

# IMPLEMENTATION OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENT (FWA) POLICY AT THE REGIONAL SECRETARIAT OF EAST JAVA PROVINCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Despite growing adoption of Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) in public sector organisations, scholarly understanding of how civil servants subjectively experience and make meaning of FWA implementation in acute security crisis conditions — as distinct from health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic — remains critically limited. This study aims to explore, describe, and formulate the essence of civil servants' lived experiences in implementing FWA policy during a security crisis at the Regional Secretariat of East Java Province, Indonesia. Grounded in Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, the study employs Colaizzi's seven-step analysis method as its analytical framework. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected civil servants across five bureaux, supplemented by documentary analysis of the Governor's Circular Letter Number 11410 of 2025. Five major themes emerged: (1) shock and uncertainty amid crisis; (2) existential dilemma between personal safety and professional responsibility; (3) rapid adaptation through technology as a bridge for service; (4) reconceptualisation of the meaning of public service; and (5) organisational learning for future policy. The essence of the experience is formulated as existential negotiation between fear and professional commitment — a transformative journey to find meaning in service amid uncertainty. It is recommended that regional governments institutionalise crisis-responsive FWA protocols, strengthen ICT infrastructure, and develop results-based performance management systems that accommodate psychological as well as operational dimensions of flexible work.

## INTRODUCTION

The continuity of public services during acute security crises represents one of the most pressing governance challenges in contemporary public administration. During 1–4 September 2025, the East Java Provincial Government faced significant disruption to normal administrative operations as large-scale public demonstrations spread across multiple districts, including Surabaya — the provincial capital. With tens of thousands of demonstrators converging on key public facilities and the security situation deteriorating rapidly, the Governor of East Java, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, issued Circular Letter



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Number 11410 of 2025, activating a Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) system for all civil servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) and non-civil servants within the provincial government apparatus. This policy required bureau heads to independently determine the proportional composition of Work From Office, Work From Home, and Work From Anywhere for their respective units. The scale of impact was substantial: the East Java Provincial Government employs approximately 4,200 ASN across its Regional Secretariat alone, all of whom were required to adapt their working modality within hours of the announcement (East Java Provincial Government, 2025a, 2025b).

Flexible Working Arrangement has emerged as a significant instrument of bureaucratic modernisation in both developed and developing countries. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) identifies FWA as a core component of results-based public workforce management, with evidence from 38 members states demonstrating links between flexible work adoption and improvements in employee productivity, well-being, and retention. In Australia, 76 per cent of public sector employees now access some form of FWA, encompassing remote work (61%), flexible hours (26%), and part-time arrangements (13%) (Australian Public Service Commission, 2024). In the Indonesian public sector context, Tasrin et al. (2021) found that work units with high autonomy, adequate digital infrastructure, and compatible virtual communication tools could implement full FWA with high employee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, Buick et al. (2024) demonstrated that FWA effectiveness is highly contingent upon managerial resource provision and support, with managers who proactively address work-family balance generating superior outcomes in employee well-being and job satisfaction. Barbieri et al. (2025) further identified that cognitive demands associated with FWA — including autonomous structuring of work activities and coordination in distributed settings — can function simultaneously as job resources and challenging demands within the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) theoretical model. Sunaryo et al. (2022) additionally found that FWA significantly affected affective commitment, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour among civil servants in Indonesian local governments.

Crisis management constitutes a distinct domain within public administration scholarship. Mohamad et al. (2025) established that safety culture, management commitment, and social media utilisation significantly influence the effectiveness of internal crisis communication in Indonesian public organisations. Caligiuri et al. (2020) demonstrated that successful adoption of flexible work modalities in crisis conditions depends fundamentally on organisational agility and the quality of mutual trust between supervisors and subordinates. Indra et al. (2025) further found that regulatory frameworks governing emergency communication in local governments significantly shape the quality of crisis response. Kniffin et al. (2021), in a broad review of workplace research, identified virtual teamwork and remote working as among the most consequential emerging challenges for workers and organisations during crisis periods. From a motivational perspective, Christensen et al. (2017) showed that public service motivation is subjected to its most severe test precisely during crisis situations, when employees must continuously negotiate between competing obligations to personal security and community service. Breuer et al. (2016), in a meta-analysis of 52 studies, found that trust operates as a stronger predictor of team effectiveness in virtual settings



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than in face-to-face environments — a finding with direct implications for crisis-era FWA management.

Despite this growing body of literature, significant gaps remain. First, existing FWA research in the Indonesian public sector is almost exclusively situated within pandemic contexts (Sunaryo et al., 2022; Tasrin et al., 2021), leaving FWA during acute security crises — characterised by sudden onset, short duration, geographic localisation, and distinctly different threat profiles — virtually unexplored. Second, the dominant orientation of FWA studies remains positivist and outcome-focused, measuring productivity metrics, satisfaction scores, or policy compliance rates (Barbieri et al., 2025; Buick et al., 2024; OECD, 2023), while the subjective, lived, and meaning-making dimensions of FWA implementation remain largely invisible to the literature. Third, Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, (2012) argue that interpretive research methodologies are essential for revealing how policy actors construct meaning from their experiences — dimensions that positivist approaches cannot access — yet such methodologies have not been applied to FWA in security crisis settings. Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, (2014) similarly affirm that the interpretive turn in social science research opens uniquely productive avenues for understanding policy implementation as it is lived by its actors. This study addresses these three gaps by exploring, from the inside, how civil servants experience, navigate, and make meaning of FWA implementation during a non-pandemic security crisis.

This study is grounded in Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, which directs attention to the things themselves — to the structures of consciousness and the essences of experience as they appear to the subject, prior to theoretical interpretation (Husserl, 1970). Husserlian phenomenology emphasises the practice of epoché (bracketing), through which the researcher suspends prior assumptions to describe experience in its purest form. As an analytical procedure, this study employs Colaizzi, (1978) seven-step method, which has been validated extensively across nursing, psychology, and social science research (Abraham & Padmakumari, 2025; Morrow et al., 2015; Wirihana et al., 2018) and is specifically suited to extracting the essence structure from multiple informant accounts. Moustakas, (1994) and Giorgi, (2009) further affirm that descriptive phenomenological analysis produces knowledge that is both scientifically rigorous and experientially authentic. Sinfield et al., (2023) demonstrated the applicability of this methodological approach for uncovering the structure of complex professional experiences.

Based on the foregoing, this study addresses three core research questions: (1) What are the subjective experiences of civil servants in implementing FWA policy during a security crisis? (2) What meanings do civil servants assign to FWA policy in relation to their professional duties? (3) What is the universal essence of the experience of balancing personal safety with the continuity of public service in a crisis context?

The significance of this study extends beyond the specific empirical case to broader questions about governance adaptability in developing countries facing recurring security disruptions. Indonesia, as the world's fourth most populous democracy with a complex decentralised government structure spanning 34 provinces and over 500 districts and cities, frequently faces security challenges related to social demonstrations, electoral tensions, and local conflicts. The capacity of provincial and district governments to maintain service continuity during such disruptions — not only through emergency preparedness infrastructure but through the psychological and professional resilience of



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their civil service workforce — represents a governance challenge of growing significance. This study provides the first phenomenological evidence base for understanding that capacity from the inside, offering insights that neither performance metrics nor policy compliance data can capture.

This study aims to: (1) explore and describe the lived experiences of civil servants at the East Java Provincial Regional Secretariat in implementing FWA during the September 2025 security crisis; (2) identify the deeper phenomenological meaning of FWA in the context of crisis-time public service; and (3) formulate the universal essence of flexible work policy implementation in government bureaucracy.

The significance of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it enriches phenomenological public policy literature by uncovering subjective and existential dimensions of adaptive policy implementation that quantitative approaches cannot access, and extends the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023) by introducing existential demands as a new category specific to acute crisis contexts. Methodologically, it demonstrates the applicability of Colaizzi's method in public administration research in non-Western, crisis contexts. Practically, it provides evidence-based input for policymakers at the regional government level to design more effective, resilient, and psychologically-informed flexible work systems.

## METHOD

The research object of this study is the Regional Secretariat (Sekretariat Daerah) of East Java Province — the central staff element of the provincial government, headquartered at the Gedung Negara Grahadi complex in Surabaya, responsible for coordinating administrative governance across all regional bureaux and serving as the primary apparatus supporting the Governor in administering provincial affairs.

This study employs a descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Edmund Husserl's philosophy. This design was selected because: the research objective is to describe the essence of a specific lived experience as it actually occurs; Husserlian phenomenology's commitment to epoché (bracketing) is appropriate when exploring a novel and theoretically underexplored phenomenon; and the interpretive paradigm underpinning phenomenology treats reality as a social construction apprehensible through individuals' subjective experience, aligning with the study's concern for meaning-making rather than causal inference (Abraham & Padmakumari, 2025; Husserl, 1970).

This study was conducted in three sequential phases. Phase 1 (Preparation, August 2025): literature review, development of the interview guide, and ethics approval. Phase 2 (Data Collection, September–October 2025): in-depth interviews conducted approximately one to four weeks after the FWA period (1–4 September 2025), while experiences remained relatively fresh. Phase 3 (Data Analysis and Reporting, October–November 2025): transcript processing, Colaizzi's seven-stage analysis, member checking, and write-up of findings.

Informants were selected purposively in accordance with four criteria: (1) civil servants (ASN) currently employed at the East Java Provincial Regional Secretariat — ensuring direct institutional affiliation with the policy's implementing unit; (2) direct experience of FWA during 1–4 September 2025 — ensuring experiential authenticity; (3) willingness to share experiences openly — essential for phenomenological data quality; and (4) capability to articulate experiences clearly in verbal form. These criteria



operationalise the phenomenological principle of selecting participants who have lived through the phenomenon under investigation and can reflect meaningfully upon it (Morrow et al., 2015; Sinfield et al., 2023). A total of 12 informants were recruited from five bureaux: Administrative Leadership Bureau (n=3), Organisational Bureau (n=2), Legal Bureau (n=2), General Bureau (n=2), Development Administration Bureau (n=2), and one Bureau Head. A range of 6–15 participants is generally recommended for Colaizzi's method to achieve thematic saturation (Abraham & Padmakumari, 2025; Wirihana et al., 2018). Informant characteristics: age 28–54 years; service 5–28 years; civil service grade III/a to IV/b; minimum bachelor's degree.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with a duration of 45–90 minutes per informant, covering: initial experiences upon learning of the policy; feelings during the FWA period; execution of official duties; personal and professional meaning of FWA; and what stood out most. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with written informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Documentary analysis supplemented interview data, encompassing: the Governor's Circular Letter Number 11410 of 2025, a press release dated 1 September 2025, and duty performance reports during the FWA period.

This study applied Colaizzi (1978) seven-stage analysis method: (1) familiarisation; (2) extracting significant statements; (3) formulating meanings; (4) clustering into themes; (5) integrating themes into an exhaustive description; (6) identifying the essence structure; and (7) validation via member checking with five informants. This method was chosen because its systematic, step-by-step structure is well-suited to generating transparent and replicable analyses from multiple informant accounts (Sinfield et al., 2023; Wirihana et al., 2018). A total of 187 significant statements were extracted across the 12 transcripts. Significant statements were defined as phrases or sentences that directly revealed informants' experiences of the FWA phenomenon. Meaning formulations were developed for each statement by asking: what does this statement reveal about the informant's experience? Formulated meanings were then organised into clusters by identifying common themes across informants' accounts. The five emerging themes were integrated into an exhaustive description that attempted to account for all informant perspectives without privileging any single account. The essence structure was formulated from the exhaustive description by identifying the invariant features that characterised the experience across all informants, irrespective of individual variation.

Maintained through: (1) credibility — bracketing documented in a reflexive journal, and member checking; (2) dependability — systematic audit trail; (3) confirmability — peer debriefing with two experienced phenomenological researchers; (4) transferability — thick description of the research context.

Institutional permission was obtained from the Regional Secretariat of East Java Province. Each informant signed an informed consent form. Identities were protected through pseudonymous codes (P1–P12). Data were stored on a password-protected server accessible only to the research team.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Policy Context and Significant Statements

On 31 August 2025, the Governor of East Java signed Circular Letter Number 11410 of 2025, effective from 1 September 2025. The policy was issued in response to deteriorating security conditions following large-scale demonstrations in Surabaya. The Regional Secretariat — located within the Gedung Negara Grahadi complex — implemented a 50% Work From Office and 50% Work From Home arrangement with daily rotation. The policy remained active for four working days (1–4 September 2025).

From the 12 interview transcripts, a total of 187 significant statements were extracted following Colaizzi (1978) first two analytical steps. Table 1 presents selected significant statements alongside their meaning formulations.

**Table 1. Selected Significant Statements and Meaning Formulations  
(Colaizzi Steps 2–3)**

Significant Statement	Meaning Formulation
"I only found out from the Bureau's WhatsApp group at around 10 PM on August 31st. I was quite surprised — it all happened so suddenly." (P2)	Policy information was received abruptly, without prior mental preparation, causing shock and disorientation.
"When I first heard, honestly I was relieved not to have to come to the office. But on the other hand, I was also worried about how work coordination would go." (P3)	Ambivalent feelings: relief at personal safety being maintained, yet anxiety about work effectiveness.
"I felt responsible for continuing to come to the office because I was the Head of the Sub-Division. It didn't feel right if everyone was at home while I was absent." (P1)	Moral dilemma between personal safety and leadership responsibility — a form of existential demand.
"The first day of WFH felt strange. Normally I'd be getting ready to go to the office — suddenly I had to work from home." (P5)	Disorientation due to sudden disruption of routine lifeworld structures.
"Coordination was done more frequently via WhatsApp and video calls. It was awkward at first, but we gradually got used to it." (P6)	Technology as an adaptive resource facilitating continuity of professional relationships.
"I realised that so much work can actually be completed from home. Perhaps we've been too accustomed to the old way of working all this time." (P7)	Critical reflexivity on the assumption that physical presence is an operational necessity.
"For me, this policy showed that the government cared about our safety. It made me feel valued as an employee." (P8)	Policy perceived as organisational care, strengthening the psychological contract.



Significant Statement	Meaning Formulation
"That period taught me that public service is not just about physical presence, but about the commitment to keep serving even in difficult conditions." (P9)	Reconceptualisation of public service identity — from presence-based to commitment-based.

Source: Interview data (processed), 2025. P = Participant code.

### Phenomenological Analysis: Five Major Themes

From the 187 significant statements and their meaning formulations, five major themes were constructed through Colaizzi's cluster-and-integrate procedure (Steps 4–5). Each theme is analysed below in relation to the relevant research question, the theoretical indicators of the main frameworks, and supporting field data.

#### Theme 1: Shock and Uncertainty Amid Crisis (RQ1)

This theme captures the initial phenomenological stratum of the FWA experience, characterised by abrupt disruption of the everyday lifeworld (Lebenswelt) — Husserl (1970) concept for the taken-for-granted structures of daily existence. Nearly all 12 informants reported receiving policy information abruptly through WhatsApp group messages late at night, with no prior consultation. This mode of dissemination radically disrupted the informants' temporal horizon.

*"That night I was watching TV with my family when my phone went off with an announcement from the Sub-Division Head. I couldn't believe it at first, but after reading the circular directly from the group, it became clear this was serious. (P2)"*

*"The situation was really unpredictable at the time. The TV was full of news about demonstrations in various regions. So when this policy was announced, my immediate thought was: things have become unsafe. (P3)"*

From the JD-R model perspective (Barbieri et al., 2025; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023), this initial phase constitutes an acute emotional-cognitive job demand — the requirement to rapidly reconfigure work routines under conditions of high uncertainty. Unlike pandemic-era FWA (Tasrin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021), security-crisis FWA creates compound demands where uncertainty about personal safety intersects with professional uncertainty simultaneously. Phenomenologically, this theme illustrates Husserl's concept of Stimmung (attunement) — the pre-reflective affective tone through which the world is first encountered.

The initial FWA experience was fundamentally structured by a sudden disruption of the everyday lifeworld, producing compound emotional-cognitive demands that differed qualitatively from pandemic-based FWA.

This finding has direct implications for FWA preparedness design. Unlike pandemic-era FWA policies, which typically allowed weeks of preparation and communication, the security crisis required civil servants to transition within hours. The literature on organisational preparedness (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2025) consistently demonstrates that anticipatory communication — even brief and informal — substantially reduces the psychological burden of sudden work modality changes. The absence of such communication in this case amplified the initial shock, suggesting that a



pre-positioned FWA communication protocol could significantly moderate the intensity of the disruption phase in future crisis events.

### **Theme 2: Existential Dilemma Between Safety and Responsibility (RQ1, RQ2)**

This theme represents the most phenomenologically intense stratum of the experience, particularly among informants in leadership positions. A profound internal conflict emerged between the fundamental need for personal safety and the deeply internalised sense of professional duty.

*"As Bureau Head, I felt I had to set an example. If I stayed home all the time, what about the staff who also had to do Work From Office? But on the other hand, I also have a family worried about my safety. It was an immensely difficult dilemma. (P12)"*

*"I felt responsible for continuing to come to the office. It didn't feel right if everyone was at home while I was absent. Perhaps this is a civil servant mindset that has become too deeply ingrained: you must go to the office. (P1)"*

Within the JD-R model, this theme reveals what may be termed existential demands — a category not previously theorised by Barbieri et al. (2025) or Bakker et al. (2023), but explicitly proposed by Demerouti & Bakker, (2023) as a necessary extension of JD-R theory for crisis contexts. Existential demands require ontological negotiation — a choice between deeply held values — rather than merely cognitive effort. From the PSM framework (Christensen et al., 2017), this theme provides empirical evidence of PSM's self-sacrifice dimension under conditions of personal physical risk, revealing that PSM can generate negative affective states (guilt, moral conflict) rather than simply positive motivation.

The existential dilemma constitutes a category of job demand distinct from cognitive demands; FWA in security crises creates conditions requiring existential negotiation that cannot be resolved by technical policy design alone.

The gendered dimension of this dilemma, while not the primary focus of this study, warrants acknowledgment. Several female informants described additional layers of domestic responsibility that intersected with the professional dilemma — managing childcare arrangements while maintaining service commitments from home. This observation suggests that the existential dilemma of crisis-era FWA is not uniformly experienced across the workforce but is shaped by pre-existing domestic arrangements and social roles. Future research would benefit from exploring these intersectional dimensions more explicitly, as they have direct implications for equitable policy design.

### **Theme 3: Rapid Adaptation Through Technology as a Bridge for Service (RQ1, RQ2)**

Despite initial shock and existential tension, all 12 informants demonstrated capacity for relatively rapid adaptation, primarily through adoption of digital communication and collaboration tools.

*"The first day was still stiff, but by the second day things were flowing. We set up a regular online morning meeting for coordination. Documents were shared via Google Drive. Communication became more intensive through WhatsApp. (P5)"*



*"What surprised me was that so much work actually got done faster when working from home. No spontaneous meetings interrupting things, no pointless small talk — I could focus more. (P6)"*

However, adaptation was uneven and encountered structural barriers: unstable home internet, inaccessibility of physical files, and dependency on wet-ink signatures — revealing a digital infrastructure deficit.

Within the JD-R model, technology functioned simultaneously as a job resource (enabling coordination) and a job demand (requiring digital competency). Wang et al. (2021) identified similar challenges — work-home interference, ineffective communication, and procrastination — as key remote work demands. Vyas & Butakhieo, (2021) found that WFH during crisis conditions produced mixed outcomes, underscoring the importance of offering multiple work modalities. From the digital transformation perspective (Mergel et al., 2019), the improvised digital adoption confirmed that transformation requires a fundamental mindset shift, not only tool adoption. Phenomenologically, technology assumed the function of an intersubjective space — sustaining professional identity and collective presence amid physical uncertainty.

Technology functioned as both resource and demand, enabling rapid adaptation while revealing structural inequities in digital readiness; beyond its functional role, it served as an intersubjective space for maintaining professional identity.

#### **Theme 4: Reconceptualisation of the Meaning of Public Service (RQ2)**

The FWA experience precipitated a significant transformation in informants' understanding of public service, challenging the dominant assumption that service is constituted by physical presence.

*"I had always thought that public service meant being present at the office, serving the community in person. But during FWA, coordination with other agencies still proceeded, letters were still processed. I began to think: what matters is not the place, but the commitment. (P7)"*

*"I feel there has been a redefinition of "presence". Presence is not only physical, but also availability — to respond, to get things done. (P8)"*

From a PSM perspective (Christensen et al., 2017), this theme documents a deepening of public service motivation: informants moved from a location-based to a commitment-based understanding of professional obligation. This resonates with OECD's (2023) advocacy for results-based performance management, though the phenomenological analysis adds crucial nuance: this shift requires experiential learning that regulation alone cannot produce. Phenomenologically, this exemplifies Husserl's concept of *Sinnggebung* (meaning-constitution) — the act through which consciousness actively constitutes new meanings from lived experience.

The FWA experience produced a profound reconceptualisation of public service identity, expanding "presence" from physical attendance to functional availability and commitment — a meaning-shift constituted through lived experience.

This reconceptualisation aligns with broader debates in public administration about the appropriate basis for evaluating civil servant performance. Indonesia's bureaucratic reform agenda has increasingly emphasised output-based accountability, yet institutional culture continues to privilege visible attendance as a proxy for commitment and diligence (Tasrin et al., 2021). The crisis-induced experiential learning



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documented in this theme suggests that carefully designed non-crisis FWA programmes — gradually introduced with appropriate performance measurement systems — could accelerate this cultural transformation more effectively than regulatory change alone. The experience of productive WFH during the crisis created concrete, personal evidence that challenged deeply held assumptions, catalysing meaning-changes that policy pronouncements had failed to achieve.

### **Theme 5: Organisational Learning for Future Policy (RQ3)**

The fifth theme reflects informants' retrospective reflections on lessons to be extracted from the crisis experience for future policy and institutional development.

*"I think the government should offer flexible work options more regularly, not only during crises. This could improve our work-life balance without sacrificing productivity. (P9)"*

*"From this experience, I see the importance of adequate information technology infrastructure. We cannot implement FWA effectively without it. (P10)"*

*"The most important lesson for me is the importance of trust. Superiors must trust that their subordinates will continue working even when not visible. Without that trust, FWA cannot work. (P11)"*

From the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2023), this theme reveals that the resources most valued for effective FWA are relational and structural — trust, clear protocols, and equitable distribution — not merely technical. Breuer et al., (2016) confirmed trust as the strongest predictor of virtual team effectiveness. The FWA policy was perceived by most informants as organisational care, generating reciprocal trust whereby informants felt compelled to prove they had not abused the trust placed in them (Buick et al., 2024). From crisis management theory (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2025), the organisational learning articulated here reflects the concept of resilience: not bouncing back but bouncing forward — leveraging crisis experience to build more adaptive capacities (Kniffin et al., 2021).

The FWA crisis experience generated rich organisational learning; informants identified trust, infrastructure, and clear protocols as the three foundational resources for crisis-responsive FWA.

### **The Universal Essence: Phenomenological Structure**

Integrating the five themes through Colaizzi's Steps 5–6, the essence structure of the FWA experience can be described as a transformative journey progressing through four phenomenological phases: (1) disruption — sudden invalidation of the taken-for-granted lifeworld; (2) negotiation — intense existential dilemma between safety and responsibility; (3) adaptation — improvised reconstruction of service capacity through technology; and (4) transformation — constitution of new meanings about work, presence, and public service identity.

Based on in-depth analysis of all five themes, the universal essence is formulated as: existential negotiation between fear and professional commitment — a transformative journey to find meaning in service amid uncertainty. This essence reflects that FWA implementation in a security crisis is not merely a technical challenge but an existential



experience compelling civil servants to continuously negotiate between their basic need for security and their professional identity as public servants. All five informants who participated in member checking confirmed that this essence description accurately captured their experiences (Colaizzi, 1978; Wirihana et al., 2018).

The four-phase structure of this essence reveals important temporal and developmental dimensions of the crisis FWA experience. The disruption phase was characterised by involuntary and instantaneous: informants did not choose to enter a crisis but were thrust into one, their lifeworld suddenly restructured around entirely new operational parameters. The negotiation phase — the most phenomenologically intense — required active, ongoing decision-making under conditions of genuine moral uncertainty, with no established protocols to guide behaviour and no guarantee that the chosen course of action was correct. The adaptation phase demonstrated a form of practical wisdom: civil servants collectively improvised new work practices that preserved essential service functions, drawing on latent competencies in digital communication and self-organisation that office-bound routines had previously obscured. The transformation phase, finally, was not a singular event but an ongoing process of meaning-revision that extended beyond the four-day FWA period into informants' subsequent understanding of what public service fundamentally means.

## Discussion

The findings establish that FWA in a security crisis exhibits characteristics qualitatively distinct from pandemic-era FWA (Barbieri et al., 2025; Tasrin et al., 2021; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021) in three key dimensions: duration intensity, threat specificity, and moral complexity. The four-day duration created acute adaptation pressure; the localised, visible threat produced a distinctive situational anxiety; and the proximity of demonstrations to the government complex created a unique moral geography with no pandemic-era equivalent.

The most theoretically significant contribution is the identification of existential demands as a new category within the JD-R framework. Demerouti & Bakker, (2023) proposed extending JD-R theory for crisis contexts; this study provides empirical evidence from a non-Western public sector context. Bakker et al., (2023) review of the past decade of JD-R research did not identify existential demands — this study's contribution fills this gap by demonstrating that in crisis contexts, demands operate at an ontological, not merely cognitive, level.

The prominence of trust across all five themes confirms Breuer et al., (2016) meta-analytic finding, while adding phenomenological depth: trust in crisis-era FWA is not merely a predictor variable but a constitutive dimension of the existential experience itself. When the FWA policy was experienced as organisational care, it triggered a reciprocal dynamic in which civil servants felt compelled to prove themselves worthy of that trust — directly strengthening public service motivation (Christensen et al., 2017). The rapid, improvised digital adoption observed in Theme 3 confirms Mergel et al., (2019) argument that digital transformation requires a fundamental mindset shift, and demonstrates that necessity — not planning — can catalyse this shift most powerfully.

A particularly significant finding concerns the digital divide revealed within the Regional Secretariat's workforce. While younger informants adapted rapidly to digital collaboration tools, several senior informants reported substantial difficulties in accessing and operating unfamiliar platforms during the four-day crisis period. This intra-



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organisational digital divide created informal inequities in workload distribution: digitally proficient staff managed larger volumes of online coordination, while digitally less fluent colleagues struggled to contribute at comparable levels. Wang et al., (2021) similarly documented that self-discipline and digital competency serve as critical moderators of remote work effectiveness. Sunaryo et al., (2022) found that among Indonesian local government employees, organisational support for digital competency development was a significant predictor of positive FWA outcomes. These findings collectively underscore that infrastructure investment alone is insufficient: sustained digital literacy development must accompany any long-term FWA institutionalisation strategy.

The psychological contract dimensions of the FWA experience merit particular theoretical attention. Informants consistently perceived the Governor's Circular Letter Number 11410/2025 as more than a regulatory instrument — it was experienced as a relational act, a signal that the organisation recognised and valued them as whole persons rather than mere functional units. This perception activated what may be understood as a positive psychological contract exchange: the government's investment in employee safety generated a reciprocal investment in service quality from civil servants, even under conditions that would otherwise justify reduced effort. Kniffin et al., (2021) identified precisely this dynamic in their comprehensive review of COVID-19 workplace research, noting that organisational responses to crisis can either deplete or strengthen the psychological resources that sustain employee engagement. The implication for public sector leadership is significant: crisis-responsive FWA, when communicated empathetically and implemented equitably, functions not merely as a crisis management tool but as an organisational development intervention.

This study also contributes to the growing literature on organisational resilience in the public sector by demonstrating that resilience is not solely an organisational property but a phenomenologically constituted achievement — produced through the lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and individual choices of civil servants. Caligiuri et al., (2020) defined organisational agility as the capacity to respond effectively to crisis conditions through trust-based flexibility; this study reveals the micro-level experiential substrate of that agility: the moment-by-moment decisions of individual informants about whether to attend the office, how to maintain coordination, and how to sustain commitment to service when conventional structures have dissolved. This experiential substrate cannot be engineered through policy design alone; it must be cultivated through ongoing investments in trust, digital literacy, and the institutional conditions that make meaningful public service possible even in the most challenging circumstances.



**Table 2. Synthesis of Themes, Theoretical Indicators, and Contributions**

Theme	RQ	Main Theory Indicator	Core Finding
1. Shock & Uncertainty	RQ1	JD-R: Emotional-cognitive demands; Husserlian Lebenswelt disruption	Security-crisis FWA produces compound, acute demands absent in pandemic FWA
2. Existential Dilemma	RQ1, RQ2	JD-R: Existential demands (new); PSM: Self-sacrifice dimension	Introduces existential demands as a new JD-R category; PSM generates guilt under physical risk
3. Tech Adaptation	RQ1, RQ2	JD-R: Tech as dual resource/demand; Digital transformation	Technology serves as intersubjective space for maintaining professional community
4. Reconceptualisation	RQ2	PSM: Commitment deepening; Husserlian Sinngebung	Physical presence → functional presence: experience-driven, not regulation-driven
5. Org. Learning	RQ3	Crisis management: Bouncing forward; JD-R: Trust as resource	Trust + infrastructure + protocols = three pillars of crisis-responsive FWA

Source: Synthesised from interview data and theoretical analysis, 2025.

## CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study successfully explored and described the essence of civil servants' lived experiences at the East Java Provincial Regional Secretariat in implementing FWA policy during the security crisis of 1–4 September 2025. Using Husserl's (1970) descriptive phenomenological approach and Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step analysis method, the study generated rich qualitative data from 12 purposively selected informants, extracting 187 significant statements and constructing five major themes. Findings Against Research Objectives:

1. Five phenomenological themes were identified — shock and uncertainty, existential dilemma, technological adaptation, reconceptualisation of public service, and organisational learning — constituting the first comprehensive phenomenological portrait of security-crisis FWA in the Indonesian public administration literature.
2. The deeper meaning of FWA in a security-crisis context lies in its capacity to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about work, presence, and professional identity, catalysing a shift from presence-based to commitment-based public service understanding.
3. The universal essence is: *existential negotiation between fear and professional commitment — a transformative journey to find meaning in service amid uncertainty*. Validated by five informants through member checking.

Findings Against Research Questions:



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1. Civil servants experienced a four-phase trajectory — shock, existential dilemma, improvised adaptation, and reflexive questioning of work norms — qualitatively more acute and morally complex than pandemic FWA experiences.
2. FWA was assigned three layered meanings: operational (service continuity instrument), relational (organisational care signal), and identity-level (reconceptualising presence as functional availability rather than physical attendance).
3. The essence captures that civil servants face not merely a practical trade-off between safety and service, but an existential negotiation in which both identities — vulnerable human being and committed public servant — simultaneously make compelling claims.

This study makes four theoretical contributions: (1) enriches phenomenological public policy research by uncovering existential and emotional dimensions invisible to positivist approaches; (2) introduces existential demands as a new JD-R category for crisis contexts, complementing Demerouti & Bakker's (2023) crisis-era JD-R propositions; (3) demonstrates that public service motivation is a dynamic process generating negative affective states (guilt, moral conflict) under conditions of physical risk; and (4) contributes a non-Western perspective to FWA scholarship.

### Recommendations

1. For the East Java Provincial Government: (1) Develop Standard Operating Procedures for crisis-responsive FWA across diverse crisis scenarios; (2) strengthen ICT infrastructure including government-issued devices, secure VPN, cloud-based document management, and digital signature platforms; (3) transition to results-based performance management systems; (4) institutionalise FWA as a permanent non-crisis option for eligible positions.
2. For Agency and Bureau Heads: (1) Communicate FWA activation clearly, promptly, and empathetically — acknowledging employees' safety concerns; (2) ensure equitable workload distribution between WFO and WFH staff; (3) build trust as a managerial priority through regular check-ins and transparent feedback; (4) provide psychosocial support for crisis-related stress.
3. For Civil Servants: (1) Develop remote work self-management competencies proactively; (2) maintain proactive communication with supervisors during FWA periods; (3) engage in reflective practice to leverage crisis events as professional development opportunities.

### Limitations

1. Bounded research site: The Regional Secretariat is primarily coordinative; findings may differ in direct service delivery agencies.
2. Limited FWA duration: The four-day event limits generalisability to longer-duration FWA arrangements.
3. Memory bias: Retrospective interviews (one month post-event) raise reconstruction bias concerns, partially mitigated by member checking.
4. Exclusion of non-ASN perspectives: Contract employees' experiences, which may differ substantially, were not captured.



Future research directions: comparative studies across regional agencies; longitudinal studies on long-term FWA impacts; mixed-methods designs combining phenomenological depth with quantitative breadth; non-ASN phenomenological studies; and application of this framework to other crisis types (natural disasters, technological failures).

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