Rediscovering Craft in Organization Studies: Perspectives and Pathways

Abstract

While craft has long lived in the margins of organizational research, mostly as a context for advancing more general theories, it has recently become the object of dedicated study and theorization. In this Introduction, we first highlight and synthesize key insights from three perspectives (phenomenological, social constructionist, and essentialist) that prior research has adopted to analyze craft. These three perspectives understood craft as an artisanal mode of production, a socially constructed characterization of productions, producers and products, and a distinctive approach to work and organizing, respectively. We position the articles and media reviews in this special issue in relation to the three perspectives and show how they advance understanding of new and emerging manifestations of craft in and around organizations. We conclude by outlining pathways for further research on craft as a complex, multifaceted and constantly morphing social and organizational phenomenon.

Keywords: craft, craftsmanship, craft work, craft practice, craft logic, neo-craft, artisanal production, authenticity, narratives

Introduction

In the age of artificial intelligence and ever-increasing digitization, we interestingly witness a simultaneous surge in attention to craft across organization studies (Bell, Mangia, Taylor, & Toraldo, 2018; Ganzin, Chirico, Kroezen, Dacin, Sirmon, & Suddaby, 2024; Kroezen, Ravasi, Sasaki, Żebrowska & Suddaby, 2021). Traditionally understood as a pre- or anti-industrial approach to manufacturing, craft is now increasingly viewed as a fundamental element of working and organizing in post-industrial society (Adamson, 2013; Luckman, 2015; Sennett, 2008). Yet, craft has been poorly established as a concept, often becoming a source of confusion and contention (Langlands, 2017; Pye, 1995).

The term craft stems from the old English "cræft" (Langlands, 2017, p. 9, citing the Oxford English Dictionary) and originally referred to a uniquely human combination of "knowledge, power, skill" with a "sense of wisdom" and "resourcefulness" in work. Having ancient origins, craft as we know it today was invented, or perhaps reinvented, around the time of the Industrial Revolution as industry's "other" (Adamson, 2013) as reflected in the efforts of the Arts and Crafts movement that spread from the United Kingdom (Morris, 1892; Ruskin, 1849). Around this time craft became strongly associated with "pre-industrial" or "anti-industrial" methods of production and a relatively strong distinction emerged between what occupations could be legitimately considered "craft." This view of craft was very close to the meaning of artisanal or artisanship (from the French *artisan* or Italian *artigiano*, both rooted in the Latin term *artitus*, meaning 'instructed in the arts').

More recently, along with a new wave of revival of handmaking and reinvention of artisanal productions (Fox-Miller, 2017), the notion of craft has been applied to a broader range of sectors, organizations, products and occupations to underline the distinctive ethos, attitudes and/or approach to manufacturing that characterize them. Perhaps the epitome of this can be found in "craft brewing" but it also appears in so-called urban "neo crafts" (Gandini & Gerosa,

2025; Ocejo, 2017). While craft is still considered the "other" to industrialized or rationalized modes of production and working, there is a gradual return to its depiction as a distinctly human ability or "indefinable intelligence" (Langlands, 2017, p. 11) to engage with the material world with knowledge, skill, dedication, and resourcefulness (Sennett, 2008).

In organization research, the concept of craft has been used in a relatively fragmented and implicit fashion. Craft appeared in research on the impact of the increasing mechanization and industrial automation on the workforce during the 20th century (e.g., Form, 1987; Wallace & Kalleberg, 1982), as well as in studies of the peculiar organizational arrangements that characterised pre-industrial production systems (Kieser, 1989). More recently, the notion of craft has been employed to understand a growing niche that has appeared in markets dominated by large, mass-market producers (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Kroezen & Heugens, 2019). Yet, while craft has been an important empirical context for the advancement of organizational theory, it has rarely received dedicated theoretical attention.

This has changed in recent years. A growing group of scholars has recognized the importance of building dedicated organizational theories of craft (e.g. Bell et al., 2018; Bell, Dacin, & Toraldo, 2021; Ganzin et al., 2024; Kroezen et al., 2021). With these efforts, have come initial attempts to develop, what we might call, a craft perspective on work and organisation. For instance, Bell and Vachhani (2020) conceive of craft as an approach to work that relies on affective relations "between bodies, objects, and places of making" (p. 1). Similarly, Kroezen et al. (2021) associate craft with an alternative approach to working and organizing, emphasizing traits such as mastery of technical skills, embodied expertise, dedication and an explorative attitude, as opposed to mechanization, standardization, efficiency and predictability.

This growing interest in theorizing craft is partly driven by the increasingly complex and multifaceted manifestation of craft as a social and organizational phenomenon. Craft is

increasingly popular, as shown in the growing efforts for the preservation of heritage crafts (e.g., paper making, textile weaving, wood-, leather-, glass-, stone- and metalworking), the surge in hobby crafts (e.g., crocheting, sewing, pottery) amid and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, and the growing popularity of dedicated "makerspaces" (e.g., hubs, fab labs, tech rooms) that offer easy access to the tools and expertise required to engage in a wide range of making activities (Browder, Aldrich & Bradley, 2019).

Craft principles and practices are also diffusing (again) across a variety of sectors in post-industrial societies, from food and beverage production (e.g., Kroezen & Heugens, 2019) to the manufacturing of luxury products (e.g., Raffaelli, 2019) and the gentrification of urban services (e.g., Ocejo, 2017). New craft-based economies are also emerging around platforms like Etsy (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Luckman, 2015). Finally, and more generally, this interest might also reflect a growing movement to rehumanize or "re-enchant" work and organization in the digital age (Endrissat, Islam & Noppeney, 2015; Suddaby, Ganzin & Minkus, 2017) – a precursor of which can be found, in the wake of the First Industrial Revolution, in the English Arts and Crafts movement (Morris, 1892; Ruskin, 1849) and the return to cherished pre- and anti-industrial forms of manufacture it advocated.

Advocates of craft have pointed out the potential of artisanal productions for creating more meaningful jobs (Bozkurt & Cohen, 2019; Pratt, Pradies & Lepisto, 2013) and consumption experiences (Campbell, 2005), enabling the transition toward a sustainable society (Moore, 2005; Rennstam & Paulsson, 2024), offering entrepreneurial opportunities (Jakob, 2013), sustaining rural or underprivileged livelihoods (Gasparin & Neyland, 2022), mitigating the impact of forced displacement (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022), and supporting political expression (Greer, 2014; Minahan & Cox, 2007). Academic research has offered early support to these ideas and has begun to investigate in more depth the

multiple interconnections between craft and social, cultural, technological, political and market forces.

Recent community-building efforts around the subject have inspired numerous workshops and dedicated conference tracks, culminating in the creation of an EGOS standing working group "Craft and emerging forms of organizing." These efforts have played an important role in connecting a growing and diverse group of scholars interested in craft, more generally, and in the processes and practices of craft approaches to work and organization, more specifically. The purpose of this special issue is to both inspire and strengthen the foundations of this fertile academic conversation by advancing the theorizing of craft in organization studies and developing an agenda for future research.

In this Introduction to the Special issue "Rediscovering and Theorizing Craft in Organization Studies" we first offer an overview of how prior work has approached the concept of craft. Next, we provide an overview of the contributions of the papers in this special issue to the advancement of the scholarly conversation on craft in organization studies. Finally, we draw attention to underexplored areas and opportunities for future studies that reflect important changes in how the phenomenon labelled as "craft" manifests in practice – its forms and scope of application across industries, workplaces, and other domains of social life.

Perspectives on Craft in Organization Studies

A review of past research in organization studies shows that our understanding of this concept has evolved along three different yet complementary perspectives (phenomenological, social-constructionist, and essentialist) that mirror its semantic richness. These three perspectives reflect changes in empirical manifestations of craft, as well as an increasing awareness of the potential of craft for advancing the understanding of work, organizations and organizing.

The first perspective is exemplified in studies that examine artisanal modes of manufacturing (as opposed to industrial ones). It seeks to illuminate distinctive features of how this work is (or was) performed, organized, valued and used in what are otherwise referred to as "traditional sectors" or the persisting legacy and relevance of these sectors in more industrialized ones. We collectively refer to these studies as adopting a *phenomenological perspective* because of their engagement with a widespread understanding of craft as artisanal, handmade productions; the labelling of this approach also conveys the emphasis that some of these studies place on how craft is practiced, experienced, and used.

The second perspective is focused instead on the socio-symbolic and discursive processes that shape how an activity, product, organization, or occupation comes to be labelled and narrated as "craft", and the implications of the labelling and narratives for the social position, standing, and valuation of these entities; we refer to these studies as adopting a *social constructionist perspective* to highlight their common interest in how understandings of craft are constructed by signalling craft-based market categories, authenticity, and narratives, and come to affect how we interpret productions, products, and producers.

Finally, the third perspective views craft as a more general approach to work and organization – a distinctive ethos and set of skills (Kroezen et al., 2021) – inspired by the artisanal, hand-made productions that are traditionally referred to as crafts (Sennett, 2008) but not limited to their confines. We refer to these studies as adopting an *essentialist perspective*, because they embrace an understanding of craft as a distinct "way of doing things", the constitutive elements of which can be used to illuminate how work is practiced and organized in a variety of settings.

Collectively, these perspectives have contributed significantly to our understanding of what we generally refer to as craft – an artisanal mode of production; a socially constructed representation of this practice, its practitioners, and its products; a set of principles traditionally

associated with this practice but applicable more broadly to understand work and organization. In this section, we overview these perspectives (see Figure 1) and their core lines of inquiry, seeking to help scholars both make sense of this vast and heterogeneous body of work and engage in a conversation among different yet complementary traditions. As Figure 1 hints at, we do not view these perspectives as mutually exclusive. They are not entirely overlapping either, as, for instance, not all artisanal productions possess the qualities that an essentialist perspective ascribes to craft (some are actually quite repetitive and leave little room to creativity), nor are all productions that come to be labelled as "craft" really artisanal and hand-made. Taken together, however, these three perspectives offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what we generally refer to as 'craft' in organization studies.

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A phenomenological perspective

Early research on "craft" was informed by an understanding of this term as the artisanal, skilled practice of making by hand, typical of sectors that – influenced by the Arts and Craft movement – we traditionally associate with this term. These studies largely focused on hand-made artisanal productions or specialized non-routine tasks in industrial manufacturing, viewed as a legacy of pre-industrial approaches to manufacturing. They explored how these activities are carried out, organized, commercialized, and, more recently, used to advance individual and social goals outside the economic domain.

A first (and extensive) line of inquiry within the phenomenological perspective, focused on craft as *practice*, examines the acquisition and deployment, valuation, de-valuation and re-valuation of the embodied knowledge, technical mastery, material intimacy and manual dexterity that characterize skills involved in artisanal work (e.g. Bell & Vachhani, 2020). Historical studies looked at how technological development, the mechanization of production and the rise of scientific management and industrial automation led, first, to the incorporation

of craft skills and system of production into factory work (Robinson & Briggs, 1991) and, later, to the gradual dilution of these skills (e.g. Braverman, 1974; Wallace & Kalleberg, 1982) and loss of status and identity for their holders (Sayse, Ackers & Greene, 2007; Strodtbeck & Sussman, 1956). Others looked at how artisanal productions and skills evolved and survived as industries and markets were transformed by technology development and industrialization (Blundel & Smith, 2013; Dudley, 2014; Gibson, 2016; Ocejo, 2017; Rostain & Clarke, 2025), and how they reconcile expectations for tradition, adaptation, and innovation (Sasaki, Nummela, & Ravasi, 2021; Yamauchi & Hjorth, 2024; see also Erdogan, Rondi & De Massis, 2020; Sasaki & Ravasi, 2024). Recent work, finally, highlighted the continued importance of learning and apprenticeship (Gamble, 2001; Marchand, 2008; Gowlland, 2012) and the interaction with tools and objects (Bell & Vachhani, 2020) in the development and transfer of these skills.

A second line of inquiry, focused instead on the *organization and governance of craft*, investigates the peculiar ways in which old and new forms of artisanal production are organized and governed to address the specific challenges (e.g., incentivizing knowledge sharing, ensuring mastery of skills, regulating competition) and opportunities (e.g., flexible adaptation, occupational ethos) that characterize them. Research in this perspective examined well-established governance structures, such as craft guilds (Kieser, 1989), subcontracting (Eccles, 1981), and the putting-out system (Lazerson, 1995), as well as emerging new forms, such as hobby clubs and makerspaces, at the intersection of passion projects and small-scale entrepreneurship (e.g. Browder, Aldrich & Bradley, 2019; Kroezen & Heugens, 2019; Mathias et al., 2018). It also suggested that in complex large-scale operations, specialized workers, whose competence is ensured by vocational training and socialization, may be in the best position to organize work locally ("craft administration", see Stinchcombe, 1959). It recognized, finally, that the organization of craft could differ depending on whether it is

performed by ordinary artisans "trying to do decent work" or artist-craftsmen "with more ambitious goals and ideologies" (Becker, 1982, p. 276). Collectively, these studies offer a view of craft as conducive to community-based forms of organizing (Kroezen et al., 2021), alternative to the bureaucratic or market-based forms commonly associated with mass manufacturing, but also as stratified, based on different levels of virtuosity of skill and interest in beauty (Becker, 1982).

A third line of inquiry concerns *artisan entrepreneurship*. Possibly inspired by the intensification of this type of entrepreneurial activities (Luckman, 2015), more recent research has begun to explore whether and how what scholars referred to as "artisan entrepreneurship" (Pret & Cogan, 2019) or "craft ventures" (Woolley & Pozner, 2024) differ from other forms of business ventures[1]. This research is based on the recognition that small-scale artisanal entrepreneurial activities, conducted by passionate individuals who are simultaneously entrepreneurs and craftspeople, might be characterised by a distinct ethos, and deserve separate investigation. It points to the deprioritization of growth and profit, non-economic motivational drivers, collaborative attitude, attachment to their work, respect for trade practices, and oppositional (to mass production and market) identities that "artisan entrepreneurs" often display (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Pret & Cogan, 2019; Ranganathan, 2018; Solomon & Mathias, 2019; Stinchfield, Nelson, & Wood, 2013; Wolley, Pozner & DeSoucey, 2022). Further, it explores the conditions under which these commitments might be beneficial for survival (Sasaki, Ravasi, & Micelotta, 2019; Woolley & Pozner, 2024).

[1] Earlier research used the term "craftsman entrepreneur" to capture a distinct type of entrepreneur who – contrary to "opportunist entrepreneurs" – did not possess formal qualifications or managerial experience, preferred technical over administrative work, and valued the performance of good work with high personal autonomy above seeking growth and financial success (Smith, 1967; Filley & Aldag, 1978). This research was arguably informed by what we describe later as an essentialist perspective on craft, as the labelling they proposed did not require entrepreneurs to be engaged in artisanal activities. Later research, however, questioned the validity of such dichotomous distinction (Woo, Cooper & Dunkelberg, 1991).

Recent studies have surfaced that show how this type of entrepreneurial activity may be particularly important in the Global South (e.g., Popelka & Littrell, 2011) or among displaced communities (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022) to combine economic income and identity expression and maintenance. In these contexts – these studies revealed – craft-making may be a primary means of survival, such as when the displaced are deprived of access to formal education and opportunities to work. At the same time, scholars have highlighted the precarious conditions that entrepreneurs face in these contexts, in the absence of adequate support structures (Kilu, Alacovska & Sanda, 2024).

Finally, a fourth line of inquiry within the phenomenological perspective focuses on the *politics of craft* and, in particular, on how hand-making and hand-made objects can become sites of political struggles or be used as political resources (Black & Burisch, 2020; Gasparin & Neyland, 2022). They delineate "craftivism" (Buzsek & Robertson, 2011; Rippin & Vachhani, 2018) as an alternative approach to political activism that manifests in the engagement of (micro-)political acts through making (Black & Burisch, 2020) and the repurposing of craft practice or objects to support social movements aimed at reclaiming identities or countering industrialization and modernization (Gasparini & Neyland, 2022; Krugh, 2014). They position craft not only as a source of resistance to industrialization (Rippin & Vachhani, 2018) but also as a democratic opportunity for engaging in political acts (Gasparin & Neyland, 2022).

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A social constructionist perspective

The studies within this perspective view craft as a social construction – as the characterization of products, productions, and/or producers as infused with qualities that affect their social position and valuation, by distinguishing them from other oppositional entities constructed as "industrial" and/or catering to the mass market.

A first line of inquiry, *craft-based market categories*, adopts a macro-sociological lens to examine the implications of products and producers being categorized as "craft" for market competition (e.g., Carroll & Swaminthan, 2000). It links the rise of craft-based market categories and identities to the revitalization of industries (Kroezen & Heugens, 2019) or the repositioning of entire product categories (Pedeliento, Andreini & Dalli, 2019). This research shows that claiming craft-based market identities enables small producers to serve specific market niches, sheltered from the competition of generalist, mass-market manufacturers (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Swaminathan, 2001); it offers them differentiating features to compete effectively in mainstream segments, should they wish to do so (Verhaal, Hoskins & Lundmark, 2017) and it mitigates reputational penalties for low-quality products (Barlow, Verhaal, & Hoskins, 2018). Building their collective "craft" identity in opposition to mass market competitors, these producers will tend to display both cooperative and competitive behavior towards one another (Mathias et al., 2017).

Research in this tradition, however, also shows the penalty that craft-based competitors incur when violating expectations for their form (Frake, 2017; Swaminathan, 2001; Verhaal, Khessina & Dobrev, 2015). It shows how their claimed (Verhaal, Hahl, & Fandl, 2022) or actual (Beck, Swaminathan, Wade & Wezel, 2019) geographical location puts producers under stronger pressures to conform to expectations for 'local' practices and qualities, effectively constraining opportunities to differentiate and expand; these expectations, however, can change over time, as new members join market audiences (Pozner et al., 2022).

A second line of inquiry, *craft authenticity*, builds on the assumption that perceptions of authenticity are essential to support claims of membership in craft-based market categories (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Frake, 2017) to examine more closely how producers signal authenticity through product design, communication, and other symbolic expressions of qualities that their audience associate with authentic craft. These signals – or symbolic

connections (Lehman, O'Connor & Kovács, 2019) – include the claimed maintenance of hand-made methods, deep expertise, choice of materials, local identity, a conservative attitude to change, and disregard for profit-seeking (Beverland, 2005; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Colombero & Boxenbaum, 2018; Thurnell-Read, 2019; Schifeling & Demetry, 2021; Voronov et al., 2013; see also Verhaal et al., 2017).

This research also highlighted the importance of specialized vocabulary (Fischer, 2021), elaborate rituals (Massa et al., 2017) and historical narratives (Solomon & Mathias, 2019; Toraldo, Mangia & Consiglio, 2019) to bolster the credibility and distinguishing value of craft claims. At the same time, it revealed how these claims are often "illusionary" (Demetry, 2019) and decoupled from actual production methods (Beverland, 2005; Voronov et al., 2013), and audiences often partake in the "co-production" of authenticity to maintain the symbolic value they derive from consumption experiences (Demetry, 2019).

Finally, a third line of inquiry, which we collectively refer to as *craft narratives*, looks at discursive practices through which multiple actors "authenticate" producers' claims, by drawing on broader narratives of "craft" as a selective and romanticized representation of pre-industrial production processes (Suddaby, Ganzin & Minkus, 2017). This research has shown how "nostalgic myths" of craft are used to "enchant" products and producers – that is to emotionally charge them with idealized and desirable qualities that stand in opposition to cold, rational, industrial, standardized approaches to manufacturing (Hartmann and Ostberg, 2013; Holt & Yamauchi, 2019; Thurnell-Read, 2019).

These studies foreground "craft imaginaries" – the histories, traditions, places and objects that shape the way we understand craft as a "romantic ideal of pre-industrial work" (Bell, Dacin & Toraldo, 2021) positioned in antithesis to modern industrialized mass production (Adamson, 2007; 2013) – and highlight their recent re-emergence reflecting the search for more meaningful work experiences (Ocejo, 2017; Bozkurt & Cohen, 2019; Rostain

& Clarke, 2025) and socially and environmentally conscious models of production and consumption (Luckman, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2017). They also draw attention to the racialized and gendered nature of some of these imaginaries, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that they imply for skilled workers who do not conform to the prevailing images of craftspeople these imaginaries reproduce (Bell et al., 2021; Ocejo, 2017).

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An essentialist perspective

This perspective conceptualizes craft as a set of attitudes and skills that define a unique ethos and "way of doing things" that is commonly associated with artisanal handmade productions but can be applied and observed in any context (Kroezen et al., 2021): in a carpenter's workshop but possibly also in the offices of Silicon Valley. It reflects a Sennettian notion of craft, as a uniquely human state of being "engaged", which entails affective and material interactions with one's surroundings in processes of creation (Sennett, 2008).

Scholars adopting this perspective use this conceptualization of craft as an analytical lens to illuminate the practice, organization, and outcomes of work broadly understood: not only artisanal productions but also professional (e.g., Dornan & Nestel, 2013; Holmes, 2015), technical (e.g., Barley & Orr, 1997) managerial (e.g., Mintzberg, 1987), entrepreneurial (e.g., Smith, 1967) or academic (e.g., Baer & Shaw, 2017) work. They do so by outlining defining elements of this unique approach to work and organizations, as well as drawing explicit or implicit analogies between a particular task or occupation and traditional artisanal work.

The first line of inquiry within this perspective investigates *craft-like occupations*. Some studies, for instance, apply the notion of craft to various occupations outside artisanal manufacturing to reveal – or argue – how these occupations can be fundamentally understood or approached as a craft, even if they are not traditionally recognized as such. Taken together, they show how this analogy helps surface "artisanal" aspects of how an occupation is (or could

be) practiced, such as the importance of tacit or embodied knowledge, all-around skills, an explorative attitude, apprenticeship-style learning, and dedication and care in how work is executed (e.g., Dornan & Nestel, 2013; Hopf, Müller, Shollo, and Thiess, 2023; Tweedie & Holley, 2016). It also suggests that there are limits to how efforts towards the standardization, codification, and proceduralization of occupational activities can be beneficial to the quality of their outcome.

In another line of inquiry, *scholarship as craft*, researchers use the notion of craft to illustrate the importance of dedication, first-hand learning, perfectionism, openness to surprise, and community-orientation in academic work (Baer & Shaw, 2017; Daft, 1983). C. Wright Mills (1959) affirms, in the opening line of "On intellectual craftsmanship" (an appendix to *The Sociological Imagination* which was based on a 1952 manuscript shared in class with his students), that "social science is the practice of craft" and engages the "beginning student" in "how I go about my craft" (p. 195). He notes that scholars form their own self while working to perfect their craft by using, examining, and interpreting their own experience. In that, "craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work" (p. 196). Relatedly, based on the assumption that "research is craft" (Daft, 1983) and "scholarly pursuit in the management sciences … is a form of craftsmanship" (Baer & Shaw, 2017), other scholars have emphasized the importance of commitment to "doing our task well" (Baer & Shaw, 2017; Bechky & Davis, 2024) and of direct engagement with one's data, the relevant literature, and the writing process (Bechky & Davis, 2024; Daft, 1983).

A third line of inquiry, *management and leadership as craft*, draws analogies between management and leadership, and artisanal work, as well as reveals ways in which craft has infused management and leadership in a historical context. Henry Mintzberg (1987), for instance, famously proposed that effective strategy requires 'crafting', comparing the work of

a seasoned corporate strategist to that of a master potter, to counter the prevailing emphasis in strategy studies on rational, structured planning, based on quantitative evidence and elaboration. More recently, Gonzalez, Kanitz and Briker (2024) warned against the risk of excessive reliance on artificial intelligence models to plan organizational change and encouraged change managers to approach their job as "AI-augmented craft." Taylor and Ladkin (2014) affirmed that leading is like a "craft" practice, involving embodiment and application of skills in a given context, and consisting of, for example, being present, paying attention, engaging with others, and being resilient. Accounting for the process of industrial modernisation of Denmark, finally, Hull Kristensen and Kjær (2001) described the emergence of a hybrid form of management that was infused with values and norms of craft organization.

Finally, in the *craft logic* line of inquiry, research in an institutional tradition proposed that the institutionalization of the essential principles of craft could manifest as an institutional logic (Kroezen & Heugens, 2018) – an archetypal template of action underpinning organizational structures and practices in a field. This template mirrors what Arthur Stinchcombe (1959) originally defined as "craft administration" and Arndt Sorge (1991) later called "craft as manufacturing logic", as opposed to alternative organizing principles prioritizing rationality, centralization, formalization, large scale, efficiency, and productivity (see also Adler, Kwan & Heckscher, 2008; Adler, 2015). While early work (e.g., Burack, 1966) assumed a linear evolution of organization from a craft to an industrial logic, later studies showed how a craft logic could be recovered and used to stimulate innovation and build a distinctive position in markets dominated by competitors adopting an industrial logic (Kroezen & Heugens, 2018; Rindova, Dalpiaz & Ravasi, 2011). More recent work advocated embracing a "craft orientation" (Rennstam & Paulsson, 2024) as a way towards a more sustainable post-growth society (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023).

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Advancing the Perspectives on Craft with this Special Issue

The five papers and three media reviews gathered in this special issue extend – and, in some cases, bridge – the perspectives outlined in the previous section.

In the main, the contributions to the Special Issue (papers and media reviews) extend the phenomenological perspective, offering a dynamic (at times also dualities-driven and dialectic) account of the evolution of craft practices in different contexts. Several contributions also provide insights at the intersection of different perspectives. For example, both Gandini & Gerosa (2025) and Zakrzewska, Beverland, and Manning (2025) advance insights at the intersection of the phenomenologist perspective and the social-constructionist perspectives: the former develops a theoretical conceptualization of post-industrial craft work in relation to changes in status, discursive materiality, and authenticity, whereas the latter delves into tensions between appreciation and appropriation and their interplay with authenticity. Dioun, Pamphile & Gorbatai (2025) further connect the phenomenological and the essentialist perspectives drawing parallels between hand-made productions and non-artisanal settings. The media reviews provide further reflections on the phenomenon of craft by drawing on diverse craft narratives (thereby connecting phenomenological and social-constructionist perspectives), from a documentary on the work of a sushi master (Yamauchi, 2025), through house museums telling the story of Arts and Crafts leaders (Hart, 2025), to exhibitions co-created by artists, organizational researchers and business historians capturing both traditions and speculative imaginaries of craft (Gasparini, Raviola, & Hjorth, 2025). Below we briefly introduce each of the Special issue's contributions.

Fetzer (2025) uses a paradox lens to illuminate how heritage craft makers navigate the inherent tensions between tradition and novelty in their craft practice. He compares and contrasts prior studies to identify three different strategies – preserving, segmenting and synthesizing – that craft makers use to navigate this paradox and inspire "virtuous cycles" that

contribute to their resiliency of their practice and trade. He also theorizes conditions that can encourage makers to adopt a particular strategy and the types of craft (building on Kroezen et al., 2021) that each strategy may be more appropriate for. Fetzer's framework enhances our understanding of how craft can endure and evolve over time as craftspeople struggle to "smooth out [the] cycles of decline and resurgence" that appear to mark the interest in craft in (post-) industrial society. More generally, it shows how the traditional approach to craft research can be fruitfully turned upside down: rather than using craft as a setting to examine more general theories, this paper uses a general theory of organizing as a sensitizing device to enhance our understanding of craft, thereby extending the phenomenological perspective on craft in organization studies.

Dioun, Pamphile, and Gorbatai (2025) similarly adopt a phenomenological perspective by looking at how experts can make craft feel accessible to novices in Makers Faire. Based on rich observations they propose that initial barriers to the adoption of craft skills can be lowered during temporary interactive events where experts relax the expertise hierarchy, promote a fun and whimsical atmosphere, and blur the boundaries between production and consumption, to encourage novices to perceive craft as accessible. By noting how similar dynamics can be observed in other settings such as beer brewing and coding, Dioun and colleagues illustrate how research adopting a phenomenological perspective can enrich an essentialist understanding of craft by showing that analogical comparisons between hand-made productions and non-artisanal settings can be fruitfully extended from core attitudes and skills to the social processes that enable their acquisition and reproduction. This study begins to shed light on alternative pathways for entry in contemporary craft, outside the traditional master-apprenticeship models. On the flip side, this study also raises questions about what might happen if barriers to entry are lowered significantly: would craft potentially also face dilution if anyone could easily become a 'maker'?

Building on an emerging line of inquiry on craft as a micropolitical resource, Vachhani, Bell, and Bristow (2025) expand our understanding of 'craftivism' through an in-depth study of how 20 British craftivists understand their practice. They show how craft provides a distinctive "repertoire of contention" (Tilly, 2008) that "relies on small actions, routines, and embodied habits which produce affect". Their study showcases the potential inherent in craft to reclaim historically defined feminine practices to connect the domestic sphere with broader societal challenges. Craftivism, they argue, differs from traditional means of political engagement as it involves a form of 'do-it-yourself' or 'do-it-together' citizenship that has not only therapeutic benefits for the maker but also the capacity to enhance community in the process. As such, making can be regarded as a form of change itself, promoted through creative, material and affective practice.

In the fourth article in this special issue, Zakrzewska, Beverland, and Manning (2025) highlight the delicate interplay between appreciation and appropriation that characterizes discourses around contemporary craft. Their analysis of the new Peruvian cuisine shows how "elite chefs" – typically from a White and cosmopolitan background – enrich their repertoires with elements from traditional Peruvian cuisine from marginalized and rural communities in the Andes and the Amazon. In this quest for authenticity, however, the rediscovery, recreation and revaluation of traditional techniques and materials go hand-in-hand with exploitation and exclusion. By uncovering these patterns, this study draws our attention to the fact that contemporary craft often occurs in contexts permeated by inequalities, many of them exacerbated by colonial legacies. Who can claim, practice, and capture value from craft is therefore an important but complex question.

Gandini and Gerosa (2025), finally, advance the notion of "neo-craft work" to describe a new form of craft work, typically found in the gentrified urban areas of Western cities, and associated with what used to be low-status work in food and hospitality. They highlight how

neo-craft work is less concerned with the quality and properties of the final object than with meaningful affective engagement in the work itself and draw attention to the discursive practices enabling the resignification of these artisanal practices. Their conceptualization of neo-craft shows how craft as a concept can 'travel' to a variety of contexts and change the nature and meaning of work. Gandini and Gerosa thus challenge our understanding of craft in contemporary society; rather than seeing the (re)surgence of craft as a simple 'return to the past' – they argue – we should see it as "a form of 'progressive nostalgia' (Gandini, 2020), which binds together the past and the future in a dialectical relationship."

The Special issue also includes three inspiring media reviews that bring thought-provoking reflections on the organizing of craft in relation to past, present, and future. In a review of the 2011 documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, Yamauchi (2025) reflects on the work of an elite craftsman (sushi master) Jiro Ono and his ambivalent relationship with his customers, suggesting that craft experience by the consumers could be like an apprenticeship in which they gain insights into the craft and also a form of recognition by the master who carefully observes them and incorporates their gestures and expressions in the making of sushi. Hart (2025) reviews two Arts and Crafts house museums – Kelmscott Manor and Emery Walker's House – and explores how, through the craft objects they showcase in a domestic atmosphere, they connect idealized pasts and utopian futures, expand our understanding of meaningful work as well as reveal a potential for continuing the activism of the movement they represent. Finally, Gasparin, Raviola, and Hjorth (2025) review three exhibitions on craft (as part of a larger research project on tradition and innovation in craft ecosystems) that have been co-created by artists, crafts workers, organizational and business history researchers. Through the reflections on these exhibitions, they highlight the importance of craft's slowness as an alternative economy of time, in which careful crafting and organizing are essential.

Pathways for Inspiring Organization Studies on and with Craft

Past research has contributed significantly to understanding what we generally refer to as craft. Craft is increasingly seen not just as a fascinating context but also as a concept that allows us to explore important questions about work and organization in the 21st century. This special issue was a call to action for researchers to advance our theoretical understanding of craft. Our overview of different perspectives and lines of inquiry used to study craft from an organizational perspective (phenomenological, social constructionist, and essentialist), and the contributions of the articles and media reviews that constitute this special issue, suggest several directions for further research and an additional perspective (see Figure 2 for an overview).

--- Insert Figure 2 about here ---

Timeliness and timelessness of craft

This special issue highlighted important temporal dynamics of craft, for example in terms of strategies for addressing the tradition-novelty paradox (Fetzer, 2025) or how craft objects in house museums connect idealised pasts and utopian futures (Hart, 2025), enhancing craft's duration (Gasparin et al., 2025) and keeping it both timely and timeless. Further research is needed on the distinctive timely-timeless duality of craft. Craft is timeless in that – in its essential principles and empirical manifestations – it is distanced from the here and now, e.g., involving skills, processes, and practices honed over long periods of time and deeply ingrained traditions spanning multiple generations, as well as providing products intended to last long into the future. Craft is timely in that, as work adopting a phenomenological perspective highlighted, it is attuned to current demands (e.g., need for simple, functional, inexpensive vs. unique, decorative, and exquisite objects), challenges and opportunities (technological developments, skill availability, social dynamics) in the way it is performed and organized. It is also timely in its political dimension, as it contributes towards social causes, for example,

through “craftivism” (see Vachhani et al., 2025), and social progress. Further research could investigate the tensions that arise at the interaction of timeliness and timelessness within and across different crafts (e.g., how can craft adapt to changing conditions and expectations without losing its essential features?) and the organizational challenges posed by this duality.

Continuity and change in craft

The special issue advanced insights on new approaches to craft, e.g., neo-craft (Gandini & Gerosa, 2025), the elevation of marginalized craft elements through authenticity claims (Zakrzewska et al., 2025), as well as how continuity in minor gestures can serve as a driver for societal change (Vachhani et al., 2025). Future research on craft could investigate the balancing between continuity (reproducing traditions, practices, and skills) and change (updating or even establishing new traditions and skills) (see Fetzer, 2025). How do craft practices persist in the face of modernity and epochal shifts, and how do they adapt to cycles of industrialization and post-industrial environments? This pathway for future investigation is characterized by an inherent tension between ensuring the ongoing reproduction and refinement of consolidated skills and techniques and exploring opportunities to break away with traditions (and perhaps create new ones) or put skills to new and different uses (e.g., Yamauchi & Hjorth, 2024). Further research could explore what ways of doing and organizing craft are sustained and which ones are transformed in a context of economic and societal changes, emerging technologies (e.g., 3D printing, AI), and innovative materials (e.g., biodegradable textiles; Cirino, 2018), as well as how the sustained and transformed aspects of craft influence craftworkers’ creativity and productivity, and human-material interactions.

Research adopting a phenomenological perspective can delve into how artisanal techniques, materials, and products are subtly altered, repurposed, or repositioned to maintain economic viability and preserve a connection with the tradition in the face of market adaptation

(e.g., Sasaki et al., 2021; Yamauchi & Hjorth, 2024). Studies within the social constructionist perspective might look instead at the discursive strategies, legitimacy struggles, and social negotiation that may characterize the efforts of a practice or an occupation to be recognized as craft (or, possibly, to lose this characterization), or at the institutional structures and processes that shape these processes. Research on craft from an essentialist perspective, finally, might look at how the adoption (or the loss) of a craft ethos might affect the capacity of occupations and organizations to endure market pressures, technological obsolescence, or loss of social standing.

An essentialist perspective might also offer a fresh viewpoint on processes of craft (re)emergence – traditionally studied in terms of rebirth or revitalization of artisanal, small-scale manufacturing in otherwise industrialized sectors dominated by large-scale producers (e.g., Raffaelli, 2019; Kroezen & Heugens, 2017) – by examining how a peculiar craft ethos and approach to work diffuses within and across occupations, or how organizations or inter-organizational systems become organized around craft or a craft ethos. A social constructionist perspective might ask instead how certain practices come to be labelled as craft (or lose this characterization) – possibly in the absence of changes in how they are practiced – or how craft narratives and imaginaries are created, evolve, and/or fade over time.

Exclusivity and inclusion in craft

Research reported in this special issue examined different approaches to inclusion in craft, for example when experts make it accessible for novices to join (Dioun et al., 2025) or elite craft workers elevate marginalized craft elements, leading to their appreciation but also generating concerns of appropriation and even craft washing (Zakrzewska et al., 2025). Future research could also delve into different aspects of exclusivity and inclusion in the practice and the products of craft. On the one hand, craft is often exclusive, entailing the mastery of a skill, which only a few can achieve, and particularities of resources and places in which craft objects

are made. It is also exclusive in that labour-intensive hand-made products are often expensive to produce and need to be sold at a premium price to cover the related costs. While craft responds to the consumer demand for sustainable products and helps promote a sustainable mindset among consumers, only affluent consumers may be able to afford them. On the other hand, craft is found to improve mental and physical well-being and is increasingly used to foster inclusion and wider participation, whereby craftworks are co-created by communities (both place-based and virtual) in which skill levels vary (Dioun et al., 2025), and used to facilitate the economic and social integration of displaced communities (Bang, Engholm, Lervad, Nosch, & Skjold, 2024; Pöllänen, 2015). Craft-based apprenticeships can offer alternative education paths for young people, with equal dignity to other forms of higher education. Sustaining both exclusive and inclusive dimensions of craft involves collaboration among multiple actors; studies could examine how striking this balance can be facilitated by collaborative forms of support that bring together craftworkers' associations and networks, academic institutions, local authorities, and policy-makers for preserving, protecting, and promoting local crafts and craft-making. Comparative studies could add to our understanding of how such infrastructures operate across places and to what effects.

Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion also seem central to deepening our understanding of the politics of craft. Future research, for instance, might examine political dynamics surrounding artisan production, such as the way in which political interests shape the material support they receive (or fail to receive), how they can become the site of exploitation and political struggles around identity, heritage and cultural appropriation (see Zakrzewska et al., 2025), or be used as political resources to initiate or consolidate social movements (see Vachhani et al., 2025). It could also examine politics of access and exclusion from craft practices, and who captures the value produced by these practices. Other studies might examine how power and interest shape the social construction of production processes as "craft," people

as “craftspeople” and organizations as “craft producers” or how craft imaginaries are produced with the intent of altering systems of production and consumption towards a world portrayed as more just, more meaningful, and more sustainable. Interestingly, craft can also seemingly take a ‘quiet’ form, as when shop-floor workers in an industrial system continue to commit to craft practices to find meaning in their work, even if such craft aspects are not recognized or rewarded (Rostain & Clarke, 2025). Further research could explore such examples of craft in unexpected places and the potential tension between craft claims and actual craft practice and how these tensions relate to power and value capture.

Boundary-sustaining and crossing in craft

Craft work involves crossing of and connecting across multiple boundaries, e.g., across disciplines and status differences, as well as between experts and novices (Dioun et al., 2025), craft masters and customers (Yamauchi, 2025), and artists, craft workers, and researchers (Gasparin et al., 2025). The exclusivity of craft is also carved out in relation to other domains, such as art (Becker, 1982) and industry, which – as they evolve and expand (or restrict) their applications – could contribute to or detract from the distinctive status of craft. For example, inclusive craft-making forms could involve collaborations between artists, accomplished craftspeople and communities at large, blurring the boundaries between art and craft; doing this might enhance the standing of craft, especially as such collective art-craft works are exhibited in museums and galleries, or become part of public art. Similarly, intriguing dynamics could be studied at the frontier between craft and industry where new technologies could allow sustaining a feel of authenticity while making craft-like products accessible to wider audiences. Examining boundary work across art, craft, industry, and other domains could also help advance our understanding of continuity and change, and timeliness and timelessness in craft (e.g. how does the evolution of manufacturing systems and processes affect the preservation or recovery of craft skills? How does the practice of craft change as it moves out

of the mundane commercial domain and into the artistic one?). They can also put forward our knowledge on the delicate frontier between authenticity and appropriation, as traditional craft techniques are re-used and repurposed to support artistic expression and exploration outside the communities that developed and maintained them.

Craft as an alternative approach to organizing

An essentialist perspective on craft in organization studies has applied the notion of craft more broadly to understand dynamics in any work domain (beyond those that are traditionally understood as 'craft'). While such research has enriched the understanding of craft organizing, we have only just begun to pull together these insights to produce a holistic, integrated perspective on craft as an approach to work and organizing (Kroezen et al., 2021). Initial concepts and frameworks are emerging that could fruitfully intersect the growing literature on craft with other literatures. In our special issue, Dioun et al. (2025), for example, show how the literature on craft could help us better understand how novices get access to 'skilled domains' in the 21st century. This suggests that future research could fruitfully explore questions at the intersection between literatures on learning, occupations and craft.

Further work could also help articulate better how essential and even marginalized (Zakrzewska et al., 2025) elements of craft can inform new organizational forms and structures, work arrangements and production systems. Such work can also involve engagement in craft ecosystems and experimenting with methods with co-creation between researchers, artists, and crafts workers (Gasparin et al., 2025). Studies could comparatively examine adoption in a wider range of contexts (beyond those traditionally associated with artisanal manufacturing) of craft-based values and approaches to work and organizing, and, by doing so, offer valuable insights into the changing nature of work (see Gandini & Gerosa, 2025).

Finally, an essentialist perspective on craft could help us explore 'the future of work'. Craft was reinvented during the First Industrial Revolution (Adamson, 2013) in manufacturing to protect or inspire more human-centered forms of working and producing. Similar dynamics are now ongoing in knowledge work with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We believe there is significant opportunity to better understand how work is changing in the age of artificial intelligence by applying a craft perspective (see, for instance, Gonzalez et al., 2024). The literature on craft provides scholars with the opportunity to go beyond the typical dichotomy of automation vs. augmentation through which technological transformation of work is typically understood (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). Scholars might ask, for instance, how the implementation of AI technology may affect the craft aspects of work (direct engagement with materiality, embodied expertise, or the dedicated and exploratory attitude).

Craft as a way of knowing

A final direction of rediscovering craft in organization studies, which we would like to highlight, is about employing craft as an embodied and affective approach to inspiration and insight in organizational research (Bell & Willmott, 2020), thereby adding a fourth perspective on craft, which we denote as epistemological perspective (see Figure 2). Researchers, particularly those engaged in studying and collaborating with craftspeople could help articulate craft not only as an alternative way of organizing but also as a distinctive way of knowing, in which visual and material modes are essential for meaning making (Boxenbaum, Jones, Meyer, & Svejenova, 2018). Such work could unravel essential features and practices through which craft could offer a distinctive "style" of knowing through doing – one that is patient and caring, embodied and multisensorial, material (with curiosity for and in interaction with matter), playful and ingenuous (able to "see" the potential of matter through skill), stemming from wisdom (often cumulative and collective, honed across generation) and contemplation, collegial, and imbued with joy. Articulating craft as a way of knowing would also involve

developing methods able to capture formativeness (Gherardi & Perrotta, 2014), i.e. “practicing that stresses how knowing is invented while doing”, which involves “relationships among corporeality, materiality, playfulness, hybridization, and recursive realization” (Gherardi, 2016, p. 692). Such articulation may also involve art-based research that weaves together diverse epistemic domains and ensures engagement through exhibitions (Gasparini et al., 2025). Implementing craft as an approach to knowing may not, however, be a natural act, as power relations and politics may block wider adoption of such an enriching, yet also privileged way of life and knowing. It may require craftivism and take a system change to implement craft-as-a-way-of-knowing on a large scale (see Bell & Willmott, 2020).

No matter which of these pathways is followed or if other craft-related pathways are charted, what this Special issue affirms is the potential of craft (as a vibrant phenomenon, an alternative way of organizing, and not least an embodied and affective way of knowing) to inspire new questions and insights in organization studies.

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Table 1. A phenomenological perspective on craft in organization studies: Core lines of inquiry

Line of inquiry	Meaning of craft	Primary analytical focus	Core topics and insights	Exemplary work
Practice of craft	Craft as distinct skill and practice	Acquisition and use, valuation, de-valuation, and re-valuation of artisanal skills; tradition and innovation in artisanal skills, use, and outcomes.	Craft/artisanal knowledge Craft and industrialization Craft reinvention and renaissance Craft and tradition	Wallace & Kalleberg, 1982 Blundel & Smith, 2013 Ocejo, 2017 Yamauchi & Hjorth, 2024
Organization and governance of craft	Craft as community -based forms of organizing	Structures associated with highly skilled, artisanal productions presented as a way to address issues of specialization, knowledge sharing and competition in occupational communities and economic activities.	Craft guilds Putting-out systems Craft administration Craft worlds Makerspaces	Stinchcombe, 1959 Becker, 1982 Kieser, 1989 Lazerson, 1995 Browder et al., 2019
Artisan entrepreneurship	Craft as artisanal commercial activity	Small-scale entrepreneurial activities, conducted by passionate individuals who are simultaneously entrepreneurs and craftspeople, and characterised by a distinct ethos.	Craft ventures Oppositional identity Product attachment Refugee entrepreneurship	Stinchfield et al., 2013 Ranganathan, 2018 Pret & Cogan, 2019 Solomon & Mathias, 2019 Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022
Politics of craft	Craft as a site of political struggle and a political resource	Artisanal activities as sites of political struggle and political resources; repurposing of artisanal practice or objects to support social movements.	Craftivism Craft resistance Craft and the mobilization of political concerns	Rippin & Vachhani, 2018 Black & Burisch, 2020 Gasparini & Neyland, 2022

Table 2. A social constructionist perspective on craft in organization studies: Core lines of inquiry

Line of inquiry	Meaning of craft	Primary analytical focus	Core topics and insights	Exemplary work
Craft-based market categories	Craft as market category and identity	Groups of producers that claim a distinct position in the market compared to mass-market competitors, because of their product features and production methods.	Niche vs. mainstream competition Within-group coopetition Audience expectations	Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000 Mathias et al., 2017 Verhaal et al., 2017 Beck et al., 2019
Craft authenticity	Craft as authenticating feature	Claimed features aimed at symbolically positioning producers in opposition to large-scale, industrial manufacturers by signalling "authenticity".	Deep expertise Local identity Disavowal of profit Co-production of authenticity	Beverland, 2005 Carroll & Wheaton, 2009 Demetry, 2019 Schifeling & Demetry, 2021
Craft narratives	Craft as narrative	Idealized representations of pre-industrial production processes, used to infuse practices and objects with appealing symbolism.	Craft-based enchantment Craft as nostalgic myth Craft imaginaries	Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013 Suddaby, Ganzin & Minkus, 2017 Bell, Dacin & Toraldo, 2021

Table 3. An essentialist perspective on craft in organization studies: Core lines of inquiry

Line of inquiry	Meaning of craft	Primary analytical focus	Core topics and insights	Exemplary work
Craft-like occupations	Craft as a distinct approach to work	Analogies between artisanal production and tasks and occupations outside this domain (e.g. reliance on embodied expertise, commitment to doing good work, etc.)	Craft-like attitudes and practices of professional and technical workers	Barley & Orr, 1997 Sennett, 2008 Hopf et al., 2023
Scholarship as craft	Craft as an essential component of academic work	Reminder about the importance of dedication, intimate engagement with the subject matter, community orientation and perfectionism in the pursuit of scholarly knowledge.	Research as craft Academic craftsmanship	Mills, 1959 Daft, 1983 Baer & Shaw, 2017 Bechky & Davis, 2024
Management and leadership as craft	Craft as a metaphor and mode for leadership and managerial work	Emphasis on the pitfalls of excessive reliance on rational, structured, abstract and detached approaches to strategy formulation and implementation. Approaches to management and leadership informed by values, norms, and practices of craft organization.	Crafting vs. planning	Mintzberg, 1988 Hull Kristensen & Kjær, 2001 Taylor, 2012 Taylor & Ladkin, 2014 Gonzalez, Kanitz, & Briker, 2024
Craft logic	Craft as template for organizing	Approach to organizing activities and production systems reflecting pre-industrial artisanal production, in opposition to industrial and market-based approaches based on standardization, rationalization, efficiency and profit-seeking.	Craft orientation Post-growth capitalism	Sorge, 1991 Kroezen & Heugens, 2017 Rennstam & Paulson, 2024

Figure 1: Perspectives on craft in organization studies

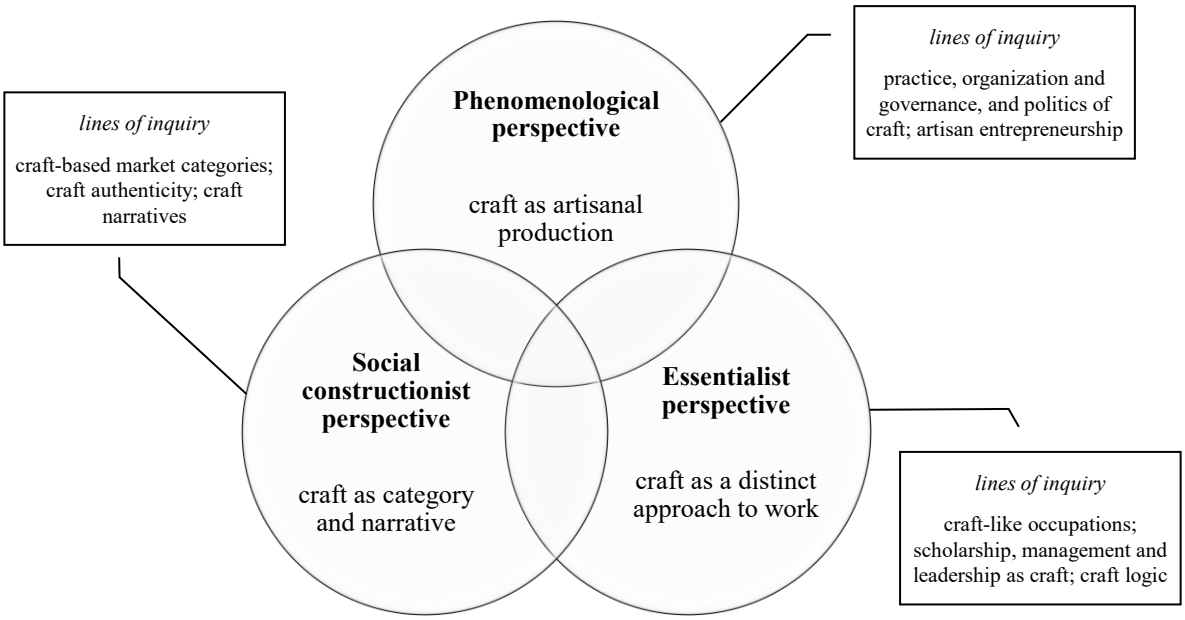

Figure 2: Pathways for inspiring organization studies on and with craft