

# Autopraxeography: a method to step back from vulnerability

Marie-Noelle Albert and Nancy Michaud  
*Université du Québec à Rimouski, Rimouski, Canada*

A method to  
step back from  
vulnerability

67

Received 29 March 2022  
Revised 10 May 2022  
31 May 2022  
6 July 2022  
Accepted 1 October 2022

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Studies on vulnerability in the workplace, although relevant, are rare because it is difficult to access. This article aims to focus on the benefits of using autopraxeography to study and step back from vulnerability at work.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Autopraxeography uses researchers' experience to build knowledge.

**Findings** – Autopraxeography provides a better understanding of vulnerability and the opportunity to step back from the difficulties experienced. Instead of ignoring experiences related to vulnerability, this method makes it possible to transform them into new avenues of knowledge. Moreover, it enables researchers to step back from experiences of vulnerability, thus making them feel more secure.

**Originality/value** – The main differences from other self-studies stem from the epistemological paradigm in which this method is anchored: pragmatic constructivism. The most important difference is the production of generic knowledge in three recursive steps: writing in a naïve way, developing the epistemic work and building generic knowledge.

**Keywords** Autopraxeography, Experiences, Reflexivity, Step back, Pragmatic constructivism, Vulnerability  
**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Even if studies on vulnerable workers remain sporadic, they hold an increasingly prominent place (Restubog *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, the difficulty of accessing vulnerable workers largely explains this lack of studies on the subject, particularly for in depth inquiries. This article is to understand how a specific method (autopraxeography) based on researchers' experiences helps enrich the study of vulnerability in the workplace by obtaining access to participants and avoiding gatekeepers. Autopraxeography makes it possible for practitioners to build relevant knowledge and step back from their vulnerabilities. Traditional methods, from a positivist perspective, aim to minimize the room occupied by researchers' selves (Wall, 2006); but, from a nonpositivist perspective, the inquirer and the phenomenon inquired into cannot be separated in the knowledge-making process (Vo, 2012). Autopraxeography is anchored in a pragmatic constructivism epistemological paradigm (hereafter: PCEP) as opposed to other methods based on researchers' experience. This paper aims to present autopraxeography and its benefits for both academia and the workplace to study and step back from vulnerability. Contrary to the human resources management norm, autopraxeography is a nonquantitative method (Grenier, 2015). To do this, autopraxeography is presented and followed by the benefits of its use (with an example). Finally, the method is applied to demonstrate how autopraxeography makes it possible to study and step back from vulnerabilities.



© Marie-Noelle Albert and Nancy Michaud. Published in *Journal of Work-Applied Management*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Journal of Work-Applied  
Management  
Vol. 15 No. 1, 2023  
pp. 67-80  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
2205-2062  
DOI 10.1108/JWAM-03-2022-0016

## 2. Vulnerability in the workplace

Studies on vulnerable people are unusual in workplace studies (Audenaert *et al.*, 2020) even though there exist studies on vulnerable workers (e.g. Murphy (2017)) and on Covid-19 among vulnerable workers (Svicher and Di Fabio, 2021). The word “vulnerable” means “capable of being physically or emotionally wounded; open to attack or damage” (Restubog *et al.*, 2021, p. 3). And there has been a growing interest in studying vulnerable workers in the past few years (Restubog *et al.*, 2021). However, accessing vulnerable people remains difficult (Liamputtong, 2007; Restubog *et al.*, 2021).

Carrying out research with participants viewed as vulnerable poses challenges and requires special considerations from researchers, including on an ethical level (Kavanaugh *et al.*, 2006; Liamputtong, 2007; Restubog *et al.*, 2021). Even after ethical approval, it is still difficult for researchers to access (Liamputtong, 2007) and retain vulnerable participants (Kavanaugh *et al.*, 2006). For instance, they do not want to be labeled as vulnerable (Ellard-Gray *et al.*, 2015). The term “vulnerable” has generally negative connotations, which is often why vulnerable participants dislike the limelight. This difficulty in accessing vulnerable participants explains why topics on vulnerability are often ignored in academic literature. And even if it is possible to nullify the asymmetry in the researcher-participant relationship, it usually remains unequal (Bashir, 2020). It is therefore hard to study vulnerability without addressing power relationships. To study vulnerability, researchers sometimes use gatekeepers to gain access to vulnerable participants. But these gatekeepers are both a way to reach participants and a major obstacle in gaining access to them (Liamputtong, 2007; Restubog *et al.*, 2021). To this end, Restubog *et al.* (2021) explain the importance of using nontraditional methods to explore vulnerability at work in depth.

After presenting vulnerability, we explain the nontraditional method chosen to examine vulnerabilities.

## 3. Autopraxeography

Autopraxeography is a method based on researchers’ experiences. It was developed and used (Albert and Couture, 2014) to produce knowledge and avoid unconsciously influencing research. This method is particularly interesting for people who return to university and those who want to produce knowledge based on their own experiences. Autopraxeography (Albert and Michaud, 2016) is a neologism that refers to the sense of “self” (“auto”) and to “praxeography,” which is close to ethnography while emphasizing a broader conceptualization (Schmidt and Volbers, 2011). “Praxeography” is meant to express that instead of culturally defined (more or less homogeneous) groups, social practices and their participants, carriers and infrastructures are the objects of praxeographic inquiry and description” (Schmidt, 2017, p. 14).

The specificities of this method are anchored in its epistemological paradigm.

### 3.1 Epistemological posture: pragmatic constructivism epistemological paradigm (PCEP)

The pragmatic constructivism epistemological paradigm (Avenier and Thomas, 2015) is another label for radical constructivism, as conceptualized by von Glasersfeld (1984, 2001), and teleological constructivism (Avenier and Thomas, 2015). “Radical constructivism, thus is *radical* because it breaks with convention and develops a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an ‘objective’ ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience” (von Glasersfeld, 1984, p. 24). Von Glasersfeld (1984) anchored radical constructivism in James and Dewey’s works of pragmatism. For this reason, Avenier and Thomas (2015) prefer “pragmatist” to “radical.” According to Raskin (2002), von Glasersfeld’s radical constructivism is an epistemological constructivism, which does not reject the notion of essence in its entirety. In this paradigm,

knowledge is a process in which there is no difference between the inquirer and the phenomenon inquired into, and they cannot be distinguished from one another. The result from the observer's point of view influences observations. So, the PCEP considers that truth only makes sense if we are aware of the manner used to build knowledge from human representations to give meaning to situations in which these humans are involved. Pragmatic constructivism is based on abduction (Avenier and Thomas, 2015), which is rooted in Peirce's work. Abduction is the only logical operation that permits the introduction of a new idea (Peirce, 1893–1913/1998). It questions how an unexpected phenomenon comes into existence (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Peirce connects abduction and interrogation (Bellucci and Pietarinen, 2020). Bellucci and Pietarinen (2020, p. 47) use Peirce's words: "Abduction is that kind of argument, which sets out from a surprising experience, that is an experience contrary to an active or passive belief." Abduction, notably in Peirce's later theory, supposes a nonlinear process – unlike induction and deduction (Bellucci and Pietarinen, 2020). An abductive process leads to new concepts that emerge to explain an anomaly, a puzzle, a chance meeting empirically, using a large spectrum of theories (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012; Jonsen *et al.*, 2018), and it allows creativity (Bechtel Jayanti, 2011).

While knowledge production with the PCEP does not result in a reliable representation of reality, it does provide some means of understanding life. To legitimize the act of building knowledge, research has to produce many epistemic works (Avenier and Thomas, 2015), which may take on different forms according to when the process took place. Such research makes it possible to further implicit hypotheses and notions that are either used in or emerge from the process. To this end, the researcher must broadly review literature to understand local knowledge and build generic knowledge. Studying alternative theories enables researchers to take a step back to enrich their construct (Le Moigne, 1990; Avenier and Thomas, 2015). This special reflexive process is fundamental for producing generic knowledge.

Generic knowledge expresses properties that are considered essential to characterize the studied phenomenon (Carlson and Pelletier, 1995). This knowledge is a decontextualized knowledge that could be recontextualized. This method may not seem scientific, but it allows us to step back from experiences and understand situations differently. From a pragmatic perspective, based on Dewey (1938), the situational problem and the solution proposed by the inquiry are determined by referring to future consequences (Vo, 2012). This knowledge is not a construction of the human mind, but a dialog between researchers and their environment (Vo, 2012), which is composed of colleagues, practitioners, reviewers, scientific texts, etc. The beginning of this dialog takes place when local knowledge and the researcher's environment confront one another. This could also be viewed as a dialog between a reflexive process and a diffractive analysis (see next section in which we describe the autopraxeography process).

### 3.2 The autopraxeography process

Albert and Couture (2014) define the process of producing generic knowledge in three recursive steps: writing in a naïve way, which must be realistic and modest; doing the epistemic work; and building generic knowledge. First, practitioners write their testimony in a naïve way, as practitioners, like talking about their day when they get home from work or recounting holidays to a friend. According to the first definition of the word "naïve" in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, naïve writing means writing that is "marked by unaffected simplicity." Writers reflect on their previous experience. Reflection refers to the metaphor of a mirror. It provides the opportunity to observe or examine one's own actions (Hibbert *et al.*, 2010). Writers produce this work without following the principles of storytelling that apply, for example, to an autobiography (Adams *et al.*, 2017). This naïve writing as autoethnography requires that the writers accept to reveal their own vulnerabilities (Custer, 2014).

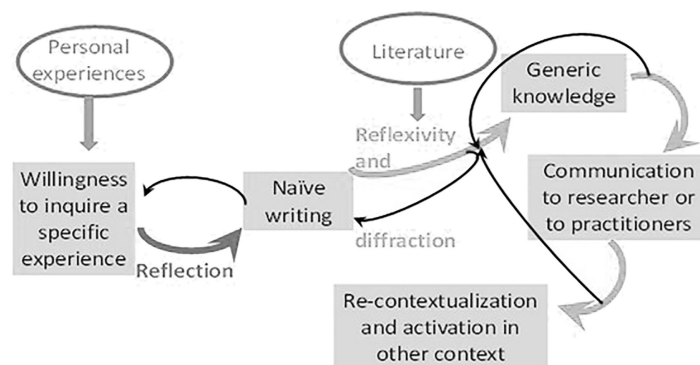
Then, after revisiting their testimonies with theories, researchers generate epistemic works. Practitioner-researchers use this opportunity to examine their narrative several times to find and develop what was initially implicit or unconscious. To accomplish this, researchers must compare and contrast personal experiences against existing multidisciplinary research. The epistemic work is a dialog between reflexive and diffractive analyses. Reflexivity refers to complex thinking and experiences: it could be seen as a process of inquiring into one's own actions (Hibbert *et al.*, 2010). The methodological purpose of diffraction is to change the perspective and enable the emergence of alternative patterns (Rae, 2016). Diffraction allows a change of perspective and the emergence of alternative models (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). Diffraction can be viewed as a concept similar to relational reflexivity, which makes it possible "to [. . .] be exposed to new contexts, new ideas, and new possibilities for theorizing" (Hibbert *et al.*, 2014, p. 283). Because reflexivity and diffraction are consistent with an abductive process (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012), it is consistent with our epistemological choice. This back-and-forth motion enables practitioners to develop generic knowledge (Albert and Michaud, 2016).

Finally, practitioners can communicate and activate the knowledge generated in other contexts. Figure 1 shows the nonlinear process and the difference between the reflection (to produce naïve writing) and the epistemic work (in order to build, communicate and activate generic knowledge).

### 3.3 Difference with other methods based on researchers' experiences

As a method based on researchers' experiences, autopraxeography is focused neither on the narrative form nor on character development: there is no intentionally fictional writing. An autopraxeography is therefore different from an autobiography, an autoethnography and a self-study of teacher.

*3.3.1 Difference with autobiography and autoethnography.* Autobiographies are "the literary expression of the individual's reflection on [their] life" (Dilthey, 1910/1961). In social research, autobiography is a genre that has become very popular (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). An autobiography can be defined as a person's life written by oneself or as marking and creating a life (Denzin, 1989). Autobiography refers to the study of "one's own (auto) life-history (biography)" (Taylor and Settelmaier, 2003, p. 234). In literature, Lejeune (1989) calls the retrospective prose narrative written by real persons concerning their own existence an "autobiographical pact" in which the focus is each person's individual life and, more specifically, the story of their own personality. "[N]arrative requires plot, as well as coherence" (Boje, 2001, p. 1). For Bruner (1986), autobiographies come mainly from the imagination rather than experience.



**Figure 1.**  
The autopraxeography process

Autoethnography is the most used of methods based on researchers' experiences, even if it is new in workplace research (Grenier, 2015; Poole, 2017; Newman and Farren, 2018). "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis *et al.*, 2011, p. 273). Autoethnography "allows the organizational researcher to intimately connect the personal to the cultural through a 'peeling back' of multiple layers of consciousness, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs" (Boyle and Parry, 2007, p. 186). According to Haynes (2011), there is no prescribed form to follow when writing an autoethnography. There are novels, dramatized episodes or conversations, vignettes, personal narratives or stories, poems and performances, field notes, and diaries (Grenier, 2015). However, plot and tension, as well as character development are important when writing an autoethnography (Raab, 2013). Thus, autoethnography crosses the line between social sciences and literature (Grenier, 2015): it is at the intersection of ethnography (the study of culture) and autobiography (Adams *et al.*, 2017). Autoethnography also allows access to vulnerability, but naïve writing in the autopraxeography process does not follow the principles of storytelling that are used in an autobiography and an autoethnography. Moreover, this writing does not focus on cultural studies contrary to autoethnography.

3.3.2 *Self-study of teacher and teaching education.* Self-study of teacher is rooted in the idea of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983). This method may be defined as a practical inquiry. According to Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), an autoethnography is "a look at self within a larger context" (p. 70), whereas self-study is "a look at self in action, usually within an educational context" (p. 70). Practitioners would write an autopraxeography when they had a particular experience that could be inquired into by using a large body of literature to produce generic knowledge (Albert and Michaud, 2016). This is different from the self-study of teacher and teaching education. However, for the self-study of teaching and teacher education, as well as autopraxeography, dialog plays a crucial role in the knowledge-building process.

Autopraxeography does not meet the obligations of the narrative form. It uses a large body of literature and, moreover, produces generic knowledge. The PCEP produces generic knowledge that diverges from both idiographic and nomothetic perspectives. Generic knowledge is not a generalizable knowledge; it has to be contextualized again in each new situation (Avenier and Thomas, 2015). Figure 2 presents the specificities of autopraxeography.

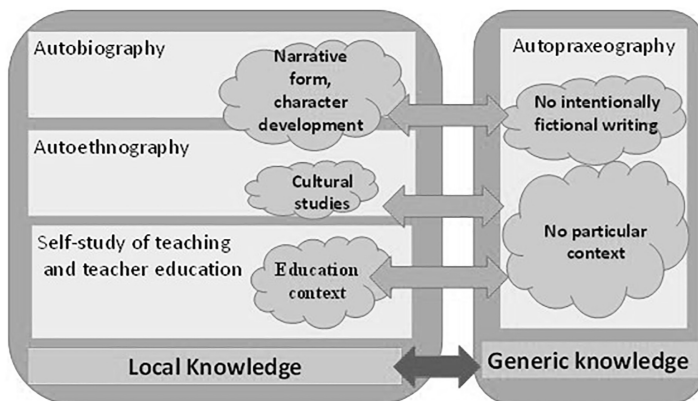


Figure 2.  
Autopraxeography  
specificities

In conclusion, autopraxeography produces generic knowledge contrary to most methods based on researchers' experiences that create local knowledge. Of course, it is possible to access vulnerability with other methods based on researchers' experiences. All these methods share the privileged access to vulnerability, but autopraxeography is the only one that creates generic knowledge on it.

### *3.4 Ethics*

Guillemín and Gillam (2004) inquire into the relationship between reflexivity and research ethics, proposing two dimensions of ethics: procedural ethics, which consists of respecting an ethics committee procedure (informal consent, confidentiality, etc.); and ethics in practice, which consist of unpredictable "ethically important moments" (p. 265). Ellis (2007) adds a third dimension: relational ethics, which "requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others" (p. 4). In studies using researchers' experiences, when we write on our own experiences, we also write about others' experiences. According to Ellis (2007), it is important to respect the wishes, rights and feelings of those involved, notably when we examine vulnerability. Moreover, it is usually impossible to obtain retrospective ethical authorization (Edwards, 2021). In this article, we changed the names of the authors and just exposed what they express themselves in previous papers. All the empirical information of this paper refers to one of the coauthors or to her previous students or coauthors. But all information on persons other than the coauthor was anonymized and came from their works previously published or submitted for publication. These people were informed and subsequently gave their consent to publish this empirical information. The chair of the research ethics committee confirmed that the arrangements complied with institutional regulations.

### *3.5 Limitations of autopraxeography*

When using methods based on researchers' experiences in research, we must also consider that there are limits to our knowledge of the past due to subjectivity, and even authors who are the protagonists of their own story are subject to these limits (Santos and Garcia, 2006). While trying to be as sincere as possible, we must acknowledge that everything is not related or even relatable. Moreover, memory can be limited and transform how we view past actions. For this reason, it is important to emphasize the study of the past from the point of view of the present, as suggested by Mead (1934). Given our epistemological choice, the purpose of the narrative is not to represent the truth, but to prepare the ground in which to sow one's epistemic work and produce knowledge to help understand life. It is not the raw material – the reconstruction of the past from the present of just one person – that produces scientific knowledge, but all the epistemic work combined. A limit of methods based on researchers' experiences, is that they provide only one source of empirical information. Each method based on researchers' experiences consists of a single point of view, which is limited and anchored in a geographical and institutional context. Epistemic work made by referring to a large spectrum of literature reduces the effects of this limit. The scientific knowledge produced is not the testimony itself, but the generic knowledge. The academic literature used during this process stems from various contexts. In this way, autopraxeography is a series of dialogs between past and present, practice and theory. These dialogs make links between ideas and generate creativity. A practitioner (researcher) needs to be willing and trained. Using autopraxeography has an impact on organizations. When these two conditions are met, such a dialog helps practitioners take a step back from their practices. One of the reasons for applying autopraxeography may be to identify how it enables the practitioner-researchers to access vulnerability and step back from it.

---

#### 4. A method to study and step back from vulnerability

This article presents two kinds of benefits from writing autopraxeographies and doing epistemic work: accessing people's vulnerability and the opportunity of taking a step back. Below, the naïve writing represents the practitioner-researcher's reflection and is followed by the discussion and the generic knowledge, which were reached by using reflexivity and diffraction. These testimonies were based on our experiences, on the one hand, as practitioner or coresearcher who used this method and, on the other hand, as a professor who guided students in its use. Although we do not explore our vulnerabilities in this article, we describe a situation in which we did expose them.

##### 4.1 *Accessing vulnerability and considering workplace complexity*

4.1.1 *Naïve writing.* The first time I used this method, it was to understand a difficult situation I experienced as an entrepreneur. I revealed a failed experience to build knowledge from it [1].

I had the opportunity to supervise the thesis of Monika with whom I was able to rework the autopraxeography method and write several articles using this method based on researchers' experiences. Monika investigated the difficulties of managing volunteers who were close to a new necessity entrepreneur. In reality, most necessity entrepreneurs are surrounded by people (an uncle, a neighbor, etc.) who help them for free. There were some articles which referred to this, but none that explained how to manage these people. To this end, Monika and I worked on that with this method. She revealed her vulnerability. This was different from the successful and powerful picture of the classic leader. Autopraxeography made it possible to access vulnerability that researchers generally find difficult to capture. A few years later, I wrote an article with a colleague on a failed teaching experience. I exposed my vulnerability and we were able to build knowledge from it.

Among others, I cowrote a paper with John, an immigrant who revealed his vulnerability. A vicious circle developed between John's vulnerability, stigmatization from different stakeholders and his feeling of nonlegitimacy. This circular reasoning in turn generated another vicious circle between mistrust or scorn, lack of self-confidence and bad organizational performance. It was difficult for John to expose himself and show his weakness. He agreed to do it as coauthor, but he would not have said anything in an interview or a survey. Moreover, using a broad range of literature we were able to build generic knowledge that is new and unexpected at the beginning of the process.

4.1.2 *Discussion and generic knowledge construction.* Autopraxeography makes it possible to explore new avenues. Albert and Couture (2014) give an example of this type of exploration. Literature and other researchers (colleagues, reviewers, etc.) challenge the experiences' practitioner-researcher and help them get beyond their first narrative. The testimony does not create knowledge; it fosters the epistemic work. So even if memory changes some elements of reality, the epistemic work builds generic knowledge that in turn produces guidelines for practitioners. However, it is not always possible to take field notes or record experiences. When researchers are practitioners, and are uncertain about what they are looking for, they cannot write down all of the elements involved in a situation. Taking more time could help academics examine specific inquiries. Reflexive (Hibbert *et al.*, 2014) and diffractive (Rae, 2016) examination using alternative theories (Le Moigne, 1990), in an apparent disorganization, lead to build emergent and complex knowledge. Emergent (Morin, 2001), this knowledge is unanticipated at the beginning of the process. This abductive logic allows creativity (Bechtel Jayanti, 2011). For these reasons, this method could build nontraditional workplace theories (Restubog *et al.*, 2021).

Numerous and various theories are used as a bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1962). The bricoleur (person who makes the bricolage) "does not limit each [task] to the tools available for the

project” (Klag and Langley, 2013, p. 161). With the script from this bricolage, scholars could produce new knowledge through improvisation rather than adherence to a specific paradigm (Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011). The coresearcher or research director, according to other theories, also facilitates reflexive analyses. With autopraxeography, instead of creating boundaries that impede researchers, theories provide them with a logic they can follow. Cunliffe (2004) explains that reflective analysis draws on traditional assumptions and can be analyzed using logic and theories that are contrary to a critical reflexivity. The use of theories is not the same as it is for a reflective analysis. It is not just logical thinking that leads to the use of one theory; it is also the script from this bricolage; quite the opposite, theories enable researchers to take other stances and see their experiences from multiple points of view. Bricolage allows different approaches to be used at the same time. This preference for conjunction instead of disjunction (what is usually expected from academics) is a fundamental idea in complex thinking (Morin, 2001), and the workplace is complex (Newman and Farren, 2018; Abreu Pederzini, 2018).

In addition, having direct access to the field can make it possible to question subjects who are not easy to study. This article shows the difficulties of vulnerable people. If practitioner-researchers demonstrate an authentic approach, the field can provide information on people’s vulnerability, which is often inaccessible. People, like John, especially in a professional context, do not want to show their vulnerability because it may expose them to injury and contempt (Levinas, 1972). However, by identifying particularly vulnerable people or groups, we risk labeling them and potentially stigmatizing them or engaging in paternalistic behavior toward them (Mackenzie, 2016). According to Restubog *et al.* (2021), vulnerability is a combination of person-dominant and context-dominant sources. This is a dialog between both. Autopraxeography, by using a broader approach than just cultural (as in autoethnography) is able to inquire into this dialog and gives access to understanding in order to produce knowledge. Thus, practitioner-researchers, like Monika and John, can access a very particular kind of information. Of course, when researchers reveal their vulnerability, it is like opening a Pandora’s Box (Raab, 2013). These researchers need to be authentic (Wiesner, 2020) and to be persuasive at being authentic (Jonsen *et al.*, 2018). With autopraxeography, understanding is broader than cultural or social studies. This method aims to produce generic knowledge, which makes it possible to transform a negative experience in a positive way, and enables one to step back.

#### 4.2 Opportunity to step back

*4.2.1 Naïve writing.* I started a PhD after working for ten years and having studied econometrics and logistics. In parallel to this process, with my spouse, we bought a vineyard. I wrote my doctoral thesis led by my doctoral advisor who was known for her work on the PCEP. I was quickly convinced that carrying out my research within this paradigm was relevant. She helped me become familiar with and use a reflexive process. Since the subject of my thesis was obviously related to my past experience, I quickly felt the need to write the story of my past experiences to understand the starting point of my reflexive thinking. Being a manager while I was studying gave me access to new experiences. Therefore, when I obtained the results of my doctoral studies, I confronted them to my new reality. I saw how inquiring into my experiences gave me access to information that could be very relevant and how all the literature that I had read helped me take a step back.

Sometime later, when I became a professor, one of my colleagues asked me to supervise a student (Mary) who was writing a Master’s thesis. I was told to be careful because she was “on the edge” and could not take a step back from her experience. I really wondered



---

how I would accomplish what I set out to do. I was sure that it was possible to use these experiences positively to build knowledge. In fact, I was convinced that this experience could create knowledge. Given Mary's emotional state, and because I was neither a psychologist nor did I have the skills, I really wondered how and if I could manage it. I began to look for information about autobiographical methodologies. Even though I could not really find the kind of method I was looking for, I found some elements to start with. Talking with this student, I realized that her thoughts were going in many directions. I realized that she had a wide variety of experiences and wanted to show something, but this thing was very vague. Moreover, she was overflowing with emotions, all the time. I realized that if she put her experience down on paper it might help her get some things off her chest. I remembered how the use of theories had helped me step back and inquire into my own experiences, so I wondered if this student could also apply this approach. I gave her some guidelines and she was able to do it. She was very proud of the result!

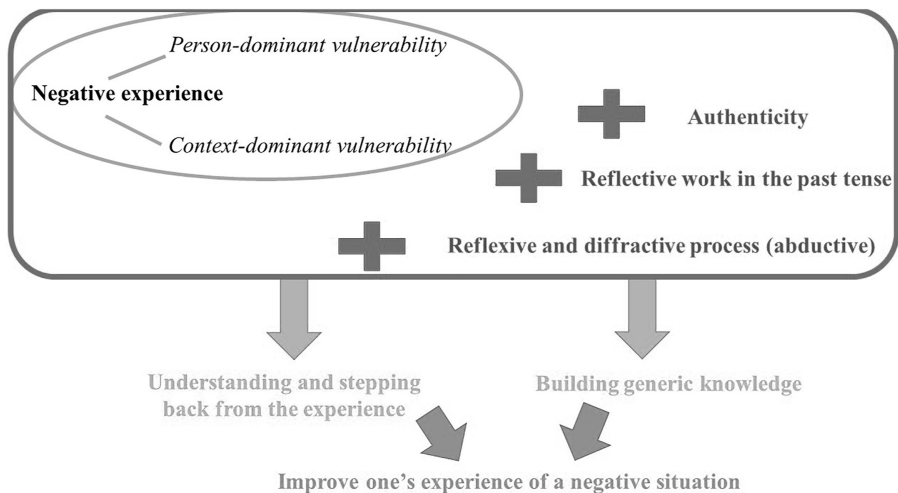
Several times, when I used this method on difficult experiences (as a teacher, as an entrepreneur or as an immigrant), I felt better, and it was the same for different coauthors and students. A better understanding of my experiences helped me.

*4.2.2 Discussion and generic knowledge construction.* Contrary to most studies based on researchers' experiences, autopraxeography requires that testimonies be written in the past tense for researchers to separate themselves from their experience, as is usual in reflection (Helyer, 2015). They take the point of view of an outsider-expert. This step back supports the emergence of new idea in an abductive process (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). This reflexivity leads to rewriting some parts of their testimony by focusing on parts or points of view that were forgotten. This kind of writing helps researchers put a distance between themselves and their experiences (Albert and Michaud, 2016). With autopraxeography, using multiple theories helps researchers step back from their personal writing and be reflexive. This reflexivity leads to rewriting some parts. Such epistemic work also means revealing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas and so on (Cunliffe, 2004). Furthermore, it is difficult to thoroughly present the thinking process.

A practitioner who has experienced a difficult situation, like Mary or one of the authors, can use this method to better understand the situation they have experienced, and thus feel better afterwards. Reflecting on negative experiences from a decentred perspective reduces the likelihood that these experiences will lead to self-destructive activities such as rumination and anxiety (Shepherd *et al.*, 2016; Orvell *et al.*, 2022). These self-distancing tools/techniques (?) could use two approaches: the "fly on the wall" and the use of "nonfirst person pronouns" (Orvell *et al.*, 2022). Autopraxeographies use both. When people analyze challenging autobiographical experiences, they tend to adopt a personal immersion perspective in which they visualize someone else's experiences through their own eyes. From this perspective, the "experiencing self" and the "resonating self" become one (Park *et al.*, 2016). However, by decentring themselves, people can achieve radically different results. Decentring is based on the psychological notion of distancing, in which the "here and now" self can mentally transcend the egocentric experience (White *et al.*, 2015). Psychological distancing can be achieved by taking a perspective foreign to the self, such as an observer or a "fly on a wall" (White *et al.*, 2015). Such distancing may also be influenced by distinguishing the "self-present-as-narrator" from the "self-past-as-protagonist." Writing in the past tense facilitates the act of distancing (Park *et al.*, 2016). Researchers begin by writing their testimony; which removes the need to keep it in their short-term memory. By writing in the past tense, the act of distancing can begin. Subsequently, the epistemic work is accomplished by using another type of language, impersonal, trying to grasp each protagonist's reality and using different theories, which enable us to understand the situation differently (such as the "fly on a wall"). Thus, this understanding makes it possible for the practitioner to take a step

back from the situation and experience it more positively. We frequently meet practitioners who wish to start a research program, whether in the context of a study or not, in order to delve more deeply into an issue related to previous difficulties. By studying this subject, ignoring their experience in order to “remain objective,” practitioners nevertheless continue to be overwhelmed by their emotions, and often fail to move past them. However, reflecting and then producing an epistemic work can help find the distance to accomplish this. The quality of the authenticity of the approach and of the epistemic work will depend on one’s ability to step back from the situation. Practitioner-researchers should therefore rely on various theories to take the necessary distance. In this way, practitioners can improve how they experience a difficult situation. If this work is carried out with the required rigor, it will also build knowledge that makes sense to other practitioners. This process helps practitioners to step back from their previous experiences. For this method to be successful, practitioners need to be trained and open to their own vulnerabilities, mistakes and failures. In societies that promote strength, being exposed does not come naturally; it is very difficult to admit to yourself that you have made a mistake. Inquiring into both the person-dominant and context-dominant sources of vulnerability (Restubog *et al.*, 2021) helps to understand the situation, step back and produce generic knowledge that leads to a better experience of the situation. Orvell *et al.* (2022) show that training in self-distancing is beneficial for vulnerable people. Not only is it positive for the vulnerable person to understand the situation, but it can also help transform the negative experience into helpful knowledge for others, thus facilitating the process. This method could help vulnerable employees or vulnerable managers, notably if they decide to go back to school.

Consequently, as Figure 3 shows, autopraxeography can be a tool to step back and build knowledge from vulnerabilities and for practitioners in a work-applied perspective to improve their experience of the situation. Negative experiences can be understood as both person-dominant vulnerability and context-dominant vulnerability, with authenticity from the practitioner-researcher, a reflective work (naïve writing) in the past tense and an abductive process. This understanding can build generic knowledge and enable participants to step back from their experience. This is interesting for practitioners who conduct studies or who are interested in research.



**Figure 3.**  
Autopraxeography, a tool to step back and build knowledge from vulnerabilities

## 5. Conclusion

This article presents how autopraxeography makes it possible to study and step back from vulnerabilities. Both are important in workplace theories and practices: the first, to study vulnerabilities, build theory on and inquire into a nontraditional way in a complex thinking; the second, as a tool to help people step back from difficult experiences. Autopraxeography uses practitioners' experiences to build generic knowledge and differs from other methods by its epistemological roots: the PCEP. This paradigm has several particularities. First, like all epistemological paradigms used by methods based on researchers' experiences, it is nonpositivist. Second, the dialog between the epistemic work and the diffractive analysis can use a broad range of literature, other researchers and reviewers' comments in order to critically and informatively take a step back and build generic knowledge. This generic knowledge is also specific to this paradigm. The knowledge built is neither generalizable nor local. The purpose of creating knowledge is to enrich the understanding of practitioners' experiences and model knowledge to constitute viable markers that can be applied in other contexts. The knowledge has to make sense to other practitioners. This epistemological root is therefore different from all those supporting other methods based on practitioner-researchers' experiences. As opposed to autobiographies, autoethnographies and self-study of teacher, local knowledge (naïve writing) does not follow a narrative form. However, according to other methods using researchers' experiences, autopraxeography makes it possible to inquire into vulnerability. Thus, using this method gives the opportunity to step back and produce workable knowledge. Instead of ignoring their experience as usual, practitioners can explore new avenues and build generic knowledge, which can transform bad experiences into something that helps people feel better. They can also step back from previous experiences to improve how they experience some emotionally negative situations, to remove whatever is blocking them in their current research process or to inquire anew into a previous research topic. Instead of trying to hide or avoid experiences, as it is often emphasized in numerous studies, autopraxeography advocates for a conscious use of one's experience. No matter how experiences influence the research process, it appears that this conscious subjectivity is personally and professionally preferable for practitioner-researchers and for producing knowledge that can make sense to practitioners.

## Note

1. The cases mentioned were either published in articles or in a master's thesis. For confidentiality purposes, we did not cite them in this text.

## References

- Abreu Pederzini, G.D. (2018), "Managerial learning challenges in a complex world", *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 17-29.
- Adams, T.E., Ellis, C. and Jones, S.H. (2017), "Autoethnography", in Matthes, J., Davis, C.S. and Potter, R.F. (Eds), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, doi: 10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0011.
- Albert, M.N. and Couture, M.M. (2014), "To explore new avenues: experiential testimonio research", *Management Decision*, Vol. 52, pp. 794-812.
- Albert, M.N. and Michaud, N. (2016), "From disillusion to the development of professional judgment: experience of an implementation process of a human complexity course", *SageOpen*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 1-13.
- Audenaert, M., Van der Heijden, B., Conway, N., Crucke, S. and Decramer, A. (2020), "Vulnerable workers' employability competences: the role of establishing clear expectations, developmental inducements, and social organizational goals", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 166 No. 3, pp. 627-641.

- Avenier, M.J. and Thomas, C. (2015), "Finding one's way around various methodological guidelines for doing rigorous case studies: a comparison of four epistemological frameworks", *Systèmes d'information and Management*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 61-98.
- Bashir, N. (2020), "The qualitative researcher: the flip side of the research encounter with vulnerable people", *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 667-683, doi: 10.1177/1468794119884805.
- Bechtel Jayanti, E. (2011), "Toward pragmatic criteria for evaluating HRD research", *Human Resource Development Review*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 431-450.
- Bellucci, F. and Pietarinen, A.V. (2020), "Icons, interrogations, and graphs: on Peirce's integrated notion of abduction", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 56 No. 1, pp. 43-61.
- Boje, D.M. (2001), *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*, Sage, London.
- Boxenbaum, E. and Rouleau, L. (2011), "New knowledge products as bricolage: metaphors and scripts in organizational theory", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 272-296.
- Boyle, M. and Parry, K. (2007), "Telling the whole story: the case for organizational autoethnography", *Culture and Organization*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 185-190.
- Bozalek, V. and Zembylas, M. (2017), "Diffraction or reflection? Sketching the contours of two methodologies in educational research", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 111-127.
- Bruner, J. (1986), *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Carlson, G.N. and Pelletier, F.J. (1995), *The Generic Book*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2004), "On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner", *Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 407-426.
- Custer, D. (2014), "Autoethnography as a transformative research method", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 19 No. 37, pp. 1-13.
- Denzin, N.K. (1989), *Interpretive Biography*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Dewey, J. (1938), *The Theory of Inquiry*, Holt, Rinehart and Wiston, New York, NY.
- Dilthey, W. (1910/1961), *Meaning in History*, Allen & Unwin, London.
- Edwards, J. (2021), "Ethical autoethnography: is it possible?", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 20, 1609406921995306.
- Ellard-Gray, A., Jeffrey, N.K., Choubak, M. and Crann, S.E. (2015), "Finding the hidden participant: solutions for recruiting hidden, hard-to-reach, and vulnerable populations", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 14 No. 5, 1609406915621420.
- Ellis, C. (2007), "Telling secrets, revealing lives: relational ethics in research with intimate others", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 3-29.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E. and Bochner, A.P. (2011), "Autoethnography: an overview", *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 273-290, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>
- Grenier, R.S. (2015), "Autoethnography as a legitimate approach to HRD research: a methodological conversation at 30,000 feet", *Human Resource Development Review*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 332-350.
- Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004), "Ethics, reflexivity, and 'ethically important moments' in research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 261-280.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995), *Ethnography: Practices and Principles*, Routledge, New York.
- Haynes, K. (2011), "Tensions in (re)presenting the self in reflexive autoethnographical research", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 134-149.
- Helyer, R. (2015), "Learning through reflection: the critical role of reflection in work-based learning (WBL)", *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 15-27.
- Hibbert, P., Coupland, C. and MacIntosh, R. (2010), "Reflexivity: recursion and relationality in organizational research processes", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 47-62.

- Hibbert, P., Sillince, J., Diefenbach, T. and Cunliffe, A.L. (2014), "Relationally reflexive practice: a generative approach to theory development in qualitative research", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 278-298.
- Jonsen, K., Fendt, J. and Point, S. (2018), "Convincing qualitative research: what constitutes persuasive writing?", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 30-67.
- Kavanaugh, K., Moro, T.T., Savage, T. and Mehendale, R. (2006), "Enacting a theory of caring to recruit and retain vulnerable participants for sensitive research", *Research in Nursing and Health*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 244-252.
- Klag, M. and Langley, A. (2013), "Approaching the conceptual leap in qualitative research", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 149-166.
- Le Moigne, J.L. (1990), *La modélisation des systèmes complexes*, Bordas, Dunod, Paris, France.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1962), *La Pensée Sauvage*, Plon, Paris, France.
- Lejeune, P. (1989), *On Autobiography*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Levinas, E. (1972), *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Fata Morgana: Livre de poche, Montpellier.
- Liamputtong, P. (2007), *Researching the Vulnerable: A Guide to Sensitive Research Methods*, Sage, London.
- Mackenzie, C. (2016), "Vulnerability, needs and moral obligation", *Vulnerability, Autonomy, and Applied Ethics*, Routledge.
- Mead, G.H. (1934), *Mind, Self, and Society: from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Morin, E. (2001), *L'humanité de l'humanité: L'identité humaine*, Seuil, Vol. 5.
- Murphy, M.P. (2017), "Irish flex-insecurity: the post-crisis reality for vulnerable workers in Ireland", *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 308-327.
- Newman, E. and Farren, M. (2018), "Transforming self-driven learning using action research", *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 4-18.
- Orvell, A., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., Vickers, B., Kross, E. and Ayduk, Ö. (2022), "From the laboratory to daily life: preliminary evidence that self-distancing training buffers vulnerable individuals against daily rumination and depression over time", *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. doi: 10.1037/cns0000323.
- Park, J., Ayduk, Ö. and Kross, E. (2016), "Stepping back to move forward: expressive writing promotes self-distancing", *Emotion*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 349-364.
- Peirce, C.S. (1893-1913/1998), "The essential Peirce: selected philosophical writings", (Peirce Edition Project, Ed.), Indiana University Press, Vol. 2.
- Pinnegar, S. and Hamilton, M.L. (2009), *Self-study of Practice as a Genre of Qualitative Research: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, Springer Science and Business Media, New York, Vol. 8.
- Poole, S.E. (2017), "Re/researching for impact", *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 146-158.
- Raab, D. (2013), "Transpersonal approaches to autoethnographic research and writing", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 18 No. 21, pp. 1-18.
- Rae, J. (2016), "A Giacometti portrait, postmodern emergence, and creativity", *Methodological Innovations*, Vol. 9, pp. 1-9, doi: 10.1177/2059799116672876.
- Raskin, J.D. (2002), "Constructivism in psychology: personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism", *American Communication Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 1-25.
- Restubog, S.L.D., Deen, C.M., Decoste, A. and He, Y. (2021), "From vocational scholars to social justice advocates: challenges and opportunities for vocational psychology research on the vulnerable workforce", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 126, pp. 1-10, 103561.
- Santos, M.V. and Garcia, T. (2006), "Managers' opinions: reality or fiction: a narrative approach", *Management Decision*, Vol. 44 No. 6, pp. 752-770.

- 
- Schmidt, R. (2017), "Sociology of social practices: theory or modus operandi of empirical research?", in Jonas, M., Littig, B. and Wroblewski, A. (Eds), *Methodological Reflections on Practice Oriented Theories*, Springer, Cham, doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-52897-7\_1.
- Schmidt, R. and Volbers, J. (2011), "Siting praxeology. The methodological significance of 'public' in theories of social practices", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 419-440.
- Schön, D.A. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Shepherd, K.A., Coifman, K.G., Matt, L.M. and Fresco, D.M. (2016), "Development of a self-distancing task and initial validation of responses", *Psychological Assessment*, Vol. 28 No. 7, pp. 841-855, doi: 10.1037/pas0000297.
- Svicher, A. and Di Fabio, A. (2021), "Job crafting: a challenge to promote decent work for vulnerable workers", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 12, pp. 1-6.
- Taylor, P.C. and Settelmaier, E. (2003), "Critical autobiographical research for science educators", *Journal of Science Education in Japan*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 233-244.
- Timmermans, S. and Tavory, I. (2012), "Theory construction in qualitative research: from grounded theory to abductive analysis", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 167-186.
- Vo, L.C. (2012), "Pragmatist perspective on knowledge and knowledge management in organizations", *International Business Research*, Vol. 5 No. 9, pp. 78-88, doi: 10.5539/ibr.v5n9p78.
- von Glasersfeld, E. (1984), "An introduction to radical constructivism", in Watzlawick, P. (Ed.), *The Invented Reality*, Norton, New-York, pp. 17-40.
- von Glasersfeld, E. (2001), "The radical constructivist view of science", *Foundations of Science*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 31-43.
- Wall, S. (2006), "An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 146-160.
- White, R.E., Kross, E. and Duckworth, A.L. (2015), "Spontaneous self-distancing and adaptive self-reflection across adolescence", *Child Development*, Vol. 86 No. 4, pp. 1272-1281.
- Wiesner, A. (2020), "Contemplating reflexivity as a practice of authenticity in autoethnographic research", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 662-670.

### Corresponding author

Marie-Noelle Albert can be contacted at: [marie-noelle\\_albert@uqar.ca](mailto:marie-noelle_albert@uqar.ca)