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Sustaining Meaningful Work in a Crisis: Adopting and Conveying a Situational Purpose

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Abstract

This two-year inductive study of a refugee-resettlement agency examines how employees navigated a workload surge caused by a refugee crisis and sustained the perceived meaningfulness of their work during and after the surge. Employees shifted their conceptualization of meaningfulness from quality to quantity during the surge; post-surge, they again redefined meaningfulness, to encompass both quality and quantity. During these transitions, employees changed how they worked to resettle refugees via three subprocesses: negotiating emotional tension (''how I feel''), adopting a situational purpose (''what my work is for in this situation''), and adjusting their work practices (''what to do to achieve the situational purpose''). Though some refugees who arrived during the surge reported worse outcomes, those who had been told the rationale for employees' quantity approach to work reported well-being and employment outcomes similar to those of refugees who had arrived during non-surge conditions. I offer a process model that elucidates how aid workers adapt their enactment of meaningful work in crisis conditions, highlighting finding a situational purpose—the provisional ''why'' or ''for what'' of their work in light of a new situation—while navigating a changing work environment.

Keywords: cognition, meaning of work, nonprofits, sensemaking, emotion

In the past three decades we have seen a growing interest in meaningful work on the part of researchers and practitioners alike (Koloc, 2013; Wrzesniewski, 2015; Bailey and Madden, 2016). More scholars of organization and management have begun to examine individuals' experiences of meaningful work, shedding light on its benefits and costs (e.g., Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Oelberger, 2019). Employees whose work provides them fulfillment and opportunities to have a beneficial societal impact enjoy such positive personal effects as higher work and life satisfaction and a stronger subjective sense of

[1] INSEAD

career success (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Dobrow, 2004; Hall and Chandler, 2005; Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Research has also established that engaging in meaningful work can entail costs (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Cardador and Caza, 2012; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Oelberger, 2019). For example, though zookeepers typically experience a strong sense of meaning and fulfillment at work, their resulting dedication and commitment prompt them to tolerate low pay and exact a toll on their physical and psychological health (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Despite such sacrifices, meaningful work continues to exert a powerful appeal to people in the workforce (Cascio, 2003).

Past research on meaningful work has largely assumed work contexts to be stable. A sample of scholarly studies of primary- and secondary-school teachers (Lobene and Meade, 2013), university faculty and staff (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Steger, Dik, and Duffy, 2012), healthcare workers (Cardador, Dane, and Pratt, 2011), and other organizational employees (Steger et al., 2013) reveals an exclusive focus on settings devoid of external disturbance. It is not uncommon for individuals to encounter workplace changes that may challenge their sense of meaningfulness and routines at work, but scant attention has been paid to understanding how individuals navigate meaningful work in the face of such changes, especially when they arise rapidly and unexpectedly. This is a serious omission. Given the potentially unstable nature of any work environment, and the inevitability of crises that can cause significant disturbance to organizations (Weick, 1988; Rerup, 2009), it is urgent to understand how and with what consequences employees who value meaningful work navigate workplace changes.

This research focuses on a type of workplace change that tends to be a direct consequence of any crisis: workload surge, defined as a sudden and substantial increase in workload. During unexpected catastrophic events, such as natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and disease outbreaks, many organizations must respond immediately to sudden increases in demand for their services or products (Arora, Raghu, and Vinze, 2010; Paturas et al., 2010; Shepherd and Williams, 2014; Rao and Greve, 2018). For example, hospitals, schools, food suppliers, and other entities must quickly accommodate the demands of a large number of people in need when earthquakes, hurricanes, diseases, or wars break out. Increases in demand translate into workload surges that could last a few days (e.g., helping people in need of shelter during a flood) or many years (e.g., resettling people in need of refuge during war). While nonprofits might be more likely than other organizations to confront workload surges, for-profits like manufacturers and retailers can also face spikes in workload in response to regulatory or market changes. In an unstable and unpredictable world, managing workload surges is arguably among the most critical challenges that organizations and their employees face.

When employees view their work as meaningful, they may be primed to weather the challenges of workload surge. Those who believe that their work has significance (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010) experience strong intrinsic motivation and a sense of obligation to a cause, both of which boost their internal resources (Richter and Hacker, 1998). Thus they are likely to stay the course in the face of difficulties and to proactively overcome challenges (Thompson and Bunderson, 2019). But such employees can demonstrate rigidity in how they conceptualize and perform

their work, rooted in deeply personal views about how it should be enacted (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Thompson and Bunderson, 2019). When workload surge precludes their preferred way of working, they may feel frustration and disappointment, ultimately leading to withdrawal (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). These two scenarios raise questions about how such employees can adaptively navigate workload surge and sustain their perceived meaningfulness. My two-year inductive study of how employees at a local U.S. refugee-resettlement agency managed a surge in workload during the Syrian refugee crisis examines how employees respond to and manage workload surge, and with what consequences.

MEANINGFUL WORK

Meaningful work is generally considered to be work that feels significant (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). For decades, most U.S. working adults have consistently named work significance as the most important characteristic of a job, ahead of such other attributes as high income, chance for advancement, short working hours, and job security (General Social Survey, 1973–2014).[1] What makes work meaningful varies from person to person; the same work can be deeply meaningful to some and less so to others (Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The factors that determine whether an individual considers particular work meaningful can be broadly categorized as internal or external. Internal factors are individuals' own needs, interests, competencies, identities, and spirituality. Generally speaking, work is viewed as meaningful if it fulfills compelling personal needs, entails activities that are of interest, fully utilizes and develops one's abilities, allows expression of one's authentic self, and connects one to something greater than the self, seen as a sacred calling pursued in the service of a higher being or a larger community (Maslow, 1971; Baumeister, 1991, 1998; Shamir, 1991; Davidson and Caddell, 1994; Gagné and Deci, 2005; Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010). External factors have to do with actors or entities outside oneself, such as colleagues and others who influence or are influenced by one's work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe, 2003; Grant, 2012; Carton, 2018) and the conditions in which the work is performed (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Specifically, research has demonstrated that employees perceive their work as more meaningful when they witness its positive impact on beneficiaries (Grant, 2012) or when they enjoy sufficient autonomy to modify tasks and relationships at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Berg, Grant, and Johnson, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Rosso and colleagues (2010) have conceptualized seven mechanisms whereby these factors can make work meaningful: authenticity (a sense of alignment between one's behaviors and one's authentic self), self-efficacy (feeling capable to make a difference), self-esteem (one's self-worth), purpose (a sense of direction and intentionality), belongingness (feeling connected with some people or entity), transcendence (a sense of connection to an entity or reality greater than the self), and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking (a process of social construction).

Research on individuals who find their work meaningful reveals largely positive outcomes in terms of well-being, both physically (e.g., improved health)

[1] https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/554/vshow

and psychologically (e.g., enhanced work and life satisfaction) (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). But it also finds that this population faces unique challenges. For instance, music students who view it as their calling to become professional musicians must accept the reality that such positions are extremely limited in number; their singlemindedness could render them overly optimistic and averse to considering alternative career options (Dobrow, 2013; Dobrow and Heller, 2015). International aid workers who view their work as deeply meaningful often experience emotional distance and conflict in personal relationships (Oelberger, 2019). In general, studies have suggested that individuals pursuing meaningful work tend to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on their work; they often engage in overwork and are inclined to tolerate low pay and poor working conditions, making them susceptible to exhaustion and exploitation (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Oelberger, 2019; Kim et al., 2020). As noted earlier, most research on individuals' experiences in meaningful work assumes that such work and the context in which it is performed remain stable. We need better understanding of how such individuals navigate a changing work context, and with what consequences. Furthermore, the challenges that have been identified in prior research tend to be unique to specific occupations; we still know little about how such employees respond to more commonplace challenges shared with people whose work is more routine and how they sustain their perception of meaningfulness in such circumstances. This research examines how employees pursuing meaningful work respond to a common organizational challenge—workload surge—and how they navigate associated fluctuations in demand.

When Meaningful Work Meets Workload Surge

A workload surge is a rapid increase in demand for employees' work. Organizations rarely have the extra resources needed to fulfill a surge in demand; funding and staffing are typically in short supply or slow to materialize. Thus employees, particularly those on the front line, must marshal their own resources—broadly, their knowledge, expertise, teamwork, and psychological power (Richter and Hacker, 1998)—and devote more effort and longer hours to their work responsibilities. Existing research in psychology and organizational behavior, though it has not addressed workload surge in particular, offers insight into the effects on employees of high job demands (e.g., Karasek, 1979; Edwards and Harrison, 1993; Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003; Spector et al., 2007). Such employees are likely to experience exhaustion, stress, and even burnout or depression (Karasek, 1979; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola, 2008), increasing their chances of health impairment or physical illness (Schnall, Landsbergis, and Baker, 1994; Bakker et al., 2003) and diminishing work engagement and job satisfaction (Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2006; Spector et al., 2007). These effects can undermine job performance (Taris, 2006; Jones et al., 2007; Bakker, Van Emmerik, and Van Riet, 2008). For example, research has shown that by increasing the risk of burnout, high job demands increase the number of days that employees are absent from work (Bakker et al., 2003), which delays task completion. In medicine, high job demands cause delays in services to patients (Berry Jaeker and Tucker, 2017). Residents and surgeons who experience fatigue, distress, or burnout also

make more medical errors (West et al., 2009; Shanafelt et al., 2010), contributing to higher patient mortality (Kuntz, Mennicken, and Scholtes, 2014).

This line of research suggests that workload surge, especially if it is intense and prolonged, can erode the perceived meaningfulness of employees' work in at least three ways. First, it drains their psychological resources and causes personal depletion (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017), which can undermine their felt competence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Second, it reduces job autonomy (Hackman and Oldham, 1976), making it hard to redesign tasks or relationships at work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Finally, it limits opportunities to build connections with beneficiaries and to have the positive impact on others that one intends (Grant, 2012). Existing research has suggested that employees pursuing meaningful work can manage to sustain a sense of meaningfulness when facing such challenging circumstances as having exploitative employers or experiencing moral injustices (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). They might also be able to sustain perceived meaningfulness as they navigate workload surge. However, we know relatively little about *how* they do so, especially when they face challenges associated with a changing work environment.

Because such employees are probably motivated to make sense of undesirable changes caused by episodes of workload surge, research on sensemaking might provide insight and guidance. Sensemaking is ''the process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations'' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 57). This process entails three main moves: (1) noticing and extracting cues from the environment, (2) interpreting these cues to construct a narrative that explains the unfamiliar or troubling situation, and (3) taking actions that accord with the constructed narrative or interpretation (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Workload surge can disrupt routine workflow, engender negative emotions, and pose a threat to the identity of employees pursuing meaningful work; thus it is a powerful trigger for sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Such employees might be likely to ask themselves, ''What is going on?'' ''What are the causes and consequences of these changes?'' ''Given these changes, is what I do still meaningful?'' and ''What should I do next?'' (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005). Changes associated with workload surge can challenge employees' existing views about what makes their work meaningful, a process that has been labeled ''sensebreaking'' and described as ''the destruction or breaking down of meaning'' (Pratt, 2000: 464). Some employees might conclude that their work is no longer meaningful and decide to withdraw; others might continue to find meaning in it and stay the course (Dobrow and Heller, 2015; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). For example, in a study of animal-shelter employees who professed a calling for their occupation, Schabram and Maitlis (2017) identified three different sensemaking patterns, or ''calling paths,'' whereby employees negotiate the challenges of a calling. Those on the ''practice-oriented'' path tend to interpret challenges as opportunities for mastery, and ultimately they likely remain and even thrive in their work; by contrast, those who follow the ''identity-oriented'' and ''contribution-oriented'' paths tend to view the same challenges as obstacles to expressing their selves or contributing significantly, and ultimately they tend to leave such work

(Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). The experience of these animal-shelter employees suggests that employees pursuing meaningful work respond to challenges at work differently and that one possible way to sustain a sense of meaningfulness is to interpret challenges as opportunities for development during sensemaking.

But like other research on how people experience challenges in meaningful work (Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep, 2006; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Cardador and Caza, 2012; Dobrow, 2013; Oelberger, 2019), the research by Schabram and Maitlis (2017) treated work and its challenges as static and consistent. Research that involves unexpected challenges has focused on changes occurring to oneself rather than to one's work, as in the case of committed musicians who had to endure the painful experience of abandoning their profession after sustaining injuries that prevented them from performing (Maitlis, 2009, 2012). When the work remains unchanged, employees who recognize its inherent challenges or experience personal mishaps that make doing the same work permanently infeasible are likely to experience a gradual sensemaking process. They need to reconcile the discrepancy between their idealized work life or romanticized expectations and the reality, and this tends to be a relatively linear process leading to either acceptance and personal growth or rejection of the challenging reality (Maitlis, 2009, 2012; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). The dynamics may be more complicated if the work context is evolving, with changes at work occurring often and less predictably. We still do not know how employees in an unstable context can quickly make sense of and adapt to a new work reality while maintaining a perception of meaningfulness. Furthermore, interpreting challenges as opportunities for mastery or growth is only one possible approach to persistence. It can even be unrealistic or infeasible if changes arise frequently and abruptly at work and are extremely intimidating. Thus we need a broader understanding of how employees can sustain perceived meaningfulness in response to disturbance and fluctuation in a constantly changing work environment—specifically, what emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dynamics underpin this process and what outcomes these dynamics might create. The resettlement of refugees during a crisis provides a suitable setting in which to examine these questions.

METHODS

Research Context: Refugee Resettlement

I conducted a two-year field study at Refugee and Immigrant Services (RISE), a refugee-resettlement agency in a northeastern U.S. city.[2] Refugees have been defined as those ''who have been forced to flee their countries because of persecution, war, or violence [and who] have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group'' (UNHCR, 2020a). The number of refugees worldwide recently reached a record high of almost 26 million (UNHCR, 2020b). Currently, fewer than 1 percent of refugees worldwide are resettled in United Nations member countries due to space constraints; the United States is one of 37 countries that offer resettlement programs for refugees. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is responsible for selecting which refugees to resettle in

[2] All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

the United States. Refugees who have been granted admission are randomly assigned to a city where they will be received by a local resettlement agency like RISE, whose employees provide assistance to support their transition.[3]

Like most other U.S. refugee-resettlement agencies, RISE relies on funding from both public and private sources [Report].[4] It receives federal funding via $2,000 in ''welcome money'' that the U.S. government provides each refugee upon arrival: RISE holds the money received by each family, allocating half to the family for rent and basic necessities and keeping the rest for its own operating costs. For a family of five, RISE receives a total of about $10,000; about half of this amount covers a security deposit and rent for an apartment that RISE has found for the family, as well as such other necessities as food for the first few days and car seats for small children.[5] After the first month RISE pays a portion of the rent for each subsequent month, using the remainder of the family's half of the welcome money until that money is exhausted; the balance of the rent is covered by the family or by direct cash assistance to the family from the U.S. Department of Social Services. Refugees resettled in the United States are generally expected to be employed and financially self-reliant within six months of arrival. In keeping with this guideline, employees of local resettlement agencies help refugees search for jobs and become economically independent.

At the time of this research, RISE had 12 full-time and eight part-time employees, of whom 15 (75 percent) were women and 19 (95 percent) were white; RISE also received help from hundreds of occasional volunteers.[6] RISE's organizational structure consists of six primary teams: the reception-and-placement team (N = 4), hereafter referred to as R&P, responsible for supporting refugees for three months following their arrival; the post-R&P team (N = 4), responsible for supporting refugees after their first three months; teams supporting refugees for at most five years in such specific domains as employment (N = 3), education (N = 2), and healthcare (N = 2); and those in administrative or other roles, e.g., directors, program coordinators, and legal services personnel (N = 5). R&P and post-R&P employees are often referred to as case managers.

My initial research goal was to examine how refugees manage transitions in such domains as language, culture, education, and employment. Analysis of early data suggested, however, that the resettlement agency and its frontline employees play a crucial role in shaping refugees' transitions. This is particularly true of RISE for two reasons. First, the city where RISE is located lacks sizable communities of people from most incoming refugees' source countries (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC, Iraq, Sudan, and Syria); thus the refugees received by RISE have no established enclaves to rely on, making RISE their primary source of support. Second, although entry-level jobs are numerous, the city offers few manufacturing or other labor-intensive job opportunities that require little English. This labor-market constraint obliges RISE employees to invest prodigious time and effort in helping refugees to

[3] Unless family members have previously settled in a particular city.
[4] The citation [Report] designates RISE's annual reports.
[5] According to RISE employees, refugee families with small children need car seats even if they do not have a car, because volunteers drive them to various destinations.
[6] The part-time employees were either students or people with other part-time jobs. The number of hours they spent working at RISE remained largely unchanged throughout my research.

learn English and to search for and socialize into jobs. These factors magnify the impact of RISE employees' work on refugees' transition and outcomes. Thus I shifted the focus of my research to examining how RISE employees supported refugees' resettlement. Two external shocks that occurred during the course of my research then provided an opportunity to study how RISE employees perceived and performed their work before, during, and after a surge in the number of incoming refugees.

My research spanned two fiscal years, from the beginning of October 2015 to the end of September 2017. Two federal-level policy changes during this time created exogenous shocks to RISE and instigated a workload crisis for its employees. The first shock resulted from a delay in implementing a plan that was formulated by President Obama to admit 85,000 refugees from all over the world during fiscal year 2016 (October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016) and that specified that at least 10,000 of these refugees should come from Syria, which was experiencing civil war and a refugee crisis. This goal represented a 22-percent year-over-year increase in the number of refugees to be resettled in the United States (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2015), but in the first eight months of fiscal year 2016, only 2,805 Syrian refugees had been admitted—far from the target number (Refugee Processing Center, 2017). To speed up the vetting process, staffing was increased in asylum countries such as Jordan and Turkey, where many Syrian refugees await permanent settlement in other nations. Consequently, the number of Syrian refugees arriving in the United States surged between June and September 2016: 9,782 Syrian refugees were admitted, which brought the total of admitted refugees in fiscal 2016 to 12,587 (Refugee Processing Center, 2017). This shock substantially increased the workload of RISE employees, especially given delayed and insufficient increases in staffing.

The second shock occurred on January 27, 2017, when President Trump signed an executive order, commonly known as ''the travel ban,'' to reduce the total number of refugees admitted in the 2017 fiscal year from a proposed 110,000 to 50,000 and to suspend the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days. Implementation of the travel ban was challenged in court, and refugees were still being admitted in 2017, but controversy resulting from the ban drastically decreased the rate of admission. A month-to-month comparison shows that the number of refugees admitted to the country dropped from 9,945 in October 2016 to 2,070 in March 2017; the number of Syrian refugees decreased from 1,297 to 282 (Refugee Processing Center, 2017). This shock in turn reduced the number of refugees received by RISE employees and thus their workload.

The two shocks subdivided my research into three periods: pre-surge, surge, and post-surge. Compared with their work in the pre-surge (N = 80) and post-surge (N = 55) periods, RISE employees resettled over three times as many refugees during the surge (N = 250). I examined the experiences of RISE employees and of the refugees they resettled, aiming to elucidate how RISE employees navigated the fluctuation in workload and to investigate the implications of their responses for refugees.

Data Sources

My data come from four major sources: (1) semi-structured interviews with all RISE employees and with a member of every Arabic-speaking refugee family

that arrived during any of the three periods of my research;[7] (2) field notes from observations conducted at RISE and with refugee families throughout the three periods; (3) a survey of adult refugees; and (4) archival data. Use of multiple data sources enabled me to triangulate findings and form interpretations with greater confidence (Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989). A summary of the data collected appears in Table 1.

Interviews and informal conversations. Because my initial goal was to study how refugees navigated their transitions, I began by interviewing refugees. I recruited participants in their daily English classes, which were mandatory for those who spoke little or no English on arrival. Accompanied by a translator fluent in Arabic and English, I explained that we were university researchers eager to learn about their lives in the United States and that we would like to schedule interviews with them in their homes. We emphasized that we were not affiliated with the government or with RISE and that the information they provided would be kept strictly confidential. Every Arabic-speaking refugee we approached agreed to participate; we visited and conducted semi-structured interviews with 60 families, of whom 14 had arrived before the surge, 35 during the surge, and 11 after the surge. Each home visit/interview lasted from 90 to 150 minutes. At the end of the visit, I gave the family $40 as thanks for participating in the study. By the time we visited each family, they had been in the U.S. for about four months. With the advent of the surge, I began to notice differences between the accounts of refugees who arrived during the surge and those who had arrived earlier; these differences suggested a deterioration in refugees' experiences with RISE during the surge. This observation led me to examine how RISE employees responded to and made sense of the surge and how their responses had influenced refugees' employment and well-being outcomes.

To study these emerging questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews, between 20 and 80 minutes in length, with all 20 RISE employees between July 2016 and July 2017. The interviews were conducted while employees were experiencing the surge: for 16 employees, the surge lasted from June 2016 until March 2017; the remaining four, who were members of the post-R&P team, experienced a surge three months later, from September 2016 until May 2017. I also re-interviewed ten employees and documented 28 informal conversations with the other ten post-surge.[8] As I started interviews a month after the surge began for 16 of the RISE employees, I could not interview them in their pre-surge period. To complement employees' retrospective accounts of their pre-surge experience, I leveraged 19 informal conversations with the four post-R&P employees that I had conducted and documented before they experienced the surge. Such informal conversations lasted at most 10 minutes and occurred while I volunteered or conducted observations at RISE. They were

[7] At the time of this research, Arabic was the native language of 80 percent of refugees resettled by RISE; they were from Syria or Sudan. Others spoke Pashto, Farsi, Swahili, and other languages. I decided to recruit only Arabic-speaking refugees due to the high cost of translation for other languages.

[8] I did not re-interview the other ten employees because multiple attempts to arrange to do so were unsuccessful. I did have several informal post-surge conversations with each of them; their accounts were largely similar to those of colleagues I formally interviewed post-surge.

Table 1. Summary of Data Collected*

Interviews		Observations		Surveys		Archival Documents	
Interviewees	# Interviews	Targets	# Hours	Respondents	# Responses	Type	# Files
Refugees	60	Refugees	140	Refugees	90	Meeting minutes [Meeting]	20
Pre-surge [R-#-Pr]	14	Pre-surge families [Ro-#-Pr]	70			Annual reports [Report]	2
Surge [R-#-S]	35	Surge families [Ro-#-S]	50			English class attendance	400 (days)
Post-surge [R-#-Po]	11	Post-surge families [Ro-#-Po]	20			Media articles [Media]	166
RISE employees	30 with 20 employees	RISE	66				
Pre-surge [Role-#-Pr]	–	In office [Office]	42				
Surge [Role-#-S]	20	Orientations [Orient.]	6				
Post-surge [Role-#-Po]	10	English classes [Eng.]	6				
47 recorded informal conversations with 14 employees		Job classes [Job]	12				

* Bracketed labels are used in the text to indicate sources of data. For example, [R-1-Pr] denotes a quote from an interview with a refugee family that arrived in the U.S. pre-surge and was given the identifier 1.

not recorded; immediately after each, I wrote down verbatim accounts or summaries of pertinent content. I used informal conversations to capture employees' immediate feelings and thoughts while working, a common practice in field studies that examine focal dynamics unfolding in real time (e.g., Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Huy, 2002; Huising, 2015).

A timeline of these interviews and conversations appears in Table 2. In interviews, RISE employees described both their present-time experience and their experience during the immediately preceding period. All 90 interviews (60 with refugees and 30 with RISE employees) were recorded and transcribed verbatim by external transcribers. Interviews in Arabic were transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English by a professional translator. My interview protocols are listed in Online Appendices A and B.

Observations and field notes. To complement insights from the interviews and informal conversations, I gathered additional information by closely observing nine refugee families, three each who had arrived pre-surge, during the surge, and post-surge. From all the families arriving during each period, I selected three whose breadwinners varied in age (from 25 to 60) and country of origin (Sudan or Syria), two factors likely to affect refugees' resettlement experiences and outcomes (Bansak et al., 2018). To learn how they navigated their transition, I visited each family once every two weeks for 12 weeks; each visit lasted from one to five hours, for a total of about 140 hours of observation. I also observed RISE employees by shadowing them and by volunteering in the RISE office twice a week for 20 weeks; each stint lasted about an hour, for a total of 42 hours.[9] I attended three orientations for newly arrived refugees (two

[9] My volunteering mostly involved driving some refugees to RISE for appointments or classes, greeting and chatting with those waiting for their appointments or classes, and driving some back home or to other places afterward.

Table 2. Interviews and Informal Conversations with RISE Employees, July 2016–July 2017*

RISE Employee (Role-ID)	July 2016	Aug. 2016	Sept. 2016	Oct. 2016	Nov. 2017	March 2017	April 2017	May 2017	June 2017	July 2017
R&P-1	S						Po			
R&P-2	S						Po			
Education-3	S							Po		
Employment-4		S					Po			
Employment-5		S						Po		
R&P-6			S						Po	
Employment-7			S						Po	
Coordinator-8			S							Po
Post R&P-9	(Pr)†			S						Po
Post R&P-10	(Pr)			S						Po
Healthcare-11				S			(Po)			
Coordinator-12					S		(Po)			
Education-13						S		(Po)		
Healthcare-14						S		(Po)		
R&P-15						S	(Po)			
Post R&P-16	(Pr)					S			(Po)	
Post R&P-17		(Pr)					S		(Po)	
Director-18							S		(Po)	
Legal-19								S		(Po)
Coordinator-20								S		(Po)

* Shaded areas represent surge periods for individual employees. Quotes from a given interview are denoted in the text as [Role-#-Period]. For example, [R&P-1-S] denotes a quote from an interview with an R&P employee who was given the identifier 1 and was in his/her surge period.

† Parentheses signify informal conversations, not semi-structured interviews.

during the surge and one after the surge, for a total of six hours), as well as six English classes and six employment-preparation classes (four of each type during the surge and two after the surge, for 12 hours in total). The extensive field notes I took during these observations resulted in approximately 300 double-spaced pages of qualitative data.

Survey. I collected survey data from each adult (aged 18+) member of the 60 refugee families I interviewed, six months after his or her arrival. The survey was administered online, in Arabic, and included measures of demographics (i.e., gender, age, marital status, family size, years of education, health status, socioeconomic status in home country, and English level), individual traits and attitudes (i.e., Big Five, resilience, locus of control, grit, growth mindset about intelligence, self-esteem), employment status and pay, and well-being (i.e., loneliness, community belongingness, life satisfaction, satisfaction with specific domains, expected upward mobility). An electronic link and detailed instructions on how to complete the survey were sent to 116 adult refugees; participants completed the survey using their smart phones or a tablet I provided. I received 90 completed responses (a response rate of 78 percent). Online Appendix C describes the variables measured in the survey.

Archival data. I collected archival data from RISE, including minutes of 20 staff meetings totaling 80 double-spaced pages; refugees' English-class attendance records for roughly 400 days during the three periods;[10] and two annual

[10] Each refugee received an English-class attendance score, calculated as the percentage attended of the total number of such classes offered during his or her first three months.

reports covering my research period. My other source of archival data was popular media. Using a news database and search engine provided by Factiva, I searched for articles containing the terms *refugee/refugees* published between 2015 and 2017 in the state where RISE is located, yielding a total of 286 articles. After eliminating irrelevant items (e.g., news on domestic tax refugees), I gathered and reviewed 166 newspaper and magazine articles.

Data Analysis

Following an inductive, grounded theory-development approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I based my analysis primarily on the interview, informal conversation, and observation data. This approach entailed simultaneously collecting and analyzing data: moving back and forth among transcripts and field notes, interpretations, my emerging conceptual framework, and the literature. To illustrate my data analysis more precisely, I describe the iterative process as evolving over four phases.

In the first phase, I coded the transcripts of my interviews with the first 20 refugee families I visited. I read through these transcripts repeatedly, coding for differences in their responses to my questions. My codes at this stage were descriptive, intended to capture accurately how refugees described and felt about their experiences (Locke, 2001). For example, I coded for their descriptions of and (dis)satisfaction with how RISE had helped them find jobs. I noticed little variation among refugees who had arrived during the same period, but differences emerged between the positive experiences of refugees who had arrived pre-surge and the negative experiences of those who arrived during the surge. My observations at RISE suggested, however, that its employees had sustained high levels of effort and dedication throughout the surge. This inconsistency prompted me to collect more data on whether and how RISE employees perceived and enacted refugee resettlement differently before, during, and after the surge, by interviewing them and more refugees, as well as conducting observations with both.

In the second phase, I repeatedly read the interview transcripts and field notes as I gathered more data from RISE employees and refugees. As in the first phase, I coded descriptively for differences among RISE employees' accounts of their work, actions taken in the course of their work, and refugees' accounts of their experiences (Locke, 2001). I observed little variation across employees, but coding revealed noteworthy changes in narratives and work practices as the surge took hold and eventually ended. Applying within-case analysis methods suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1984), I documented in detail the accounts and actions of each RISE employee pre-surge, during the surge, and post-surge to ''become intimately familiar'' (Eisenhardt, 1989: 540) with their experiences in each phase and as they transitioned into the next period. I then mapped RISE employees' accounts and actions onto the refugees' experiences in each period, as captured in interview and survey data.

In the third phase, I consolidated and abstracted my descriptive codes by their underlying theoretical constructs, a process known as axial coding (Locke, 2001). For example, while documenting employees' responses to the surge, I applied several descriptive codes to their narratives about the pre-surge period (e.g., ''telling clients to ask people at RISE for help whenever they need to''

and ''helping clients ask for permission to be absent from work'') and the surge period (e.g., ''telling clients to figure out how to get internet on their own'' and ''not helping clients who did not show up to work''). These codes suggested that during the surge, employees shifted to expecting refugees to shoulder major resettlement-related responsibilities themselves, generating the axial codes ''internalizing/externalizing responsibility.'' Analysis during the second and third phases revealed fundamental changes across the three periods both in how RISE employees understood the purpose of their work and in their work practices, with corresponding effects on refugees. This pattern raised new questions about how these changes had occurred and what factors had triggered or facilitated them.

In the fourth phase, I focused on seeking answers to these new questions by returning to the interview transcripts and field notes. I repeated descriptive and axial coding with the aim of identifying the factors that had set in motion the changes in RISE employees' accounts and actions (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Locke, 2001). I iterated between the emergent factors and constructs drawn from existing literatures (e.g., sensegiving) to build a process model illustrating how RISE employees had changed their interpretations and enactment of work, while sustaining a sense of meaningfulness, as they responded to a fluctuating workload (Charmaz, 2006). I then assessed whether the pattern of changes—and the factors driving the change process I had identified—had been suggested in other data sources. After drafting a process model, I conducted member checks with four informants who validated my interpretations and conclusions.

FINDINGS

During our interviews and informal conversations, I asked each employee, ''What do you like most about what you do?'' and ''What is most meaningful to you about the work you do at RISE?'' All 20 employees, without exception, described how deeply meaningful they found their work. One said, ''I'm from a refugee family, and every part of this work means so much to me. . . . I love everything I do in refugee resettlement and want to keep doing it as long as I could'' [Post R&P-9-(Pr)].[11] Nine employees spontaneously used the term *calling*. One stated, ''Being part of refugee resettlement is my calling. I don't care what I do with refugees. I can do anything, anything that can change and better their life. . . . Working with refugees is what I want to do'' [Employment-4-S]. Seven others answered yes when I asked, ''Do you consider your work a calling?'' Their dedication to improving refugees' lives made it particularly striking that during the surge their emphasis on the importance of caring for refugees quickly diminished; unsurprisingly, refugees who arrived during the surge fared worse in terms of well-being and employment outcomes than those who arrived either pre- or post-surge. Even more striking was that, despite their intense workload and refugees' dissatisfaction during the surge, employees continued to believe in the meaningfulness of their work. The key explanation was that during the crisis they embraced an alternative purpose for refugee

[11] Codes in the form [Employee role-#-Pr/S/Po] denote data from an interview with an employee given code # who was in his/her pre-surge, surge, or post-surge period. Parentheses signify informal conversations, not formal interviews.

resettlement—a situational purpose—and accordingly adopted different practices to achieve that purpose. I labeled employees' perception and execution of their work's purpose in each period their ''enactment of meaningful work.'' The rest of this section describes how employees adapted their enactment of meaningful work as they transitioned into and back out of the surge; it culminates in a theoretical model of adaptation of the enactment of meaningful work to sustain meaningfulness in response to a disturbance in the work itself. The illustrative data presented in this section are supplemented by additional supporting data in Tables 3–5.

From Quality-Focused to Quantity-Focused Enactment of Meaningful Work

From the pre-surge period to the surge period, the focus of RISE employees' enactment of refugee resettlement shifted from quality to quantity. This section describes both forms of enactment and the transition between them. Because my findings about the pre-surge period are largely based on employees' retrospective accounts, they should be read as suggestive rather than definitive.

The pre-surge period: Quality-focused. During the pre-surge period, from October 2015 through May 2016, RISE received about 20 families totaling about 80 refugees; two to five families arrived each month. For each family, RISE employees must complete a list of tasks mandated by the U.S. government. For example, within the first three months of a family's arrival, R&P employees must complete such tasks as ''moving them into their apartment, getting them set up to receive financial assistance, and procuring documents like Social Security cards and employment authorization cards'' [R&P-1-S]. However, employees stressed the necessity of doing more than these required tasks to successfully resettle a refugee family:

> This is a completely new place, a completely new life to our clients. . . . Yes, it's guaranteed that you have a home with a bed to sleep in and you get an ID and some money, but how are you going to survive the next month, the next year, or longer? There's much more to be done. [Post R&P-16-(Pr)]

Given the multitude of challenges facing each refugee, employees shared the belief that the ultimate purpose of refugee resettlement is to ensure that each refugee can independently navigate his or her daily routine in an unfamiliar place. As one employee explained:

> Before the surge happened, the staff–client ratio was at a reasonable level. We didn't feel overwhelmed. . . . Everyone here would agree that it is extremely important to ensure each of our clients feel comfortable and confident and have the resources they need to make a successful transition. . . . This is what refugee resettlement is for; this is why we are here; this is why we do this work. [Healthcare-11-S]

Consistent with this belief, employees indicated that supporting their clients' transitions gave them a great deal of satisfaction. When I asked a post-R&P employee what she liked about her work, she replied:

> I love being there when each of my clients finds successes in their lives here. . . . When they first arrive it can be quite stressful and overwhelming, but over time these kinds of milestones happen where, oh, you know, ''I'm enrolled in English class and I'm making progress'' or ''I'm on my first job'' or ''All my children are enrolled in school and they're really happy.'' So watching these things happen to each client that are tangible results of my work is really rewarding, and it kind of makes it all worth it. [Post R&P-10-(Pr)]

Employees' accounts of their pre-surge experience tended to express a shared conviction that the staff should assume, or internalize, responsibility for facilitating refugees' transitions. As one recalled, ''I was going above and beyond what I could, because it's my responsibility to make sure my clients are on track to be self-sufficient'' [R&P-6-S]. Employees often told refugees, ''Come find us whenever you need help'' [Office].[12] One post-R&P employee stated that helping refugees in an ongoing, open-ended way, though not required, was an important aspect of their work:

> We don't want clients to feel they are forgotten because they have been here for a while or we are receiving new people. We want them to know we are here to support whenever they need help, and make sure they have all the resources they need to continue to learn and pursue their goals. [Post R&P-10-(Pr)]

Similarly, the three-person employment team suggested that, pre-surge, they had internalized responsibility for helping refugees not merely find jobs but also manage any job-related issues that might subsequently arise. ''Once someone gets hired, that's not the end of it,'' one team member said. ''There are usually a lot of issues that come afterward. And before the surge, I always felt that I should definitely jump in and help them with everything.'' He offered an example: ''Some clients, mostly clients from the Middle East, would have conflicts with their female supervisors. We have to talk to our Middle Eastern guys, like, 'Here, you have to listen to anyone that's your supervisor, whether they're female or male,' because sometimes they don't respect their employer if she's a female'' [Employment-S-7].

To equip each refugee for a successful transition, employees offered individualized support. As a post-R&P employee explained prior to the surge, ''There's a box in my mind that I check, basically saying that the client can get through this and that task or not. So whatever that client needs to make that happen, I would do it'' [Post R&P-17-(Pr)]. Typically, determining whether a refugee could complete a task independently entailed three recurring steps: teach, observe, and evaluate. For instance, after teaching a refugee how to take a bus, an R&P employee observed the refugee do so alone and evaluated whether she was capable of taking a bus comfortably. If yes, they continued on to the next task; if no, they returned to the first step [Ro-1-Pr].[13] Employees thus customized the time and effort they expended on each case and individualized each refugee's transition. A member of the education team described how, pre-surge, she had connected refugee parents with their children's schools: ''I did everything I could to make sure that each family knows where

[12] The attribution [Office] signifies observations conducted at RISE employees' offices.
[13] Codes in the form [Ro-#-Pr/S/Po] denote observations conducted with a refugee family assigned a code of # who arrived pre-surge (Pr), during the surge (S), or post-surge (Po).

their children are going to school, and knows how to get there, and knows how to get in contact with the school if they have to'' [Education-3-S].

These findings provide suggestive evidence that, pre-surge, RISE employees believed the central purpose of refugee resettlement to be ensuring that each refugee made a successful transition; they viewed themselves as the primary actors responsible for achieving this goal, and they provided customized services to each refugee. Such quality-focused enactment promoted employees' personal connections with refugees and facilitated their resettlement, but it was no longer sustainable once the surge began.

In transition. Beginning in June 2016, in response to ''the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time'' (UNHCR, 2016), RISE employees experienced a substantial increase in workload. For about seven months, until January 2017, the number of incoming refugee families increased to ten or more from a pre-surge maximum of five per month. Employees referred to the period from June 2016 to March 2017 (and through May 2017 for the post-R&P team) as a ''surge'' because the workload far exceeded their own and RISE's capacity. RISE leaders foresaw the surge would persist for some time given the severity of the refugee crisis, and they quickly began expanding capacity by fundraising more intensively, hiring additional staff, and seeking support from community groups and churches [Meeting]. But new refugees arrived much faster than additional support did. As one employee said:

> Our leaders are very positive about helping the most people, and we have a lot of success in fundraising—and I think we truly believe that we can take on as many as possible, and then we will be able to fundraise in connection with that. But in practice I think that there's a huge delay between the new numbers coming in and our capacity expanding. And I think that was the real issue. And, you know, during the brunt of the surge, for three months we had just two full-time case managers, each having almost 20 cases, and we were short of money, short of volunteers, and just short of everything. [R&P-2-S]

The surge in workload elicited intense emotions from employees, who described feeling excited and hopeful but also stressed and powerless. One employee shared her conflicted feelings: ''I'm very excited about welcoming more clients. . . . I would do everything I could to help them start a new life. . . but just look at my desk, the paperwork, all these things I have to do. . . . It's getting very stressful'' [R&P-1-S]. Before the surge, a post-R&P employee had expressed eagerness to support more refugees: ''I think we can handle more. . . . I'd like to help more clients. . . . I like being part of their transition and seeing them do things on their own—that's really rewarding'' [Post R&P-16-(Pr)]. But when his workload soared, he quickly felt overwhelmed: ''I've definitely underestimated how overwhelming it is. . . . I still think this is exciting, that we can help more people come here, but I'm also feeling powerless. . . . There's so much that needs to be done, and yet there's only so much I can do'' [Post R&P-16-S]. Another employee concurred: ''There is always more you want to do, but there are so many clients. And the clients I've worked with have so much need that, you know, you can never truly serve them in the way you want. So we're kind of having to reconcile that tension'' [R&P-6-S]. The

demand for help was so unrelenting that some employees were on the verge of burnout. As one reported:

> [One day] I just broke down. I was just—I started laughing with my co-workers. We were laughing about something, but it was actually a really stressful and difficult situation. And we were just laughing at the ridiculousness of it. And while we were laughing, I just—it turned into tears. I was—and I just started crying. I couldn't stop. And so my coworkers almost cried too, and we decided to go get a tea, like we had to go. We just needed to walk away. Our supervisor was like, ''Sometimes just take a half-hour and go outside.'' [Employment-4-S]

When pressed about how laughter had turned to tears, this employee suggested:

> It was because of the ridiculous amount of work, the strain that burns you out. . . . Because every day during the surge I can't get through an email. I can't get to a 10-minute email without having interruptions from five clients who have this and that need. And it's difficult to get anything done. You can't follow through with anything because there's always something. [Employment-4-S]

Overwhelmed by strain and emotional tension, employees began to reassess the aim of refugee resettlement in a crisis situation and to ponder a fundamental question: ''Should I continue to focus on making sure each of my clients is comfortably settled here while there are so many others waiting for my help?'' [R&P-2-S]. One employee described seeking to make sense of the challenge: ''I would pull myself out of the nitty-gritty of my job and look at the big picture'' [Employment-5-S]. By looking at ''the big picture,'' some seemed to find an alternative purpose in the new situation: a situational purpose. One employee elaborated: ''So I enter this type of job because I want to do good and I want to help each refugee, and that still happens. But I don't have warm interactions with every one of them on a daily basis now given the surge. . . . I have to kind of sit back and appreciate the big picture: that I'm helping to resettle many refugees in an unprecedented refugee crisis'' [Coordinator-20-S]. The new situational purpose—to resettle many refugees—meant that time spent with, and service provided to, any individual refugee would have a limit. Employees rarely offered customized support even when it was sorely needed. One employee explained:

> I now think about the more than 20 cases—almost 100 clients—I have, in everything I do. Because of that, I found myself having to say to clients who really do need the help that I can't help them. And that can be tough. Then I will suggest that they reach out to people in their community to get this done. But for some people, they don't have many community members, or they don't have many friends, and that can be tough—because even if they don't have friends who can help them, I still can't help them. So you kind of know that you're leaving people out to dry. [Employment-7-S]

Not all employees were able to readily embrace a situational purpose. Doing so seemed less feasible for seven employees who had described choosing refugee resettlement as a career because of, for instance, an ardor for ''learning about each refugee's stories'' [Education-3-S] or for ''the idea of helping a family build a new life'' [R&P-6-S]. Such declarations seem to suggest a modern interpretation of a calling, which ''emphasizes 'inner requiredness'—

fascination, need, obsession, self-indulgence rather than duty'' (Thompson and Bunderson, 2019: 431). The surge undermined their main sources of joy, making it difficult for them to treat enlarging the number of incoming refugees as a new purpose and engendering a sense of loss. One employee lamented:

> When the surge just started, I remember feeling lost. . . because I was too busy to talk with any of my clients for even just ten minutes. . . . I wasn't sure what's the point of resettling refugees if we couldn't even have a meaningful conversation with them to understand their needs and aspirations. . . . I didn't know what this is all about or what I'm supposed to do. [R&P-6-S]

By contrast, the other 13 employees had described entering refugee resettlement more out of a sense of duty than for intrinsic gratification. One asserted that ''refugees are victims of a broken society and we, the privileged, should help them as much as we can'' [Post R&P-10-(Pr)]; another explained that ''I come from a refugee family, and I feel the responsibility to help those who shared the same experience'' [Employment-4-S]. This motivation is in keeping with the neoclassical definition of a calling, which ''emphasizes 'external requiredness'—duty, obligation, responsibility, a fire in need of putting out'' (Thompson and Bunderson, 2019: 431). On the first few days that workload increased markedly, all 13, without apparent hesitation, specified the resettlement of many refugees as their new purpose, given an unprecedented refugee crisis [Office]. With this new situational purpose, they described maintaining positive connections with individual refugees as less important:

> There's no guarantee that the people you're working with will be thankful to you, and I'm okay with that from people, and that makes it [a] really hard job. But you can't expect people to thank you; you can't expect people to like you. One of my clients probably thinks I'm cool, or they probably think, ''This girl did nothing for me,'' or ''I don't know what she was doing.'' But I, you know, I have no control over that. That's something I ultimately am becoming okay with because, you know, I can't control it, and I'm now looking at the bigger picture, that I'm helping to resettle many people into a safer place. [Post R&P-10-S]

Despite their initial sense of loss, it only took about a week for the employees who experienced ''inner requiredness'' to appreciate and endorse the situational purpose of resettling more refugees [Office]. Their shift seemed to have been effectively facilitated by leaders' efforts at the onset of the surge to ''influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality'' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). I identified three main sensegiving moves on the part of RISE leaders. First, they bolstered employees' occupational and organizational identity by framing the task as a challenge that refugee-resettlement professionals and RISE must accept. ''Receiving refugees is one of the most noble traditions in our country,'' said one RISE leader at a staff meeting. ''We work in a refugee-resettlement agency; we have committed ourselves to resettling refugees, and we cannot turn our backs on the millions of refugees now who are crying for help. . . . These are lives that we can save'' [Office]. Employees' identities as staff members working in refugee resettlement and at RISE became more salient. One of them said after the meeting, ''[Our leader] just made me think, 'This is

what we do. Of course we should [resettle more refugees]; like now is the time, you know. Maybe five years from now there won't be this need and things will really slow down. Now is the time that people need our help, and it's our job to help them'' [Office].

Second, RISE's leaders prompted employees to consider the alternatives that refugees would face if they were not resettled. As one employee recalled:

> In order to reach the goal [of accepting 10,000 Syrian refugees], they [the federal government] were asking all the agencies, ''Can you increase your capacity?'' And our leaders were like, ''Yes, we'd love to!'' Whereas we were all being, like, ''No more people please. We can't; we're physically exhausted; there's no houses; it's too much.''. . . But our leaders were like, ''Well, we have to; there's nowhere else for these people to go, so we have to take them.'' And we agreed. So we did. And we just kept getting more and more and more. [R&P-1-S]

Contemplating the alternatives for refugees seems to have concentrated employees' attention on the surge's positive implications and on the impact they would have on many refugees' lives. It also seems to have steered employees to focus on the quantitative aspect of their work's impact rather than its impact on each individual. As one employee remarked:

> I wouldn't have the courage to bring in such a large number of refugees all at once if not for the leaders' firm decision. They helped me see the counterfactual—like, if we didn't do it, all these people would very likely have little chance to survive or be separated from their family for an unpredictable period of time. [Coordinator-20-S]

Finally, leaders' open expression of emotion intensified their sensegiving. Specifically, their passion for resettling numerous refugees was highly motivating and empowering to employees. ''[Our leader] is awesome, and he's a great supervisor; he's a great director; he's our fearless leader; he goes out there and he loves what he does. And he gets us excited,'' said one employee. ''He's like a teacher. When you have a teacher who loves what they do, you love learning that subject even if you don't like it, you know. So that's what it's like when he's like, 'Yes we can take all these people''' [Education-3-S]. Another employee praised the same leader:

> He's very enthusiastic. . . . He's also very convincing, you know. So, he convinces us we can do this, like, ''Let's take on double the refugees we had last year.'' And we're like, ''Oh, I'm not sure, and that's going to—that's scary.'' And he's like, ''You know what? But we can do it.'' And then we all get excited about it, and we're like ''Okay, let's do it, let's do it.'' [R&P-15-S]

Leaders' sensegiving inspired and energized all employees, especially those impelled by ''inner requiredness,'' who began to perceive joy and impact in resettling a surging number of refugees.

But employees were not provided guidance on how to handle the surge in practical terms on the front lines. They quickly learned that, to fulfill their new situational purpose, the permeable boundary they had formerly enjoyed with refugees would have to be replaced with a firm and unyielding one. When work demands encroached on their personal lives, many employees decided that ''we have to come up with a new way to do this'' [R&P-2-S] and began to

fortify the boundary between themselves and refugees. As one employee recounted:

> Then very soon after the surge happened, I kind of saw—I did not foresee how bad it could get, and how—I mean, during that surge period I lost so much of my personal time for months, and I couldn't balance work and my personal life, because it was impossible. So ever since that, I've been more strict with putting down barriers between my work and my personal time, and between me and my clients. That has led me to kind of not sweat the small details, like, you know, the little things through the day that I'm not going to harp on. [Healthcare-11-S]

Setting boundaries could take the form of emotional disengagement, as this employee lamented: ''It's kind of unfortunate because, in order to help many people, in some ways I have to disengage emotionally from day-to-day interactions I have with the clients'' [Post R&P-9-S]. Boundaries could also be implemented via clear refusals:

> So, because most clients need more than I can actually give, I have to have strict boundaries in what I can help with and what I cannot help with. And that's kind of a survival technique. I think it's absolutely necessary for this type of work. You know, being able to say clearly yes or no, I can or can't help, is crucial. . . . If you're wishy-washy on things, if you say, ''Oh, maybe, I don't know; maybe I can do it, blah blah blah,'' then the client will say, ''Oh, I could push her on this.'' And then it's just, they keep on coming back. So that's why I've developed a pretty strong, but kind and compassionate, no. [R&P-6-S]

Given the strong personal relationships that employees had previously enjoyed with individual refugees, strengthening boundaries was painful, as one employee recalled:

> When the surge just started, it's like—I remember, it's like—I can truly remember, it was so overwhelming and difficult to set these boundaries because, you know, it would be so hard for the clients to figure anything out without your help, like how. . . I just had to stop myself from thinking any more about it. [Education-13-S]

But the same employee reported that ''Maybe after a week or two, it became fine. At this point I feel pretty comfortable with it'' [Education-13-S]. Another employee explained that she had quickly adjusted to enforcing boundaries as a necessary tactic to avoid burnout:

> It really takes learning it, and practice, in order to actually master it. And also, of course, when you fail to set a boundary, immediately you see the consequence of that, which is: you are working overtime and stressing yourself out. [R&P-15-S]

About a month after the surge began, employees found themselves becoming more adept at setting boundaries [Office]. One reported that ''I'm becoming better at setting boundaries and saying no, but saying no in a nice way, hopefully, most of the time'' [Employment-4-S]. Setting boundaries went hand in hand with the new situational purpose, as another employee noted: ''We are resettling a larger number of people. Maybe that means, for example, when you zero in on specific moments, you have to tell a client, you know, 'I'm sorry

I can't teach you how to do that. . . . I have many others to help''' [Coordinator-12-S].

Colleagues helped each other learn and become adept at boundary setting, and they affirmed each other's resolve. For example, one suggested sharing practices and support at weekly meetings:

> We have meetings every week. . . . To me, resettling as many people as possible and saving more lives is very important, and to do that I have to just focus on providing the basic things for everybody. But it is also good to learn how my colleagues handle it. I mean, we all share the same problem of having too many clients with too little resources, so it's great to hear how others set the boundary and know that I'm not the only one struggling. [R&P-1-S]

Employees validated each other's boundary setting. One day, an employment-team member was telling a frustrated and desperate refugee that he would have to try harder to look for work by himself: ''I can't help you fill out the applications. You can and should try to do it yourself.'' The refugee's case manager, having overheard, then said to him: ''Yes, you need to be more patient and work harder. We have many people to help. . . . We are saving many people's lives'' [Office]. Another employee described a group decision to stop helping refugees set up internet service and acquire state IDs or driver's licenses:

> We decided as a group that we're not going to help any client with internet signup because it's too much time for us. . . . And things like taking clients to the DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] to sign up for an ID card or take their permit test for driving, we will not take them in. We'll give them an info sheet on how to do it, but all of us decided as a group that we wouldn't do it because there are many people who we have to help. [R&P-2-S]

Consensus on such decisions gave employees a sense of assurance about boundary setting, which became a behavioral norm during the surge. As employees became accustomed to the new situational purpose of resettling as many refugees as possible, they began to feel predominantly positive emotions facilitated by their new work practices. One employee asserted, ''We are trying to save as many lives as possible, and this is indeed what we are doing now. . . . Thinking about that really excites and energizes me'' [R&P-6-S]. By the end of the first month of the surge, employees had embraced a new enactment of refugee resettlement, embodying a shift from quality to quantity.

The surge period: Quantity-focused. During the surge, employees continued to view their work as highly meaningful. As one said:

> I'm ten times busier now during the surge, and my pay stays pretty much the same. . . . But I still love to do this job, because refugee resettlement is important. . . . This is my calling, and the fact that there's this surge means our work is even more important, more needed, now. There should be more of us. . . . We can't go. [Healthcare-14-S]

When asked what was most meaningful about their work during the surge, employees' narratives focused on resettling as many refugees as possible,

which differed greatly from the focus on quality pre-surge. One employee commented:

> I know we are not providing each refugee with as good services as what we did before the surge, but, to us, the ability to help a large population of refugees is equally important, especially during the surge when so many refugees are in need of help at the same time. I still love what I do and think what I'm doing is extremely meaningful, because helping a huge number of people who are fleeing war or persecution is important. [Coordinator-8-S]

Employees asserted that helping as many people as possible was the central purpose of their work in an unprecedented refugee crisis. ''It is important for us to know that the more people we receive, the more lives we save,'' said one employee. ''And that's what we do and why we are in refugee resettlement'' [Post R&P-16-S].

During the surge it became much more commonplace for employees to urge refugees to ''figure things out on their own'' [Post R&P-16-S]. In orientations for new refugees, they emphasized the importance of helping themselves [Orient.]. ''I keep telling them that if they want Americans to respect them, they have to work hard,'' said one employee. ''And 'It's your responsibility to learn English, to find jobs, so you can be self-sufficient''' [Coordinator-20-S]. On every possible occasion, and especially if they observed refugees not working hard enough to achieve independence, employees stressed the importance of assuming responsibility. One employment team member recounted:

> I can't stand it when they come in and say, ''Ann, where's my job?'' I would be like, ''What?'' You know, it's very irritating, because it's not, you know—it's *your* responsibility. It's really their responsibility to find a job. And I know they need the help, and that's why I'm here, and I do help them; I help all of them. But they need to do their part as well. When I don't see that they're coming to English class and they're not working hard and they're just saying ''Where is my job?'' it's frustrating. And I will tell them every time that it's their own responsibility and they need to work harder to be able to get a job. [Employment-5-S]

This outlook was captured in several articles published during the surge, which asserted that the U.S. refugee-resettlement program reflected the American attitude of ''pulling yourself up by your bootstraps'' [Media]. The shift to externalizing responsibility from resettlement staff to the refugees themselves was articulated by this employee:

> I tried to do my best to help them, but over time I just felt ''Okay, you [the client] are the person who needs to make things happen.'' So I just personally felt like, kind of, ''Oh, you're still asking me for help, but you should do all these things, I think, now you're able to do. You should be more considerate of other people's time and attention.'' So I have this switch-off point. . . or maybe sharing of responsibility. . . . I tell them, ''Yes, it's my responsibility of helping you, and I was willing to do it.'' But I think when I reached a point of feeling, maybe, ''Oh, I don't have as much mental energy, or I don't have as much cognitive resources to handle so many people,'' I started to make a switch: ''Now it's your time to do all those things. So, I don't know how it would go for you, but you have to figure it out yourself. And it will be good for

> you, because you would be able to learn, and you have to be independent as soon as possible anyway.'' [Post R&P-10-S]

In place of attending to each refugee's individual needs, employees began to approach refugees in the aggregate, aiming to meet only their basic needs. The same employee who, pre-surge, had emphasized doing whatever it took to help each refugee explained the bind:

> It's not like ''Oh, I'm just not going to help.'' It's like now I can't help you take the bus, which I was helping people do before. I would love to help a single family who has more needs, more like what I did before the surge, but during the surge there are so many people who need my help, and I have to just do the basic things for everybody. . . . Because of the high level of services we gave clients before, and because they've kind of already been promised that RISE would help, it's very hard for us now to say ''No, sorry, we can't.'' But we have to say no, and we have to just give everybody the same kind of services. [Post R&P-17-S]

The same employee who had asserted that pre-surge she ''would invest more time with people who just need more help, because I wanted to make sure they learn how to do things here'' indicated that she had to begin standardizing her services for all refugees:

> It's my job as a case manager to provide the same services for all clients. If it's going to be harder for some, that's unfortunate, because I need to help many people. . . . Like I don't have the time now to take those who haven't gone shopping anywhere before to go shopping; that's something they'll have to do on their own. [R&P-2-S]

From Quantity-Focused to Mixed Enactment of Meaningful Work

RISE employees' shift from a quality-focused to a quantity-focused enactment of their work entailed an adaptive learning process. But an alternative explanation could be that they were justifying a reduction in quality while continuing to believe that high-quality service is meaningful, as suggested by the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). In other words, to deceive themselves into believing that reinforcing boundaries between themselves and refugees was beneficial, they shifted to a focus on the quantitative impact of their work. I argue, however, that though justification might have contributed to the shift in their thinking, it is unlikely to have been the main driver. This interpretation is supported by a subsequent post-surge transition in employees' enactment of their work via a largely similar process. These findings also further validate the initial transition process.

In transition. A U.S. federal travel ban was signed in January 2017, but RISE employees did not experience a marked decrease in workload until April 2017; after that point, they began receiving just one to three families each month and entered the post-surge period. The decreased inflow of refugees elicited an array of emotions: guilt, sadness, gratitude, and relief. Some employees who expressed a sense of guilt noted that the surge had changed how they viewed and treated refugees. ''We were operating under a totally different perspective of what constituted resettling refugees and what constituted minimum services,'' one said [Post R&P-10-Po]. Another mused

that they might have jumped to faulty conclusions about refugees during the surge:

> During the surge I was, in my view, pretty impatient. When clients came to me and asked, ''Where is my bike?'' or ''Can I get internet?'' I would get frustrated, especially if I didn't see them come to English class every day or if they didn't even try looking for bikes themselves. But now when I think about it, they said, ''Where is my bike?'' probably not because they were rude or lazy. ''Where is'' is probably the only word they know how to say or the only way they know how to ask a question in English. They were trying. . . . But I had no option, because I had too many other clients with more important needs. [Post R&P-9-Po]

Strong feelings of sadness also emerged:

> This is a top-down problem from our federal government, which is the anti-refugee agenda. . . despite the largest refugee crisis we are facing right now. . . . That makes us sad; that makes us feel like we wish we could do more, but that's out of our hands. We are just feeling helpless, which is not a good feeling and creates, I think, a sadness that permeates all of refugee resettlement. [Education-3-Po]

Meanwhile, though, employees felt pleased that they could reconnect with individual refugees, noting that they had missed ''the bonding I had with my clients'' [R&P-15-(Po)]. One explained:

> It's extremely sad to see the travel ban in effect. . . . Our clients are shocked and confused too. . . . We were hugging each other, giving each other strength, and I was telling them not to worry. At that moment I was actually feeling—how do I put it? It wasn't quite a happy moment, but I was feeling gratified that I have the capacity to listen to them again. My time is no longer so cramped up that I can now enter my clients' life and their heart, like what I did before. [R&P-1-Po]

Most employees were acutely aware that they were trying to satisfy two different aims in their work—to ensure successful transitions for current clients and to resettle as many refugees as possible—and attributed their ambivalent emotions to that circumstance. ''I thought I would be very happy after the surge ended. But no, I'm still feeling sad, because it's important to give more people a safe home,'' one employee explained [R&P-2-Po]. ''But I'm also feeling guilty that my clients were not having a good experience here, because it's an important part of my job to make their transition easier'' [R&P-2-Po]. Another employee articulated the same issue:

> It's really been a tension. . . . Now I can't fully focus on helping each of my current clients because I know there are still lots of refugees out there who are waiting to be resettled, and we ought to do something to make that happen. . . . But neither can I focus exclusively on figuring out how to bring more refugees in, because, you know, that policy is hard to change, and I need to help my current clients better adapt to living here. So both are important, you know. [R&P-6-Po]

Post-surge, employees began to dedicate more time and effort to current clients' individual needs. For example, case managers helped needy refugees apply for public housing [Meeting], and education employees found preschools that would accept refugee children for free, allowing their mothers to attend

English classes and search for work [Meeting]. At the same time, employees remained convinced that ''we should try to bring as many people here as possible'' [Employment-5-Po]; as one asked rhetorically, ''What's the point of refugee resettlement if all those refugees are suffering out there but we can't bring them to a safe place?'' [Healthcare-11-(Po)]. Thus they found new ways to pursue this quantity-focused purpose: by working to raise public awareness of refugees, especially via social media [Office] and presentations to local organizations advocating for offering entry to more refugees [Meeting]. See Table 3 for supporting data that illustrate how RISE employees adapted the enactment of their meaningful work as they entered the surge and then the post-surge period.

The post-surge period: Mixed. About two weeks after the surge ended, I observed that RISE employees were enacting a mixed version of refugee resettlement. Their perceived purpose became twofold in keeping with the shared belief that ''refugee resettlement is about both making sure our current clients adapt well and bringing more refugees to safety'' [Post R&P-9-Po]. They implemented this dual purpose by renewing their commitment to helping refugees feel comfortably settled while campaigning to receive more. ''We want refugees to feel they are welcome here. I keep telling my clients even though the president signed the travel ban, many American people would like to have them here,'' one employee explained [R&P-1-Po]. ''We will help them and make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. . . . We will also go out there to tell people that we can and should take more people and save more lives'' [R&P-1-Po]. Rather than treating quality-focused enactment as the ideal and then reluctantly invoking a quantity-focused purpose to justify changing their practices and the quality of their services, employees seemed to view both enactments as equally compelling. This finding suggests that cognitive-dissonance theory does not fully account for the shift in employees' enactment of their work. Instead, the key was adoption of a second and comparably motivating situational purpose. See Table 4 for additional data that illustrate the three types of enactment.

Implications for Refugees' Experiences

Unsurprisingly, how RISE employees enacted resettlement services shaped refugees' experiences; see Table 5 for data that supplement the findings in this section. Those who arrived pre-surge benefited from quality-focused enactment. In interviews, these families expressed optimism that they could ''eventually stand on our own feet, buy a house, and have a good future'' [R-1-Pr].[14] They also expressed strong motivation to learn English. Breadwinners described highly proactive job searches. ''I don't want to sit at home and wait for RISE to find me a job,'' said a Sudanese refugee. ''David at RISE taught me how to introduce myself, and Ann helped me write a CV. So I just walked into restaurants, gas stations, and shops, introduced myself, and gave them my CV'' [R-7-Pr]. Pre-surge, within four months of arrival refugees typically found employment at small businesses or factories or as hotel housekeepers; most were paid minimum wage or more, rather than less and under the table.

[14] Codes in the form [R-#-Pr/S/Po] denote data from an interview with a refugee family given code # who arrived in the U.S. pre-surge (Pr), during the surge (S), or post-surge (Po).

Table 3. The Process of Adapting Enactment: Supporting Data

Theoretical Categories	Supporting Data
Negotiating emotional tension	*Surge: Excited but overwhelmed* ''I was very excited after knowing that we will take in more refugees, and I'm still very excited about having more clients, but it is overwhelming. . . . It feels often that I can't do as much as I would like, because of the time constraints. So a lot of people need help at the same time, and it's hard to explain certain things to people when we have constant language and cultural barriers in a short amount of time in a busy space. . . . I would have requests pile up that I feel like I will not be able to respond to or I might forget. So I do get nervous. That's probably the largest frustration.'' [Education-3-S] ''I think we all are very excited, and I do believe that we will do it and bring more people to safety. But I didn't realize it would be so stressful. . . . I have them [clients] here every day, and coming into the hallway sometimes is scary. You know, you walk out and there are just like 20 people waiting for you. . . to ask you questions and, you know, telling me 'I need this, I need that,' and telling me 'I have rent to pay, and I have this and this.' And, you know, I hear the same thing from everybody. It's just a lot to take on; it's a big burden. Yet I'm just one person, and I feel very overwhelmed.'' [Post R&P-9-S] *Post-surge: Gratified but sad* ''It's great, and I mean in a way it's nice, that we can help our clients now to upgrade. But it's sad, because we're not getting as many refugee arrivals, and there are still people out there who need our help.'' [Employment-4-Po] ''It's great to see that our clients are doing much better and seem much happier now with our help. But I just can't help thinking about how many people are dying every day because this president we have right now decided to shut our door to those refugees. We could be saving more people's lives.'' [Post R&P-17-(Po)]
Adopting a situational purpose	*Surge: The importance of resettling more refugees* ''It's by federal law with the refugee program that I'm expected to enroll children within 30 days of their arrival. And then the surge happened. . . . I was very stressed out, not only by the number of registrations I had to do but because I knew, oh, my gosh, there's no way I'm getting any of these children enrolled within 30 days. So definitely it made me feel like I wasn't doing a good enough job and like I was letting RISE down, I was letting the clients down. . . . I just wanted to make sure that they were enrolled as quickly as possible, and I wasn't able to do that in a timely manner, which made me feel that, okay, I'd have to change my perspective: look at the bright side, that we are bringing a lot of people to safety.'' [Education-13-S] ''I feel like I'm as passionate now as before the surge. I feel like I'm more tired, but I've just learned more and more that this is my calling. It's just that, before, I was focusing on helping each of my clients, and now I focus on being part of a bigger effort to help many refugees.'' [R&P-15-S] *Post-surge: The importance of both helping current refugees better and resettling more refugees* ''The travel ban is a big surprise to everybody. So many refugees' lives are being completely overturned by this policy. It definitely shows to me again the vulnerability of this population and why we do the work we do. . . . Working in refugee resettlement is not just about resettling those who have come but also educating the public about who refugees are and why it is important for humanity.'' [R&P-2-Po] ''I'm utterly disheartened by the travel ban. I mean, we all know how serious the war is and that millions of people are displaced now. Yet the response of our country to that is ''Let's shut our door''?. . . Now we should get more people to support refugees. . . . It's important for us to make sure our current clients are doing okay here, and it's also part of our job to get more public support for refugees, especially now.'' [Healthcare-14-(Po)]

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Theoretical Categories	Supporting Data
Adjusting work practices	*Surge: Setting boundaries* ''Boundaries do have to come up, and we have to tell clients, 'Look, you know, you're one of many people who is looking for help, and we can't spend all the time that you're asking for with you.''' [Employment-7-S] ''Before the surge, I don't think we were that overloaded. I mean, you know, they always require a lot of help, and we were busy. But, with the surge, things just became out of control, you know. It's good to set boundaries. Our biggest goal is to get them to be self-sufficient. We can't hold their hands the whole time. Like, they need to learn how to make doctors' appointments for themselves.'' [Coordinator-12-S] *Post-surge: Loosening boundaries and branching out* ''And finally it's slowing down a little bit, but I felt like it's also sad because that means we're saving fewer lives. So there's always a tradeoff. I guess when you're having way more incomers, you're feeling stressed; you're feeling that you may not be able to provide as much as before to each family. But at least you're saving their lives. Yeah, and I would always prefer to be busy rather than bored. So right now I'm feeling a little bit sad, and especially that, you know, the war hasn't ended. There are still conflicts, wars going on. But that's out of my control. All I can do now is to help our current clients as much as I can, and that's what I'm doing. I'm doing my best to make their transition a little bit easier, which makes me less sad. . . . I'm spending more time trying to tell people, like on social media, if I see someone saying things like 'What if there are bad people coming in?' I will tell them refugees are already going through a very stringent vetting process to be able to get here.'' [R&P-6-Po] ''I'm again adjusting what I focus on and how I spend time in my job. . . . I'm checking in with each of our clients to make sure they are okay. . . . I didn't have the bandwidth to do it before, but now I can. I'm also making sure to spend time on advocating for refugees, like encourage people to call their senators and representatives, tell them we want to resettle as many refugees as possible.'' [Coordinator-8-Po]
Inner vs. external requiredness	*Inner requiredness* ''Each refugee family has such an amazing story to tell. I was so fascinated by each of their background, the whole journey they have traveled to get here, and still the resilience and calm they show. I love hearing their stories and want to be part of their stories.'' [Post R&P-9-(Pr)] ''I read this article about how being in a soccer team changes the life of many refugee kids and just felt how amazing it is to play with these kids and be part of their growth. I want to connect with them.'' [Coordinator-12-S] *External requiredness* ''We are in a nation of refugees and immigrants. . . . Resettling refugees is our duty.'' [Healthcare-11-S] ''My parents came to the U.S. as refugees, and they always helped other refugees as long as they could. . . . Because of them, I always think it's my responsibility to help refugees. So as soon as I saw a job opening here, I applied.'' [Legal-19-S]

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Theoretical Categories	Supporting Data
Leaders' sensegiving	*Reinforcing organizational and occupational identity* ''He [leader] was right: RISE is a refugee-resettlement agency, and we are working in refugee resettlement. It makes no sense if there are many refugees out there waiting to be resettled and yet we do not take them.'' [R&P-6-S] ''I was telling everyone, 'This is the time for our organization, and all of us in it, to play an important role as we are facing a serious refugee crisis.''' [Director-18-S] *Prompting awareness of alternative scenarios* ''When our director said, you know, 'These refugees would have nowhere else to go if we don't take them,' the image of the boy drowning and lying dead on the beach immediately came up. And that just made me feel we have to take as many as possible to hopefully stop that tragedy from happening.'' [Coordinator-8-S] ''News about refugees and how difficult life is for them is everywhere. But we kind of forget about that, as we are so focused on our daily work. But he [leader] reminded us of that.'' [Post R&P-9-(Pr)] *Empowering through expressed positive emotions* ''So our director is very enthusiastic, and he's kind of a big-picture guy who wants to provide everything to as many clients as possible.'' [Healthcare-14-S] ''We have a director who's very positive about helping the most people, and I think he truly believes that we should and can take on as many as possible.'' [Legal-19-S]

Refugees who arrived during the surge reported starkly different experiences. Employment was a critical factor in their experiences. Subject to the pressure created by RISE employees' inability to provide them hands-on help, a Syrian refugee reported:

> They [people at RISE] told me my welcome money will run out very soon and I need to find a job as soon as possible. . . . I want to work and make money too, but I don't know what to do and where to go. I only know how to go to RISE, but they are always busy and don't have time to help me. [R-18-S]

Many refugees reported that pressure from RISE wounded their sense of dignity and self-esteem, causing them to ''feel bad.'' One refugee said, ''They think we want to use their money forever. That makes me feel very bad. No, we don't want to depend on their help. After I find a job, I will not need their help'' [R-21-S]. The pressure they felt from RISE amplified the stress and fear of struggling with limited financial assistance, a language barrier, and difficulty finding jobs; eventually such pressure compelled many to take any job they could find. Ninety percent of those who arrived during the surge were Syrians who spoke minimal English; typically, the only jobs they found were physically demanding and paid less than minimum wage, under the table. Most took more than six months to find their first jobs, which were rarely full-time. Those who worked at multiple jobs to make ends meet described feeling lonely, exhausted, and mired in poverty, able only to hope that their children would have better lives. Refugees' employment prospects were circumscribed by a shortage of feasible jobs in the local labor market. But the employment staff

Table 4. Quality-Focused, Quantity-Focused, and Mixed Enactment: Supporting Data

Dimension	Quality-Focused	Quantity-Focused	Mixed
Purpose of work	*Quality-focused purpose* "If you asked me just five months ago, I would say my work here is to make sure each of my clients feels settled and happy. You know, the clients—every single one of them, I think—are just such strong, amazing people. . . . You come to this new world and you have to learn a new language, find a job. Like, everything is different, everything is new. It's just tough, and I would do my best to make sure every single one of them is fine." [R&P-6-S]	*Quantity-focused purpose* "Now is the time that lots of people need our help, and we just have to jump in and do it. Our work now is to make sure we can save all their lives, as many as possible, and that's very exciting and meaningful." [R&P-6-S]	*Mixed purposes* "It's important now to think about how to help our current clients upgrade, and also educate people about who refugees are, what they have to go through to come here, and that we can and should welcome more of them to come. . . . Both are important parts of our job in refugee resettlement now." [R&P-6-Po]
	"Working in refugee resettlement is about connecting with each refugee to help them begin a new life safe, happy, and successful. And I could interact with them very closely to see, you know, how my work is impacting their lives. And that kind of gives rise to the reward for me." [Post R&P-17-(Pr)]	"We should and can absolutely take them. . . . We want refugees—all of them, if possible—to be in a safe place. Even if we're not going to give them as great a service as we did to clients a few months ago, it is still good overall." [Post R&P-17-S]	"My job is not just about services now. Of course, it's still important to help our clients make a better living here. . . . It's also about helping to change the political agenda. We know who refugees are, what they are like, and how they come here—but apparently many people don't. . . . It's our job to tell them." [Post R&P-17-(Po)]
Responsible actors of work	*Internalization* "Before the surge, I definitely felt very strong about finding a good apartment that works for each family and that they can afford. That's a big part of my responsibility. Another part of it is listening to people and giving advice and trying to encourage them." [Coordinator-8-S]	*Externalization* "I have this family now, they are not very well educated, not used to living in Western society at all. Everything I ask them to do, they were like 'What do you want me to do?' and like 'I have no idea what the words coming out of your mouth even mean.' And I would just stop listening to them and just be like 'Just trust me, go to this place at this time, and things are going to happen and it's going to be good for you.' And then, yeah, it is their responsibility to learn and adapt." [Coordinator-8-S]	*Mixed* "On the one hand, I think we have to help them [refugees] as much as possible, because they really don't know anything or anybody else that could help them. On the other hand, I saw from the surge some of them did end up okay, although they were very frustrated and disappointed. . . . For the big things, like finding an apartment. . . that's still my responsibility. But for things like fixing this and that, I will let them handle by themselves. . . . It's also helpful to show people that, look, refugees don't come here to only rely on us." [Coordinator-8-Po]

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Dimension	Quality-Focused	Quantity-Focused	Mixed
	''I feel like a lot of us at RISE always want to do a lot—not that we always do or can do that much, but we always feel like these people are depending on us.'' [Post R&P-9-(Pr)]	''To be self-sufficient requires studying English on their own, coming here to job-readiness class, and doing a lot of things actively on their part. . . . Like, you know, I can only meet with you if you have been going to English class and job-readiness for the last week.'' [Post R&P-9-S]	''Some [refugees] are more dependent on us than others. . . . It's my responsibility to help them with things that they really can't do themselves or nobody else could help them with. But when I think they can do something themselves, I will leave it to them. . . . It's the responsibility of both us and our clients here to tell people refugees are not dangerous.'' [Post R&P-9-Po]
Work practices	*Customization of services* ''Even if the families kind of know where the school is, they might not know how to navigate the bus system to get there, or they might not know where the closest bus stop to the school is. So it's good for us to be able to show them. And if the child is really sick, it's good to have the RISE minivan to pick up the parent and then go to the school.'' [Education-13-S]	*Standardization of services* ''Now during the surge, I would tell the mothers to go to their kids' school by themselves if the teachers called. But it was hard to say that, because I know especially women don't feel super comfortable taking the bus on their own. And, obviously, a lot of the women—I think almost all of the women—don't drive. So for me to say you have to do these difficult things on your own was uncomfortable. But I know it would be good for them eventually.'' [Education-13-S]	*Mixed* ''I'm working on helping our clients find free or cheaper preschool for their younger kids, so the mothers have time to learn English and find jobs. . . . I'm also spending more time now working with the teachers of the local schools to educate the students about how refugees come to our country.'' [Education-13-Po]
	''It was very different before the surge. . . . Whatever a family needs, I'd help them with it. . . everything from giving them an initial home-safety orientation, doing general intake meeting with them, ensuring they're enrolled in public benefit, to kind of checking with them on an ongoing basis and helping them with anything that comes up during their resettlement process.'' [R&P-15-S]	''Things like getting a car or getting internet, they're very important to clients, and they're important for self-sufficiency. But they are not in my must things to do, and I'm not going to help anyone with it now, even though I was helping those who really had troubles before.'' [R&P-15-S]	''I'm helping my clients with things that I wasn't able to help them with during the surge. Like yesterday I helped a client find a cheaper apartment. . . . In addition to that, we are also starting to do more community programs to educate people about refugees because many of them just don't know.'' [R&P-15-Po]

Table 5. The Experiences of Refugees: Supporting Data

Period	Supporting Data
Pre-surge	Husband: ''I like studying English. I study it using computer, my phone, and the books. I bring back all my papers. I take notes.''
	Wife: ''They are helping me and encouraging me to learn. Every day I go to the class at RISE. If the kids come home and don't find me, they will find me at RISE.'' [R-5-Pr]
	''People at RISE taught us how to live in the U.S. and helped us find jobs. They helped us write our CV and taught us what to say in job interviews. I used the CV they helped me write and just went to different places to look for jobs myself, like grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants. . . . When I don't understand, I will call RISE and they will help me talk to the boss. . . . I asked everyone I know if they have jobs for me. I'm very passionate about working.'' [R-11-Pr]
	''When this family first got here, their apartment had mice, and the mother and kids couldn't sleep at night. RISE helped them find a different apartment soon. They consider employees at RISE part of their family and would invite them over for dinner often. They are currently happy and feeling hopeful about the future.'' [Ro-3-Pr]
	''This family is happy with what RISE has done for them. They consider employees at RISE their friends. The father said, 'We are not thinking about moving anywhere, because we are just getting used to here. We are close to RISE, to the schools, to my work. Everything is good. This neighborhood is very safe and it's good.' But their rent is high. To afford rent, their oldest son will have to work full-time after high school and won't be able to go to college. RISE is helping them find money so that their son can continue school.'' [Ro-12-Pr]
	Six months after arrival, of the 14 breadwinners who arrived pre-surge, 13 (93%) landed in full-time jobs that offered minimum wage or more.
Surge	''We received a letter from RISE saying this is the final month they are helping us with rent, and I just felt like someone is grabbing my neck. . . . I know I have to find a job and pay rent, so they don't have to tell me all the time. I didn't forget. Every time they tell me this, again I get headache. They are not helping me; they are hurting me.'' [R-19-S]
	''I am like a machine every day. All the money I make goes to rent. I was hoping to go to the community college, earn a degree, and get a better job, but I can't because I have to work and support my family. . . . There's no way for me to get a better job, because I still don't understand English. . . . I'm too tired every day. . . . When I think about my future, I see only darkness. But I hope my children can have a good life in the future, because they will speak English.'' [R-23-S]
	''This family said they were reminded every day that their financial assistance would be reduced in each following month. They did not feel that RISE was helping them to navigate the financial challenges. Instead they felt that RISE was only reminding them of the difficulties, pushing them to find jobs and make money, without showing or teaching them how, which further intensified their stress.'' [Ro-25-S]
	One Syrian refugee fainted one day in his English class because of his stress, and he stayed in the hospital for a few days [Eng.]. He and his wife [Ro-33-S] shared with me the extraordinary stress they felt: Husband: ''I'm under a lot of pressure and stress. Job, financial stress, rent, English, paying back the plane tickets. Everything adds up, and I don't know if I can handle it.'' I turned to his wife: ''What about you?'' Wife: ''I don't want to say I'm under a lot of stress and pressure, because I don't want to add that to my husband. And also I was pregnant with the baby when we arrived. But there's a lot of fear.''
	Six months after arrival, of the 35 breadwinners who arrived during the surge, 21 (60%) had found work. Only eight (23%) landed in full-time minimum-wage jobs, while the other 13 (37%) worked part-time and were paid under the table.

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Period	Supporting Data
Post-surge	''When they gave me the letter that says 'Welcome to America,' it was like a dream. We were on the airplane, and we saw the map that our plane landed. I thought, 'Oh my god, we are in the USA.' When we landed, I didn't talk. I was very, very, very quiet. I was very calm when we met the immigration officer. . . all the way till when we went to take the van, and when we arrived here and saw our case manager waiting for us. When we were leaving the airport and entering the city, I forgot all the bad things, all the painful and bad moments. I said okay, new life starts. . . so I took the plane and came to the U.S. Without RISE, where could I go? We can't just go and ask people to take us to their house; we just can't. RISE took us. At least they found us a house, at least. In my country, I had a three-bedroom house. My country took away my house. But here, in a foreign country, RISE found me a house. You see the sofa; you see the fridge. I was very grateful. Even until now, I don't know how I can thank RISE, because at that moment when I came into the house, saw the sofa and everything—you know, you go somewhere, and there's one organization who knew you were coming. You have children and they help send your children to school; you need this and that, and they have prepared them for you. You just feel that you are not alone.''
	I asked: ''Are you close to your case manager and other employees at RISE?''
	''I would like to, but we are not that close and don't interact as much as I'd like to.'' [R-50-Po]
	This family thinks RISE is helpful, but they don't have close or strong relationships. The mother said, ''When we ask them for things, they give us almost everything we need. We are very grateful and want to spend more time with them. Our case manager came sometimes, but we didn't talk much, other than some basic things. I want to invite them to come have a meal to thank them, but we can't find a date yet.'' [Ro-52-Po]
	Six months after arrival, of the 11 breadwinners who arrived post-surge, seven (64%) landed in full-time minimum wage jobs.

acknowledged that the quantity-focused enactment of their services also played a role:

> It's difficult for our low-level English-speaking clients, but there are jobs for them as well. I feel like there are plenty of jobs here and plenty [of] employers that want to hire. But I feel like, with the surge and everything, we were not focusing much on connecting them and preparing them for jobs, or facilitating the matching between each refugee and a good employer. [Employment-4-Po]

RISE employees noticed the worsening of refugees' experiences but viewed it as ''unintended, but unfortunately a necessary cost for us to save more people's lives'' [R&P-6-S]. They also believed that quantity-focused enactment enabled refugees to achieve self-sufficiency quickly. But this self-sufficiency was short-term in nature: low-paying and physically demanding jobs offered few opportunities for personal growth. Thus employees had unintentionally slotted refugees into an employment trap, exacerbating their feelings of stress, isolation, and desperation about the future. Furthermore, when employees reverted post-surge to providing more individual attention, the resulting personal connections seemed less close and less strong than was the case pre-surge. And by that point, many of those who had arrived during the surge had exhausted their welcome money. Those not yet employed were desperate to find jobs; those who had jobs were struggling to make ends meet while seeking better-paid jobs. Many had to borrow from RISE, via the rental-assistance program, to afford their rent; when their financial situation improved, they were required to repay the loans [Meeting]. They had not been able to establish

themselves during the period designated to do so and felt uncertain how long it would take to improve their lives.

On surveys, results of one-way ANOVA and *t*-test analyses suggested that while refugees who arrived during the surge were similar to those who arrived pre- or post-surge in various demographic and personality attributes (see Online Appendix D), they reported worse outcomes with respect to employment and well-being six months after arrival. Specifically, community belongingness of refugees who arrived during the surge (M_{surge} = 2.75) was significantly lower than that of refugees who arrived before ($M_{pre\text{-}surge}$ = 3.81, $p < .001$) or after the surge ($M_{post\text{-}surge}$ = 3.47, $p < .001$), as was life satisfaction (M_{surge} = 3.62, $M_{pre\text{-}surge}$ = 4.70, $p = .003$, and $M_{post\text{-}surge}$ = 4.25, $p = .006$). Expected upward mobility of refugees during the surge (M_{surge} = 1.31) was significantly lower than that of refugees pre-surge ($M_{pre\text{-}surge}$ = 2.33, $p = .02$) but did not significantly differ from that of refugees post-surge ($M_{post\text{-}surge}$ = 1.87, *n.s.*). Furthermore, though finding a job was considered by RISE to be a success, refugees who arrived during the surge (N = 35) and found employment (full- or part-time, N = 21) reported significantly more loneliness ($M_{withjob}$ = 4 and M_{nojob} = 3.57, $p = .03$), lower community belongingness ($M_{withjob}$ = 2.94 and M_{nojob} = 3.61, $p = .02$), less satisfaction with their control over their lives ($M_{withjob}$ = 3.20 and M_{nojob} = 3.58, $p = .03$), and lower sense of dignity ($M_{withjob}$ = 3.19 and M_{nojob} = 3.83, $p = .01$) than those who had not found jobs (N = 14), probably because most were being paid under the table and did not feel legitimately and securely employed. Those who arrived pre- or post-surge (N = 25) exhibited a largely opposing pattern: those who found jobs (N = 20) reported significantly lower loneliness ($M_{withjob}$ = 3.29 and M_{nojob} = 4, $p = .02$) and higher community belongingness ($M_{withjob}$ = 4 and M_{nojob} = 3.10, $p = .05$) but not higher satisfaction with control over their lives ($M_{withjob}$ = 3.60 and M_{nojob} = 3.35, *n.s.*) or higher dignity ($M_{withjob}$ = 3.80 and M_{nojob} = 3.47, *n.s.*) than those who had not yet found jobs (N = 5).

Purpose Conveyance as a Potential Path to Smoother Transition

On average, refugees who arrived during the surge appeared to have more negative experiences with RISE and worse employment and well-being outcomes than those who arrived pre- or post-surge. But four such families, though similar demographically and in terms of personality characteristics to others in their cohort, did not report worse experiences and outcomes. In interviews, these four families were distinguished from others by the understanding they expressed of RISE's quantity-focused situational purpose during the surge. ''Look at how many of us are here, and who knows how many more are coming. RISE has so few people, and they can only do so much in a day'' [R-24-S]; ''I know they can't help us with everything. Some they can do, but others. . . they just can't, because there are many other people who have more urgent needs'' [R-25-S]; ''For anything, I will think first if this is something I could do by myself or ask a friend, a neighbor, to help me with first, before going to RISE, because I know they are extremely busy now with all the new refugees coming'' [R-27-S]; ''People at RISE are helping a lot of refugees. I'm not the only one, and I can't just think for myself and my family'' [R-32-S]. They mentioned exchanges with employees that had opened their eyes. One recounted, ''I was trying to get some more kitchenware on a 'free-food day,'

but Alex [an employee] told me they needed them to help other refugees, because there were many who had nothing yet. So that really struck me'' [R-32-S]. Alex described the same incident in an interview:

> It's normal that they are thinking about their own family, thinking about, like, ''What about my kids and my. . . .'' I get it. But I remember some day—there's a food-pantry day, which can be very stressful. People feel like, you know, ''I only have 15 minutes; they didn't let me go back; I needed more rice.'' And it's like, I get it, I totally get it. But one guy was trying to sneak in and take a pot. I saw him. And it's not a big deal—like, who cares if you take a pot, right? It's all donated material. But I told him, you know, ''We need this for the next family, because there are many families that don't have anything and that we are helping, and we use this to set up the kitchen in their new apartment.'' And you should have seen; he almost cried. He almost cried, because he's like, ''Oh, gosh, another family like me, like mine, needs this pot. Of course.'' [R&P-2-S]

Another refugee recalled, ''One day I went to Emily to complain because my sister, who went to Canada, told me they gave her family a year of free housing. Emily explained to me: here is different. They are trying to resettle many more people, so resource would be limited. That helped me understand and appreciate it'' [R-27-S]. Emily too alluded to this incident:

> It's regrettable that they have an initial shock period that's so strong. And I do think that a lot of that is due to misinformation. There were a lot of conversations happening between refugees resettled here and resettled in other countries and across the U.S. And I heard a lot of times, you know, ''My cousin is in Germany; he got this. My sister was in Texas; she got this.'' And when I got a minute, I would explain to them, ''This is a complex system. Every country, every state, has a different way. We are doing this now because there are many refugees we are helping, et cetera.'' I hope they could understand. [Post R&P-16-S]

I designate what Alex and Emily did in these exchanges as ''purpose conveyance''—that is, making one's purpose known and understandable to others. Doing so is especially important when employees have adopted a new situational purpose but clients continue to expect a prior one. My findings suggest that, in the case of the four families, purpose conveyance enhanced empathy and encouraged resourcefulness, leading to better employment and well-being outcomes. It is plausible that, had employees consistently conveyed their new quantity-focused purpose during the surge, more refugees would have adjusted and enjoyed a positive transition in that period. One employee summarized it well:

> Usually, like in culture-orientation classes or other things even before they arrive here, people from the UN or other agencies, or even our own leaders, will say to clients, even just in passing, ''We're so happy you're here. What do you need? I'm sure we can get that for you.'' Normally that's indeed what we do, and clients know we would do that. But things were different during the surge. . . . We really should have considered clear messaging, consistent clear messaging, with the clients about what we can and cannot do and why we do things this way. . . . I do think it is important to tell clients what we are trying to do here, why we are doing this and not that, and just the amount of service that RISE would provide, so that clients can understand our situation and adjust. [R&P-6-Po]

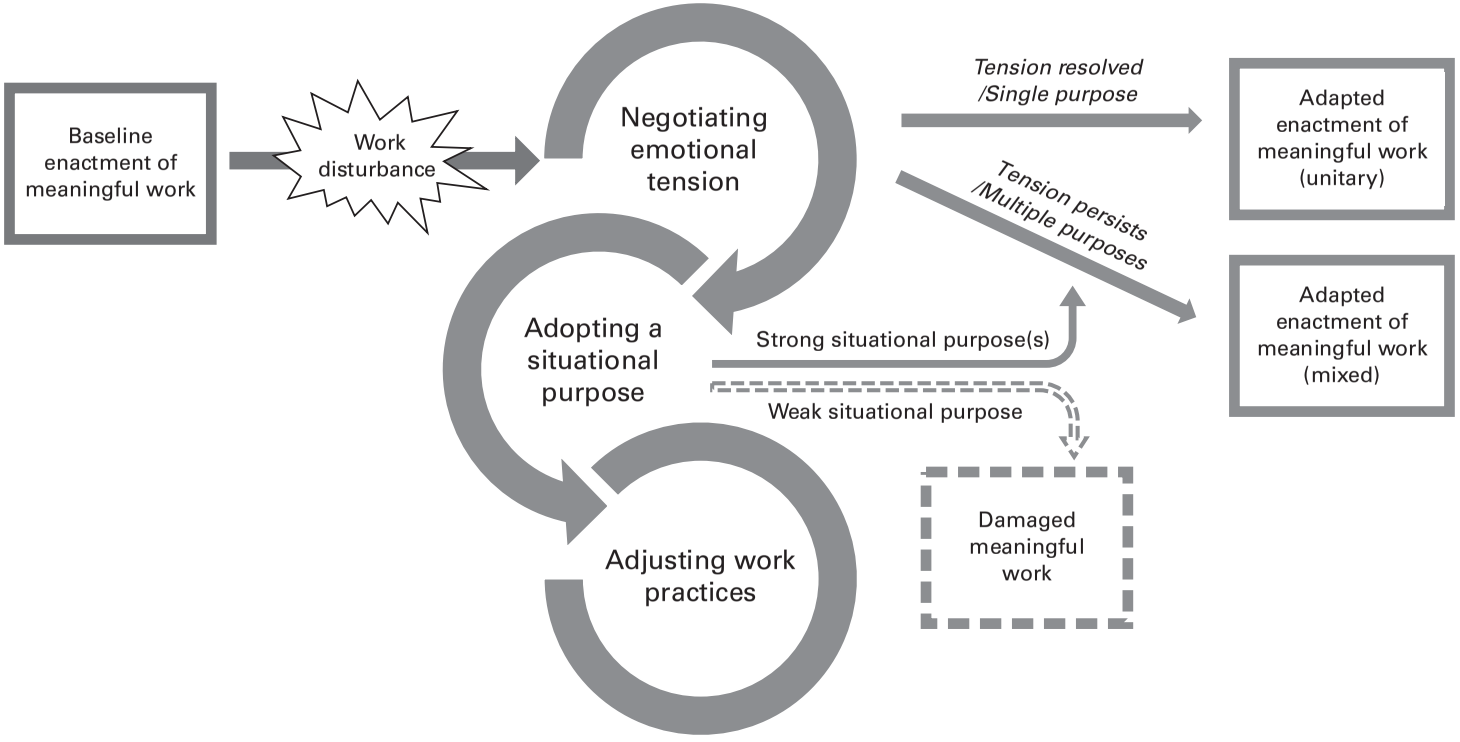
DISCUSSION

Figure 1 depicts how individuals adapt their enactment of meaningful work to accommodate changes in work conditions as a result of a crisis. People who perform meaningful work believe that it serves a purpose they care about, and they adhere to practices they consider essential to achieve that purpose (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). Their purpose and practices at any non-crisis time constitute the baseline enactment of their work. When a crisis alters any element of their work, individuals might experience emotional tension and initiate an effort to adapt enactment of their work to the crisis while sustaining its perceived meaningfulness. This process entails three subprocesses: negotiating emotional tension, adopting a situational purpose, and adjusting work practices. Such adaptation can be considered successful if individuals identify an alternative situational purpose and adjust their work practices accordingly, thus resolving their emotional tension. By contrast, the outcome would be considered mixed if, for example, emotional tension persisted and multiple situational purposes were adopted. And failure to adopt a new situational purpose in the wake of a crisis would probably undermine their work experience, potentially leading to abandoning the work.

People who perceive their work as meaningful tend to associate it with positive feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Such positive feelings tend to be amplified when the work's value to others is made more salient (Grant, 2007, 2012); this is often the case for essential service personnel during natural or humanitarian disasters. But a crisis can also make routine practices unfeasible and derail pursuit of the work's baseline purpose, eliciting stress and sadness. When people experience positive and negative feelings about their work simultaneously, they typically feel compelled to interrogate the unusual situation creating such tension (Fong, 2006). The questions they ask themselves can be summarized as ''Is my work still meaningful now that I can't do what I did before? If so, why am I feeling bad? If not, why am I feeling good?'' While seeking answers to these questions, employees may search for a new purpose in light of the crisis. My findings suggest that whether employees identify and accept a satisfactory situational purpose for their work seems to determine their success or failure at sustaining its meaningfulness and adapting their enactment of it accordingly.

When the travel ban ended the surge, RISE employees readily concurred on two situational purposes: ensuring current refugees a high-quality transition and resettling more new refugees. Their unanimity might be attributable to their shared on-the-job familiarity with both purposes. But when a new situational purpose is unfamiliar, as was the case during the transition from the pre-surge period to the surge period, embracing it is apt to be challenging for some. Two factors seem to facilitate the adoption of a new situational purpose. As described earlier, the first is a perceptual attribute that Maslow (1967) referred to as ''inner/external requiredness.'' Thirteen employees in this study indicated that they viewed refugee resettlement as meaningful work primarily because it is needed; they were drawn to such work as if they had experienced a call to do so from outside themselves—a sense of ''external requiredness.'' When the surge happened, these employees' external orientation made them quick to recognize and accept a compelling situational purpose to resettle more refugees in the face of an unprecedented refugee crisis. In contrast, the other

Figure 1. Adapting Enactment of Meaningful Work in the Face of Disturbance



seven employees viewed their work as meaningful mainly because they enjoyed interacting with refugees. They were driven by a need for joy and fulfillment—a sense of ''inner requiredness.'' These employees found it more difficult to adopt as a compelling situational purpose the resettlement of more refugees. If no sensegiving had been exerted, they probably would have experienced a loss of meaning as their baseline enactment of meaningful work was rendered impossible, eventually resulting in withdrawal (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017).

Sensegiving on the part of leaders or other impactful actors may guide employees without a sense of ''external requiredness'' to embrace a new situational purpose and to adapt their enactment of work accordingly. When the surge began, RISE leaders provided sensegiving by reinforcing employees' occupational and organizational identities; prompting them to consider the grimmer alternative scenarios for refugees; and empowering them through expressed positive emotions like passion, confidence, and encouragement. In particular, the seven employees primarily driven by ''inner requiredness'' were prompted to commit to and act in accordance with the collective (Simon and Klandermans, 2001) when they felt more intensely their occupational and organizational identities; contemplating the plight of displaced refugees evoked a sense of responsibility, and leaders' expressions of positivity caused them to view the surge more optimistically and boosted their efficacy to tackle the challenges (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Wanberg and Banas, 2000). As a result, these employees ultimately accepted the resettlement of more refugees as a compelling new situational purpose and adapted their enactment accordingly.

To carry out their new situational purpose, employees adjusted their work practices, a subprocess facilitated by peer colleagues (Barker, 1993; De Jong, Bijlsma-Frankema, and Cardinal, 2014). Redesigned work practices are the manifestation of employees' new enactment of their work; a redefined situational purpose is its invisible foundation. Meanwhile, employees continue to negotiate their own emotional tension. Prior research has suggested that individuals engage in emotion work in an effort to regulate their feelings sufficiently to be deemed socially appropriate to a particular situation (Hochschild, 1979). During the surge, for instance, RISE employees' new situational purpose and practices—to resettle more refugees—amplified their positive emotions. After the surge, the two purposes they adopted perpetuated positive feelings about tending to current refugees alongside negative feelings about the truncated inflow. When employees resolve emotional tension by adopting a new situational purpose and associated practices, accordingly displaying predominantly positive (or appropriately negative) emotions, they are creating a new enactment of work with a unitary structure. If emotional tension persists, given their dual purposes, their baseline enactment of work is likely to be adapted to accommodate a mixed or hybrid structure.

Theoretical Implications

Prior research on meaningful work has predominantly focused on stable work contexts in which the conditions of one's work and the preferred ways to enact it remain unchanged. By contrast, this research investigates how employees navigate a changing work context. In stable working environments, individuals' consistent narratives and behaviors convey the kind of meaning they derive

from work: as a job, career, or calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Research on how employees negotiate challenges while pursuing meaningful work tends to examine contexts in which the challenges either are inherent to the work (e.g., low pay and toxic culture) or pertain to individual circumstances (e.g., severe injuries), yet the situations they face are relatively stable and permanent (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Maitlis, 2009, 2012; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). Employees in such contexts often engage in a gradual process of sensemaking, eventually either accepting these challenges as opportunities of learning and growth or rejecting them as threats to their identities or aspirations (Maitlis, 2009, 2012; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Oelberger, 2019). These studies suggest that the emotions, cognitions, and actions of individuals engaged in meaningful work are driven by a fundamental and relatively stable understanding of what their work should accomplish or consist of. By treating the work context as stable, this literature has overlooked important questions: How do individuals engaged in meaningful work navigate potentially frequent and abrupt changes at work? And how do they sustain work's meaningfulness in the midst of changes? I undertook an inductive investigation of these questions. My main finding is that these individuals undergo three subprocesses: negotiating emotional tension, adopting a situational purpose, and adjusting work practices. In particular, while feeling emotional tension, individuals engaged in meaningful work can flexibly redefine its immediate purpose in keeping with a changing situation, which helps them to readily adapt how they enact their work and maintain its perceived meaningfulness in an unstable environment. In doing so, employees can sustain the meaningfulness of their work even when an external disturbance causes undesirable change. As the nature of their work changes, they can sequentially adopt enactments that embody different purposes (high-quality resettlement vs. resettling more refugees) and approaches (providing a full array of services vs. urging refugees to do more for themselves). This pliancy of beliefs and behaviors among employees engaged in meaningful work has gone unexamined in prior research that views work contexts as stable.

Perhaps the more significant insight of this study is that the key to adapting enactment of meaningful work and maintaining perceived meaningfulness is employees' recognition and acceptance of a situational purpose in light of a changing work environment. A situational purpose is a provisional ''why'' of what employees do that meets the needs of a new situation (e.g., a refugee crisis) while also aligning with their overarching sense of meaning, which likely remains unchanged (e.g., resettling refugees as a calling). Whether employees can quickly identify and affiliate with a situational purpose determines their willingness and ability to adaptively navigate a changing context. In any organization, a situational purpose functions as a powerful shared objective, in turn facilitating both the perpetuation of employees' efforts (Duckworth et al., 2007) and collective organizing of employees' activities (Weick, 1979) in an unstable environment.

My findings also suggest that identifying a situational purpose is an important element of leaders' sensegiving and of employees' sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Carton, 2018). Leaders can facilitate employees' adoption of a new situational purpose through sensegiving, thereby redirecting employees' efforts. Employees, in addition to coming up with an account that makes sense of what is happening

and why, can benefit from redefining the situational purpose of their work to match the new circumstance they encounter (Weick, 1988; Maitlis, 2005). This task may be especially challenging for those primarily driven by a sense of ''inner requiredness'' to seek joy in their work rather than the discharge of a duty (Thompson and Bunderson, 2019).

Another contribution to the literature on meaningful work is the finding that adapting the enactment of meaningful work can have unintended downstream consequences for others. Earlier research has largely examined the effects on individuals themselves of pursuing meaningful work (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Cardador, Dane, and Pratt, 2011). This study shows that when such individuals redefine the purpose of their work situationally and revise their work practices accordingly in order to maintain its meaningfulness, the people they serve may be affected.

My study also extends research on job demands and resources in two ways. First, this literature has concentrated on documenting the negative physical and psychological consequences of high job demands, such as stress, fatigue, and burnout (Richter and Hacker, 1998; Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003; Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2006). My findings suggest that these negative effects could drive employees to consider an alternative set of beliefs and practices. In other words, rather than a static end state, the negative effects of high job demands can initiate a new way of enacting one's work (possibly with unintended consequences). Second, the job demands–resources model posits that, to effectively cope with high demands at work, one needs sufficient resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Previous research has conceptualized resources as a dynamic construct: as any objects, tangible or not, that could be activated or mobilized as resources via a process called resourcing (Dutton et al., 2006; Feldman and Worline, 2011; Wiedner, Barrett, and Oborn, 2017). Resourcing theory suggests that organization members make use of limited available resources in innovative ways to achieve outcomes that are similar to, if not better than, those that would normally be realized with more resources (Feldman and Worline, 2011; Sonenshein, 2014). However, my findings suggest a boundary condition: an extremely high workload might mean insufficient resources even to enact the initial process of resourcing. Thus initial resources, especially cognitive capacity, are an important precondition for effective resourcing. Insufficient resources also appear to affect employees' beliefs about who should assume the responsibility for resourcing; during the surge, RISE employees reassigned this responsibility to refugees themselves.

Finally, research has suggested that individuals' enactment of meaningful work recapitulates the logic they adhere to at work—that is, the pattern of beliefs and practices by which they make meaning of their social reality (e.g., Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, 2008; Thornton, 2004). My finding that RISE employees could adopt a mixed enactment of work might have implications for research on professional logics and in particular on how professionals can adhere to more than one logic at a time (Thornton, 2004; Dunn and Jones, 2010; Cornelissen and Werner, 2014). As Dunn and Jones (2010: 126) observed, ''it is not known why multiple logics within a profession will coexist in relative balance with each other at some points in time and why one may become dominant at another time.'' My findings suggest that employees can find more than one purpose meaningful (e.g., quality vs. quantity); it is likely that this capacity enables multiple forms of enactment or logics to coexist. One

logic may prevail at a particular time because the purpose it supports is more salient to the situation at hand.

Practical Implications

This research pinpoints practical strategies that leaders and employees can employ to navigate crises and, in particular, improve the effectiveness of human services during workload crises. For leaders, my research underlines the importance of helping employees recognize and accept a situational purpose to facilitate their management of crises. It highlights that although it is important to hold steadfast the organizational or professional mission, leaders need not adhere strictly to the existing understanding or enactment of the mission; rather, leaders must reframe the immediate purpose of staff members' work in accordance with any emerging crisis while still aligning it with their overarching mission, such that the work can be viewed as situationally meaningful. By bolstering employees' organizational and occupational identity, eliciting their thoughts about alternative scenarios, and/or boosting positive emotions, leaders can help employees find and accept a situational purpose and revise their enactment of meaningful work while maintaining a sense of meaningfulness during crises.

For employees, my findings suggest that adopting a situational purpose—a process that can be facilitated by leaders and peers—helps them adapt to a changing work environment while sustaining a sense of meaningfulness. Furthermore, for those providing human services, clearly conveying to clients the purpose of a decrease in personalized services remedies their negative reactions at times when the workload surges. Purpose conveyance appears to elicit clients' empathy for service providers, prompting them to adjust their expectations and behaviors. Organization leaders should consider prompting or training employees to practice the tactic of purpose conveyance when changes in work enactment become necessary.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations, some of which may offer directions for future research. First, because the surge was unforeseen, I began the project with a different focus and did not conduct pre-surge interviews with RISE employees. I learned about their pre-surge experience from my pre-surge observations, informal conversations with one team, and others' retrospective accounts, the last of which could involve retrospective bias. Though I was able to leverage data from informal conversations with all four post-R&P employees to triangulate my findings and minimize such bias, this group was small. Future data gathering on employees' work experience prior to an unexpected crisis ought to select organizations with groups working in a sequential manner, ideally much larger groups.

Second, whether my findings are generalizable to settings in which employees tend not to view their work as central to their lives and identities is an unanswered question and possibly a limitation. Refugee resettlement tends to draw people who are quite uniform in terms of demographics, personality characteristics, and commitment to service work. RISE's employees are predominantly white women. All employees considered their work deeply

meaningful; they were uninclined to leave it, especially during a refugee crisis. In other organizations and occupations, fewer employees may view their work as meaningful, raising questions that future research may examine about how they would navigate a similar work disturbance and whether they would remain in their jobs.

Third, this study distinguishes between quality- and quantity-focused enactments of meaningful work, but there are undoubtedly other ways of delineating enactment in crisis situations. For example, one may enact meaningful work in a more risk-seeking or risk-averse approach or in ways that prioritize obtaining either delayed gratification or immediate joy. Future research is encouraged to investigate other forms of enactment. The specific dimensions along which quality- and quantity-focused enactments vary may be different in other contexts. In particular, while my study finds that employees changed their view on who should bear most responsibility in the work during crisis, this dimension might not be applicable or manifest in the same form in other settings that involve no direct beneficiaries. Moreover, quality- vs. quantity-focused enactment in other contexts may entail other dimensions that this study lacked. Both possibilities could be addressed by future research.

Nevertheless, my model is intended to capture a general process of how enactment of meaningful work can change in the face of a disturbance in the performance of that work. Given the prevalence of workload crises in an array of organizations—especially in human services, such as healthcare and educational institutions—the process of shifting between quality-focused and quantity-focused enactment, and the identified content of each, might be widely shared. For example, physicians and nurses who encounter a large influx of patients during a pandemic may resort to a focus on their quantitative impact; professors with many students to teach or many manuscripts to review may also shift their attention to the scale rather than depth of their impact.

Finally, my research looks exclusively at refugees' experiences of changes in service providers' enactment of meaningful work, but the same changes could have a broader set of implications for individual and organizational outcomes. Future research can examine such other outcomes as changes in organizational culture or structure and in human-resources practices. Further, my research finds that conveying employees' situational purpose to clients at times of change has considerable impact; future research is needed to examine the effects of purpose alignment/misalignment among employees, among leaders, between employees and clients, and between employees and leaders. It would also be fruitful to identify tactics for conveying and resolving differences in purpose between organization personnel and clients.

CONCLUSION

Meaningful work is ardently yearned for but often arduous to sustain, especially at times of crisis. We know that people engaged in meaningful work are motivated to sustain a sense of meaningfulness in the face of uncertain, often unfavorable, changes at work, yet how they do so and with what outcomes have been less understood. I shed light on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dynamics undergirding this process, bringing forth the central role of adopting a situational purpose. As Victor Frankl (2006: xiv) powerfully stated, ''Life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones.''

Adopting a situational purpose helps individuals adapt the enactment of work and sustain a sense of meaningfulness in a changing work context, even when the change creates extreme physical and psychological strain. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize and, through conveying the situational purpose, to ameliorate the unintended, potentially negative consequences on affected members, such that the meaningfulness of the work can truly be sustained.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article can be found in the Online Appendix at http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0001839221994049.

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