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Specific demands and resources in the career of the Norwegian freelance musician

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Specific demands and resources in the career of the Norwegian freelance musician

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Background: Research indicates that there is a higher degree of mental health problems, family/work conflicts and sleep-related problems among workers in creative occupations than in other professions. Research also reveals that musicians have to deal with a relatively high degree of occupational stress. There is, however, a lack of research investigating the qualities of freelance musicians' psychosocial work environment, as well as possible protective factors for maintaining good mental health. *Methods:* Based on 12 in-depth interviews, we used a template analysis to examine the unique characteristics of the professional life of freelance pop and rock musicians. *Results:* Using the job demands-resources model as a conceptual framework, we found that an unpredictable future, threats to the family/work balance and significant amounts of external pressure were three broad contextual demands facing freelance musicians. Social support from family, fellow band members, audiences and their professional network, as well as having adequate personal resources such as entrepreneurial skills, value-anchored flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity and dedication to music making were described as important for managing life as a freelance musician. *Conclusions:* Musicians' psychosocial work environment and health seem to be related to the three overarching protective factors also described in resilience research: namely personal dispositions, family coherence and social resources.

Keywords: freelance musicians; artists as entrepreneurs; psychosocial work environment; mental health; occupational health psychology

Creative and cultural industries exhibit growth across the European economy (Power, 2011). In the UK, this industry has recently been growing at more than twice the rate of the rest of the economy (Missingham, 2006), and a similar tendency has also been reported in the Netherlands (Zwaan, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2010). In Scandinavia, however, the pattern diverges; while certain regions have grown, others have declined. Nevertheless, an estimate shows that 4.3–7.3% of the total employment is within the creative industries in Scandinavia (Power, 2011).

According to Kenny and Ackermann (2009), performing musicians have to face a number of physical, social and psychological challenges in order to thrive and adequately develop their musical career; these challenges place them at high risk for physical and psychological strain as well as ill health. Empirical research indicates that musicians and workers within the creative industries deal with a relatively high degree of occupational

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stress (Holst, Paarup, & Baelum, 2012; Iñesta, Terrados, García, & Pérez, 2008; Middlestadt & Fishbein, 1988; Smith, Brice, Collins, Matthews, & Mcnamara, 2000). And there is also qualitative research indicating that performing artists report experiences of stigma and devaluation of their choice of occupation (Barker, Soklaridis, Waters, Herr, & Cassidy, 2009).

There have been few studies on the prevalence of medical problems among musicians (van Fenema et al., 2013), yet existing evidence from both international (Bellis et al., 2007; Raeburn, 1987; Raeburn, Hipple, Delaney, & Chesky, 2003) and Scandinavian (Kyaga et al., 2013; Tynes, Eiken, Grimsrud, Sterud, & Aasnæss, 2008) studies indicates that psychological strain and mental health problems are reported more frequently among artists than in most other professions.

In 2008, a report based on data from the Norwegian living conditions survey (LKU, www.ssb.no/en), developed by the National Institute of Occupational Health (Tynes et al., 2008), was published. The report was based on standardized well-established instruments, measuring both individual health and job-related psychosocial factors across a wide spectrum of different occupations. Findings showed that common mental health problems such as anxiety, restlessness, depression and sleep problems were reported more often among artists than in any other occupational groups. Furthermore, artists were more likely to experience conflicts regarding the balance of work and family life. However, the artist group in this study only included 78 workers within the wide-ranged spectrum of the creative industry (e.g. writers, musicians, writers, painters and photographers), thus the report was unable to capture the unique work characteristics in musicians.

The research literature on arts, creativity and psychological health shows that creativity, which is a prerequisite for many forms of artistic and musical performances, may be associated with increased risk of affective disorders (Akiskal, Savino, & Akiskal, 2005; Kyaga et al., 2013; Mula & Trimble, 2009) and substance abuse (Tolson & Cuyjet, 2007). A recent Swedish prospective population-based study showed that people within the large spectrum of creative occupations, such as research, arts and music, were more likely to suffer from bipolar disorder than were the control groups (Kyaga et al., 2013). An epidemiological study on the mortality of European and North American rock and pop stars showed a significantly higher mortality rate among the artists than a demographically matched sample (Bellis et al., 2007). These empirical findings underline the importance for further study of the creative industries in general, and specifically for pursuing research on the psychosocial work environment of freelance musicians within the popular music genre.

A recent qualitative study (Dobson, 2010a) of 18 young freelance musicians (nine classical and nine jazz musicians) reported poor financial security among the informants. Besides musical talent, this study identified several factors important for success in freelance musicians' occupational lives. The importance of having a wide social network combined with good networking skills was underscored. In addition, alcohol consumption was shown to play a role in socializing with others. Another paper (Dobson, 2010b), based on information from the same informants, showed that there may also be genre-specific differences. While the jazz musicians focused on developing a sense of exploration and freedom through their work, the pursuit of accuracy in performance was of particular importance for the classical musicians.

Most of the research on the psychosocial work environment and health of musicians has focused on permanently employed musicians working in large orchestras within the genres of classical music, opera or jazz. In addition, studies have mainly focused on the influence that work conditions have on the musicians' physical health (Leaver, Harris, &

Palmer, 2011; Paarup, Baelum, Holm, Manniche, & Wedderkopp, 2011). With regard to work-related mental health issues, the majority of the studies have focused on specific problems such as performance anxiety (Kenny, Davis, & Oates, 2004; Kenny & Osborne, 2006; Osborne & Kenny, 2005, 2008). Dobson (2010a, 2010b) has reported some of the occupational challenges described by freelance musicians. Still, the research literature is scarce and in need of more empirical research that explores the specific psychosocial work environment factors in freelance musicians' working lives.

Within the field of psychosocial work environment research, one of the most investigated and established models is the demands-control-support model (Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Van Der Doef & Maes, 1999). The model postulates that job strain, health and productivity are related to the levels of job demands (e.g. working hours, work intensity, physical demands, etc.), perceived control (e.g. skill discretion and decision authority) and social support (e.g. instrumental and emotional support from leaders and colleagues). The model has been praised for its simplicity (De Jonge & Kompier, 1997), but has also been criticized for its lack of complexity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Nevertheless, both positive (e.g. motivation and learning) and negative (e.g. psychological strain and burnout) outcomes of the psychosocial work environment can be attributed to the relationship between levels of demands, control and support. This form of comparative relationship is also the foundation of the more recent job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Derks, 2010; Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009), which is a model that incorporates both job demands, social support, control and other important job characteristics in two broad categories: demands and resources. Job demands are defined as the physical, psychological and contextual factors at work which require effort and/or skills, and are therefore associated with physical and psychological costs such as strain and burnout. Job resources are factors that foster growth, motivation, learning and development. Social support, resilience, self-efficacy, autonomy and perceived control are examples of these important job resources. Studies indicate that job resources serve as a buffer for stressful job demands, mitigating possible negative outcomes such as burnout (Bakker & Derks, 2010). Other studies report that personal resources such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) play a role in mediating the relationship between job resources and engagement as well as influence the perception of job resources (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

As a part of a large-scale project on the mental health and work environment of musicians in Norway, we carried out an initial qualitative study to ensure better contextual understanding of the psychosocial work characteristics that are unique to musicians working freelance. By using the job demands-resources model as a theoretical foundation, combined with a focus on mental health and protective factors, we were able to map the unique psychosocial factors that were described to influence the quality of freelance musicians' work environment and mental health.

Methods

Informants

Our study received ethical approval from the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics, North Norway. The informants chosen were selected under the guidance of a reference group consisting of experienced musicians who had affiliations with the Norwegian Musicians' Union and Rock City Norway.¹ Although the primary focus was on the genres of pop and rock, we also wanted to include genre-crossing artists in order to get

Table 1. Informants included in analysis.

Participant no.	Gender	Instrument	Genre	Notification
1	Female	Vocals	Pop/Jazz	
2	Male	Instrument	Rock/Metal	
3	Male	Instrument	Pop/Rock	
4	Male	Instrument	Pop/Rock	
5	Female	Vocals/instrument	Pop/Classical	Composer
6	Female	Vocals/instrument	Pop/Folk	Composer
7	Male	Vocals/instrument	Pop/Rock	Composer
8	Male	Instrument	Pop/Rock	
9	Male	Vocals/instrument	Pop/Rock	Composer
10	Male	Vocals/instrument	Rock/Metal	Composer
11	Female		Management	
12	Female	Vocals/instrument	Pop/Jazz	Composer

a wider insight into freelance musicians' working conditions. We also chose to include an informant from the management system with the purpose of achieving a more broad contextual view of the music business.

The musicians who participated in this study were award-winning artists and musicians of varying age, experience and public exposure. All had released albums and made their living primarily through their music on a freelance basis. Since the musical community and industry in Norway are rather small and transparent, we have chosen not to disclose more personal information of each participant than what is listed in [Table 1](#).

Interviews

Interviews lasted approximately 2 hours and were carried out over a period of 6 months (October 2011–March 2012). The interviews were recorded using an MP3 recording device. With the purpose of “warming up” and getting a more inclusive contextual understanding of each musician's professional life, Section 1 of the interview schedule began with a focus on the musician's background and experience. Focus then shifted to job demands and specific challenges or stressors related to being a musician as opposed to any other type of professional. Relevant examples of the musicians' daily lives were always sought out in this segment of the interview. The purpose of this section was to obtain a firm understanding of the uniqueness of the job demands freelance musicians face in their line of work. Section 2 of the interviews focused on job resources, personal resources and preventative factors. Our goal was to explore what factors, beyond musical talent, are important for musicians to be able to master the demands and challenges of their work life as well as maintain good health. Section 3 was aimed directly at the musicians' own experiences with health and their use of healthcare during their careers. This article focuses mainly on information gained from Sections 1 and 2.

The first and last author identified the research aims and planned the design. All interviews were done by the first author, a trained qualitative interviewer and clinical psychologist. Transcriptions were done with assistance from a student majoring in organizational psychology and they were systematically reviewed by the first author before analysis. All in all we completed 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The first author wrote the initial draft, and all authors contributed to the rewriting as well as to the discussion and interpretation of results.

Analysis

NVivo software was used for the exploration of transcripts (Richards, 2009). Template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 2004) was chosen as the appropriate method for our research questions. The coding manual was developed using a combination of the *a priori* and editing organizing style (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). An initial template was based on the theoretical and empirical foundations of the demands and resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In order to account for a possible need for refinement or expansion of the initial template, an additional line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of 4 out of 12 interviews was pursued. This coding process showed that it would be reasonable to proceed further with analysis based on two broad themes: *demands* and *resources*. The first and second authors conducted parallel reviewing and coding of the interviews in order to make the analysis process more transparent. Further investigation within these higher order themes revealed subthemes that were continuously revised before the finalization of analysis.

Results

During the interviews it became increasingly clear that it was difficult for our informants to distinguish work from the rest of their lives. Life as a freelance musician was described to be welded with one's identity and lifestyle. The musicians related that it often made little sense to describe work and leisure as two different entities.

One of the most important aspects of being a musician is the fact that you are making ends meet based on your hobby. You are earning based on your persona, and therefore it cannot be compared to any other occupation.

It became more sensible to view demands and resources as two broad factors that influence the whole life as a freelance musician. With regard to health, being sick was regarded as not being able to play, a scenario that was almost described as being impossible.

We are never sick. I believe it has never happened. Of course, it depends on how you define being sick. If some of us had turned up at the hospital, we would probably been given sick-leave. Despite fever and back-aches, you play . . . and you postpone being sick to when you come back from tour.

It is like the body is postponing being sick. It is the fact that you are indispensable. I believe that's the reason. Everything demands on you, and that's a really good feeling, it is not bad at all. One feels valued.

Keeping these aspects in mind, we describe findings relating to our main templates, demands and resources, as well as focus on the core categories which were described to be unique to musicians' line of work. It is important to note that the different categories should be viewed as dynamic entities that are related to one another (Table 2).

Demands

With regard to demands, we found three broad contextual dimensions: "unpredictable future and lack of given structure," "stress on family/work balance" and "external pressure." These demands have previously been defined as physical, psychological and contextual factors that require effort and/or skills on the musicians' part and were associated with significant physical and psychological costs to the musicians.

Table 2. Categories related to demands and resources.

Themes	Categories	Citations
Demands	1. Unpredictable future and lack of given structure a. Unstable economy b. Lack of foresight	“It is the collision between your ambitions, dreams and reality. You are not able to realize it due to financial issues. I believe that there are many who succumb because of that” “There is something about the way of life that you have chosen, which often results in getting that feeling that you are inadequate. You may succeed artistically . . . you reach your goals . . . you manage your guitar-solo . . . but your way of life may also result in that you may hurt others, or feel that you are not able to fulfill the demands of your loved ones.”
	2. Family/work conflicts	
	3. External pressure a. Identity pressure	
Resources	1. Support a. Family support b. Support from band and/or professional network c. Support, feedback and communication with fans and audience	“I’ve had a very stable family, also in the ups and downs of my career. I have, for the first time of my life, been able to lend them money, instead of always being the one who has to ask them for it. And that is probably the most important explanation for my own good mental health status.”
	2. Personal resources a. Dedication to music b. Entrepreneurial skills c. Flexibility and proactivity d. Internal locus of control and resilience e. Fostering and maintaining core values	“You have to have this managing-talent; otherwise, you need to have people around you who complement you. If you are in a band, this can be taken care of by other band members. If you are alone, you have to have a network around you that helps you manage the talent you have . . . but musical talent alone is not enough.”

Unpredictable Future and Lack of Given Structure

Despite the fact that the freelance musicians we interviewed had, with a few exceptions, succeeded in making music their primary occupation, it was not a lucrative business. Insecurity and continuous instability with regard to income, assignments (such as playing gigs) and work hours seemed to dominate life as a freelance musician.

Unstable Economy

Unstable economy was described to be a major challenge, particularly in the first years of the career. Two of our informants revealed that they had significant financial trouble during the start of their career. These financial problems were a major challenge to the musicians’ ability and willingness to pursue a further career within the creative industry.

I know that this is what I want to do. Especially after all the challenges I have faced. But money is the main problem for everyone choosing to be a musician.

Money was not, however, described as the driving force behind the choice of becoming a musician, yet it remains the single most important factor allowing musicians to make ends meet. In some instances, the musicians either have to rely on financial support from family

and friends or obtain spare jobs or assignments that are often in conflict with values and career goals.

Lack of Foresight

The continuous change in professional demands is a challenge that is prominent in the work of freelance musicians. In addition to the more common demands that all musicians face, such as the pursuit of accuracy and quality in performance as well as securing enough time to practice, freelance musicians have to live with the lack of structure and foresight that is associated with “regular” work. The amount of work pressure may vary significantly; freelance musicians are continually challenged to seek stability in unpredictable job situations.

One thing that is unique is that everything is based on short time frames and last minute work. One does work intensively in certain periods and very little in others. So it is very unstable. It may be compared with being at war, being a soldier. At one moment you are home relaxing, and then it's out again, 24/7... It looks like a war. You do not know if you will come back alive... or... that's a bit exaggerated... but you do not know what is facing you.

One of our informants made an interesting point that the aforementioned characteristic has become less unique to life as a freelance musician, mainly as a result of the growing globalization and organizational changes within more traditional industries.

Family/Work Conflicts

Most of our informants related that they had experienced considerable challenges regarding the balancing of family and work life. The combination of challenges experiencing continuously changing work demands and an unstable economy and stress to the family/work balance is regarded as one of most critical factors for musicians deciding to quit their careers. Our informants mentioned several talented musicians who decided to quit their job as a freelance musician because of the instability it imposed on the family/work balance. Musicians in our sample were dependent on their families' ability to adjust to their unusual work situations.

The ones at home had to adjust themselves to my line of work. My kids have become accustomed to growing up with a father on the road. As a father, in this line of work, we are never involved in school events and weekend events. When there are family events like birthdays and funerals, we are usually gone as well.

Although difficulties in balancing work and family life are seen as a major challenge, our informants also made it clear that these challenges can be dealt with. Touring musicians, for example, have the opportunity to catch up on contact with the family when the tour is over.

If you are a touring musician, you sometimes see your children twice as much as any other guy, and sometimes not at all. All depends on how one can deal with this phenomenon. I think that this is worse for women than men... being physically away from your kids when they are young. When they become teenagers, it's a completely different world, I think... The explorers on the South Pole expedition were gone for years... that is not the case for touring musicians. So we have a luxury problem, after all, compared to the past.

External Pressure

Freelance musicians often experience a significant amount of external pressure. Although this pressure varies with degree of exposure and fame, the work is based strongly on external feedback and expectations from audience, media and other interests. Financial

challenges are one of the most critical factors when pursuing a career as a musician, and some of our informants described that they have had to accept work that was in conflict with what they truly wished to do (i.e. playing at organizational conferences and events).

Identity Pressure

Most of our informants conveyed the importance of maintaining integrity, a musical identity and some core values, and that external demands and expectations can make this difficult. Freelance musicians are, more or less, thoroughly enmeshed with the product itself. This seems to challenge the musicians' integrity and identity, both as an individual and a professional.

There are few jobs where people applaud you when you've done your job. That's the obvious, positive part. The next day... you open the newspaper... and they say that you have performed miserably. You can actually experience that... Everybody gave you applause and standing ovations and thought it was fantastic at the concert... but the next day the newspaper says it's all rubbish. That's strange... and I believe you'll not face that in any other profession. You can actually do your job properly, or even absolutely fantastic, but even then experience that people condemn you afterwards.

As previously mentioned, the musician's professional product is tightly linked to the identity and the core values of the musician as an individual. As a consequence, the pressure of having to deal with the image of oneself as a product, while still being able to foster and keep one's core personal identity and values, becomes difficult.

At first it was very difficult. I felt it was too much. The times photographers took pictures of me, hidden, it was... terrible... I ran home and cried. It had a major impact on me, because it became a form of psychological collision between the value I put on myself as an individual and what I did as a musician. I did not understand it properly. And now I understand what's the major problem for pop stars. They turn themselves into a piece of artwork, and become empty.

Many young musicians contact me, and many of them have trouble dealing with critique. They take it personally, and believe that if the critic says that the song is not good, they automatically think that the critic doesn't like them, that they are ugly and so forth.

It is obviously a challenge for many performers to handle external pressure from the media, audience, record companies, managers, colleagues and all others involved.

Resources

With regard to resources, which we have previously defined as work factors that foster growth, motivation, learning and development, we found two broad dimensions: "support" and "personal resources." These two dimensions represent internal and external resources that may function as a buffer for stress as well as provide a potential source of job engagement and well-being.

Support

Family Support

The family is described as being an important source for both emotional and practical support. Having a family that supports the career choice and that provides economical and emotional support is described as vital for further pursuit of career goals. Most of our informants reported that this is a buffer for stress and an important source of motivation, both important factors for career success.

I've had a very stable family, also in the ups and downs of my career. I have, for the first time of my life, been able to lend them money, instead of always being the one who has to ask them for it. And that is probably the most important explanation for my own good mental health status.

Family support is tightly linked to the previously described family/work balance. Having a family that acknowledges the pros and cons of being a musician, while also understanding the specific occupational challenges associated with it, is described as vital to the successful pursuit of a career as a freelance musician.

Support from Band and/or Professional Network

Informants that play in a band describe how the other band members often make use of the information, knowledge and skills that each band member displays. Not only do band members have different roles in music, but they also take different roles in their growing "enterprise."

To push the band forward we had to do an internal scanning, looking for what each one of us could contribute to the band, besides being a musician. We had one that was a good strategist and who was creative in finding solutions, not only in music, but also within business and marketing. (We had) the songwriter, who provided the raw material and another one that was good at talking with the media. Another band member was good at promoting the band and one that was good at administration and economy.

This is an example of both collective control and instrumental support provided within a band. There is also a qualitative distinction between being in a band, and working on your own. The band seems to have a greater opportunity to face challenges as a team, while the individual musician has to face a variety of demands by themselves or with assistance from people within their network. Working within a band or a small ensemble is clearly challenging in other ways, however. Problems such as maintaining a well-balanced combination of personalities within the band, productive group decision-making and conflict solving, appropriate delegation of team roles, advantageous leadership structures and other group-related issues were common themes. For our informants who were band members, fostering a positive and functional work environment within the band is regarded as vital.

I found out that I have had enough. I had done what I could, and I was neither able nor willing to do this anymore. I woke up every morning ruminating about the challenges that would face me during the day. We were the best when we were on stage. Off stage, it was chaos. We had disputes that turned into conflicts, different personalities and different types of people collided. Different types of friends. And when we lived together, on tour, with such differences ... I felt it was extreme. If you manage to work in this band, you'll manage anything.

Support, Feedback and Communication with Fans and Audience

For our informants, communication with, and response from, the fans and audience is one of the most important sources for motivation and engagement. The importance of the immediate response the band gets from the audience at a concert is emphasized and described as being unique.

That is what I live for, that is the magical thing. Of course some concerts stand out more than the others... the joy of standing there and that something happens... It is the communication... the interplay... between me and the audience. I get excited. It's probably the adrenaline. I'm a total addict...

*Personal Resources**Dedication to Music*

Most of our informants did describe a passion for music making and performance developed through early years, with the help, motivation and support from family and social network.

I grew up in a town where there was a well-developed community music school. I began in a musical kindergarten when I was four, and went further on to playing the piano when I was five. I had musical parents, and a lot of time was spent on musical activities.

My dad bought an organ when I was 3–4 years. He wanted to play. He took lessons and so forth. But he quit, and I was the one who ended up playing the organ. And ever since, I have played it. I joined a band at 9 years of age.

This early introduction to music and music making was consistent in all of our interviews. Making it important to view the job as a musician as an occupation that one gets introduced to at an earlier stage than others. It is also important to note that most of our musicians did describe a passion for music making and music performance, and that this music making was also described as a vital source for health. As well as the lack of music making and performance seemed to be associated with lack of enjoyment and restlessness.

And then you have the playfulness. It is totally important . . . in addition to the seriousness. It's actually like having fun playing a game, a very complicated one. It is 10,000 finger movements during two and a half hour that you have to hit with millimeter precision. The goal is making music... It is like playing a game. In addition, it is a fairy tale . . . You have to remember this all the time . . . that the reason for starting this was the playfulness. It started with just playing for fun . . . then it became work . . . and the media . . . and all that crap . . . but the playfulness must always be there.

Entrepreneurial and Managerial Skills

Life as a freelance musician is described as a continuous process of balancing musical and performance skills with professional, managerial or entrepreneurial skills. One of our informants gave a thorough and informative description of the combination of musical talent and entrepreneurship that is needed to succeed as a freelance musician.

Yes, I have several examples of people that have quit the music business, and I have played with many of them. People that I saw had the talent, but not the proper focus. Maybe it was because they did not want it enough. They seemed to have the natural talent, but did not have the skills to communicate it and manage it. XX has got the talent, and is good at managing it, and is skilled to maintain focus on that. You have to have this managing talent, otherwise, you need to have people around you who complement you. If you are in a band, this can be taken care of by other band members. If you are alone, you have to have a network around you that helps you manage the talent you have . . . but musical talent alone is not enough. If you have great musical talent, you probably have bad practical talent. There is obviously some dichotomy there, but somebody has got the combination of talents. YY is not so good at it. He is creative as hell and should have got at least as great a career going as XX. His work is absolutely stunning, but since he is not good at managing his talent, and keeping focus on that bit, he falls short. I simply think that it lies there. You have to have the combination of musical talent and the skills to manage it in a professional manner. Present it in a natural way. You have to be smart in gaining a professional network and to be at the right place to the right time.

This citation summarizes the essence of what we hear from our informants. Freelance musicianship is not solely associated with what we could call traditional challenges regarding performance and musical training, but it is also rather strongly linked to skills concerning organizing, developing, selling and networking.

He had his own band, and it did not work. Even though they had come a longer way than us and had a major hit on the radio. They were about to gain major success. But then all the other demands came, and they were not organized enough to meet and solve them.

It is important to have the ability to face the insecurity and instability created by these demands in a work situation that is prone to change from one day to the next. One of our more experienced informants described how she has to master a variety of activities beside music making and performance, and that developing her product and keeping her eyes open for new possibilities is a continuous challenge.

There is so much you have to be good at as a freelancer. Handling the media, sell yourself as a musician, etc. Sometimes it can be very demanding. I may ruminate about it, and fear the continuous challenge of having to sell myself . . . and sometimes it feels nice to have a day off... Other times it is not good at all . . . Now that I am getting older and experience that fewer and fewer know me and my musical background, I realize that I have to tell them my whole story. Tell them about something I did in the 80s, before many of them were born . . . seems like the Jerusalem times. It is becoming more and more difficult. To begin with, it is the challenge of becoming established, to get a foot inside the door. Once you get established, you cannot relax . . . you never get to the place where you can relax. It is not like being in an orchestra or any other form of permanent employment. Every day you have to prove that you have something to provide, or else, you have to renew yourself . . . You have to constantly show that you are still going strong.

Flexibility, Proactivity and Tolerance for Ambiguity

Our previous category showed that successful entrepreneurial skills are important in order to keep up with the demands of the entertainment industry. Looking at the last citation, it is reasonable to ascertain that success also calls for the ability to be flexible and adaptive to continuous changing demands, and that this flexibility and adaptability may be related to personality domains and resilience. It was also revealed that being proactive and maintaining a consistent watch on future career possibilities and/or obstacles is important, as exemplified in this citation:

And there lies the whole solution. After the year of 19XX, when I started on my own, and since I was working freelance, I was watchful and did not tie myself to one specific client without having eyes and ears open for new assignments. Many have failed this important exercise, and it is dangerous to get too comfortable, thinking that the payment will last for years. You are so confident, you are so certain that you will be asked the next year as well. But then they cut you off, and you sit there without a job. So I did decide to be watchful.

Persistence and Internal Locus of Control

In contrast to being an employee, where the enterprise is the provider of demands, control and support, the freelance musician has a larger degree of autonomy and responsibility. In order to manage the unpredictable future and lack of given structure, our informants have to provide this structure and stability by themselves. Certain informants in our study can afford to outsource some of these functions to managers and consultants, yet all of our informants still describe the fundamental need to have control over their own career and their musical product.

I feel like I have not been able to expect that someone else would be able to put together a job description that is fitting for me to work within. I entered this line of work when I was a teenager, but have never been accustomed to having a manager. Ultimately it is you that has to earn enough money to support yourself, and if not, you have to find another source of income. I have not asked others to solve this.

Every musician knows what I am talking about when I say this . . . you come to a point where you must understand that if you get bad feedback, it is you and only you that gets it . . . If you get good feedback, it is also only you that gets it. You have to make sure that you have deserved that negative or positive feedback, instead of standing there and blaming some other idiot.

Fostering, Maintaining and Committing to Core Values

What started as a hobby became a profession for most of our informants. They described a journey that began with playing an instrument or singing as a child and teenager. The informants related the dichotomy of feeling joy while playing and creating music to suddenly experiencing that the hobby has become an occupation. The sudden experience of being bombarded with external demands and having to find a way to meet these types of demands was a challenge. The fact that many musicians were drawn in different directions, while simultaneously having to understand the essence of what was important, also presented a challenge. Throughout this process, it was important that the musician find the way back to why it all started, while maintaining integrity and a commitment to their core values.

You have to get to the position where you find the source of why you started with this. 'Yes, because I love singing and music. That's why I'm doing it. Now there is someone who is tampering with it. This does not feel right for me' . . . in that situation you have to take that fight. You have to say: 'This does not feel right for me, so it has to be done in another way'. And then you have to stand there on the judgment day and live with it. I've been in the position where I got lost, and that was the worst thing that I have ever experienced. Because then I had a nasty feeling that I was not in proper contact with myself and my reasons for why I started with my musical career.

Discussion

Our results reflect how the life of the freelance musician is influenced by a dynamic interplay between external demands and social and personal resources. The freelance musicians in this study seem to have a fundamental passion for music making, and seem to make few distinctions between work and leisure life. Most of our musicians describe that they are making proactive efforts to maintain their freelance occupation, by establishing a large professional network, together with the important support from family and social network. In this discussion we will explain how the career is maintained through the use of personal, family and social resources.

The Interplay Between Demands and Resources

Our informants consistently relate that a reliable income is a major theme in the life as a freelance musician. If the product you offer does not sell, you are simply not able to maintain a sustainable career. The continuously changing external demands of the industry make it quite challenging to pursue a professional musical career. Our results indicate that support from family and colleagues, combined with personal resources such as flexibility, and a resolute set of values and resilience are important factors in managing these demands. Research has demonstrated that a combination of high job demands, due to large workloads, but low job control, has previously shown to be related to significant strain and negative health (Häusser et al., 2010; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Van Der Doef & Maes, 1999). The combination of low workloads and low control has been described as a

negatively passive work situation that inhibits motivation and learning (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). These results reflect the fact that with the continuously changing demands of the industry, the freelance musician must seek to obtain the control needed, while also keeping alive the passion for creating music, in order to construct a satisfactory work situation.

An important distinction between a permanently employed musician and a freelance musician is the lack of any given structure among the freelancers. While the psychosocial work environment and contextual factors of the employee are traditionally formed by the employer, the freelance musician stands freer to influence his or her own work environment. At the same time, the freelancer must also be able to flexibly change between different professional situations and conditions. The skilled freelance musician can proactively influence the contextual demands by fostering and obtaining a professional network, maintaining a good relationship with the family and continuously looking for new job opportunities.

Musical talent is, unless remarkably exceptional, far from enough to maintain a successful freelance career. The musician needs to possess social and personal resources that serve as a potential buffer for stress as well as a set of skills that will proactively influence and adjust for the future demands of their often unstable work situation. In other words, a competent set of diverse skills is necessary to navigate through the chaos, where musical talent is important, but on its own not wholly sufficient.

The Freelance Musician as a Flexible Entrepreneur

Menger (2001) describes that a combination of entrepreneurship, flexibility and self-actualization is important in order to manage occupations within the creative industries. Bennett (2009) illustrates similar results from investigating the work patterns, education and professional development of working and unemployed musicians and dance artists. Her study describes the myriad of activities musicians and dancers have to master to build a long-term career within the arts. Bennett links this vast skill set to a form of career that, within vocational psychology, is called a protean career (Hall, 2004). The protean career is one in which an individual, not an organization, is in charge. The person's core values are the main motivation for career decisions, and the main criteria for professional success are subjective. Menger (2001) states that artists have to hold multiple jobs and operate like small businesses on their own. Bennett (2009) finds fault with the "labeling" of artists as musicians in the narrow sense, and argues that viewing musicians solely from a performance aspect is not sufficient for understanding the occupational challenges musicians face.

The information gathered from our informants is in accord with Bennett's findings. While freelance and permanently employed musicians have to deal with similar physical and psychological challenges related to performance, freelancers also face a wide range of additional challenges. For the permanently employed, these issues are mostly taken care of by employers and/or management.

Zwaan et al. (2010) argue that artists in general have always faced high degrees of physical and psychological challenges because they are most used to project-based work and often face the uncertainty of having permanent employment. Menger (2001) argues that the artist has historically been challenged by a highly competitive and fast changing labor market that is similar to the changes we are now seeing in other forms of industry today. Pursuing this historical view further, Weber (2004) describes how some of history's most renowned musicians saw the insufficiency of solely being a good performer or

composer and, in order to succeed, expanded their role as a musician to include a variety of entrepreneurial skills. They made an effort to gain a solid network of alliances, attracting media and an audience base, and made use of a variety of entrepreneurial skills in order to achieve career success. In keeping with our findings, informants in Dobson's (2010a) study on freelance musicians also stressed the importance of building dependable networks in order to obtain steady income.

While research literature has begun to map the psychosocial work environment and characteristics of the performance aspect of being a musician, the entrepreneurial aspect has gained little interest so far. While persistence and self-control may be important for orchestral musicians seeking accuracy in performance (Dobson, 2010b), our results indicate that flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity are also important in maintaining a successful freelance career.

Mental Health Maintained by Family, Social and Personal Resources

Our informants emphasize the importance of being "thick-skinned," a metaphor illustrating one of the personal resources that is described to be needed to adequately pursue a career in a continually changing creative industry. In addition, results indicate that a combination of personal, family and social resources is beneficial for both career and health. Kenny et al.'s (2004) study on performance anxiety and occupational stress among opera chorus artists argued that artists may use personal and social resources as an adaptive way of coping with anxiety. In resilience research, the quality of mental health is said to be determined by a transactional processes involving psychosocial risks, vulnerabilities and protective factors (Hjemdal, Friborg, & Stiles, 2012). Similarly, the biopsychosocial model postulates that mental health is best understood in terms of a combination of biological, psychological and social factors, underscoring the need to know both the individual and contextual factors to understand strain, adaptation and mental health processes (Santrock, 2006). Our results on resources are consistent with the dominating view that good health is regarded to be influenced by personal dispositions, family coherence and social resources (Friborg, Hjemdal, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2009; Hjemdal et al., 2012).

In addition to this, our results show that the freelance musician has to manage external demands and challenges that are associated with producing, marketing and selling their work while still weighing this against one's core values. These values are related to both the performer's musical product and their identity, and as such are quite important to the freelance artist. Being tolerant of ambiguity and maintaining an internal locus of control seem to be important personal factors dealing with such external demands.

The aforementioned type of value-anchored flexibility could also be related to a newly developed concept called psychological flexibility (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Psychological flexibility refers to the human ability to recognize and adapt to various shifting situational demands. The ability to shift mindsets and behavioral repertoires when needed in order to foster healthy personal and social functioning is also considered psychological flexibility, as is having an awareness and commitment to actions that is congruent with one's values. Psychological flexibility is a fundamental source of psychological health and has been shown to protect a person from anxiety, depression, substance abuse and long-term disability (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). In addition to the theoretical constructs from resilience literature (Friborg et al., 2009; Hjemdal et al., 2012), the described personal resources could also be linked to concepts such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and locus of control (Rotter, 1990). The common denominator between

these concepts is the belief in one's own ability to influence situational demands. This is described to be an important resource in our results, and these concepts have also been linked to occupational stress, health and well-being in numerous studies (i.e. Lagerveld, Blonk, Brenninkmeijer, & Schaufeli, 2010; Onwezen, van Veldhoven, & Biron, 2012; Park, Beehr, Han, & Grebner, 2012). This dynamic relationship between contextual demands, personal and social resources should be taken into account when investigating the mental and occupational health of freelance musicians.

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first study to investigate the unique aspects of the psychosocial work environment among Norwegian freelance musicians. The recruitment of informants was done under the guidance by the Norwegian musicians' union, finding informants representing the width of the freelance musicians. Our informants were award-winning musicians, with extensive experience from the Music business. By using the job demands-resources model, our results add unique information about this form of occupation, linking it to an already well-established theoretical framework. We used template analysis, which is well suited for such an endeavor.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Of note, there was a gender division with regard to instrument; while we had four male informants who were purely instrumentalists, all our female informants used vocals as well. A larger sample of informants would have given us broader descriptions and better possibilities to describe possible gender-specific differences in job demands and resources. Through the use of template analysis, we have focused on specific factors that our musicians describe as demanding and protecting. This specific focus may have neglected other important aspects, such as emergence of self-identity, self-expression, creative processes and health, previously addressed in other qualitative studies (Daykin, 2005; Dobson, 2010a, 2010b).

Concluding Notes

The joy of playing music and pursuing personal interests is a vital resource for our musicians. The informants describe that they got an early introduction to their occupation, and they describe a passion and dedication. There is, nevertheless, an obvious lack of given structure in the lives of freelance musicians, and it is very important that the musicians have the skills necessary to create this form of structure by themselves. Family coherence, social resources and personal resources such as entrepreneurial and managerial skills, tolerance for ambiguity and value-driven flexibility seem to be vital factors in maintaining a successful freelance career. In accordance with Menger (2001) and Bennett (2009), we argue that it would be reasonable to further investigate the entrepreneurial aspect of freelance musicianship. We do also argue that it would be relevant to further investigate the demands and resources that influence the quality of the outcomes of freelance musicians' psychosocial work environment, including knowledge from both occupational health psychology and resilience research.

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Note

1. Rock City (<http://www.rockcity.no/english>) is a national resource center for professional music, situated in the city of Namsos, Norway. Rock City aims to contribute to the professionalization of the music industry.

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