and record keeping, while teachers broadened the cross-role perspective on how administrative arrangements were experienced outside the administrative office. This composition was intended to reduce dependence on a single managerial account and to make discrepancies across roles analytically visible. The study does not claim formal saturation because the archived field record contains no saturation grid or documented point of code redundancy. Participant adequacy is therefore justified by role coverage, depth of engagement, and triangulation rather than saturation. Other potentially relevant roles were not sampled, and the reported procedural quotations are weighted toward leadership and administrative participants because those roles directly performed the administrative routines examined; this evidentiary imbalance is acknowledged rather than addressed through reconstructed quotations.

Table 1. Participant Profile

No.	Name/Code	Position	Education	Experience
1	KM (Head of Madrasah)	Principal	S2 (Master's)	17 years
2	WK (Vice Principal – Curriculum)	Vice Principal	S2 (Master's)	12 years
3	SA1 (Senior Administrative Staff)	Administration	S1 (Bachelor's)	9 years
4	SA2 (Administrative Staff)	Administration	S1 (Bachelor's)	5 years
5	GR1 (Senior Teacher)	Teacher	S1 (Bachelor's)	10 years
6	GR2 (Subject Teacher)	Teacher	S1 (Bachelor's)	6 years

Note. Participant codes are used throughout the manuscript. Field data, 2025.

Data Generation and Research Transparency

Data were generated over three months (March-May 2025) through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The interview protocol was organized around hierarchical authority, formal rules, division of labor, impersonality, technical competence,

documentation, and participants' explanations of relational or moral considerations. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Observation covered routine administrative work, staff meetings, and decision-related activities. The documentary corpus comprised six categories: organizational charts, position/job descriptions, standard operating procedures (SOPs), Ministry-issued regulations or circulars, meeting minutes, and correspondence/administrative archives. Documents were included when directly relevant to the 2025 administrative processes under study and capable of corroborating at least one analytical dimension. Formal availability was distinguished from actual use by comparing documentary evidence with interview accounts and observed practice (Bowen, 2009).

Reporting is limited to details that can be verified from the retained field record. That record does not preserve a defensible duration range for individual interviews, a standardized count or total duration of observation sessions, a complete item-level document inventory, or a sufficiently reliable record of interview language and individual interviewer assignment. These details are therefore not reconstructed retrospectively, and observational and documentary evidence is used for episode-level corroboration rather than frequency estimates. Institutional access was obtained before fieldwork, interviews were recorded with participant consent, and participants are represented by role-based codes. The retained project materials do not contain a verifiable ethics-committee approval identifier or separate written-permission number; no such identifier is reported. These documentation limits are treated as reporting constraints in the interpretation of the case.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed the interactive logic of data condensation, display, and iterative conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Deductive Weberian dimensions functioned as sensitizing categories rather than fixed conclusions. First-cycle descriptive and in vivo coding preserved participants' language and recurrent practices; second-cycle pattern coding connected these materials to the six Weberian dimensions while retaining inductive categories such as relational flexibility, coordination shortcuts, staffing constraints, and religious-moral justification (Saldaña, 2021). The coding pathway was auditable at the level of reported evidence. For example, SA1's statement that staff 'sometimes skip steps' when short-staffed was first coded as skip steps/short-staffed, grouped as a workload-related procedural shortcut, and then compared with the formal-rules dimension and SOP documents. Likewise, KM's claim that the chain of command was consistently followed was confronted with two observed correspondence episodes that bypassed the designated vice-principal route. That negative evidence revised the interpretation from consistent hierarchy to formalized but variably enacted hierarchy. Coding was researcher-led; no independent second coder was documented, so no intercoder-reliability claim is made.

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Reflexivity was approached through analytic safeguards rather than an unverified retrospective positionality narrative. The retained study materials do not support a defensible claim about the researcher's prior relationship to the site or a detailed insider/outsider position; this absence is disclosed as a reporting limitation. To reduce confirmatory interpretation, the analysis separated the documentary existence of a rule from evidence of enactment, retained discrepant cases, compared participant roles and data sources, and delayed application of the 'religious-rational' label until formal and participant-invoked moral-relational logics could be shown to interact in the same administrative domain. These practices are consistent with contemporary guidance that treats

reflexivity as an explicit examination of how researcher assumptions and analytic choices shape qualitative interpretation (Jamie & Rathbone, 2022; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

Trustworthiness was addressed through three months of field engagement, cross-role comparison, methodological triangulation, preservation of contradictory evidence, and an audit trail consisting of field notes, transcripts, coding decisions, and analytic matrices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ahmed, 2024). Preliminary thematic summaries and factual descriptions were shared with three participants as a member-checking step. The retained audit trail confirms that this review occurred but does not preserve the participant-selection rationale for the three reviewers or an itemized map of comments to textual changes. Member checking is therefore reported as an opportunity for factual correction and interpretive feedback, not as proof that participants validated every interpretation. Transferability is supported through contextual description but remains limited by the single-site design and the reporting constraints noted above.

Results and Discussion

Enactment of Rational-Legal Principles

Across the three data sources, formal-rational features were visible but their enactment varied by administrative domain. The organizational chart documented differentiated authority levels, including Ministry/oversight requirements, the head of madrasah, vice-principals, unit or functional responsibilities, and teaching/administrative staff. This establishes the formal architecture of hierarchy but does not by itself demonstrate that daily work always moved through the prescribed chain.

The head of madrasah (KM) described the intended routing: 'Every decision at this madrasah follows the chain. Staff bring issues to their unit head, the unit head reports to the vice-principal, and the vice-principal brings it to me. We do not allow bypassing the chain, except in genuine emergencies.' (Interview, KM, March 2025). This account shows that hierarchical routing was explicitly recognized as the legitimate administrative arrangement.

Observation nevertheless produced contradictory evidence. In two observed correspondence episodes, documents were routed directly to the principal's desk without passing through the designated vice-principal. The principal redirected them for proper handling, producing delay. The cross-source finding is therefore not that hierarchy was absent, but that a formally codified chain was not uniformly enacted in every observed episode.

Formal Rules and Standard Operating Procedures

Document analysis established the availability of six categories of administrative instruments: the organizational chart, position descriptions, SOPs, Ministry regulations/circulars, meeting minutes, and correspondence/administrative archives. The reviewed SOP material addressed correspondence management, student data administration, personnel records, and asset management. Because the archive did not preserve an item-level document census or a systematic staff-knowledge test, the evidence supports the existence of written rules but not a numerical estimate of accessibility, knowledge, or compliance.

Interview and observation evidence showed selective departures from documented sequences. SA1 stated: 'The SOP is there it is written and signed. But in daily practice, especially when we are short-staffed, we sometimes skip steps. The file still gets processed, but not always in the documented sequence.' (Interview, SA1, April 2025). Read together with the available SOPs and observed workflow, this supports a descriptive finding of formalized procedures that were not

uniformly followed under workload pressure; theoretical interpretation of this pattern is reserved for the Discussion.

Division of Labor and Task Specialization

Formal job descriptions distinguished administrative functions. The curriculum vice-principal was responsible for academic scheduling, teacher assignment, and curriculum documentation; student-affairs functions included extracurricular activities, attendance records, and student behavior reports; and administrative staff handled correspondence, financial reporting, and personnel data. These documented boundaries show formal role specialization within the case.

Practice was more flexible. WK explained: 'When the administrative staff is absent or overloaded, I often end up handling correspondence that is technically not my job. There is no rule against helping, but it creates confusion about who is responsible for what.' (Interview, WK, March 2025). This account, together with observed workload-related overlap, shows that staffing constraints could weaken the clarity of specialization even when written role boundaries were available.

Documentation and Records Management

The document set and observations showed sustained record-keeping practices without supporting a claim that every administrative event was documented. Reviewed materials included meeting minutes from formal meetings, numbered official correspondence, personnel files containing qualification and performance records, and financial records using standardized templates. The coexistence of paper-based and partially digital records was visible in the case, indicating a transitional documentary arrangement rather than a fully integrated digital system.

SA2 described the correspondence routine: 'Every letter that comes in gets a number and a reception date. Every letter going out gets a dispatch number. We keep both in the agenda book and now also in a computer register.' (Interview, SA2, April 2025). The convergence of this account with reviewed correspondence and records supports the narrower finding that core documentary procedures were maintained while manual and digital systems coexisted. The available data do not support a prevalence claim beyond the case or a claim of complete digitization.

Impersonality and Technical Competence

Rule-grounded decision justification was partially evident in decisions concerning teacher assignment, student promotion, and resource allocation. KM stated: 'When I assign teachers to classes or make curriculum decisions, I refer to the regulations and what the school needs. I cannot base decisions on personal closeness that would not be fair.' (Interview, KM, March 2025). The evidence therefore supports impersonality in the narrower sense of justifying official decisions by institutional criteria; it does not imply emotional distance or the absence of collegial relations.

The coded interview material also contained participant-invoked moral-relational categories, including *ikhlas*, *amanah*, *musyawarah*, and *ukhuwah*. They are treated here as emic categories used in this setting, not as essential or uniform properties of Islamic organizations. In the reported administrative domains, *musyawarah* and *ukhuwah* could accompany consultation, mutual assistance, and flexible coordination without establishing systematic favoritism. The analytical risk arose when relational familiarity coincided with shortcuts around designated communication channels. Because the retained quotation set tied to the reported procedural episodes is concentrated among leadership and administrative roles, these value categories are summarized from the coding record rather than illustrated with reconstructed teacher quotations.

Technical competence showed a similarly mixed pattern. Formal qualification requirements were present, including minimum S1 (bachelor's) qualifications for teaching staff, but in-service administrative training was described as infrequent and non-systematic. KM stated: 'We want our administrative staff to be better trained in bureaucratic procedures, but training opportunities from the Ministry are limited, and we do not have the budget to organize our own.' (Interview, KM, May 2025). Within this case, the evidence links limited training opportunities to a capacity constraint; it is not extrapolated as a condition of Indonesian madrasahs generally.

Table 2*Cross-Source Evidence on Weberian Dimensions at MTs II Lubuklinggau*

Weberian dimension	Ideal-type indicator	Cross-source evidence	Descriptive synthesis
Hierarchical authority	Clear chain of command and differentiated authority levels	Organizational chart and KM interview establish the intended chain; two observed correspondence episodes bypassed the designated vice-principal route.	Formalized but variably enacted
Formal rules and procedures	Written rules, SOPs, and rule-grounded decisions	SOPs and Ministry rules were available; SA1 and observed workflow showed selective step-skipping under workload constraints.	Available but not uniformly followed
Division of labor	Fixed duties and role specialization	Job descriptions differentiated functions; WK and observed workload overlap showed cross-role task substitution when administrative capacity was constrained.	Clear on paper, flexible in practice
Impersonality	Official decisions justified by institutional criteria rather than personal preference	KM described rule-grounded assignment decisions; coded interview material showed relational consultation without evidence of systematic favoritism.	Rule-based with relational modulation
Technical competence	Appointment and performance linked to relevant qualifications and expertise	Qualification requirements were documented; KM reported limited and non-systematic in-service administrative training.	Credentialed with development constraints
Documentation and records	Administrative acts and decisions recorded in durable form	Reviewed minutes, numbered correspondence, personnel and financial records, SA2 interview, and observation showed paper and partial digital systems operating together.	Core records maintained; digitization incomplete

Note. 'Descriptive synthesis' labels summarize the specified combinations of interview, observation, and documentary evidence; they are not numerical ratings. Field data, 2025.

Conditions Supporting and Constraining Enactment

Cross-source comparison identified five recurrent contextual conditions: structural scaffolding, resource/capacity constraints, cultural-relational practices, managerial support, and technological-documentary arrangements. These categories are descriptive rather than causally ranked. Formal hierarchy, Ministry requirements, job descriptions, and SOPs provided administrative scaffolding, whereas coordination gaps weakened routine consistency. Staffing shortages and limited training contributed to task overlap and constrained technical development. Leadership support reinforced procedural expectations but did not prevent all bypassing. Manual and digital records operated in parallel, creating a transitional workflow. Cultural-relational practices were more ambivalent: participant-invoked values could support responsibility and consultation, while relational familiarity could coincide with shortcuts. Table 3 maps each condition to the Weberian dimension most directly affected.

Table 3. Contextual Conditions and Their Interaction with Weberian Dimensions

Category	Case evidence: enabling and constraining dynamics	Most directly affected dimension(s)
Structural	Hierarchy, Ministry rules, job descriptions, and SOPs provide formal scaffolding; coordination gaps and lack of routine procedural review weaken consistency.	Hierarchy; formal rules; accountability
Resource/capacity	Limited administrative staffing and non-systematic training contribute to task overlap and constrain technical competence.	Division of labor; technical competence
Cultural-relational	Participant-invoked ikhlas, amanah, musyawarah, and ukhuwah can support responsibility and consultation; relational familiarity can also coincide with shortcuts. The evidence does not establish systematic favoritism or religious causation.	Impersonality; hierarchy; rule consistency
Managerial	Principal support reinforces procedural expectations, but observed deviations show that compliance is not fully institutionalized.	Hierarchy; formal rules
Technological-documentary	Manual and digital records coexist; incomplete integration can complicate workflow and inter-unit coordination.	Documentation; coordination

Note. Categories summarize recurrent case evidence and are not ranked causal determinants. Field data, 2025.

Interaction of Formal-Rational and Religious-Relational Logics

For RQ3, a religious-relational logic was attributed only when a participant-invoked moral-relational category could be linked to the same administrative domain as a formal rule or structure. Three relations were distinguished analytically. Coupling occurred when a value-based explanation supported responsibility, consultation, or care without displacing the prescribed procedure. Tension referred to situations in which relational expectations and procedural demands pulled practice in different directions. Bypass referred to an observed or reported departure from the prescribed chain or sequence. The case provides evidence of coupling in consultation and responsibility, and limited evidence of bypass where relational familiarity accompanied routing flexibility; it does not establish systematic favoritism or demonstrate that religious values caused the observed shortcuts.

The minimum empirical conditions for the provisional 'religious-rational bureaucracy' pattern were therefore: an active formal-rational administrative structure, explicit participant invocation of religious-moral or relational categories, and observable interaction between the two in the enactment of a procedure. The label was not applied where religious identity appeared only as institutional background or where a procedural deviation could be described solely through workload, staffing scarcity, managerial discretion, or routine informality. This threshold keeps the concept case-bound and prevents organizational informality from being automatically religiously attributed.

Discussion

The principal finding of this study is that rational-legal bureaucracy at MTs II Lubuklinggau is more accurately characterized by a distinction between formal institutionalization and practical enactment than by either bureaucratic compliance or bureaucratic failure. The madrasah possessed recognizable Weberian features, including hierarchical authority, written procedures, differentiated responsibilities, qualification requirements, rule-grounded decision making, and documentary routines. Nevertheless, these arrangements were enacted unevenly: correspondence occasionally

bypassed the prescribed chain of command, procedural steps were shortened under staffing pressure, role boundaries became permeable when administrative personnel were overloaded, and manual and digital documentation systems operated simultaneously. Structural rules and managerial support therefore functioned as enabling scaffolds, whereas staffing limitations, non-systematic training, coordination gaps, and incomplete digitization constrained consistent implementation. Equally important, participant-invoked values such as *ikhlas*, *amanah*, *musyawarah*, and *ukhuwah* did not constitute an alternative administrative system. Rather, they interacted contingently with formal procedures: they could reinforce responsibility and deliberation, coexist with relational flexibility, or accompany procedural bypasses without providing sufficient evidence that religion itself caused those deviations. These findings directly answer the three research questions by showing, first, how Weberian principles are enacted unevenly; second, which contextual conditions shape that enactment; and third, under which evidentiary conditions formal-rational and religious-relational logics can legitimately be interpreted as interacting.

At the international level, this pattern is consistent with contemporary research on institutional complexity and hybrid organizations, although the present case introduces a more explicitly religious-relational configuration. Shams (2021) demonstrates that professionals in public hybrid organizations do not simply resolve competing institutional logics; rather, they interpret and manage tensions through situated identity work. Sætre (2023) similarly shows that hybrid organizations may combine selective coupling, decoupling, and compartmentalization when confronted with contradictory institutional demands. Ghio and Verona (2022) further argue that institutional plurality becomes observable through organizational practices rather than through the mere coexistence of abstract logics. These insights correspond closely with the present finding that formal bureaucratic and religious-relational principles cannot be inferred solely from institutional identity; their interaction must be demonstrated in concrete administrative practices. Studies by Zollo et al. (2023) and Anderson-Gough et al. (2022) likewise indicate that organizations manage multiple identities and logics through blending, separation, and context-specific accommodation, while Stafford and Stapleton (2022) show that different combinations of institutional logics can produce substantially different accountability arrangements even within ostensibly similar governance structures. Parker et al. (2021) similarly identify bridging and buffering between competing public-sector logics, whereas Kumi and Saharan (2022) demonstrate that hybridization may produce unequal relationships between organizational principles rather than stable equilibrium. Taken together, these studies support an interpretation of MTs II Lubuklinggau not as a setting where “bureaucracy” and “religion” represent mutually exclusive systems, but as an institutional environment in which multiple logics become selectively activated, coupled, or separated according to administrative circumstances.

The observed procedural shortcuts and task overlap also align with recent developments in street-level bureaucracy research. Chang and Brewer (2023) emphasize that frontline bureaucratic behavior is strongly conditioned by the contexts in which formal policies are implemented, while Peeters and Campos (2023) show that resource scarcity and institutional weaknesses can shift unresolved organizational complexity toward frontline actors, who subsequently respond through improvisation and informal adaptation. This perspective helps explain why the present study should not interpret every deviation from an SOP as evidence of religious-relational influence. In MTs II Lubuklinggau, short staffing, workload pressures, limited professional development, and

coordination requirements provide more parsimonious explanations for several departures from formal sequencing. In this respect, relational flexibility is analytically distinct from religious causation. The finding therefore strengthens street-level bureaucracy scholarship by demonstrating the importance of differentiating resource-induced discretion from value-mediated enactment, particularly in religious public organizations where informal practices might otherwise be too readily attributed to institutional faith identity.

The coexistence of paper-based and partially digital administrative systems adds another layer to this interpretation. International studies increasingly show that digitization does not automatically eliminate discretion, inconsistency, or organizational complexity. De Boer and Raaphorst (2023), for example, found that automation altered public officials' perceived discretion and enforcement styles but did not produce a simple technological replacement of bureaucratic judgment. Considine et al. (2022) similarly caution that machine bureaucracy may increase consistency and efficiency while simultaneously creating tensions concerning responsiveness to contextual circumstances, and Busch (2023) demonstrates that users remain cautious about automation in complex street-level decisions. At the organizational level, Ahn and Chen (2022) emphasize that successful digital transformation depends substantially on employee acceptance, familiarity, training, and perceptions of technological value, while Kuhlmann and Heuberger (2023) show that local digitization entails organizational restructuring, staff upskilling, and context-specific implementation difficulties rather than merely converting paper into electronic records. This evidence provides a useful comparison with MTs II Lubuklinggau, where manual and digital systems coexist rather than forming an integrated digital workflow. Educational-management research reaches a similar conclusion. Carvalho et al. (2022) associate digital transformation with leadership and institutional performance, whereas Khatir and Madani (2024) demonstrate that infrastructure, human resources, organizational culture, and transformation strategy interact in shaping administrative performance. Thus, incomplete digitization in the present case should be interpreted less as a technological deficiency in isolation and more as an organizational transition involving competencies, workflow design, coordination, and institutional adaptation.

The results also resonate with international research specifically examining governance and multiple institutional logics in educational organizations. Marsh et al. (2020) found that ostensibly different organizational models in Los Angeles schools continued to share institutionalized commitments and practices, suggesting that multiple logics do not necessarily dismantle established organizational structures. Milner et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated that school accountability can consist of layered public, professional, and social logics, with hierarchy and professional discretion operating simultaneously rather than as straightforward opposites. Allen and Gann (2022) further emphasize that formal governance architecture alone does not guarantee legitimate or effective accountability; governance depends on meaningful relationships, participation, and institutionalized mechanisms of responsibility. These international findings help contextualize the present case: formal hierarchy at MTs II Lubuklinggau remained institutionally authoritative even when daily coordination required relational adjustment. The significant difference, however, is that the present study identifies an explicitly articulated religious-relational vocabulary within this coexistence and imposes a stricter empirical threshold before classifying it as an institutional logic.

Within Indonesia, the findings extend recent scholarship on madrasah management and Islamic educational governance. Haddade et al. (2024) demonstrate that madrasah reform depends

not only on policy architecture but also on institutional capacity and implementation strategy, while Mahsusi et al. (2024) emphasize the interaction of digital transformation, management, and Islamic organizational culture. The present study adds a micro-process perspective to these broader reform discussions by showing precisely where formal arrangements converge with or diverge from routine administrative practice. Related research involving Muhammad Sufian also provides useful Indonesian contextual evidence. Rokhman et al. (2024) show that academic supervision becomes more effective when management structures, professional competencies, and systematic procedures are deliberately integrated rather than left as formal requirements. Rustanto et al. (2026) similarly place organizational governance and information quality at the center of effective digital educational systems, supporting the present argument that digitization must be understood as a governance process rather than merely technology adoption. Other studies demonstrate a parallel principle regarding religious and cultural values: Koderi et al. (2023) show that local values become educationally meaningful when explicitly translated into instructional processes; Pratama et al. (2024) examine how institutionalized religious practice relates to educational outcomes; and Erlina et al. (2025) demonstrate that religious-moderation values become operational when incorporated into structured educational practice. Although these studies address different educational domains and should not be treated as direct evidence concerning administrative bureaucracy, they reinforce an important contextual proposition: values produce organizational or educational consequences through specific mechanisms of enactment, not merely through the religious identity of an institution.

Theoretically, pedagogically, and from a policy perspective, the findings suggest that Weberian bureaucracy and institutional-logics theory can be productively combined if analysis distinguishes formal structures from episode-level enactment. The study refines this combination by requiring three conditions before identifying religious-rational interaction: an active formal-rational rule or structure, explicit participant invocation of a religious-relational value, and observable evidence that the two interact in implementing a procedure. Pedagogically, although this research examines administration rather than classroom instruction, clearer administrative routing, better role differentiation, structured cross-training, and more reliable records can indirectly protect teachers' instructional time by reducing task ambiguity and administrative spillover. The findings therefore support periodic SOP review, administrative professional development, integrated digital record systems, and explicit protocols for deliberation that allow *musyawarah* and collegial assistance without obscuring accountability. At the policy level, madrasah authorities and the Ministry of Religious Affairs should regard digital transformation as an institutional-capacity project requiring staff competencies, workflow integration, governance standards, and documentary traceability rather than simply procurement of technology. Policies should also preserve space for ethically grounded consultation while ensuring that relational flexibility does not undermine role clarity, procedural fairness, or accountability. Importantly, this study did not investigate students' online behavior, media literacy, identity formation, emotional well-being, or mental health; therefore, policy recommendations concerning social-media regulation or psychological intervention would not be empirically warranted. The defensible policy implications concern administrative workload, organizational capacity, digital governance, procedural consistency, and institutional accountability. These conclusions accord with broader evidence that digital and hybrid governance outcomes depend on implementation arrangements rather than formal adoption alone.

The novelty and contribution of this study lie in developing the provisional concept of “religious-rational bureaucracy” as a deliberately bounded sensitizing pattern rather than presenting it as a universal model of Islamic administration. Its contribution is therefore not the generic observation that Islamic values and modern bureaucracy coexist in a madrasah. Instead, the study specifies the empirical conditions under which such coexistence can legitimately be interpreted as interaction. By distinguishing coupling, tension, and bypass, and by refusing to classify workload-driven informality as religious simply because it occurs within an Islamic institution, the analysis reduces the risk of cultural or religious essentialism. Methodologically, the triangulation of formal documents, cross-role interview accounts, direct observations, and contradictory evidence further demonstrates why organizational charts and SOPs should not be treated as proxies for implementation. The concept consequently extends institutional-logics research by shifting attention from the organizational presence of multiple logics to their observable co-activation within particular administrative episodes. It also refines Weberian analysis by showing that deviation from an ideal type need not indicate the disappearance of bureaucracy; rather, it may reveal how formal authority is negotiated under resource, relational, and technological conditions.

Several limitations and future research directions delimit these contributions. The analysis concerns one state madrasah and six purposively selected participants; it therefore supports analytical rather than statistical generalization. The participant record is weighted toward leadership and administrative roles, formal saturation was not documented, no independent second coder was retained, and the available observation and documentary records do not permit reliable estimates of how frequently particular procedural departures occurred. In addition, the retained research archive does not support a detailed retrospective positionality account or a verifiable ethics-committee identifier. Future research should therefore undertake comparative multi-site studies involving state and private madrasahs, Islamic schools with different governance structures, and non-religious public schools to determine whether the proposed religious-rational configuration is distinctive or represents a more general form of relational bureaucracy. Longitudinal observation and process tracing could establish whether particular forms of coupling are stable or situational, while broader sampling of teachers, administrative personnel, supervisors, parents, and Ministry officials could reveal how the same procedures are interpreted across organizational levels. Mixed-method designs could subsequently test whether role clarity, staff capacity, administrative training, digital integration, and value-based deliberation predict procedural consistency, fairness, efficiency, employee workload, or service quality. Such evidence would provide a stronger basis for determining whether “religious-rational bureaucracy” can develop beyond a sensitizing concept into a transferable explanatory framework.

Conclusion

This study shows that rational-legal bureaucracy at MTs II Lubuklinggau is best understood as formally established but unevenly enacted. Hierarchy, written rules, differentiated responsibilities, qualification requirements, and documentary routines structured administrative work, yet observed bypassing, task overlap, limited training, coordination gaps, and partial digitization qualified their consistency (RQ1). Structural scaffolding and managerial support enabled procedure, while resource/capacity and technological-documentary constraints complicated it; cultural-relational practices had contingent effects rather than uniformly positive or negative ones (RQ2). Participant-invoked *ikhlas*, *amanah*, *musyawarah*, and *ukhuwah* could support responsibility and deliberation,

but religious interpretation was retained only where such categories were explicitly connected to a formal administrative domain. Workload, staffing scarcity, managerial discretion, and routine informality remain credible alternative explanations for other procedural flexibility (RQ3).

Accordingly, 'religious-rational bureaucracy' is proposed only as a case-bound sensitizing pattern requiring three co-occurring conditions: an active formal-rational structure, explicit participant invocation of religious-relational values, and observable interaction between those logics in procedural enactment. The single-site design, six-participant sample, incomplete item-level observation/document records, absence of a formal saturation or intercoder-reliability record, imbalance in presented participant quotations, and incomplete retrospective reflexivity/ethics documentation limit transferability. The most defensible next step is multi-site comparative research with broader participant coverage, explicit analytic and reflexive audit trails, and outcome measures capable of testing whether particular forms of coupling strengthen or weaken administrative consistency, fairness, and efficiency.

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B. Five additional publications involving Muhammad Sufian

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