

Including:
Card deck with
vignettes and
activities, worksheet,
poster and more



The introspector's toolkit for responsible practice

For understanding, identifying and managing risks & opportunities in introspective design studies

Created by Katerijn van Kooten

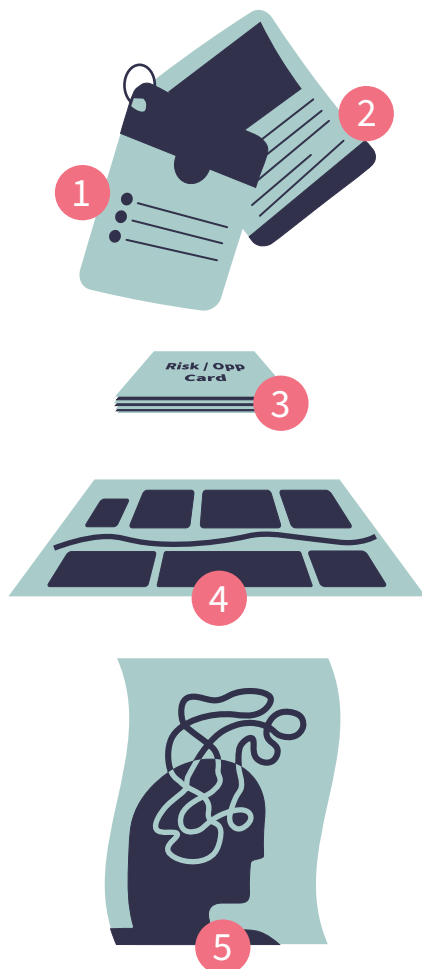
Toolkit Manual

About this Toolkit

You are a design researcher (or researching designer) who has decided to enter the wonderful world of introspective methods. In your study, you are both the researcher and researched. This dual role, along with the personal, revealing nature of introspection is what gives this method its unique opportunities and risks. Risks may affect you (the researcher-participant), but may also affect those you refer to in your research. After all, introspective accounts of your personal experiences almost always implicate others in your life.

This toolkit will support you in doing your introspective study responsibly. It is designed to help you understand, identify and manage the risks and opportunities of your introspective research, minimizing the potential harm, while maximizing the opportunities. This toolkit distinguishes between risks and opportunities within two main areas in the process of introspection: the act of introspection itself, and sharing (e.g. publishing) your introspective account. You can use the toolkit individually, but it is more powerful when you do the activities with others.

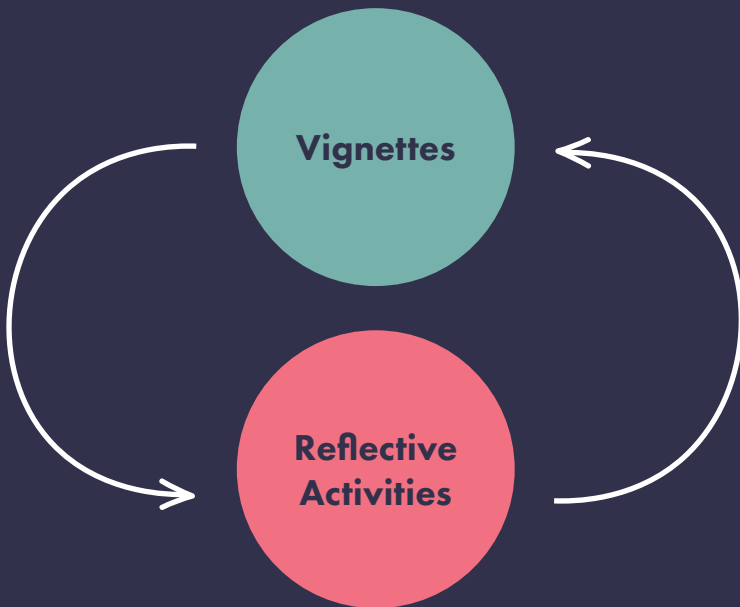
Toolkit Components



1. Take the card deck and find the **Activities**. You can just do them all or use the Activity Quickscan to check out which Activity to start with.
2. Read the **Vignettes** in the card deck to learn from other researchers how risks and opportunities manifested themselves in their design-related introspective studies.
3. Use the **Risk and Opportunity Cards** to understand the definitions of the different Risk Dimensions and Opportunity Categories.
4. Fill out the **Activity Worksheet** to draft up your results of the Activities.
5. The Risks & Opportunities (R&O) **Overview Poster** can be used to view common risks and opportunities within the Act of Introspection versus Sharing your Introspective Account. Use the back side of the poster to create a **DIY Poster** as a visual summary and reminder in Activity G.

Card Deck

Learn from the stories of introspective researchers and use the reflective activities to understand, identify and manage risks and opportunities in you own project.



**The Introspector's Toolkit
for Responsible Practice**



#1 Christine

“When I was 19 years old, I started experiencing symptoms of depression. Around that time, I started journaling. Journaling helped me get out of my negative thoughts and feelings. Some time ago, I read about introspective research for the first time in a paper by Ellis. It inspired me to use introspection for my own research, in order to understand my journaling practices and how they supported positive thinking. I hoped that with my personal story, I could relate to others who were struggling.

For this research, I started writing lengthy descriptions of what I had thought and felt back then, and how journaling had worked out for me. Introspection was a great way to research the complex emotional experiences that I experienced in the past, and I learned a lot about myself.

However, the more I recalled memories of this difficult period in my life, the more I also felt and even relived the pain that I felt back then. Apparently, the dark thoughts were tucked away carefully in the back of my brain, and now they were eager to come out of their secret hiding place and take over my thought processes again. Experiencing these painful feelings and thoughts, I doubted whether I should continue with this research. I noticed that thoughts about depression could not leave my mind, especially on days that I was studying.”

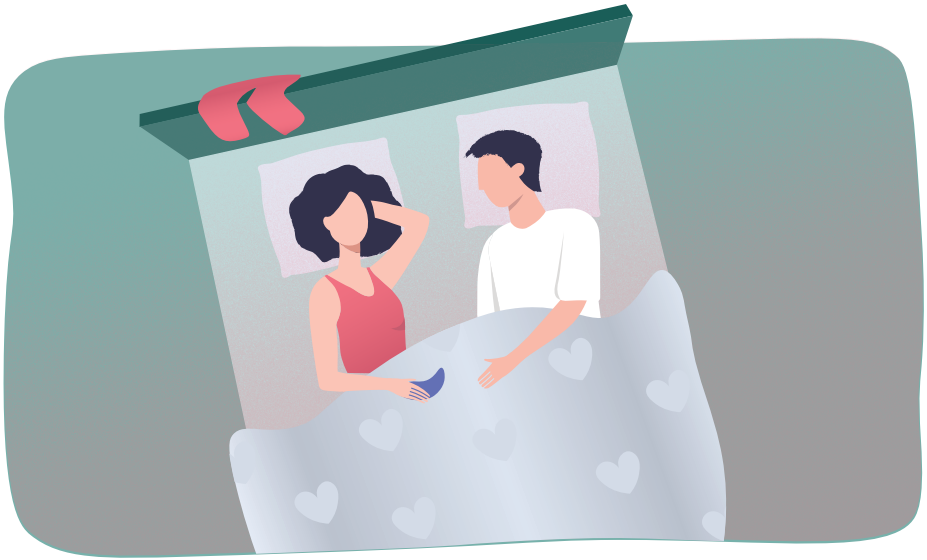


#2 Alex

“I have never been a sports fanatic, but last year, a friend of mine persuaded me to run half a marathon. The first few times of training were exhaustive, and I could hardly bring myself to do it. But after a few times, I noticed a certain feeling start to rise during my run. I felt at peace. Having noticed this feeling of peace, I started noticing it at certain other moments too. It was a beautiful feeling.

After hearing about introspection, I was immediately intrigued by this way of collecting personal, felt experiences. I decided to try this method and keep count of when I felt peaceful, in order to design for peaceful experiences later. To collect data, I started to fill in a diary at the end of each day, in which I wrote down my experiences, thoughts, and feelings during that day. Some days I didn't really experience this peaceful feeling, whereas on other days I could write down a lot.

A few days into my research month, I was running my usual Saturday morning run. But rather than feeling at peace, I noticed my mind working hard. Am I feeling it yet? How shall I verbalize this in my diary later? After my run, I felt dissatisfied. I couldn't enjoy my run like I usually did. Over the next weeks, I noticed it was hard to be in the moment. Rather, I felt distanced, analytically looking at the situation.”



#3 Kiran

“After following a workshop on designing for sex, I knew this was what I wanted to do. I started a design project with the goal of designing a foreplay toy to help long-term couples get intimate. After a short research phase, ideating and prototyping, I felt like I had come up with the ultimate concept, and I spent a few weeks turning it into a high-fidelity prototype.

The tool involved different textures and vibrations that could be placed on different parts of the body as a way of massage. To validate the tool, I wanted to organize a user test that would require a couple to use the toy for a few weeks. Not only was it difficult to find a couple that was willing to participate, I also struggled to get approval from the ethical board. Information about sex and relationships is considered sensitive and furthermore, they weren’t very eager to just let me test a provisional toy. I reckoned it would be much more convenient to test it on myself.

I asked my partner whether they would be OK testing the foreplay toy with me. They were excited to test it with me and didn’t really want to know any details of the research. The toy broke down once, but I managed to fix it the day after. After the testing was completed, I retrospectively collected notes about how I had experienced it. I tried to describe my experiences as best and honestly as I could, and didn’t shy away from any personal details about our sex.”



#4 Charlie

“Not many people know this about me, but I have been struggling with persistent social anxiety ever since I was a child. It has definitely influenced my study performance. Presentations, group work, or even having to talk to a fellow student are things that cause high stress. In my graduation project, I decided I wanted to help other students with social anxiety. Next to a literature review, I wanted to gain empirical insights through in-depth interviews with people who suffer from social anxiety. However, the ethical review board rejected my first proposal. They wanted me to include additional safeguards in accordance with the GDPR, but I was running out of time. That’s when I decided it would be convenient and quicker to use introspective research.

I could start right away, and I had 24/7 access to my own data. I noticed when writing in my research diary, that I learned more about myself and how my social anxiety manifested itself. However, things got more difficult toward the end of my project. My diary also included vivid descriptions of the fear I felt during the meetings with my supervisors. This was important data, but it felt very private, and awkward. What would my supervisors think of me when reading this? Would it influence the way they saw me? Would they still offer me that Ph.D. position that I was hoping to get?

I considered writing down the story in a more superficial way so that I wouldn’t have to feel embarrassed. However, was I then still showing ‘the truth’? Wouldn’t that decrease the value of my research? How much of the truth would I have to show to maintain its value, and how much of the truth would I have to hide to protect my own privacy?”



#5 Kai

“My mother passed away when I was only 4 years old. I have only a few memories of her, most of what I remember from her is how I remember her from pictures. My father and I didn't talk much about it in my childhood. It was very painful for him to recall. However, as I got older, I got more curious about my mom, and I started asking my dad lots of questions. I remember these conversations as difficult, and tense, but they also brought us closer together. This personal experience motivated me to design conversation cards for people who had lost a family member. To form my design process, I wanted to research this experience, and I retrospectively introspected the conversations with my dad and wrote them in an introspective account.

Before sharing the account with other people, I asked my dad to read it. I felt like he had the right to read it first. Halfway through the account, he said: “I have always fully supported your academic career, but did you really have to write about this?”. He didn't want to finish reading the piece. He said he wasn't sure if he was comfortable with this being shared with others. I had promised him that I wouldn't continue the project if he did not support it, but at that moment I had mixed feelings. I wanted to help other people who had lost a relative, and I saw the bigger impact that this project could make.”



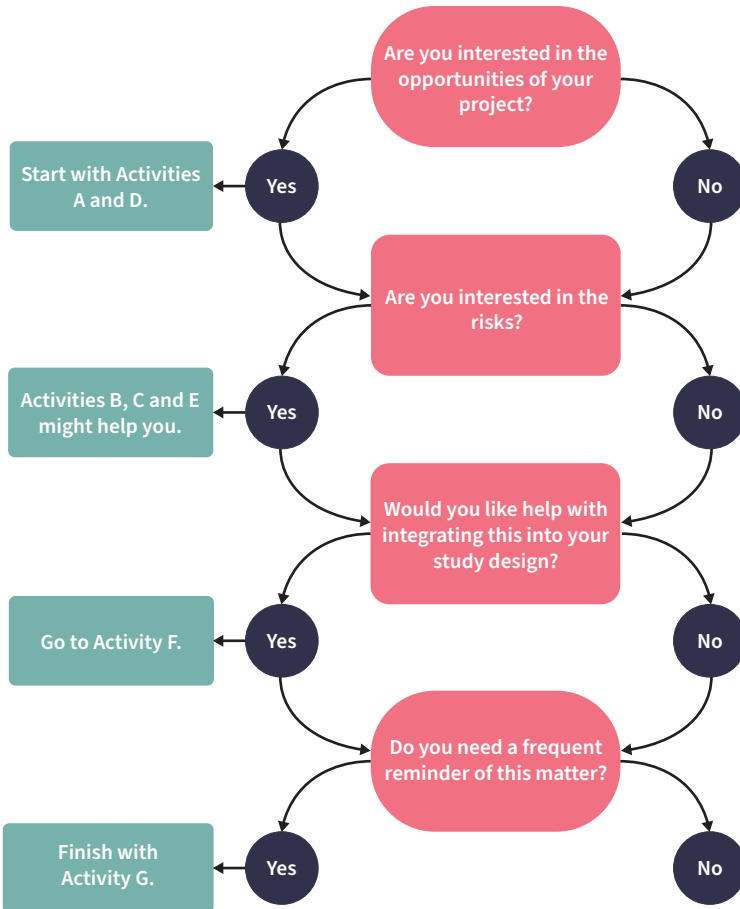
#6 Martha

“For my graduation project, my design goal was to create a work environment where everybody feels free to voice concerns. It was a project that I felt very passionate about, especially after what I had experienced myself. After finishing my bachelor’s degree in design, I took a year off to work as a UX designer at one of the largest tech firms in the country. I wasn’t surprised to be working in a predominantly male team, as this had happened often during my studies. However, at this company, I soon started to experience sexism first-hand from my direct co-workers.

By telling my own story, I was hoping people could relate. I hoped I could make a real impact. Working on this project gave me a sense of purpose. Recalling these bad memories, I tried to write them down as detailed as possible. However, I started getting doubts along the way. Even though it was wrong for my ex-colleagues to have behaved that way, was I right for writing about it and exposing them? I would not put their names in it, but anyone looking at my LinkedIn profile could check where I had worked that year. My former colleagues would likely be retraceable, which could have bad consequences for their relationships, or their jobs. I realized it wasn’t just my story that I was telling, it was theirs as well. I could not protect their anonymity unless I would remove my own name from my work.”

Activity Quickscan

The activity cards are designed to help you understand risks and opportunities in introspection, identify them in your own project, and learn to actively manage them. Each activity can be done individually, but is more powerful when you do it with others. To help you determine what activities you want to do, do the quickscan below.





A. Making a visual reminder

(10 min)

Goal:

To create a DIY poster as a visual reminder of your opportunities and risks.

- 1 Go to the Infographic Poster.
- 2 Check out the risks dimensions and opportunity categories that are most common within the act of introspection itself vs. when sharing of publishing an introspective account.
- 3 Use the Risk and Opportunity Cards for understanding the definitions of the risk dimensions and opportunity categories.
- 4 Go to the poster template on the back side of the infographic poster and fill out your project details.



B. Identifying Opportunities

(30 min)

Goal:

To understand the variety of opportunities that introspection can present, and to identify opportunities in your own project context.

- 1 Read through the 6 Vignettes.
- 2 What opportunities do you recognize in these stories? What opportunities do you recognize for introspection itself, and what opportunities for sharing your introspective account?
Tip: Check out the Risk & Opportunity Overview Poster for guidance.
- 3 Which of these opportunities do you expect to encounter in your own project? Write them down in the Activity Worksheet and use the stickers to put them on the Poster Template.



C. Identifying Risks

(30 min)

Goal:

To understand the variety of risks that can arise through introspective studies, and to identify potential risks in your own project context.

Read through the 6 Vignettes.

What risks do you recognize in these stories? What risks do you recognize for introspection itself, and what risks for sharing your introspective account?

Tip: Check out the Risk & Opportunity Overview Poster for guidance.

Despite risks to yourself, what risks might be caused by referring to others in your research?

Which of these risks do you expect to encounter in your own project? Write them down in the Activity Worksheet and use the stickers to put them on the poster template.



D. Understanding the effect on wellbeing

(20 min)

Goal:

To understand the effect on wellbeing by assessing the probability of your identified risks and their impact.

- 1 Revisit the risks you identified in activity B.
- 2 Go to backside of the Activity Worksheet and check the Impact Table. Assess for every risk which score is applicable.
- 3 Determine the probability of this risk happening.
- 4 Go to Activity C on the Activity Worksheet and fill out the risk in keywords in the applicable box, based on impact and probability scores.



E. Strategies for Opportunities

(20 min)

Goal:

To formulate 3 concrete strategies for enhancing one or more opportunity.

- 1 Revisit the identified opportunities. You might want to enhance/ensure opportunities with higher priority, whereas you might just want to accept other opportunities if they come around. Which opportunity has high priority for you?
- 2 Using the prompts below, think about how you can actively enhance your chosen opportunity. Write down 3 ways of enhancement in the Activity Worksheet.

Enhance

- What can you do to ensure this will come your way?
- What can you do to make the opportunity even bigger?
- What resources might help you do this? Think about: Materials, Money, Time, Technology, Knowledge, People...



F. Strategies for Risks

(20 min)

Goal:

To formulate 3 concrete strategies for managing one or more risk.

- 1 Revisit your identified risks and their impact and probability. Based on these factors, determine what strategy to apply: *Accept* the risk, *Mitigate* it or *Avoid* it.
- 2 Using the prompts below, think about how you could apply the relevant strategy to the relevant risk. In the Activity Worksheet, write down 3 ideas to make the strategy more concrete.

Accept

- Do you need to revisit the risk at a later time?

Mitigate

- What can you do to reduce the probability of the risk happening?
- What can you do to reduce the impact of the risk on your/others' wellbeing

Avoid

- What is the cause of the risk?
- Is it possible to avoid this cause (partly)? If yes, how might you do that?



G. Integrating in your study

(20 min)

Goal:

To make concrete how you can embed your defined strategies in your study routine.

- 1 The valuable information you have gathered during the activities is more likely to be used if you integrate it into your introspective study. In the worksheet, write down how your learnings are going to affect your work. For example, you can consider:
 - Study Design: What might change in your study design?
 - Time: How do you plan for it?
 - Energy: How do you combine things so that it doesn't become extra work?
 - Other

Risks & Opportunities Overview



LEGEND

Opportunity Categories
Opportunities for the researcher

- A. The Practical Side of Introspection
- B. Introspection as Self-Regulation
- C. The Beauty of Introspection
- D. Improved Relatedness
- E. Making an Impact
- F. Gaining Recognition

Risk Dimensions

Risks for the researcher and for those referred to in the research

- 1. Psychological/Emotional Risk
- 2. Physical Risk
- 3. Social Risk
- 4. Privacy/Confidentiality Risk
- 5. Economic Risk

My Risks & Opportunities



**Risk
Card**

**Risk
Card**

**Risk
Card**

**Risk
Card**

**Risk
Card**



1. Psychological/ Emotional Risk

Introspection might result in undesired changes in thought process or emotion.



4. Privacy/ Confidentiality Risk

Researcher-introspection might result in intrusion of one's solitude or into one's private affairs, public disclosure of private information, or unwanted identifiability.



2. Physical Risk

Researcher-introspection might result in experiencing physical pain or discomfort when studying a phenomenon in unsafe situations or under unsafe circumstances.



5. Economic Risk

Researcher-introspection might result in negative consequences to one's economic status, including one's income and job opportunities.



3. Social Risk

Researcher-introspection might result in a negative effect on one's social situation, such as embarrassment within a social group, negative judgment, changing relations or loss of reputation.

**Opportunity
Card**

**Opportunity
Card**

**Opportunity
Card**

**Opportunity
Card**

**Opportunity
Card**

**Opportunity
Card**



A. The Practical Side of Introspection

Introspection gives you 24/7 access to rich experiential data. It can be quicker and more convenient than organizing empirical studies with other participants, fulfilling the need for comfort and autonomy.



B. Introspection as Self-Regulation

By paying special attention to your inner states, you can learn a lot about yourself. It can teach you to manage yourself better and develop competences. It can help strengthening the mind, and even have influence on the body.



C. The Beauty of Introspection

Due to its highly personal nature, introspection can be a beautiful and moving experience. You live through it, it is very engaging, full of inner passion, and you will have a lot of very rich material to share.



D. Improved Relatedness

Introspection can contribute to increased relatedness between you and your readers, as well as other introspective researchers. Besides, introspection can help you gain more understanding of others, increasing empathy.



E. Making an Impact

When sharing or publishing your introspective account, you can make a positive impact on your readers about something you find meaningful. Furthermore, you can create a contribution to the design field in general.



F. Gaining Recognition

Sharing your introspective account can lead to appreciation by others, or positively affect your position as a researcher.

Activity Worksheet

A. Reflecting Prior Knowledge

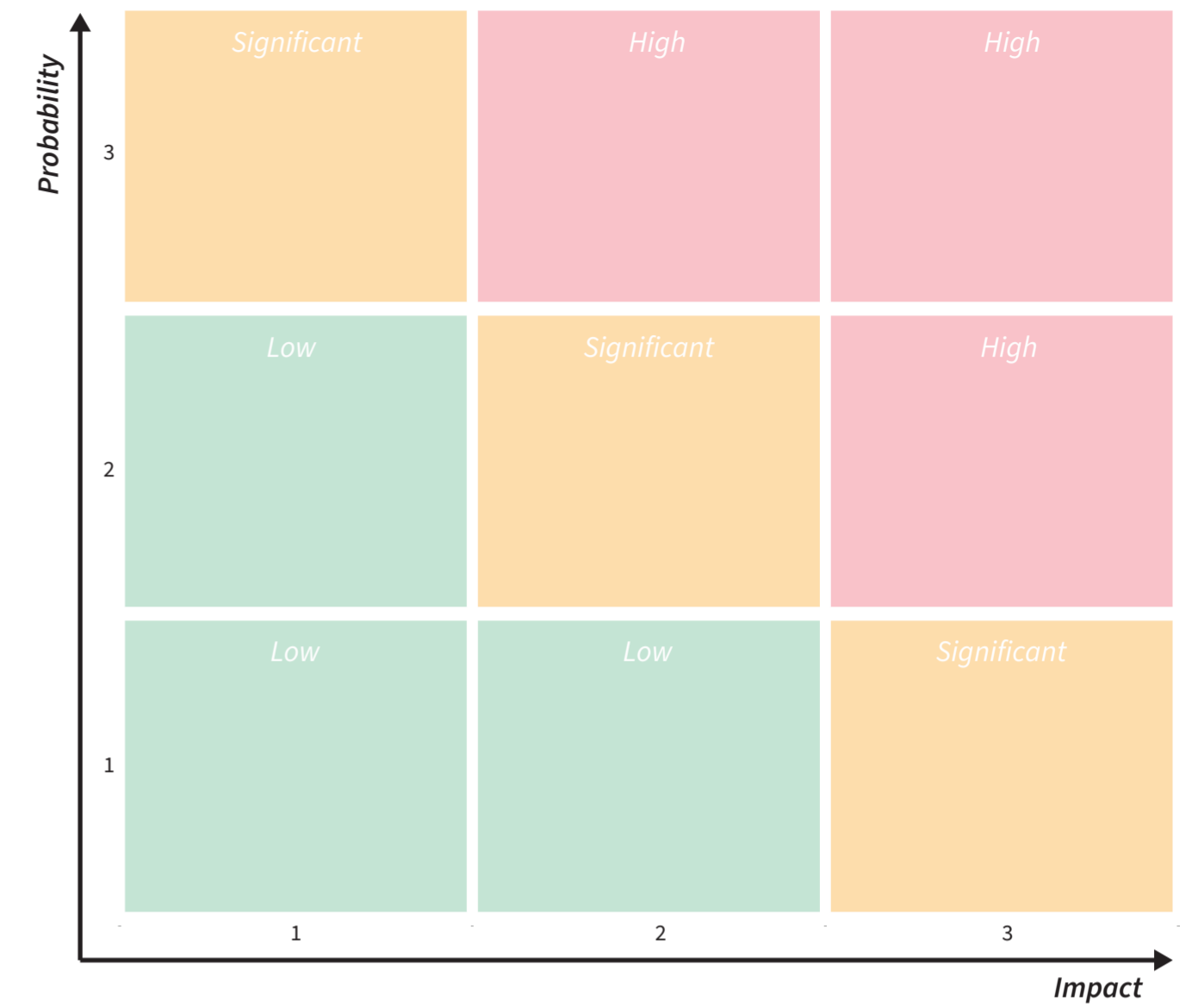
B. Identifying Opportunities

Act of introspection	Sharing an introsp. account
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C. Identifying Risks

Act of introspection	Sharing an introsp. account <i>Risks to self</i>
	Sharing an introsp. account <i>Risks to those referred to</i>

D. Understanding the effect on wellbeing



E. Strategies for Opportunities

Enhance: intensify, increase, or further improve the quality, value, or extent of the opportunity

F. Strategies for Risks

Accept: Acknowledge that a risk can happen, but no action required	Mitigate: Reduce the probability or the impact of the risk	Avoid: Eliminate the cause of the risk / Not pursue things that can cause harm
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G. Integrating in your study



D. Support Table for Activity D: Impact Table

This table shows the impact scores (vertical) for each of the 5 Risk Dimensions (horizontal).

	Risk Dimensions →	Psychological/Emotional Risk	Physical Risk	Social Risk	Privacy/Confidentiality Risk	Economic Risk
Score ↓	Definitions → ↓	<i>Researcher-introspection might result in undesired changes in thought process or emotion.</i>	<i>Researcher-introspection might result in experiencing physical pain or discomfort when studying a phenomenon in unsafe situations or under unsafe circumstances.</i>	<i>Researcher-introspection might result in a negative impact on one's social situation, such as embarrassment within a social group, negative judgment, changing relations or loss of reputation.</i>	<i>Researcher-introspection might result in intrusion of one's solitude or into one's private affairs, public disclosure of private information, or unwanted identifiability.</i>	<i>Researcher-introspection might result in negative consequences to one's economic status, including one's income and job opportunities.</i>
1 (Low)	Risk impact is minimal.	The experienced changes in thought process or emotion are minimally undesired (e.g. short-lasting/ temporary feelings of unrest or discomfort).	The experienced physical pain or discomfort is minimal (e.g. brief period (minutes), and low pain level).	The experienced negative impact on or through social relations is minimal (e.g. a moment of embarrassment).	Limited personal information involved (e.g. no sensitive or health information involved).	One's income or job opportunities are barely affected.
2 (Moderate)	Risk impact is significant.	The experienced changes in thought process or emotion are moderately undesired (e.g. serious feelings of discomfort that can be dealt with by yourself).	The experienced physical pain or discomfort is moderate (e.g. longer period of typically days and /or pain levels that give serious discomfort).	The experienced negative impact on or through social relations is moderate (e.g. some relations are impacted).	The introspective account reveals someone's identify unwantingly and/or shares private information.	One's income and/or job opportunities are moderately affected (e.g. less than 5% of income and/or no impact on current professional activities).
3 (High)	Risk impact is severe.	The experienced changes in thought process or emotion are highly undesired (e.g. strong anxiety, burn-out, depression; professional help needed).	The experienced physical pain or discomfort is severe (longer lasting and/or medical care is needed).	The experienced negative impact on or through social relations is high (e.g. important relations (friend, family, professionally) are impacted or damaged).	Information shared can reveal someone's identity unwillingly and/or intrudes one's private affairs, might result in psychological, social or economic risk.	One's income and/or job opportunities are affected severely (e.g. more than 25% of income and/or current job position is at stake).

D. Support Table for ActivityD: Probability Table

This table shows the probability scores (vertical), which are applicable to all Risk Dimensions.

1 (Low)	Very unlikely to occur.
2 (Moderate)	Will sometimes occur.
3 (High)	Certain or almost certain to occur.



A. The Practical Side of Introspection



A. The Practical Side of Introspection



A. The Practical Side of Introspection




B. Introspection as Self-Regulation




B. Introspection as Self-Regulation




B. Introspection as Self-Regulation



C. The Beauty of Introspection



C. The Beauty of Introspection



C. The Beauty of Introspection



D. Improved Relatedness



D. Improved Relatedness



D. Improved Relatedness



E. Making an Impact



E. Making an Impact



E. Making an Impact



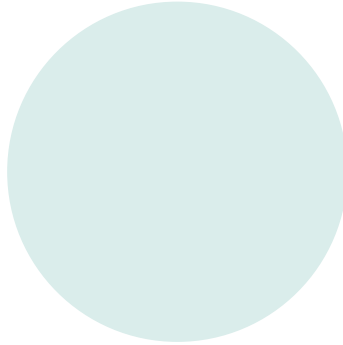
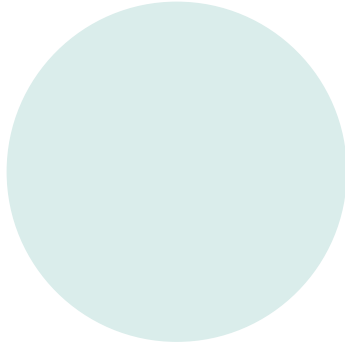
F. Gaining Recognition



F. Gaining Recognition



F. Gaining Recognition





1. Psychological/
Emotional Risk



1. Psychological/
Emotional Risk



1. Psychological/
Emotional Risk



2. Physical Risk



2. Physical Risk



2. Physical Risk



3. Social Risk



3. Social Risk



3. Social Risk



4. Privacy/
Confidentiality Risk



4. Privacy/
Confidentiality Risk



4. Privacy/
Confidentiality Risk



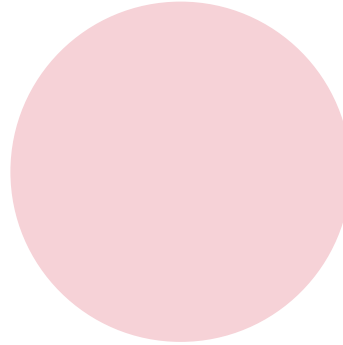
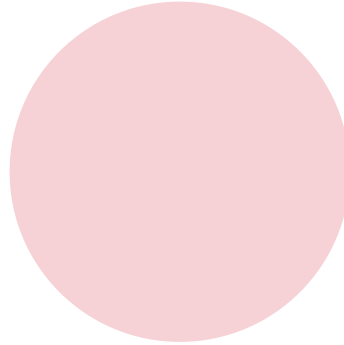
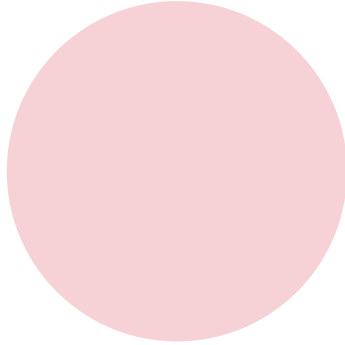
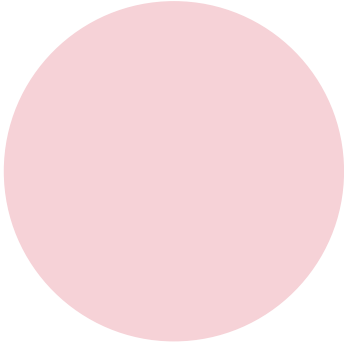
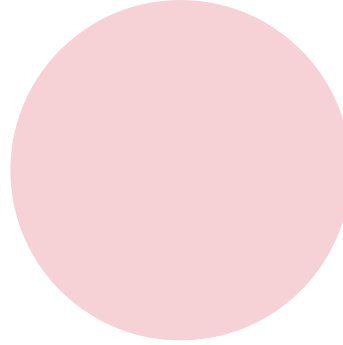
5. Economic Risk



5. Economic Risk



5. Economic Risk



Resources and References

Resources

For those seeking further information, I have listed a couple of personal recommendations on supplementary resources.

If you want to learn more about ethics of self:

Chatham-Carpenter, A. (2010). **“Do thyself no harm”**: Protecting ourselves as autoethnographers. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Article M1. Retrieved [May 2023], from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/213/183>

Edwards, J. (2021). **Ethical Autoethnography: Is it possible?** *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406921995306>

Doloriert, C., & Sambrook, S. (2009). **Ethical confessions of the “I” of Autoethnography: The Student’s Dilemma.** *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 4(1), 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640910951435>

If you want to learn more about ethics towards others:

Ellis, C. (2007). **Telling secrets, revealing lives.** *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947>

Tolich, M. (2010). **A Critique of current practice: Ten foundational guidelines for Autoethnographers.** *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(12), 1599–1610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310376076>

Rambo, C. (2007). **Handing IRB an unloaded gun.** *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 353–367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406297652>

If you want to learn more about introspection in general:

Xue, H. & Desmet, P. M. A. (2019). **Researcher introspection for experience-driven design research.** *Design Studies*, 63, 37–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2019.03.001>

Ellis, C. (1999). **Heartful Autoethnography.** *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(5), 669–683. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973299129122153>

Höök, K., Caramiaux, B., Erkut, C., Forlizzi, J., Hajinejad, N., Haller, M., Hummels, C. C. M., Isbister, K., Jonsson, M., Khut, G., Loke, L., Lottridge, D., Marti, P., Melcer, E., Müller, F. F., Petersen, M. G., Schiphorst, T., Segura, E. M., Ståhl, A., ... Tobiasson, H. (2018). **Embracing first-person perspectives in soma-based design.** *Informatics*, 5(1), Article 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/informatics5010008>

References

The foundational research sources used in the toolkit's development can be found in my [Master’s thesis](#).