Frequently referring to students’ previous knowledge, experiences, or projects is essential to developing a professional judgment, but it is not sufficient. Other efficient pedagogical strategies are also crucial. According to the experience in question, as soon as one of these elements is missing, there is no more possibility of developing a professional judgment. Professors thus have an important role within the process of gaining a professional judgment because they have the possibility of influencing these two variables.

Several authors propose integrating liberal learning into business administration curricula to teach practical reasoning (e.g., Spee & Freiberg, 2015; Statler & de Monthoux, 2015). Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, and Dolle (2011) see liberal learning as a way of thinking about the world. They distinguish four central dimensions: analytical thinking, multiple framing, the reflective exploration of meaning, and practical reasoning. This integration could foster “professional judgment in complex and morally ambiguous circumstances” (Colby et al., 2011, p. 55).

This article focuses on the construction of knowledge based on an experience. One of the coauthors (henceforth, “the professor” and “she”) enjoyed working at her university particularly because of the Persons Management Master’s Program. The objective of this program was to train managers differently. It was composed of special courses: personal development, ethics, critical management, among others, and human complexity. She was very attracted to this program, and especially to the course titled “Human Complexity: Theories and Models.” When she arrived at this university, she was expected to teach this course. She sought to foster a high level of critical thinking in her students. However, her enthusiasm did not catch on and her experience was a fiasco.

In this article, we try to explain the results of this experience with respect to the generic knowledge that was produced. We present the method used—autopraxeography within a pragmatic constructivism paradigm—and then we describe the implementation process of a human complexity course. We conclude the article by sharing some generic knowledge that was built from this experience.

**Professional Judgment in a Complex World**

**To Go Beyond Rationality**

Formal rationality is an outcome of Weber’s (1978/1922) ideal type of bureaucracy. Weber identifies two forms of rational action. The first is rational value (wertrational). The
second is rational in finality (zweckrational). The last one rationally adjusts the means to the desired goals. This register has been extensively explored by economists (as in game theory) and in management science. Cognitive scientists distinguish two kinds of rationality: epistemic rationality (“how well beliefs map onto actual structure of the world”; Stanovich, 2011, p. 6) and instrumental rationality (behaving in the world so that you get exactly what you most want, given the resources available to you; Stanovich, 2011). Simon (1957) proposes to bind rationality because of uncertainty, problem complexity, limited information, or time constraints.

Simon (1976) uses procedural rationality, the thought processes used to come to the decision, to bring together the two distinct disciplines (economics and cognitive psychology) that study rational human behavior. Nevertheless, March (2006) argues that even if procedural rationality is recommended when uncertainties are associated, it is when the uncertainty is highest that this kind of tool is inappropriate (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). For Bauman (1987), uncertainty is the most important source of fear. Rationality is adapted to the practical ends for which it is intended (Morin, 1973). However, rationality turns into its opposite when it degenerates into rationalization (Morin, 2001). The Soviet Union’s completely streamlined mega-machine would have been hopelessly paralyzed if quinquennial plans had been strictly followed. It could only work with covert disobedience (Morin, 2001) and lots of creativity. Furthermore, ambivalence and complexity are inherent in phenomena and persons, for example, and cannot be eliminated. We cannot manage them; we can only manage with them. In this sense, using professional judgment could seem important in achieving a realistic stance. For Rhodes (2012), in much of management theory, organizations are viewed as “incubators” for “cold rationality” (Rhodes, 2012, p. 1315), and in the collective imagination, managers have to be logical, reasoned, and rational decision makers (Munchinsky, 2000). This unrealistic and mechanistic approach is put forward to lessen the judgment and interpretation that persons in organizations can spontaneously build. This conception resembles the computer metaphor (Morgan, 1986) and is based on scientific principles that are characterized by Henry (1987/2012) as immoral and without reference to life as it rejects all forms of subjectivity. The excesses of rationality in organizations have been noted, analyzed, and criticized for a long time (e.g., Clegg, Hardy, & Nord, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2003). Bolton and Galloway (2014) emphasize the importance of taking account of complex business environments and their ambiguity, and the weakness of simplistic and linear approaches in business schools.

Yet, to take into account the complexity of persons and their environment, it would be preferable to change metaphors. An alternative metaphor founded on the concept of enaction may better consider the subjective character of the subject, as well as the objective character of the object. This would allow persons to use management tools as guides and use their professional judgment to act. These tools are representations of a reality, but they are not reality itself; the map is not the territory (Korzybski, 1933/1994). Although these representations are useful for understanding reality, they should leave room for professional judgment. Acting within the computer metaphor may lead to being less responsible because, in this case, action does not depend on reflection but on an automatic procedure. A mechanistic approach, through its determinism, puts emphasis on the fulfillment of prefixed criteria. However, complex situations shed light on unexpected elements (the same is true for persons). This unpredictability can help reach the original goals differently from the way previously programmed. Must we favor the ends we strive to reach or stick to the ways we have chosen for reaching them? Adopting a way of thinking based on purpose rather than on process seems preferable for making priorities (Morin, 2001). The professionalism of leaders allows them to use their judgment in attaining their goal because they are guided, not blinded, by management tools. This could be embraced by all persons working in an organizational setting. Professional judgment is more than an instrumental implementation of rationality. It requires sensitivity to transferable, inter-subjective phenomena, as well as to unique persons, contexts, and practices that always transcend rules and categories (Todres, 2008). Professional judgment therefore needs to contextualize generic knowledge.

Judgment is an act of deciding [. . . ] professional judgment is a disposition toward deciding based on careful consideration of theoretical knowledge and skills [. . . ] it creates bridges between the universal terms of theory and the gritty particularities of situated practice [. . . ] Such judgment always incorporates the moral, the reflective and the social. (Reiman & Johnson, 2003, p. 5)

In addition, professions represent the social incarnation of the principal aspects of human well-being (Golby & Parrott, 1999). For Statler (2014), “the professional judgment of a manager has to do with contingencies and potentialities, with events that may be anticipated but cannot be predicted” (p. 400). The problems that professionals face are often complex and indeterminate, sometimes having no clear solution (Schön, 1993); as a result, there are no easy mechanistic procedures that make it possible to sidestep the embodied decision of flesh-and-blood human beings. This contradicts traditional literature on decisions and assessment: The evaluator has a universally valid method to perform rational and logical calculations and evaluations (Guve, 2007). According to FACIONE, FACIONE, GIANCARLO, and FERGUSON (1999), professional judgment requires both the will and the ability to think critically. As Rehn (2007) puts it, a culinary metaphor can illustrate this. A cook prepares a recipe for “living” products (meat, fish, fruit, or vegetables). There are two options: strictly implement the recipe or use professional judgment. In the first case, the cook must follow the instructions to the letter, scrupulously abiding by the proportions and the cooking time indicated. In the second case, the cook can adjust the
Professional judgment seems similar to another notion: critical thinking. There are several definitions of critical thinking and some of them look like a description of professional judgment. Based on Ennis (1962), Thayer-Bacon (1998) describes critical thinking with a focus on how it neglects or downplays emotions; how it privileges rational, linear, deductive thoughts over intuition; and how it presupposes the possibility of objectivity, thus not recognizing one’s situatedness. We do not share this description. Redding (2001) defines critical thinking as a “self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which such judgment is based” (p. 57). Furthermore, Young and Warren (2011) include the capacity to “make reasonable decisions in the face of imperfect information” (p. 860) in their definition of critical thinking skills. However, some authors indicate that the term “critical thinking” is difficult to define because there are multiple and varied definitions (Yildirim, Sükran, & Seher Sarıkaya, 2011; Young & Warren, 2011). In addition, critical thinking is a subject debated in higher education. How should such skills be taught? Students must defend their thinking with evidence, and tasks have to allow them to develop these skills. Exercises which contain only one good answer should thus be banned (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). The purpose must be to train them to make “good” decisions (Thomas, 2011). To this end, several studies indicate that students must participate actively (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011; Knechel, 2000; Redding, 2001), but rare are the studies that propose concrete ways to develop such skills in students. Consequently, Young and Warren (2011) consider that there is a problem in integrating critical thinking into a program. How do we operationalize teaching professional judgment in the classroom? More concretely, how do we help students develop their professional judgment?

**Method**

This study uses an autopraxeography method that is anchored in the Pragmatic Constructivism Epistemological Paradigm. This article presents the epistemological paradigm and then it explains the related methodology.

**Pragmatic Constructivism Epistemological Paradigm**

The paradigm of pragmatic constructivism (Avenier & Cajaiba, 2012) is similar to radical constructivism as conceptualized by Von Glasersfeld (2001), Vico, as well as James and Piaget (Avenier, 2010). In this epistemological paradigm, knowledge neither claims to reflect an ontological reality (for nobody could rationally prove its existence) nor does it reveal its characteristics when this reality exists. This constructivism is not so extreme that it rejects the notion of essence entirely (Grint, 1998). In this paradigm, although knowledge is being constructed, there is no distinction between the inquirer and the phenomenon being inquired into. They simply cannot be distinguished because what results from the observer’s viewpoint (an explicit or implicit theoretical hypothesis) is what influences observations. Pragmatic constructivism considers that Truth is meaningless because of the way knowledge is built from human representations to give meaning to situations in which persons are involved. Therefore, producing knowledge does not mean having a true representation of reality but rather possessing ways and means to understand life.

Reflexive work is what researchers do when they behave as reflexive practitioners of scientific research. It consists of tracking what seems self-evident and digging into both the implicit assumptions made and the deep meaning of the notions that are used or newly introduced. The researcher often uses a large body of academic literature to understand local knowledge, not to seem scientific but to stand back and understand it differently.

**Autopraxeography**

Autopraxeography is a self-study method, and an overall presentation of this kind of method will be presented first. Then, the autopraxeography method will be defined by explaining the label, the specificities, the process, and the limits.

**Self-studies.** Research in social sciences increasingly uses narratives and biographical methods (Haynes, 2006). Historically, these methods can be traced back to the ancient Greeks (Gould, 2006), but they are not currently used in management studies. For example, Boje and Tyler (2008) and Haynes (2006, 2011) use auto-ethnographies while introspection is emerging in consumer research (Gould, 2012). Various kinds of similar approaches exist under different names: autobiography, auto-ethnography, introspection, personal narratives, narratives of the self, personal experience narratives, self-stories, first-person accounts, personal essays, auto-observations, personal ethnography, reflexive ethnography, and testimonio among others. Researchers do not agree on the limitations of each of these approaches (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Contrary to existing research, researchers seek to make sense of personal experiences by using these reflexive methods.

The use of autobiographical methods could be perceived as “insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 11) by scientific standards. “Self-study researchers have also exhibited the need to wrestle with the question of the validity of their studies” (Feldman,
The word “autopraxeography.” Albert and Couture (2014) give guidelines to implement a special self-study method: experiential testimonio. In this article, we choose to change the label used by Albert and Couture. Indeed, we think that the name “experiential testimonio research” cannot be explicit enough. Therefore, we prefer the autopraxeography terminology. The latter is a neologism that refers both to auto-ethnography and praxeography. According to Schmidt and Volbers (2011), praxeography “focuses on the observation and description of social practices” (p. 432), and ethnography limits its inquiry to the culture of an ethos. In this way, praxeography emphasizes a broader conceptualization. Thus, autopraxeography is the counterpart of auto-ethnography with a large spectrum of investigation. This method could be used when one of the co-researchers lived a particular experience with a large literature review to produce generic knowledge.

Specificities of this method. This method presents three specificities. First, usually self-studies are conceived in an idiographic perspective. The knowledge built from practices is a situated local one (Tsoukas, 2005). Autopraxeography is based on the Pragmatic Constructivism Epistemological Paradigm. It produces generic knowledge that diverges from both idiographic and nomothetic perspectives. This is why this method seems to offer students some clues regarding how to act as practitioner-researchers in an academic setting. With respect to the production of generic knowledge, Prasada (2000) and Carlson and Pelletier (1995) point out that it expresses properties that are considered essential to characterize the studied phenomenon. Both testimony and the concepts generated should enable a connection to be established between researchers and practitioners (Albert & Couture, 2014). This generic knowledge is not generalizable; when placed in another context, it must be contextualized again (Avenier, 2010). This generic knowledge could decrease the gap between theory and practice in management.

Second, the quality of this method depends on quality criterion of an abductive explanatory case study in pragmatic constructivism as explained by Avenier and Thomas (2015): “The quality of inferences depends on the intelligibility and cogency of reasoning used in building the model from the empirical material” (p. 80). Autopraxeography consists of a successive back and forth movement between practice (internal reflexivity) and theory (external reflexivity). The use of alternative theories makes it possible to critically and knowledgeably improve the construct (Le Moigne, 1995).

Third, researchers separate themselves from the moment of their experience. They take the point of view of an outsider-expert. In autopraxeography, using multiple kinds of theories helps researchers step back from their personal writing and be reflexive. This reflexivity leads to rewriting some parts of their personal writing, by focusing on parts or points of view that were forgotten. This is why testimonies are written in the past tense. This kind of writing also helps researchers step back from their experiences.

The autopraxeography process. This method consists in writing a testimony. It is essential that the narrative seem realistic. At first, a narrative is written in a completely naive way, without trying to understand, at the time of its writing, what happened and why. Narrators simply talk about their lived experience (what they experienced and how they experienced it), such as talking about their day when they get home from work or recounting their holidays to a friend. To provide a specific context, practitioner-researchers must modify, rework, deconstruct, and reconstruct their narrative until it is as rigorous a reflection of their story as possible.

Researchers use this process to produce a reflexive work. Practitioner-researchers use this opportunity to revisit their narrative several times to find and develop what was at first implicit or unconscious. To accomplish their work, researchers must compare and contrast personal experience against existing multidisciplinary research. These comparisons allow researchers to develop generic knowledge that could be activated in other contexts.

Some limits of this method. When using biographical methods in research, we must also consider that there are undoubtedly 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 & Garcia, 2006). While trying to be as sincere as possible, everything is not related or even relatable. Moreover, memory can be limited and transform past actions. So, it is important to emphasize the study of the past from the point of view of the present as G.H. Mead’s work suggests (Albert & Couture, 2014). Given our epistemological choice, the finality of the narrative is not to represent the truth, but to build a ground to have reflexive works and produce knowledge to understand life. The raw material that is the reconstruction of the past from the present of just one person does not produce scientific knowledge; it is all the reflexive work on it that produces it. A limit of self-studies comes from the single source of empirical information. It is just one point of view that is limited and anchored in a geographical and institutional context. The effect of this limit is reduced by the reflexive work, which is supported by a large spectrum of academic literature from various fields of study.
Results and Discussions

This part presents 4 years of experiences in four narratives. Each narrative is italicized and followed by the related work. Table 1 provides a summary of these experiences, including the reflexive work.

Year 1

Narrative. The master’s program in Persons Management is offered in the administration department in a small university. The goal of this program is to improve students’ understanding of human complexity in organizations and to give them a more complete vision of the relationship between the goals of organizations, the individuals, and groups that form organizations. The course labeled “Human Complexity: Theory and Models” is at the heart of the program. In this program, students don’t follow the official sequence (except for some special courses). The program only has evening and weekend courses and is composed of both part-time and full-time students. Whereas some of them are young foreign students with little professional experience, some of them have more professional experience. Sometimes, students are even near retirement. The team of professors is limited. Each of them is specialized in one or two courses and teaches in the Business Administration bachelor’s program. When I arrived, the team was in transition. Several professors retired. Some students were complaining of the professors’ low expectations. The new team decided to increase the theoretical level. This course aims to learn the diversity of the different perceptions that exist to make sense of the human being and explore the most significant contributions drawn directly from the huge reservoir of knowledge, that is, the humanities, to highlight the wide range of possibilities. It seemed important in this course to address different concepts of the human being. I was very excited to start teaching this course. I have been interested in theories related to complexity since the beginning of my doctoral studies. I was convinced of the importance of awakening curiosity and of the humanities in understanding real life within organizations and in making decisions in complex situations. I experienced this a few years ago as a practitioner. So I thought I could more or less easily transmit my interest to students. I had planned many readings from a variety of fields (excluding management). These readings were demanding, but I wanted the students to acquire a high level of understanding because I had heard from some colleagues and students that they wished the theoretical level in our program to be raised. The collection of texts I had gathered was very thick with difficult texts, and I was proud. I relied on seminars based on these readings to build knowledge among students. Participation was graded; I indicated at the outset that participation consisted of actively relating their experience or practice to the theory studied in class (readings and lectures). Given their apparent inability to get through the reading material, I changed my requirements and made it optional. Presentations were also initially planned based on the readings (more personal research), but this too was eventually changed. At this time, the goal of developing professional judgment was tacit and implicit. I had dealt before with this kind of theoretical knowledge, and for me, this process was natural. So it was not my target.

Very quickly, students came to see me to share their concerns. I quickly realized that these views were shared unanimously. The work seemed to be inaccessible; students did not manage to accomplish their readings. I had to modify the instructions and no longer required presentations based on the reading material provided. The presentations dealt only with the scheduled topics, although superficially. The seminar format, in this case, was a complete failure. The level of discussion was flat. Student learning was low and most did not understand the value of studying inapplicable theories. Students complained that this course was too theoretical and not making much sense (this was said and written during the course evaluation); nevertheless, they were globally satisfied with the course. Despite telling them how these theories were relevant to them, there were too many texts, and they were too difficult: We came to a deadlock.

Reflective work. The goal of this course was closer to arts education (demo–practice–production–critique, recursive, theory and practice, showing, expression, individualized and diverse learning style) than to traditional management education (text driven, discursive, theory, telling, impression, batched and abstract learning orientation; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Thus, this kind of learning could be considered a structured controversy, which was one way of developing critical thinking in a classroom (Quinn, Burbach, Matkin, & Flores, 2009), but it was insufficient. The major problem faced during the first year of this course concerned the reading material. The professor suggested an excessively large number of readings, without preparing a list of essential readings. Students were disheartened by this workload, and the texts were very difficult to understand. As we noticed, it is very important to assign realistic reading loads (Nilson, 2010). “Students need to feel that there is a reasonable possibility of success and that the work is of value” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011, p. 143). The students must have the feeling that they can successfully complete a task and they must understand the relevance of the work they are asked to accomplish (Prégent, Bernard, & Kozanitis, 2009). These factors influenced the students’ motivation. Accordingly, the students in this course did not read the material and the seminar was uninteresting. They learned few concepts and the professor was disappointed with the outcome. The professor could not imagine that students would not make the necessary connections between these kinds of theories and reality because they seemed so obvious to her. She neither asked how to develop professional judgment nor how students could use theories learned in class to gain a deeper insight into organizational life. There could not be any problem
solving as there were no problems. Even though this professor wanted to make space for good conversation, as Kolb and Kolb (2005) put it, it was not easy for her to do that.

**Year 2**

**Narrative.** Once burned, twice shy. This year, I was afraid to teach the same course. I wanted to drastically reduce the number of texts to read and tried to make them more accessible. To make sure the students read the texts, I asked them to make index cards:

These index cards from your readings should contain key elements of the texts and/or links between human conception (and understanding) and the theories (or issues) presented by management in the workplace. No specific format is
required. These cards will be used as a basis for class discussion.

I did not want to show them what style to adopt, I wanted everyone to find the form that suited them, which is why I marked the cards on a weekly basis, and I gave feedback to each student who wanted it. I did summative evaluations of the quality and process improvement of the different cards. I was open-minded. I taught them the importance of recognizing every person, and applied it myself. At the end, they were not interested by my formative evaluation and just wrote some abstracts of the texts. They were not able to make reflections.

Moreover, to engage them in the learning process, I decided to ask them to present some parts of the theories. They were divided in groups and had to read more to present the different theoretical aspects. Students did not like to receive information about articles and what was presented during the lecture part of the course by the other students. So, the discussions that I had wanted to anchor in reality remained theoretical. I regularly tried to relate the theory according to my own experience as a practitioner. In the end, I didn’t manage to reach the students; I failed to get them to open up to new theories.

I provided books for each group so they could summarize the content of the readings required the previous year. I also required students to give oral presentations on each topic (or approach) and tried to lead discussions on professional life. In this class, as in every year, the group consisted of both students with work experience and students in initial training. I hoped that these theories would reflect their experience and lead students to be interested enough that they would be open to other approaches to understanding Persons Management. Also, I organized case studies to be worked on in small groups, asking them to discuss different approaches studied in class. I wanted them to use other approaches to demonstrate the value of being open to other types of theories to obtain a wider range of information than what can be obtained with more conventional methods. This experience was also a disaster. Students used the different theories just to have a good evaluation and didn’t use them to develop their judgment. Reflections were very superficial.

In the course evaluation, some students complained that the knowledge explored didn’t seem applicable in more practical professional settings. I was very disappointed. I thought that reference to my own experience, discussion with experienced students, and case studies would enable students to link theoretical knowledge and practical uses, to better understand organizational life.

**Reflexive work.** This second year, the professor made many changes: She reduced the reading material and asked the students to make index cards from their reading. The index card idea was good, but the professor was not specific enough in her instructions. Students did not know how to make the index cards. They had no work method. Two studies on the student learning profile report the same outcome (Bédard & Viau, 2001; Viau, 2006).

The professor added some case studies and required students to present their subject to the class. There were many good ideas used by the professor, but the results were inconclusive. In addition, the students made very theoretical presentations and the professor connected the class content to their practice during discussions. The presentations were uninteresting because the students had not succeeded in making their own connections between theory and practice. The students did not appreciate this activity. They probably found it difficult to get involved in their learning and were not used to it. They reproduced the models according to the instruction paradigm. However, the professor was aiming for the learning paradigm, which is characterized by active learners; learning is student-centered and interactive; knowledge is constructed and created; and those who teach seek to develop all the student’s competencies. The instruction paradigm is characterized by knowledge delivered by instructors; learning is teacher-centered; teachers classify and sort students; and learning is cumulative and linear (Barr & Tagg, 1995). In this case, the professor met certain obstacles relative to the students’ attitude and had some difficulty giving the time for reflecting on the theoretical content of the course (Yildirim et al., 2011). In this case, the professor did not give specific instructions for the oral presentations and thus did not make her expectations clear. And yet, as professors, we know that it is very important to inform students of expectations and requirements. It is necessary to explain to them their role and what that implies with respect to the work they will do (Prégent et al., 2009). As a consequence of incomplete index cards, the students were not able to apply the new theories to the case studies. The professor believed in the importance of establishing connections between theory and practice. She used a problem-solving process. The previous experience was analyzed, and a different solution was chosen. But students’ behaviors were not those anticipated. Even if the professor adopted a caring attitude toward her students, it was insufficient. The relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 1997) is important, but cannot erase some difficulties experienced by students, and thus by the professor. Afterward, this openness to others (Lévinas, 1972) and the failure experienced may have increased her vulnerability.

**Year 3 (fall semester)**

**Narratives.** This year, I was afraid to teach this course. I decided to build support and eliminate the risk that students would turn against the material. I was convinced that it would solve everything! Given what I learned from the previous year, I brought slight changes to the texts to facilitate further reading. I decided to stop requiring student presentations. The index cards from the previous year showed no real
reflection and seemed limited with regard to discussions. This is why I decided to reword my requirements:

This statement is not a summary of the text, but a personal reflection. These cards should contain the key elements of the human conception as presented in each text, links to the theory presented in class, links to previous sessions (except session 2) and problems (theoretical and/or practical) management may encounter in the workplace.

The cards were uploaded and evaluated. The reflections were much better than in previous years. Nevertheless, students worked, but they ultimately failed to appropriate the material. They still did not understand the value of learning these different approaches. They still did not adhere to this type of learning.

Year 3 (winter session)

Narrative: I taught three students. They were managers who had previously followed a special curriculum for managers. I previously had these students in a course where I based a very important part of the teaching on experience. The professional program was less demanding than the master’s program. Before, students had always been satisfied with my course. So, I was wondering how to deal with these people. I could do as I did previously, but I did not feel up to doing the same with them. I knew they would be more disconnected from theories and much less accustomed to theory than my other students. With them, I felt better, more myself. So I adjusted my course to make it “less serious” and emphasized only the theoretical elements that I deemed essential. I started to show some mainstream documentaries linked to all the main theoretical concepts to anchor them in reality. Although it may seem like I was lowering my requirements, it was in fact a way of anchoring theories in practice. I wanted to give them theory to help them better understand the context in which they would eventually be working. Students were satisfied again with my course and they produced in-depth reflections. I was astonished!

Reflective work. In the third year course, the readings were further simplified and presentations were canceled. The instructions for the index cards now specified that it should include a reflection and not a summary of the text. Although not perfect yet, the outcome was better than in Year 2. It was encouraging! We can explain this improvement by a better description of expectations (Prégent et al., 2009). Nevertheless, why did the students fail again to reach the level of learning hoped for by the professor? Did they not know how to make a reflection? Probably not, and the professor did not give them an example of what a reflection could look like. The professor simply took for granted that the students knew how to make a reflection. Finally, the professor has to be inspiring (McEwen, 1994). If we do not reach our supposed potential, our self-esteem decreases (James, 1890). So the professor’s self-esteem was low, and students felt this weakness. Humans, like other primates, can be cruel and attack the weak (Van Lawick & Goodall, 1971). Moreover, any transient loss of control in a worrying situation can lead to withdrawal and even more serious blunders (Goffman, 1967). Many professors hesitate to teach critical thinking because they do not feel up to the task (McEwen, 1994). The failures experienced by the professor can be used as examples.

During the same academic year, the professor also taught this course to a group of administrators. This change of clientele required that the professor modify her teaching method, which also led to other changes. The main modification was to put emphasis on the most important concepts that should be learned in the course. Biggs and Tang (2007) argue that this promotes deep learning in students. Kenny (2012) discusses several points to ensure student success and engagement. One of these points is to focus each session on only a few central concepts. The professor indicated that this allowed her to better anchor theories in practice. Indeed, learning requires an investment in energy and time; it is necessary to give students time to think about an answer. Indeed, “the most common discussion opener is the question, and the most common error in questioning is not allowing students time enough to think” (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011, p. 40). For this group, the professor chose the content and took more time to explore it in class. She chose quality of learning over the quantity of concepts presented. Students have to base their judgment on basic theories. This way the professor does not have to go into the details of the content of the course (Sunder, 2010). Golding (2011) claims that subjects’ previous knowledge is important for developing critical thinking skills.

Year 4

Narrative. I decided to change the approach of the course, making the academic requirements even more specific. Adjustments regarding the cards were made. I stated orally that reading and full understanding of each document was not mandatory. Most importantly, they had to find the key elements in each text, reflect on their own experience (even embryonic), and develop ideas. During each class, I insisted on some theoretical points and described my experiences, making connections with the theories seen in previous classes. Each theoretical part was linked to reality (helped by the documentaries). I didn’t present each individual theoretical element. My choices were made on what I linked with management situations. The focus was therefore on the quality of the reflection rather than on the amount of information. At the same time, I started becoming aware of the notion of professional judgment and I realized that it was my goal to develop it in this course. One way of developing professional judgment is to gain a different understanding of human complexity within organizations. I encouraged students to share
their thoughts and to relate what they learned to reality. My objective was to bring new insights to known situations. One of the goals of this course was to foster the development of professional judgment. To do this, they should apply what they learned. This course could open the eyes of students to such reflections, show how theories that may seem remote to management (e.g., human ethology) can help understand different organizations, and demonstrate how, while they remain insufficient, management tools learned in more traditional courses can be used as guides. Organizational reality includes dialogic elements; it is a journey, starting with human ethology and showing very concrete elements. Yes, the theories studied are far from reality, and management theories destabilize, but if they aren’t linked to what is known, then a problem arises. Students have been destabilized but still was rooted in experiences, illustrated with tangible examples all the time, but with relatively few theoretical elements that challenge. To help them do this exercise, I gave them, a few weeks before the end of the course, a short formative case study (a fable). The objective was to understand the fable, making it easier to transfer the knowledge to other contexts. First, I asked them to try to understand the case on their own, that is, as they usually would, without purposefully trying to apply what they learned in this course. Second, I asked them to use a topic by topic approach, as taught in class. They did as they had always done, and then I asked them to look at this case study from the point of view of different approaches. They discovered that all the approaches enabled them to understand the elements that they so far hadn’t been able to grasp. The students understood how these theories could be used to better understand realities, and they said so. This case study was followed a few weeks later by a longer one (like years ago) with a summative evaluation. The students were able to make deeper reflections than before. Many students came to see me and told me that they had delayed taking this course because of its bad reputation. But now that they had taken it, they did not understand. This course was certainly demanding in terms of work, but they thought that it taught new ways of understanding. Many of the students this year told me that this course was important for understanding people management differently. This corresponds to the acceptance of the inherent complexity in organizational life, which can be understood through different points of view.

By improving their understanding of the complexity of organizational life, the students were able to develop their professional judgment.

Reflexive work. In the fourth year course, the professor told the students that their reflection could be based on some excerpts of the text but not on the whole text. Her instructions were clearer than they had been in previous years. Students could choose excerpts that moved them. This choice increased the students’ perception of control over their learning and kept learners intrinsically motivated (Kenny, 2012). Students gain a certain sense of control when they are offered significant opportunities to make choices, which in turn improve their motivation (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Kolb developed experiential learning theory (ELT) which is a knowledge-building process that involves experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, and shows the importance of making links between them (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). The index cards used to stimulate reflection looked like journal writing. It is a way described by several authors who favor the development of critical thinking (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004). Furthermore, the quality of the students’ reflections allowed them to participate actively in finding solutions to the case studies. Klebba and Hamilton (2007) note that case studies combine theoretical content and critical thinking skills providing a deeper student learning experience. Indeed, the objectives of the case studies were to “develop the students’ capacity to analyse a complex situation; choose a solution and argue in a rigorous way in its favor” (Prégent et al., 2009, p. 98). Klebba and Hamilton mention that case studies are a good means to integrate authentic professional situations into a course and to create a stimulating situation which increases the participation of the students. Kenny (2012) argues that one of the three strategies to ensure success and engagement is to involve the learner using “activities that promote practice and problem-solving to facilitate synthesis, integration and application” (p. 3). Thus, the professor should begin with a simple case study before proposing a more complex one. The use of a simple case study at the beginning positively influences the students’ motivation. We can “help students strengthen their feeling of autoefficiency by giving them activities in increasing degrees of difficulty” (Prégent et al., 2009, p. 253). Coe (2011) demonstrates several advantages of scaffolded assignments: Students are more prepared to write and to think critically, they do a better analysis of their readings, and they offer a better interpretation of the studied concepts. Phillips and Heiser (2011) experiment with the Scaffolding Theory among accounting students. The study demonstrates that the students improve how they solve complex situations when the simpler initial situations were well understood. The course should therefore be planned in a way to use knowledge, not only to acquire it. Students must be able to formulate and justify their ideas (Greenawalt, 1997). The addition of case studies to the course moves in this direction. This helps students commit themselves to a meaningful activity, thus contributing to build a bridge between theory and practice, both being essential elements according to Sanzo, Myran, and Clayton (2011). Finally, thanks to reports produced during Years 1 to 3, the students reached the level of learning aimed for during Year 4!

Building Generic Knowledge: The Importance of Frequently Referring to Students’ Previous Knowledge, Experiences, and Projects and Other Efficient Pedagogical Strategies

The experiences presented above make it possible to build generic knowledge. A professor who wants to develop
professional judgment could use theoretical knowledge found in liberal learning and humanities to this end. If this professor does not frequently refer to students' previous knowledge, experiences, and projects, students might develop a mental block; they may not learn or develop their professional judgment. If this professor does not use efficient pedagogical strategies, students will not learn. Indeed, the professor has to use specific educational approaches to develop critical thinking (Golding, 2011).

Even if a professor wants to develop students' professional judgment using liberal learning and humanities, failure is still possible. Referring frequently to students' previous knowledge, experiences, and projects seems to be a major factor in successfully attaining the course objectives. Without this, students may not be interested, which leads to deadlocks, making it impossible to develop judgment and to learn. These reactions are defensive. Students wish to prevent embarrassment or threat (Argyris, 1993; Lewis & Dehler, 2000). This experience is not unique. This kind of reaction has been observed in other cases. Liberal learning and humanities should destabilize most students, which may allow them to improve their thinking process. However, if the professor does not try to build bridges between the theories presented and the students' reality, the result can be disappointing. Professors who want to develop professional judgment using liberal learning have to be conscious about the importance of frequently referring to the students' reality. This practical reasoning and the reflexive exploration of meaning are two of the four dimensions of liberal learning (Colby et al., 2011). The first one is a characteristic of professional judgment (Colby et al., 2011; Spee & Fraiberg, 2015). In the first years of the testimonio, the professor tried to use analytical thinking and multiple framing; without enough practical reasoning and reflexive exploration of meaning, it did not work. Harrison and Akinc (2000) show how integrating discussion and dialogue into management education can foster student learning. Of course, some students can learn without help, but this is not the case for all of them. If the majority are driven to inactivity, it could be difficult for the professor to help others progress.

Although these frequent anchorages are necessary, they remain insufficient. The professor must also use other efficient pedagogical strategies. For example, if the students think it is impossible to complete the task set by the professor, they will stop trying. The result is the same if the strategy used seems uninteresting (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Without student interest, it is not possible to foster professional judgment. The importance of interest is not new. Dewey (1913) already placed emphasis on it:

> Interests, as we have noted, are varied; every impulse and habit that generates a purpose having sufficient force to move a person to strive for its realization, becomes an interest. But in spite of this diversity, interests are one in principle. They all mark an identification in action, and hence in desire, effort, and thought, of self with objects; with, namely, the objects in which the activity terminates (ends) and with the objects by which it is carried forward to its end (means). Interest, in the emotional sense of the word, is the evidence of the way in which the self is engaged, occupied, taken up with, concerned with, absorbed by, carried away by, this objective subject-matter. (p. 90)

However, even if the professor is aware of the importance of interest, the pedagogical strategies chosen may, in some cases, still fail to generate interest in students. Dewey (1938) emphasizes the prominence of experiences in learning: “The present affects the future anyway” (Dewey, 1938, p. 50). Dewey studied children's education. For adult students, as in this complexity course, it is important to anchor learning within the prior experiences of the learner (Holton, Swanson, & Naquin, 2001; Knowles, Holton, Swanson, & Holton, 1998). In this way, the past influences not only the present but also the future. Although this idea of using the learners' experiences is not a new one, it is difficult to implement in a theoretical and model course. Teaching this kind of course does not come naturally. This article explores these difficulties. It shows the importance of challenging the teaching goals and the course content. Professors need freedom and willingness to do this. Professors must accept to explore outside of their own comfort zone. This is neither usually done nor easy. Moreover, it may make the professor vulnerable.

Nevertheless, results are, in fine, very positive. Students can develop their professional judgment. In experimenting with these new theories on their own previous experiences, they live Dewey's (1938) idea of experiences' continuity. “Every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies, in some way, the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Thus, they can grow to become a better future manager.

**Conclusion**

This article described an experience of teaching liberal learning and humanities to students in administration. After several educational tries and an analysis of the resulting reports, we noticed that the professor had an important role to play in the development of the students' professional judgment. A professor must act on two levels: frequently refer to the students' previous knowledge, experiences, and projects (anchoring), as well as use efficient pedagogical strategies. If one of these two elements is not used, students become incapable of participating; they develop a mental block, and no learning is possible. In these circumstances, the goals set by the professor will not be reached and professional judgment will not be developed.

This experience demonstrated that students naturally developed a mental block because of their rather high aversion to change. This mental block initially surprised the professor, who felt powerless when faced with this attitude and did not know how to react. This deeply disappointed the professor,
which led to disillusionment. The professor believed in the importance of open-mindedness and tried to overcome the students’ resistance by setting up different strategies to open the students up to new avenues. The professor reproduced this model and integrated it with a group during Year 4 and the outcome was decisively positive. These students developed their professional judgment. Unlike what traditional literature claims, these future managers should be able to recall that they are human beings and act with a better understanding of persons, their contexts, and interactions. Even if these conclusions seem obvious, they are nevertheless often forgotten by those who teach. Some discussions with various professors and students confirmed it. Despite the fact that the professor had good intentions, and the use of existing literature did not concretely allow her to practice, the results were disastrous. Thus, this article shows experiences similar to some other teachers have had, who may feel ashamed but now see that they are not alone.

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