

SPECIAL ISSUE: ARTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Self-Directed Learning on the Runway to Crafts Entrepreneurship

Achieving Product–Market Fit through Learning Cycles with Self-Management and Self-Control

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ABSTRACT: Many artisans practice self-directed learning to gain crafts expertise in non-academic settings. They can apply this skill for crafts entrepreneurship. A preliminary exploratory study supported by three crafts entrepreneurs' cases explored their transition from artisanship to entrepreneurship. It begins to address the lack of literature at the nexus of crafts entrepreneurship and self-directed learning. Findings suggest artisans develop their product-market fit and solve business-related issues in self-directed learning cycles, exercising self-management at each step, and self-monitoring the outcomes. With profound implications to promote crafts entrepreneurship in resource-strapped small legacy cities, we present guidance for future research to develop this field. **KEYWORDS:** Crafts entrepreneurship, self-directed learning cycles, legacy cities, self-management, self-monitoring, creative industries.
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Crafts Entrepreneurship

Creative industries, of which crafts is a dynamic sector, are gaining attention due to their resilience to economic downturns, the ability to promote inclusive development and overall community well-being, and for stimulating growth in other industries such as telecom. Crafts products are “those produced by artisans either completely by hand or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product” (UNCTAD, 2010, p. 140). Crafts products

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differ from visual, performing, and literary art products in that they operate in a more functional commercial mode in the marketplace. Examples include products involving fiber, leather, metal, wood, pottery, textiles, and first-hand visual-arts and design products. These are among the most traditional expressions of creativity, leveraging local cultures, traditions, and built and natural assets of their place of origin. Global crafts industries contributed \$35 billion in international trade in 2015 and exhibited a growth rate of 4.42 percent from 2003 to 2015 (UNCTAD, 2018). Crafts industries have the potential for job creation and serve as possible tools for poverty alleviation while simultaneously promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity. Artisan or crafts entrepreneurship is an emerging field of study due to its role in revitalizing economies while emphasizing cultures, traditions, and the historic architecture of a place (Ratten, Costa, & Bogers, 2019). Although scholars have been studying crafts entrepreneurship, Pret and Cogan (2019), in their systematic literature review, highlight a dearth of conceptual papers and recommend theoretical discussions to provide conceptual guidance for empirical research. To advance this conversation, we focus on learning theories, as successful entrepreneurs demonstrate strong learning abilities (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Neck & Corbett, 2018).

Of various learning theories, we examine the practice of self-directed learning (SDL), defined as a process where individuals are responsible for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 293). In a review of the scholarship on entrepreneurship teaching and learning, Neck and Corbett (2018) emphasize the need to develop theoretical understanding using adult learning theories, including SDL. Artisans who become entrepreneurs, especially in challenging contexts, have to exercise agency and direct their skill development, and like other nascent entrepreneurs, can take responsibility for their learning (Post, 2015). These conditions make SDL a suitable frame for the study. A growing and significant share of adults use SDL as a way of life (Owen, 2002), to transition to self-employment (Fenwick, 2002) often found among artisans, and to acquire new knowledge and skills for social action or to drive change (Baumgartner, Lee, Birden, & Flowers, 2003). However, studies examining entrepreneurial learning using SDL, particularly in nonacademic contexts, to date are few; exceptions include Tseng (2013), Carwile (2009), and Howard (2010). Given that artisans frequently self-direct learning the craft, we contemplate that they have the advantage to practice SDL for entrepreneurship.

Crafts products' project-based nature and multifaceted values, such as utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, and traditional (UNCTAD, 2010), can present unique challenges during entrepreneurial opportunity creation or discovery. We focus our inquiry on if and how crafts entrepreneurs practice SDL, especially in determining the fit between their products and the market needs, developing a new customer base, and acquiring business skills. Given the nascence of SDL for entrepreneurship and craft entrepreneurship in particular, and as suggested by Pret and Cogan (2019), we focus on an initial conceptual exploration of the topic supported by specific cases. Next, we discuss the potential of crafts entrepreneurship in the context of small legacy cities and present an argument to select cases from such a city in the United States for the conceptual development of the topic.

Legacy cities are places that once thrived economically and culturally, but since the mid- to

late-1900s have experienced sustained population loss and economic contraction (Tighe & Ryberg-Webster, 2019). These cities were once the powerhouses of industrial production, their growth fueled by waves of immigration and migration, their heydays characterized by robust infrastructure, downtown centers, arts and cultural facilities, and diverse neighborhoods. After decades of decline, disinvestment, and population and job losses, many legacy cities are confronting the issue of revitalizing and reshaping their communities both economically and culturally. However, quintessential features of traditional American culture found in legacy cities, such as working hard and seeking to excel in one's craft, (Berube & Murray, 2018) offer an opportunity. People celebrate the craft products as DIY (do-it-yourself) creations and the makers for shaping their unique identities and those of their towns (Berube & Murray, 2018), while simultaneously offering consumers the option to participate in ethical purchasing behaviors (Luckman, 2015).

In "Crafted places/places for craft," Harris (2018) highlights the growing intersection of craft and pop-up cultures where the emphasis is on transforming the urban fabric through one-off handmade production. The Main Streets of America movement (<https://www.mainstreet.org/home>) has more than eight hundred nationally accredited programs, many in small legacy cities, emphasizing the value of handmade artisanal businesses for their revitalization. Artisanal works include craft brewing, works of metal, wood, clay, and stone, quilting, fashion, and jewelry. Among the growing artisanal entrepreneurship centers in the Main Streets of America is, for example, Milwaukee, WI, which is revitalizing itself with a number of artisanal crafts businesses, including Scathian, a design and build firm; Our Daily Salt, which produces handcrafted kitchen goods; Sparrow, a metal etching store; Wild Haven, a yarn shop focusing on unique fibers; and several craft breweries, as well as culinary craft businesses. The share of ceramics, fiber, and woodcraft is high in Western North Carolina cities (Stoddard, Davé, & Evans, 2008). In contrast, in Peoria, Illinois, the laid-off workforce from the large manufacturing firm Caterpillar leveraged their industry expertise to create smaller companies using an artisanal approach for their products (Kapp, 2017). The cities of Paducah, Kentucky and Santa Fe, New Mexico in the United States are recognized as cities of crafts and folk art. The television network PBS has documented several more examples of this phenomenon in its Crafts in America series.

Although small legacy cities have significant opportunities for the crafts economy, there are several issues. First, even though this sector is a genuine component of the creative economy and offers a vector for job creation, it is often disregarded and disconnected from public policy (UNCTAD, 2010), and small legacy cities lack the necessary support to enable its growth. Second, in national discussions on postindustrial revitalization strategies, small legacy cities fall under the shadow of larger cities like Detroit and Cleveland (Hollingsworth & Goebel, 2017). As an example, these authors cite that there are twenty small legacy cities in Ohio alone, accounting for a third of its population and a third of the state's GDP, which nevertheless are falling further and further behind. The well-being of these small legacy cities is essential for the prosperity of the state and the country. Superficially, the challenges faced by small legacy cities

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might be comparable to those of the neighborhoods in larger legacy cities. However, the solutions of the latter are not readily adaptable to small legacy cities due to lack of resources and access to economic activities of larger cities. Third, entrepreneurial ecosystems consisting of incubators, investors, training, and mentoring for any kind of entrepreneurship is lacking in small legacy cities. Should cities decide to develop them, it not only takes time (Roundy, 2019), but the crafts are often an afterthought.

The growing phenomenon of crafts entrepreneurship in small legacy cities despite these adversities further emphasizes the significance of SDL, motivating us to engage in a conceptual exploration of the topic. Next, we visit the literature on SDL.

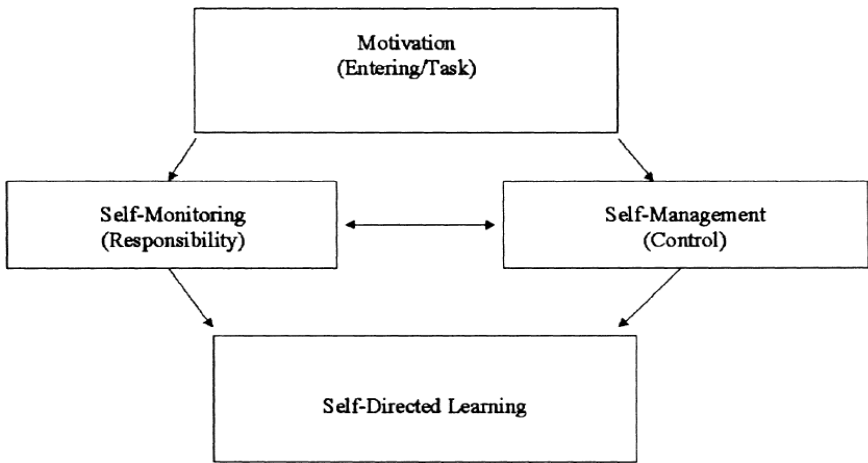


Figure 1. Self-Directed Learning Conceptual Model. Reproduced from Garrison (1997).

Self-Directed Learning

Although SDL has been around for a long time (Houle, 1961; Tough, 1971), its scholarship was not taken seriously until recently, as examining learning that happens in the daily lives of individuals was considered neither worthwhile nor possible (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 289). The concept that adults do learn deliberately on their own has since gained momentum, and theory-building in the area of SDL continues to draw interest (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

In a comprehensive review of SDL literature, Merriam and Caffarella (1999, pp. 293–305) summarize SDL models as:

- linear and instructional: often teacher-led in academic or classroom settings
- interactive: often learner-led, where it is less planned and structured

The context for our study is artisans in legacy cities embarking on an entrepreneurial journey. Consequently, we are interested in cases where SDL is learner-led, interactive, less structured, and takes place in non-academic settings. In this mode, learning episodes occur from the interaction of environmental factors, the personality characteristics of the learner, their cognitive processes, and the contexts in which they are operating.

Garrison (1997, p. 22) defines a comprehensive model for SDL with a balanced integration of cognitive and collaborative learning processes (Figure 1).

Self-management, one of the three dimensions Garrison describes, represents the collaborative component for external or contextual task control specific to the management of learning activities. It does not indicate freedom from external influence. In an interactive model, the learner collaboratively shapes the environment in support of goal-directed actions. Learner proficiency, resources for learning, and interdependence capturing the norms, standards, and learner choice determine self-management. Increased learner control brings increased responsibility, and therefore, the need for the second dimension, self-monitoring. Primarily cognitive, this dimension represents a commitment to learning, whereby the learner takes responsibility to integrate new and existing knowledge structures to construct meaning. At the metacognitive level, it requires the learner to reflect and think critically, assess outcomes, and develop new strategies to achieve intended outcomes. Motivation, the third dimension, is the coming together of attitudes, feelings, and goals, and is necessary for the initiation and maintenance of efforts towards learning.

Although there is an increasing call to advance the scholarship of learning theories for entrepreneurship (Neck & Corbett, 2018; Wang & Chugh, 2014), the exploration of SDL for entrepreneurship is still nascent. Studies have looked at SDL readiness of entrepreneurs and found that it positively correlates with superior entrepreneurial performance (Guglielmino & Klatt, 1994). Another study found that entrepreneurs from individualistic cultures rank higher on SDL readiness (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2006; Oliveira, Silva, Guglielmino, & Guglielmino, 2010). Only a few scholars have explored aspects other than SDL readiness, and fewer have used qualitative, descriptive, or mixed-methods to study SDL for entrepreneurship. In a conceptual analysis, Tseng (2013) suggests that exercising self-monitoring to learn about oneself, and self-management to learn about the business enable entrepreneurial learning. Additionally, developing self-monitoring and self-management skills helps individuals to self-direct their learning efforts. Carwile (2009) investigated the experiences of eight women during their first four years of business ownership and found that most learning was in-the-moment rather than pre-planned, relied heavily on the involvement of others, and exhibited varying levels of motivation for learning. The study emphasizes the need for aspiring entrepreneurs to “know how to learn” in order to improve entrepreneurial performance. In a study of nascent entrepreneurs’ participation and discontinuance in a formal entrepreneurial extension education program, Post (2015) found that they have a strong desire to be in control of and be responsible for their learning goals. In a qualitative study of eleven nascent entrepreneurs in the services industry, O’Shea and Buckley (2010) highlight that entrepreneurs self-regulate their learning through interactions with various individuals, groups, and organizations.

Crafts Opportunity and New Venture Creation Nuances

Artisan products and businesses, like most other creative works, exhibit characteristics that differentiate them from the rest. Drawing from the broad list of characteristics of creative enterprises provided by Pratt (2008), we highlight those that are significant for our discussion:

- They prioritize the realization of intrinsic values from the craft alongside considerations for financial sustainability of the business
- The work processes are project-based, catering to a short life with a rapid turnover of the products
- They tend to have porous boundaries and mutually dependent relationships between
 - nonprofit, for-profit and public entities
 - their production and consumption processes
 - formal and informal economies
- Their products are highly competitive with small temporal and quality differentiation
- The majority of the organizations are micro, comprised of self-employed or two to three-person businesses

These characteristics call for higher tolerance of the uncertainty of demand, expertise in risk and failure management, willingness to honor the entrepreneur's deep connection with the product, greater creative autonomy, and ability to work in a fast-moving, competitive environment (Saintilan & Schreiber, 2017, pp. 5–9). Luckman (2013) argues that the small size of the businesses requires entrepreneurs to collaborate within and outside their companies rather than work as solo individuals. Recognizing a market opportunity assumes an idea that is either an innovation, an invention, or an improvement—one that people need, desire, or find useful and valuable (Neck, 2011). In the case of crafts products, several factors challenge the concept of an entrepreneurial idea and its categorization as invention, innovation, or improvement, as well as the notion of product–market fit. These include their project-based nature, their multifaceted values, and a deep sense of connection of the artisan with the product. The entrepreneurial learning for idea generation and validation for market need or desire must, therefore, need changes. Similarly, we see challenges with rational and deterministic methods, or the lean startup-based methods for customer segmentation and discovery. In our analysis, we pay attention to these aspects when artisans develop products, acquire new customers, and use their knowledge and skills for new venture creation.

Methods

To contribute to SDL research, Caffarella and O'Donnell (1988) suggest descriptive investigations of learning projects, whereas Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) propose qualitative studies to investigate self-direction in adult learning. Qualitative research methods are best suited when studying questions of the “how” and “why” aspects of a phenomenon as they allow researchers to capture thick descriptions of the responses and facilitate generating a deeper understanding

of the phenomenon (Stake, 2013). SDL-related qualitative studies, for example, were able to reveal the reasons why some learners do not make a conscious effort to pre-plan learning activities (Carwile, 2009; Spear & Mocker, 1984). Given the nascence of SDL in the context of entrepreneurship in general and crafts entrepreneurship in particular, Babbie (2007) and Pret and Cogan (2019) recommend a conceptual exploration to guide future empirical research. This study focuses on only three cases to conduct a preliminary examination of the applicability of SDL to crafts entrepreneurship and recommend research for the theoretical development of this topic.

Sample and Data Collection

Duluth, Minnesota, in the United States, is a small legacy city with a population of about 90,000 and a thriving crafts sector. Duluth boasts the only United States port accessing both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, making it easy for the rest of the nation to tap into the area's abundant lumber, ample wheat, and expansive ore-mining opportunities (see reference list for Downtown Duluth article). In 1869, it was the fastest-growing city in the United States. However, like other small cities, Duluth had transformed from a thriving community to one where the blue-collar industry started to fade. The town's economy became stale. In 2005, a blueprint created by local leaders with support from Knight Foundation tried to preserve what citizens loved most about the city's character and its past while enabling new development to sensitively blend in and enhance the community's personality and sense of place (Bohl & Bixby, 2011). Among many initiatives, a crafts economy has gained roots with Lincoln Park Crafts District that houses manufacturing for the outdoors, a craft-brewing ecosystem, and repurposing industrial structures to promote a maker culture (Commission, 2017). Several media reports highlight the craft district's characteristics (see reference list for articles from TCB Magazine, Thomson House, and LISC).

The fieldwork involved three entrepreneurs in the areas of art, fashion and jewelry, and coffee roasting. The sample was purposeful as the intent was to cover diverse and complementary aspects of the phenomenon in this study rather than look for theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989). The sample comprised a variety of crafts, and the entrepreneurs varied in age, gender, and education. Table 1 summarizes the demographic and business information of the study participants, whose identifying information is masked (Creswell, 2009) by generic names and descriptions of their companies. At the time of this study, all three participants were entirely dependent on the business as the primary source of income, had both full-time and part-time employees, and for this study were termed as successful entrepreneurs.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews guided by an interview protocol supported the exploratory nature of the study (Yin, 2010). Interview questions included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Tell me a bit about your background, experience and your cultural identity
 - Probe as to how the participant got involved in the craft

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- Share with me your journey of going from an interest in [the craft] to trying out different things with it
 - For the turning points mentioned, probe to understand the motivations, actions, and learning
- Describe how you gained business-related expertise, especially knowing that [mention their specific background]
 - Probe to understand the choices they made along the way, actions and learning

Interviews with founders occurred at a mutually convenient time and place. Since individuals might have difficulty recollecting and describing their learning practices (Rae, 2000), the questions focused on helping participants trace and reconstruct their developmental pathway from artisan to becoming an entrepreneur, eliciting stories of subjective experiences. Thus, questions flowed from conversations rather than from a specific set of questions and answers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Table 1. Participants and Business Information

Name	Demographics	Initial Expertise	Profile
Jeff	Male, age in the 40s, some college education	Some professional experience, high expertise in visual arts and tattoo craft	Tattoo studio, retail rental space, has been in business for two years
Mary	Female, age in the 50s, Bachelor's degree	Event management industry experience, jewelry making and upcycled women's clothing as a hobby	Retail stores selling handmade women's jewelry and upcycled fashion products, retail rental space in two locations, has been in business for eight years
George	Male, age in the 30s, Bachelor's degree	Some unrelated work experience and few years at coffee shops, coffee roasting as a hobby	Retail coffee shop and wholesale coffee roasterie, retail rental space, has been in business for three years

Data Analysis

We developed individual case studies for the three study informants. Each participant's interview was a window into the learning journey. We began our analysis by documenting the narratives describing the areas of learning (consciously chosen or otherwise), the approaches to learning (planned or otherwise), the actions to acquire new knowledge and skills, and their motivations for these activities. While doing this, we focused on specific areas of transitioning from artisanship to starting a new venture, namely developing products and acquiring new customers and business knowledge. We attempted to uncover the reasons to prioritize specific actions and learning goals over others. Such narratives—fragments of text—were highlighted and studied with the SDL conceptual model (Figure 1) to uncover specifics for each dimension in the model. Iterating between the model and the narratives helped to draw out categories in the operationalization of the SDL model. Such analyses resulted in the creation of the individual case studies

presented below. A discussion of the findings from these cases follows.

Case 1: Jeff

Jeff's passion for drawing, painting, and art in general dates back to his childhood. As a young adult, he was able to present his art at local coffee shops and galleries. Describing his continued motivation for the art, Jeff emphasized the fun and play aspects of making art. He said, "I would spend a lot of time [producing art, drawing portraiture, graphite stuff] . . . I enjoy it . . . it's fun, it's like an outlet for me." Two years into making art as an adult, through his networks, Jeff learned of an opportunity to do some mural work at a tattoo studio in Utah. This opportunity motivated him to sell some of his work and make a bit of money. He did not use any explicit principles to price the product. Observing the dynamics at the studio, Jeff realized an opportunity for his art, but more importantly, noted how others were using their creativity to fulfill it. He narrated it this way, "here I was saving money to give [the art] to other people . . . these guys were making money right now doing what I wanted to do ultimately, making tattoos." Using his knowledge of the craft, where one learns as an apprentice, he was able to transition from drawing to tattooing, learning the right way, the wrong way, the new way, and what he should and should not do. Jeff described learning from experts and his involvement in the community of tattoo artists sharing work, lending each other help when needed. During this time, his craft was a side gig. He worked as a contractor but kept an eye on the income from it. Reflecting on the side gig, Jeff learned to understand his customers, their opinions about his work, the price they were willing to pay, and about the equipment, materials, and related costs. It gave him the confidence that even if he tried something else in his life, the gig could be a fallback option should the need arise. He described an ongoing market need, "You get all these projects that aren't done on people out there, and they want you to finish it. They are willing to pay you \$100 an hour to tattoo them." Personal factors motivated Jeff to reflect and evaluate options when he decided to venture into entrepreneurship. While he knew a few business basics, particularly on pricing, inventory management, and customer service, Jeff narrated several problems he faced beginning with finding affordable rental space, and weaknesses related to business operations. Each situation involved trying out approaches and learning. About sales, he said, "Basically, nobody is going to babysit me. I wake up every morning unemployed. If nothing happens that day, it's because I didn't make it happen." Many times, recognizing his strengths to be hands-on, Jeff did tasks, such as painting and flooring to make his rental space launch-ready, himself. On other occasions, identifying his weaknesses, Jeff hired an accountant, set-up a point-of-sale system, and said, "The more I can delegate away, the more I can focus on my art that brings me money." Sharing the knowledge he had acquired about customers and markets and his business operations, Jeff said, "You get the housewives and kids that never would have thought about getting tattoos done that are interested. That's the kind of market I am shooting for . . . on top of charging less than other shops, the free touch-ups for life are unheard of because we want [the tattoo] to look good and the clients want it to look good. It gets them back into the shop too."

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Jeff shared his attitude towards failure: “I’d rather try something and fail than to never have tried at all. You know, because I can live with failing and knowing that I at least tried. But I can’t really live with never doing it.” The above narratives suggest Jeff is a reflective learner, assessing each situation with intrinsic motivation to excel at his craft and his business, which in turn informs his actions.

Case 2: Mary

Mary’s craft of making jewelry and later upcycling women’s clothing to make one-off fashion wear was a hobby for a short duration, kept to herself. Her first external recognition for the craft happened at a camping event when strangers who saw her handmade jewelry were impressed, requesting her to make some for them. She described the cascading demand that followed, saying, “One was from Washington DC, somebody from Chicago, a girl from Minneapolis. They took it back and wore it. And then their friends wanted what I had created.” Realizing her gift, she started making jewelry for sale.

Mary and her partner were both artists but were working unrelated full-time jobs. During their vacation trips to New Mexico, both would make art. Mary described how a business idea arose during one such trip, when her partner suggested opening an art gallery even though neither knew anything about art galleries. She said, “While I’m nodding, I’m asking all these questions in my head. Where to open? How to open? With what? What do you put in the art gallery? How do you afford it? What kind of finances does it take?” She then reached out to people in her networks, ask, learn, and decide the actions. Her partner started a ceramics studio, and she sold beads and jewelry while still working her job. This approach continued for a short while, during which Mary built a small customer base. An external circumstance—being laid off from her job—motivated Mary to venture into entrepreneurship. From this point on, Mary cites action orientation and attempting a variety of strategies until she figured out her products, customers, and financially viable operations. She describes several learning episodes arising from strategic choices, such as the kind of business and business model, and from operational issues, like attracting customers to her store during a brutal winter. The reflection and evaluation were intrinsically motivated. Mary described a situation where she evaluated her options to continue with the jewelry store or teach classes, and said, “Teaching is fine, and I like it. It’s lucrative. I am good at it, But I don’t love it. Do what you love. Let the rest go. So I really learned and massaged [to be a women’s upcycled clothing and jewelry store].” Another situation illuminates a learning episode when Mary had to solve a business problem: She says, “It snowed two feet on December fifth, the parking meters were buried in the snow drift. It was cold and icy. It is my biggest month for sales. Although we managed to pay bills, there was no money to put in the bank. And then January, February, and March were even colder. It was tough.” Reflecting, exploring scenarios and options available, Mary said, “They’re things I cannot control. As an entrepreneur, control what you can. I just went to my happy place, made a bunch of stuff.” Assessing the entire situation, she said, “I learned that there should be a Plan B, Plan C, to not let the fear set in.” While her daily actions after opening the business were reflected the value of

doing everything one can to stay afloat, Mary embraced reflectivity and constant assessment of situations, and derived motivation from overcoming adversity.

Case 3: George

George, who grew up in a small town, described his inspiration for his craft and the first making and sharing process as, “There was nothing else you could do really [in the town]. I remember having that first specialty coffee and liking the taste. [My brother and I] had a small home espresso machine and turned our basement into a coffee shop with syrups and stuff for like when friends would come over. We called it The Last Portage. I feel like I fell in love with that process.” Intrigued by specialty coffee, he would listen to podcasts about coffee while mowing his lawn. Driven by curiosity and play, he and his roommate, who was a chemistry major, experimented with roasting coffee, exploring hundreds of blends, the chemistry behind them, and the tastes. He developed a broad and in-depth knowledge of coffee roasting and as he shared the coffee with friends, he learned about their likes and dislikes. George and his roommate purchased an at-home roaster, hooked up a popcorn popper to it, and developed a sophisticated setup that would log all roasting details to a computer. Describing the experiments, George said, “We would take little sheets of paper with different roasts, tape them on the wall, and try to figure out what makes a roast good and what doesn’t.” Towards the end of such experiments, he continued, “We tasted thirty-two different coffees multiple times. For me, it totally defined the way we roast coffee. So much to the point that I felt an authority on it.” Reflecting on the process and the learning, he said, “We roasted away and taught ourselves in that experience.”

He shared the coffee he roasted with friends and family. George described the growing demand: “I finally bought one of those \$500 in-house roasters, and I started selling bagged coffee to family and friends.” By this time, he had developed networks of people in the coffee business through his work, began to write about articles for Roast magazine, and developed an expanding customer base. Reflecting on his unhappiness with his jobs at coffee shops and family pressure to pursue a real career, George began to contemplate the idea of starting a business. The combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations led him to develop a business plan with help from his brother, and George began to look for angel investors through his networks. While one was taking shape, for personal reasons, he moved to Duluth and had to call off the investor relationship. Once again working an unrelated job, George focused on expanding his home roasting jobs. He said, “I got to the point where I’d buy one full bag of coffee, like those 150-pound and needed a larger roaster. All of a sudden I sold this one account, eighty bucks a week, and realized I should do something.” Faced with an operational issue, the need for a much larger roaster, he tapped into his knowledge base of a local organization that supported startups. He was still operating from his home at a facility that did not meet food safety standards, attempting to solve one problem after another that came with growing demand. He said, “All of the sudden [my coffee] was out there. All I was doing is I had these bags, and I was stamping them, I had a laser printer in my garage. It was hodge-podge, I didn’t have a permit.” Reflecting and assessing the

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situation, he realized it was not the right thing to do. He decided to launch a venture and evaluated alternatives to determine the business model. He said, “Are we just going to be a roasterie or a café? What type of company do I want to be? What type of job do I want to have?” His past knowledge and learning from relationships in the coffee business were useful in answering these questions and making business decisions.

Driven by curiosity and the desire to tinker and play, George collaborated with his colleagues to engage in cycles of experimentation to get better at the craft, and publishing in industry magazines and the invitation to judge competitions was a testimonial to the expertise he achieved. Simultaneously, motivated to solve problems while growing his customer base, George used his prior knowledge and networks and took actions to acquire business-related knowledge.

Discussion

A narrative story form facilitated the study informants’ recollections of their early days from tinkering with their craft to starting their venture. A thematic analysis of their stories against a conceptual SDL model revealed the operationalization of each dimension in the model. Based on the findings, we propose that artisans exploit the attitudes and skills involved in making craft for entrepreneurship. Artisanry requires the physical realization of a model or a concept by hand, through iterative exploration and refinement, which offers immediate tactile feedback, and provides insights into improving the product (Luckman, 2015). Making craft is a way to exercise our agency in the physical world. As was observed in the cases, the artisans-turned-entrepreneurs extended their agency for entrepreneurial activities, by being action-oriented, repeating cycles of making products, and sharing them with prospective customers. On the other hand, the desire to excel or master the craft motivates artisans to act on tactile feedback. It requires reflecting and self-assessing the tactile feedback, and from that, sharing their products with others to make meaning and to learn. The study suggests that artisans-turned-entrepreneurs extend these reflective practices for entrepreneurial learning, demonstrating constructivism, a core principle of SDL. Artisans combined a dual action orientation and reflective practices into SDL cycles of “make—share—listen—learn—adapt” (Figure 2) and “assess knowledge gaps—choose actions—act—review outcomes—learn” (Figure 3) on their path to entrepreneurship. Through the first learning cycle, artisans create products that customers want and help customers develop a taste for the products they make, shuttling between the two to generate a product–market fit. More importantly, this dynamic makes space to integrate their artistic and creative desires. The second learning cycle is triggered when problems occur and results in acquiring business knowledge. The discussion below about the findings in these two areas reinforces the highly integrated nature of the three dimensions in the SDL model, as also suggested by Garrison (1997).

SDL for Product–Market Fit and Developing New Customers

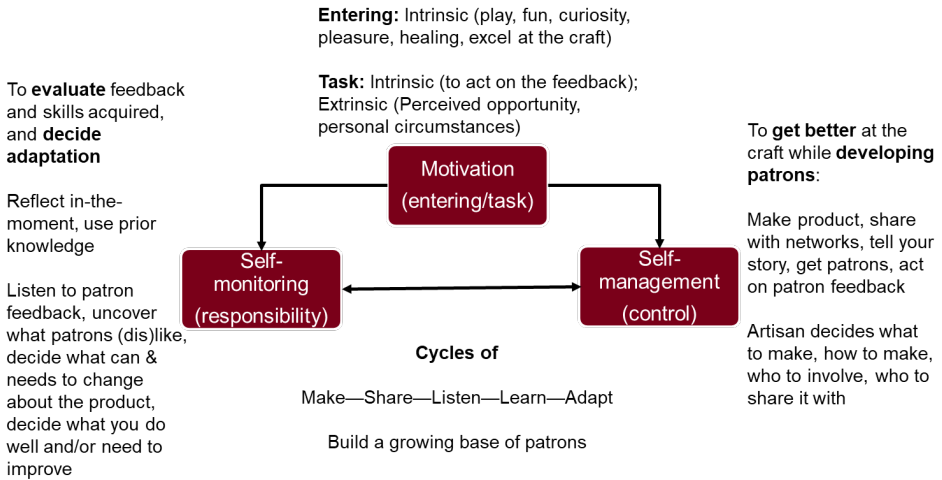


Figure 2. SDL dimensions for product-market fit and developing patrons.

Adults prefer SDL when they volunteer to learn or are forced to learn (Howard, 2010; Owen, 2002). Play makes people happy and prepares them for the unique challenges and the ambiguities they face in their daily lives (Brown, 2009; Thwaites, 2018). With intrinsic motivation, artisans leverage the play aspect of making and tinkering to create craft products and share their creations with friends and family, sometimes strangers too. By doing this, the artisans collaboratively construct meaning from the actions they share with the world (Garrison, 1997). The play element also creates the desire to gain mastery of the craft skills, motivating the artisans to listen to the reactions of others, even when critical, and to learn, try variations, and improve the products. Here, the artisan manages the tasks, exercises control over the subsequent iterations of the products, and decides the resources to leverage, and with whom to share. The cases suggest that these cycles enable the creation of a base of patrons, however small or large, and gives artisans the confidence that they can exert some control over their environment through artisanship (Baumgartner et al., 2003; Thwaites, 2018). The cases suggest that a perception of market opportunity (as in George’s case) or an external factor such as a life situation (as in Jeff and Mary’s cases) when coupled with the acquired self-efficacy catalyzes the transition of artisans into entrepreneurship. Once into entrepreneurship, artisans shape their contextual conditions (Garrison, 1997) by paying more attention to product–market fit, acting with a sense of urgency on the feedback of their patrons and customers, and, more generally, on the market needs. The only shift that occurs in the “make–share–listen–learn–adapt” cycle is where “sharing” happens more often through “selling.”

The cognitive components of SDL require the learner to take responsibility to construct personal meaning, integrating new ideas with previous knowledge (Garrison, 1997). The cases

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suggest that artisans who become successful entrepreneurs regularly evaluate their work products not only against their creative desires but also for the feedback received from the patrons. The assessment occurs for new craft skills acquired and to develop an understanding of the market needs. Per our findings, pragmatism drives artisans to reflect in the moment to guide future actions and adaptations, occasionally upon the achievement of business or career milestones. All informants provided examples where they assessed multiple alternatives to guide decisions about which products to make. Assuming cognitive responsibility to self-monitor the learning process (Garrison, 1997; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020), artisans leveraged one or more of the following factors to guide future actions:

- their prior knowledge
- what they did well
- their patrons’ desires
- their own creative interests
- financial viability.

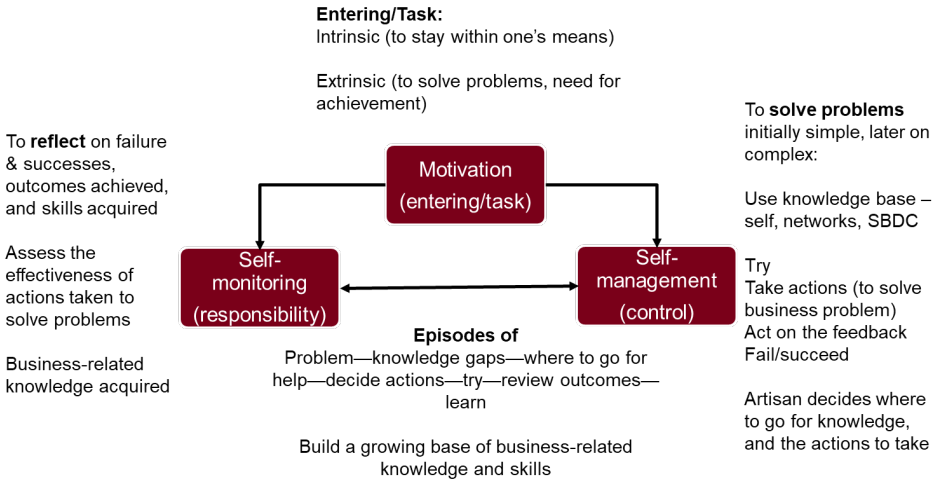


Figure 3. SDL dimensions to acquire business-related knowledge and skills.

Constant reflection and evaluation of their skills demonstrate responsibility while exercising control on the actions artisans take, paying attention to their unique contexts. Artisans’ constant reflection and evaluation of their skills demonstrate responsibility and control over the actions they take within a given context.

SDL to Acquire Business-related Knowledge and Skills

Learning by solving problems is the characteristic of constructivist learning theories (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020), and self-directed learners perform extraordinarily well in environments that require problem-solving, innovation, and change (Guglielmino & Klatt, 1994). Acts of solving business-related problems are learning episodes. Congruent with the observations made by

Brown (2009), our study findings suggest that artisans who object play with hands are good at solving problems of all kinds. Artisans who successfully transition to entrepreneurship look at startup problems and failures as opportunities to learn and grow, and are motivated to take action. Faced with difficulties, artisans initiate learning by first reviewing what they know and identifying the gaps, then reaching out and tapping into the knowledge of people in their networks for new knowledge. Artisans control the nature of such learning with regards to the pace, the timing, the location, and the modes. For example, a sudden increase in the demand for his product necessitated that George purchase a large roaster. George had known a local organization working with startups, and decided to secure funding through them. He chose not to explore alternate paths, such as crowdfunding, and through his actions and decisions shaped the contextual factors, for example, the relationship with the funding organization. As in other entrepreneurial contexts (Carwile, 2009), our study suggests that craft entrepreneurs leverage the trial-and-error approach, a core capability of artisans who tinker with their hands (Mason, Garber, Hochtritt, & Sharma, 2018), to direct learning in the areas of business operations and marketing. When faced with externalities that artisans cannot control, a strategy can be to rely on making craft, to handle the stress, and to enable clear thinking. Another motivating factor for business-related SDL is about trying to operate within one's means (often financial).

Successful craft entrepreneurs demonstrate a willingness to self-monitor the learning process by reflecting on the strategies used to solve problems (Garrison, 1997; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Although the procedures used to address business issues and critical decisions are founded on the principles of self-management to gain mastery in the craft, entrepreneurs take responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness of these procedures. They can clearly articulate the skills acquired, especially relating to business operations, marketing, and finances. The study shows that overcoming adversity and solving business issues increases an entrepreneur's self-confidence, further motivating them and demonstrating the interdependence of self-monitoring and motivation (Garrison, 1997).

Conclusions

We began with the opportunity to revitalize the small legacy cities using economic activities in the crafts sector, and the role SDL can play to foster crafts entrepreneurship in the craft community in these cities. Studying SDL of three artisans from legacy city Duluth, Minnesota who became successful craft entrepreneurs, we found that artisans are well-positioned to pursue craft entrepreneurship. The transferability of SDL frequently found among artisans is an advantage for craft entrepreneurship. The SDL on the runway to entrepreneurship for the three artisans had many commonalities. Two models (Figures 3 and 4 above) capture specific details about three critical dimensions of SDL as individuals transition from artisanship to entrepreneurship. The findings from the study are promising, and further research is necessary to develop SDL theories for crafts entrepreneurship. We discuss the limitations of the study first, followed by implications for practice and theory.

The study is exploratory, examining the nature of SDL among artisans who were able to

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launch craft businesses and survived the first few years of operations. First, due to the study's conceptual nature aimed at guiding future empirical research, scholars must exercise caution when generalizing the findings. Second, there is the potential for recall bias, especially when discussing learning that occurred some time ago. Future research can examine SDL through real-time and longitudinal studies. Third, the sample was purposive, small, and covered only successful cases, and while the research provides a window into SDL among craft entrepreneurs, empirical qualitative studies with broader and larger samples are necessary for theory building. Finally, the study was at a legacy city that already has a thriving craft entrepreneurial community, and the SDL dynamics can be different if the contextual factors are changed.

The research has several implications for practice. First, the path to entrepreneurship can begin with an active pursuit of craft as a hobby or a side gig using SDL to develop patrons or customers and using intrinsic motivations to increase commitment to the craft. The perception of a market opportunity or external factors can help pivot to entrepreneurship. Second, SDL stories of entrepreneurs such as those in this study, not the heroic ones, can raise artisans' confidence. Homophily among artisans suggests the possible effect that, "if she can do it, so can I." Third, a personal coach can guide artisans and heighten their awareness of SDL and its transferability to business aspects. Finally, small legacy cities can establish co-working spaces with a focus on helping artisans operationalize the self-directed learning cycles to develop patrons, as observed in this study. This implication is particularly profound as small legacy cities have a thriving artisan community.

SDL theories for entrepreneurship, particularly for the context of craft entrepreneurship and small legacy cities, are in nascence. However, the research provides preliminary evidence for exploring this topic using empirical methods. Future research should use a grounded theory approach by expanding the sample and focusing on theoretical saturation to develop testable propositions. Such research can build on the SDL cycles as well as the specific self-management and self-monitoring processes uncovered in this study. Further, comparative studies examining the SDL among artisans who have attempted to be entrepreneurial but did not succeed and those who were successful, i.e., where the craft-business became their primary source of income, can help to develop a robust conceptual model. Studies can also focus on the inhibitors to SDL among artisans. Similarly, quantitative comparative studies measuring SDL-readiness of artisans and others can further (in)validate the preliminary findings of this study. Finally, future research can compare SDL among craft entrepreneurs from different legacy cities, small and large, to study the influence of contextual factors on SDL for crafts entrepreneurship.

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