Belonging versus connection

People are herd animals. Not everyone to the same extent, but we depend on each other for our survival. Communicating and collaborating are important skills that have helped people to stand their ground under dangerous circumstances. It is therefore of vital importance to belong to the group. If we say or do the wrong thing, we can be rejected or abandoned. "Social" danger is therefore almost always present (even when we are alone). What do we do in the event of danger? Run away, hide or fight.

My way to tame the beast of social exclusion is to be nice. I adapt, stay friendly, even though it doesn't feel that way. Another strategy is to mediate in conflicts. Because even the breakup of a group feels threatening. I try to take a middle position, not to take sides and to view it from multiple sides. Until I no longer know what I actually feel and think about it.

Brene Brown is known for her work on shame and vulnerability. On netflix she can be seen in The Call to Courage (https://www.netflix.com/nl/title/81010166). At the end of her story she says: it's not about belonging, it's about connection. That was an eye opener for me. Belonging means that you do everything you can to secure or retain a place in the group. So run away, hide or fight, which means you have to give up something of yourself and keep it hidden. Which also means you take something away or withhold from the other. Connecting is about opening up to the other from your own authenticity, showing yourself in your vulnerability. It starts with taking the other and yourself as you are and standing with yourself. It's not for nothing that the title of Brene Brown's talk is "The Call to Courage". It requires courage, willingness, to show yourself in your vulnerability.

Recently I worked with someone who from the beginning evoked the feeling that I was failing. Often that doesn’t hurt much, but now it did. I thought I should discuss that with him because I suspected that he would get the same response from others. I didn't find the courage, afraid that he would misunderstand and get angry. An opening occurred when his supervisor made a remark, which overlapped my experiences with this man. I seized the opportunity and shared with him what he evoked in me. The process provided him insight into how he could come across. It gave me the confirmation that people can be open to feedback and not immediately get angry. But it also provided me with a better understanding of myself. I saw what part of this interaction was his and what part was mine. Instead of trying to belong and not get rejected, I had jumped in for the connection, with him and with myself.