



Workplace Mental Health: Supporting People Better

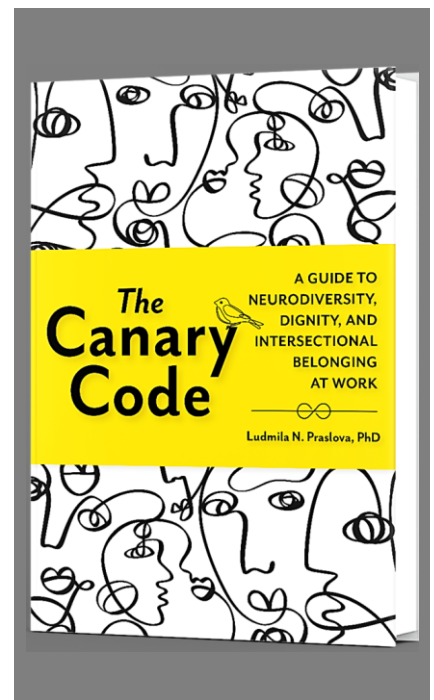
Ludmila N. Praslova, Ph.D.

Alt text: A line drawing of overlapping abstract faces on a colorful background

1

Ludmila N. Praslova, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP

- Professor, Industrial-Organizational Psychology at Vanguard University of Southern California
- **The CANARY CODE: A Guide to NEURODIVERSITY, Dignity, and Intersectional Belonging at Work** (Berrett-Koehler, April 2024)
- Consulting: supporting organizations in creating systemic neurodiversity inclusion.
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ludmila-praslova/>



2



2022-2023 Study by Workplace Institute

- surveyed 3,400 people across 10 countries
- 60% of employees say their job is the biggest factor influencing their mental health.
- Managers have as much of an impact on people's mental health as their spouse/partner, 69% (vs. doctor 51% or therapist, 41%).
- At the end of work, 43 % of employees are "often" or "always" exhausted.
- 78 % of employees say that stress negatively impacts their work performance.

3



2022-2023 Study by Workplace Institute

- Leaders are stressed, too.
- 40 % of the C-suite say they will likely quit within the year because of work-related stress.
- middle managers are more often stressed out than their team members and senior leadership (42 % vs. 40 % and 35 %, respectively), and 25 % are "often" or "always" feeling burned out.
- <https://www.ukg.com/resources/article/mental-health-work-managers-and-money>

4

Mental health, wellbeing, and environment

- Anxiety is about 70% environmental
- Depression is about 50-60% environmental
- Trauma and PTSD/PDSD, largely environmental
- Burnout and moral injury, largely environmental

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573560/>

<https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.2011.10091342>

5

Trauma from the Greek “wound,” a physical or mental injury.

Traumatic events: external events with the potential to cause injury.



Traumatic stress distress responses that can occur in response to traumatic events (emotional, behavioral, health consequences).

Stressors: external events that demand coping ability and resources.



Stress: response to external events that *exceed* coping ability and resources.

Chronic work stressors: prolonged taxing situations, lack of resources.



Burnout: occupational syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress, causing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal accomplishment at work.

Morally stressing/injurious events: e.g., forced to act contrary to values



Moral distress/moral injury: injury to the sense of morality; shame and guilt, quitting job, whistleblowing

Adversity: long-term, sociological and community-based negative stressors that affect individuals or groups



Poverty, racial, etc trauma responses

Demoralization: a type of stress response, a sense of inability to cope, helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, incompetence.

© Ludmila Praslova

6

Individual-level interventions

- Resilience training
- Self-care
- Rinsing off a pickle and putting it back into the brine.

<https://hbr.org/2023/01/todays-most-critical-workplace-challenges-are-about-systems>



7

Solutions for systemic prevention:

• Structural prevention:

- Policies to address overwork, constant “on”
- Policies to curb bullying
- Support “mental health” days, leaves, schedules that allow for sufficient sleep
- Support inclusion and belonging

<https://hbr.org/2022/11/how-bullying-manifests-at-work-and-how-to-stop-it>

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/742858/the-canary-code-by-ludmila-n-praslova-phd/>

8

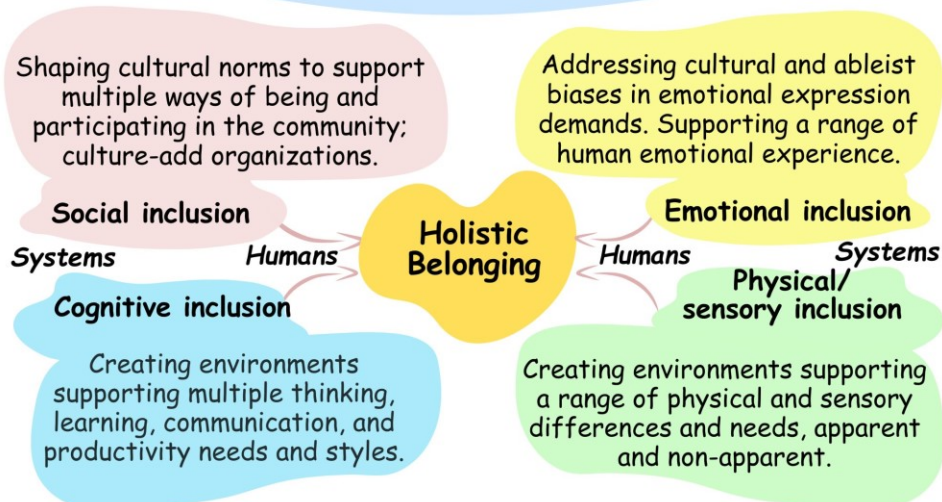
Solutions for systemic prevention:

• Systems and Leadership for Belonging

- Belonging is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, better cardiovascular health, and longevity (US Surgeon General, 2022; Fiske, 2019)
- Belonging is also elusive; few organization welcome a whole person
- We are not “warm bodies” or “brains on a stick”

9

From holistic (neuro)inclusion to holistic belonging.



Based On: Diverse Teams Thrive With Four Elements of Belonging; MIT Sloan Management Review, March 19, 2024; an excerpt from: The Canary Code: A Guide to Neurodiversity, Dignity, and Intersectional Belonging at Work by Ludmila N. Praslova PhD. ©Ludmila N. Praslova PhD.

10

Social Inclusion

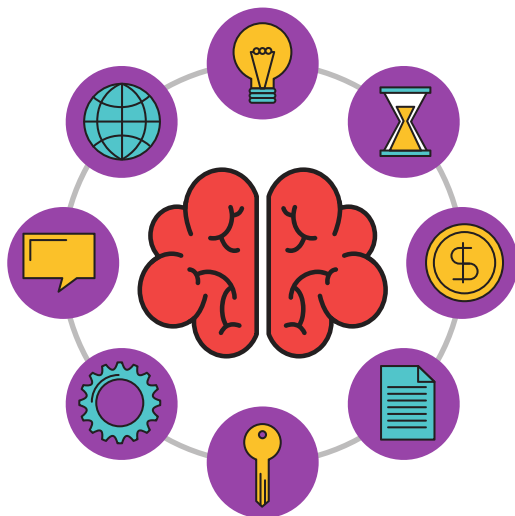
Being invited to the “party” or “table.”

Human social needs are not one-size-fits-all

- Employees should be welcomed but never pressured to participate in social activities.
- Facilitate varied forms of social connection
- Engagement and commitment can be expressed in different ways.
- Do not sacrifice authenticity to “culture fit”



11



Cognitive Inclusion

- Respect differences in learning, communication
- Use multiple communication and training methods
- Allow for schedules to align with natural productivity rhythms

12

Emotional Inclusion

- Address rigid and judgmental attitudes toward differences in emotional intensity and expression;
- Remove stigma from normal human emotions such as sadness or joy;
- Provide physical spaces for emotional processing



13

Physical/sensory inclusion

- Accessibility and safety, including sensory accessibility and safety
- Attention to sensory considerations beyond required protection (physical hearing protection vs. psychological protection from noise).



14

Training

Mental health and wellbeing awareness for leaders

Mental health and wellbeing awareness for all employees

Trauma-informed organizations

15

Q & A



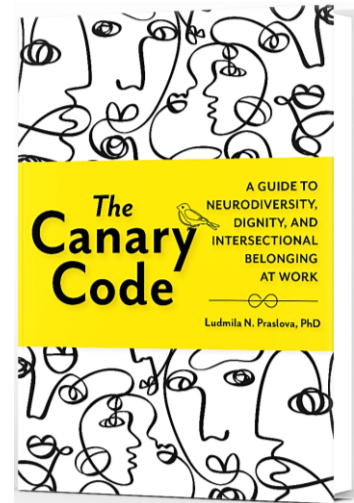
16

Contact information:

Ludmila N. Praslova, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP

lpraslova@vanguard.edu

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ludmila-praslova/>



Ludmila N. Praslova, Ph.D.