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So you want to be a Rock 'n' Roll star? Career success of pop musicians in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Empirical research on the career development of pop musicians is scarce. In the present study three sets of factors that have been posited to determine musicians' career achievement were tested: background characteristics, personal attributes and the professional environment of pop musicians. A group of aspiring professional Dutch pop musicians ($N = 340$) responded to online questionnaires. Regression analysis showed that social support and a professional attitude were positively associated with career success, and conscientiousness negatively. Most important, the professional context, i.e., having a website dedicated to the musician or act, and having access to professionals in the music industry, emerged as the strongest predictors of career success. Surprisingly, we found that self-perceived musical talent was not linked to career success. The limitations of our study and implications for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

A number of themes are regularly addressed in vocational research on professional musicians: first, the physical and psychological problems associated with musicianship (e.g., Gabrielsson, 1999, 2003; Steptoe, 1989); secondly, the personality of musicians (e.g., Dyce and O'Connor, 1994; Gillespie and Myors, 2000; Kemp, 1996); thirdly, the development of musical talent and performance skills (e.g., Davidson et al., 1996, 1997) and finally, the live music performance (e.g., Gabrielsson, 1999, 2003). In these studies it is commonly acknowledged that becoming, or

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being, a professional pop musician is characterized by high career uncertainty and that the profession, though potentially glamorous, can be stressful (Cooper and Wills, 1989; Gabrielsson, 2003; Janssen, 2001; Kemp, 1996). Though aspects of musicianship and performing have been researched thoroughly, the process of becoming a professional musician has attracted far less attention, that is, empirical research on the career development of musicians is scarce. In this study we will explore potential determinants of career accomplishments of pop musicians. For this purpose we conducted a cross-sectional survey among a group of young, (semi-) professional Dutch pop musicians.

1.1. Defining career success

Success as a musician or, more broadly, as an artist, is a multi-dimensional concept that has been defined and investigated in rather different ways. Some scholars have focused on aesthetic success and studied criteria such as inclusion of compositions in reference works on music, or ratings on aesthetic significance by experts or critics (Kozbelt, 2005; Simonton, 1986). A different yet related way of understanding success is to look at the reputation of the artist, as was first proposed by Howard Becker in his classic work on artistic production: Art Worlds (1982). Becker acknowledged that reputational value can be translated into financial value, reputation then becomes the foundation of economic success (Becker, 1982: 23). In studies that take up Becker's approach, the reputation of an artist is, again, assessed or estimated by experts or critics (e.g., Beckert and Rössel, 2004). These two approaches to success are both highly relevant to the study of artistic production and artists' career development, but they are not suited for investigating career patterns of aspiring professional musicians. Measuring success through reputation or aesthetic value is a suitable method for established artists but inappropriate for starting musicians, the focus of the current research project, as they are still building their reputation and in the process of getting acknowledged by experts and critics.

In measuring career success, we adopted an approach from career psychology research. Within this field, it is common to distinguish between subjective and objective career success. Subjective career success is defined as the individual's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with one's career. Objective career success is defined as objectively observable career accomplishments such as salary or the number of promotions within a company (Judge et al., 1995, 1999; Ng et al., 2005). In this study we will focus on objective success, measured through the career achievements of musicians. Several authors in the field of popular music studies have noted that musicians, or their musical products, are in contact with their audiences in three ways: through media exposure, sales of their recordings and live performances (e.g., Frith, 1988; Longhurst, 2007; Shuker, 2001; Toynbee, 2000). These also represent the three most important ways for musicians to gain an income with their musical activities. Hence, in this study we will use measures of media exposure, frequency of performing and music sales as indicators of objective career success.

1.2. Possible correlates of career success

Empirical studies within the field of career psychology have examined the degree to which background and demographic variables, intrapersonal variables, organizational and contextual variables relate to career success. Studies have shown relatively consistent findings regarding the relationship of demographic variables with career success. Overall, gender was found to be related to success, as women often experience lower levels of career success than men, while age and educational level were found to be positively related to success (Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al.,

2005). In addition, being married was positively related to success. The relationship of marital status with career success is commonly explained by the assumption that married individuals are more stable and responsible than singles, making them more favourable job candidates (Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005; Pfeffer and Ross, 1982). In addition, several studies showed a positive association of social support with career outcomes (Feldman and Ng, 2007; Harris et al., 2001; Parasuraman et al., 1996).

With regard to personality traits, the Big Five personality dimensions have often been studied in relation to career success. These dimensions are Conscientiousness (being organized and responsible), Extraversion (being outgoing and energetic), Agreeableness (being kind or sympathetic), Openness to Experience (being curious and imaginative), and Neuroticism (being anxious or tense). Several authors found a relatively stable pattern of relations between these personality dimensions and career success: Conscientiousness and Extraversion were positively related, whereas Agreeableness and Neuroticism were negatively related to career success (Boudreau et al., 2001; Gelissen and De Graaf, 2006; Judge et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005; Seibert and Kraimer, 2001; Soldz and Vaillant, 1999). With regard to Openness to Experience different studies yielded contradictory findings, a meta-analysis by Ng et al. (2005) showed indications of a positive correlation with career success.

It is important to note that most of the aforementioned studies concentrated on career outcomes within large organizations, often studying managerial level functions within hierarchic corporations. It is less clear how these variables are related to career success within different kinds of professions such as, in this study, that of pop musician.

Although empirical research on pop musician's career success is scarce, there are a small number of studies that are related to the present study and we will therefore consider whether findings from these studies can also be related to career success. With regard to personality, performance anxiety is found to be a common trait among different kinds of musicians (Hamann, 1985; Hamann and Sobaje, 1983; Kemp, 1996, 1997; Lehrer, 1987). Although this would appear as an impeding trait, in combination with high levels of performance skills and frequent engagement in performance, performance anxiety can in fact facilitate successful performance (Hamann, 1985; Hamann and Sobaje, 1983; Lehrer, 1987). Performance anxiety has also been related to perfectionism: because perfectionists set themselves high standards they may experience higher levels of internal pressure (Flett and Hewitt, 2002; Stoeber and Eismann, 2007). In a study among musically talented high school students in Germany, perfectionism was related to musical achievement (Stoeber and Eismann, 2007). We will explore if perfectionism is also directly related to measures of objective career success. In addition, we assume that perseverance is associated with musicians' career success. Pop musicians often have to face hard times throughout their careers (e.g., income insecurity, negative reviews of their artistic work by critics). Kogan (2002) argues that especially during the phase of establishing a career, perseverance is necessary to overcome these occupational hardships.

In a study based on interviews with record industry key decision makers, Zwaan and ter Bogt (2009) found that a number of characteristics were mentioned to be common among successful musicians. These included perseverance, professional attitude, perfectionism, authenticity, musical skills and musical talent, characteristics that are expected to positively affect career success. The study also discussed the importance of musical education and musical socialization. In addition, having access to a professional network and social support were said to be important for musician's career advancement (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). We will consider these findings and their connection to the career success of musicians.

1.3. Research strategy

In her elaborate review of research on artistic careers, Janssen (2001) notes that some studies have focused on background or personality traits while not considering the influence of social and institutional contexts, whereas other studies that did focus on the contextual influences often neglected the importance of background and personality. Janssen therefore calls for a comprehensive research strategy that takes into account the different variables affecting artists' career development. In related research fields there are some examples of studies that do include both intrapersonal and environmental determinants, such as the generic model of career development in the performing arts (Kogan, 2002; Kogan and Kangas, 2006); or the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT, see Gagné, 1995, 1999). Although these studies do not specifically focus on career success of popular musicians, they do offer some guidance in the development of a research strategy of the determinants of career success. The most important contribution of these models is the incorporation of both intrapersonal and contextual factors. In this study, we will explore a range of background, personality, and contextual variables and their connection to career success. For this study we propose the following research strategy:

As Fig. 1 shows, we expect that several categories of predictor variables (background, person, and environment) are related to the level of career success.

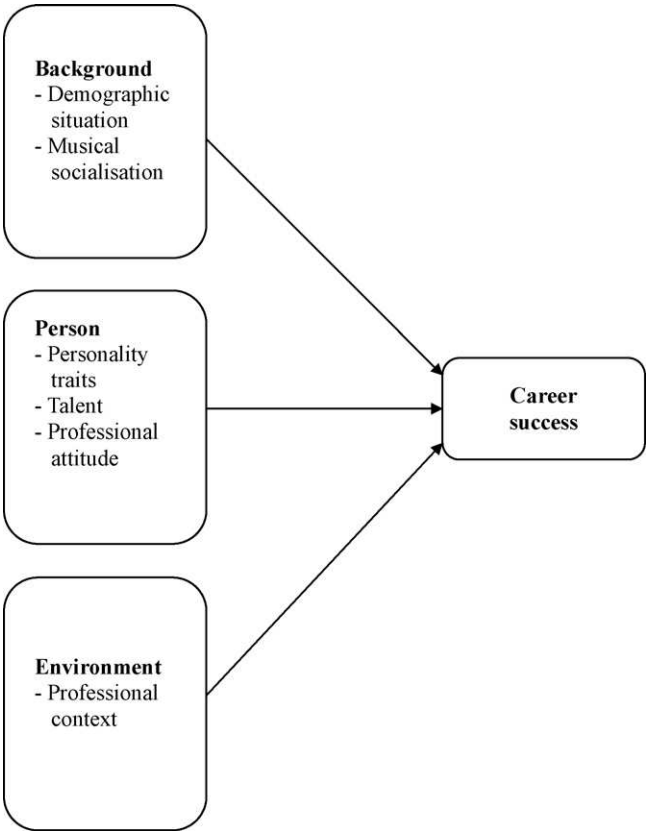

Fig. 1. Schematic overview of our research strategy: three categories of possible determinants of career success are tested in our study.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Respondents were approached in collaboration with a number of organizations in the Dutch pop music field that either provided us with names and addresses or sent out a call through their mailing list or website. These included three national organizations: the *Dutch Pop and Rock Institute* (*Nationaal Pop Instituut*),[1] the *Grand Prize of the Netherlands* (*Grote Prijs van Nederland*),[2] and the pop musician's labour union *FNV-KIEM BV Pop*. In addition, four regional pop organizations (*GRAP*, Amsterdam; *PopUnie*, Zuid-Holland; *BRAM/BrabantPop*, Noord-Brabant; and *Groverpop*, Groningen) assisted in the approach of respondents. These organizations represent two areas within the Randstad, the urbanized centre of the Netherlands, which includes the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, and two areas outside of the Randstad (the provinces of Groningen and Noord-Brabant). Lastly we approached students from the *Rock Academy* in Tilburg, which is the first professional education institute for pop musicians in the Netherlands.

The primary objective was to include individuals who could be described as starting musicians with an aspiration to become professional musicians. An age limit was set at 16, which is the minimum age in the Netherlands to earn money from public performances on a regular basis. An upper limit for age was set at 35 as the chances of career mobility decrease rapidly after this age (Menger, 1999). The age mean (M) was 25.1 years ($SD = 4.7$). Our second inclusion criterion holds that the musician was not yet an established artist on a national level, but there was a provable commitment to a professional career. This commitment could be, for example, membership of the musician's labour union, participation in the national talent competition, or sending in a demo for review in the magazine of the Dutch pop and rock institute.

With the help of the organizations mentioned above, 363 acts[3] were approached and asked to participate. This resulted in a sample of 358 musicians.[4] Most of these respondents were active in more than one act. A small group of 27 respondents who were active in only one act 'shared' this act with one or more respondents who also had no other acts. Thus, the musical careers of these respondents were based on the same act. To avoid the possibility of dependent measurement, 18 out of the 27 respondents were randomly removed from the database. Therefore, the final number of respondents (N) included in this study was 340, representing a broad range of backgrounds, genres, and regions. These respondents were active in no less than 647 different acts ($M = 2$, $SD = 1.1$). Appendix A shows three tables displaying the frequencies of number of acts per respondent, the role they have within their acts (vocals and/or musical instrument) and musical genres in which the respondents categorized their own music.

[1] The *Dutch Pop and Rock Institute* (*Nationaal Pop Instituut*) is now part of the Music Centre the Netherlands. This organization promotes Dutch music in the Netherlands and abroad and is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Culture. One of their activities is publishing the monthly magazine FRET which features reviews of demos from unsigned bands.

[2] The *Grand Prize of the Netherlands* (*Grote Prijs van Nederland*) is the biggest national popular music talent competition and consists of four genre divisions, Pop/Rock, Singer/Songwriter, Dance and Hip Hop/R&B.

[3] *Acts* refers to all the different types of formations common in popular music, these can range from solo projects by singer-songwriters or dance-DJs, to duo's and larger groups such as bands, rap crews, or any other kind of musical collaboration. We prefer to use the term 'acts' as this term has no connotations to any specific musical genre.

[4] In most cases the individual respondent was the person who was listed as the contact or spokesperson of the approached act. In some cases this resulted in multiple respondents from the same act.

2.2. Measures

The musicians responded to online questionnaires, including questions about their personal background, demographic situation, musical socialization, social context, personality, musical activities, and professional context. All independent variables, except for the categorical variables gender, education, partner, website and professional network, were measured using five-point Likert type scale items. The item scores were averaged to obtain single scale scores. An overview of the scale items developed by the authors (*Social support*, *Perseverance*, *Professionalism*, *Networking*, and *Authenticity*) can be found in Appendix B.

2.2.1. Success

The dependent variable in this study, *Objective career success*, was measured using four items regarding objectively observable career accomplishments over the past 12 months. These included *national radio airplay*, *national television airplay*, *CD sales*, and *performance frequency*. These accomplishments represent the three main career dimensions (media coverage, sales of recordings and live performance) central to career success in pop music as discussed in Section 1.

National radio airplay measured the average amount of plays of the respondent's music on national radio within the past 12 months ranging from 1 = 0 *plays* to 10 = *more than* 50 *plays*. *National television airplay* measured the average amount of plays of the respondent's music on national TV within the past 12 months ranging from 1 = 0 *plays* to 10 = *more than* 50 *plays*. *CD sales* measured the number of CDs sold within the past 12 months ranging from 1 = 0 *CDs sold* to 6 = *more than* 1000 *CDs sold*. *Performance frequency* measured the average amount of performances within the past 12 months ranging from 1 = *once per year* to 8 = *more than once per week*.

Factor analysis (PCA) of the standardized item scores resulted in one latent construct with item loadings ranging from .65 to .83. Hence, a composite scale score was computed as the mean value of the four separate scale item values. The resulting score was sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's alpha: .73). As the distribution of this score was positively skewed (skewness statistic of 1.48), the scores were transformed using the log transformation.

2.2.2. Background variables

Four variables referred to the respondents' demographics: g*ender*, *age*, the musician's e*ducational level*, and whether the respondents had a *partner*.

Educational level was measured using a range of categories corresponding to the different levels in the Dutch educational system and coded into three comprehensive categories (1 = *low*, 2 = *middle*, 3 = *high*).

Social support measures the amount of experienced social support as indicated by four items ($\alpha = .82$).

Musical education was measured by two dichotomous variables: whether respondents had followed *music lessons* and whether they had *conservatory* education (including comparable professional education such as the Rock academy). A third variable with regard to musical socialization, *Performance experience*, measured the number of years that respondents were involved in public performances.

2.2.3. Intrapersonal variables

The *Big Five* personality dimensions were measured using the Dutch translation of the standardized, shortened version developed by Gerris et al. (1998) using six items per

dimension. Gelissen and De Graaf (2006) showed that this shortened version is a valid representation of the original questionnaire with 20 markers per dimension. The six items of each separate scale were averaged to obtain single-scale scores: *Conscientiousness* ($\alpha = .87$), *Introversion* ($\alpha = .88$), *Agreeableness* ($\alpha = .85$), *Openness to Experience* ($\alpha = .80$), and *Neuroticism* ($\alpha = .80$).

Perseverance measures the subject's devotion to his or her musical activities. This scale contains four items ($\alpha = .72$).

Perfectionism measuring the subject's self-oriented perfectionism was derived from the original scale developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991) and translated into Dutch. This scale consists of three items ($\alpha = .50$).

Professionalism measures whether subjects perceived themselves as professional musicians, the scale consists of three items ($\alpha = .69$).

Networking contains three items ($\alpha = .75$) and measures the degree to which subjects are engaged in actively seeking helpful relationships to progress in their musical careers.

Authenticity, consisting of three items ($\alpha = .63$), measures the degree to which subjects perceive their own musical products to be unique and authentic.

Self-perceived talent measures the subject's own perception of their musical talent, based on frames of reference related to their fellow musicians, this scale is based on the comparative subscale of self-perceived talent developed by Watt (2004) and consists of three items ($\alpha = .73$).

Professionalism, networking, authenticity and talent are primarily attitudinal measures, based on self-evaluation, and are accordingly categorized as intrapersonal variables.

2.2.4. Environment variables

Five dichotomous items were used to measure the subject's professional status: whether subjects had a *website* based around the subject's musical activities, and whether subjects were being represented by a *manager*, a *booking agency,* a *record company,* and/or a *music publisher* (response categories: 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*). Factor analysis showed that these last four items (manager, booking agency, record company, and music publisher) were indicative of the same latent construct. Therefore, the response values of these items were summed to obtain a 5 point scale score, measuring the width of their *Professional Network*, with scores ranging from 0 (*no professional network*) to 4 (*complete professional network*). Reliability of this scale is .57, as indicated by the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (or KR-20, the measure of internal consistency reliability for dichotomous measures).

2.3. Strategy of analysis

In order to find which of the independent variables could best explain the differences in career success, we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression. The different variables were entered in the regression analysis in a fixed order: first, the background variables were entered, next the intrapersonal variables, and finally the environment variables.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptives

Male musicians were over-represented in our sample (73.5%). This is likely because there are more males in the total population of pop musicians. Two recent studies (van Bork, 2008; IJdens

et al., 2009) on popular musicians in the Netherlands presented similar results with regard to gender distribution. A majority of respondents (63.2%) indicated to have a relationship. The educational level of the respondents was evenly distributed with 21.8% of the respondents having a low education, about half of the sample (52.9%) having a middle educational level, and about a quarter of the sample (25.3%) having a high educational level. Most respondents (79.9%) had followed music lessons and about a quarter (25.3%) had also followed professional education such as conservatory or the rock academy. A majority (77%) reported having a website based on their musical activities. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the variables in this study.

3.2. Regression analysis

Table 2 shows the results of the second step in our analysis, that is, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

Each different step in this regression analysis significantly contributed to the amount of explained variance, as indicated by the significant R^2 increase ($ps < .001$) and the final step of the analysis explained about 39% of the total variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .39$, $R^2 = .43$). We tested for multicollinearity and despite several relatively strong correlations between the predictors, no problems of collinearity were observed (i.e., all Tolerance values $>.20$ and all values of variance inflation factors <2).

At Step 1, which represents the musician's background, gender, education, having a partner, social support and performance experience were significantly related to career success, indicating that the more successful musicians were male, had higher educational levels, had a partner, experienced higher levels of social support, and had more experience with performing. Age, having had music lessons, and having followed conservatory education were not significantly related to career success. Within this first step, social support was the strongest predictor of career success (as indicated by the β-values in the fourth column of Table 2).

Of the intrapersonal variables entered at Step 2, only three variables significantly contributed to the prediction of career success. Conscientiousness was negatively related to career success indicating that for musicians being sloppy, or in positive terms, being flexible and spontaneous was an important trait for career success. Both professionalism and networking were positively related to career success, suggesting that those musicians who showed a strong professional attitude and who were more actively engaged in networking activities experienced higher levels of career success. We found no significant association with career success for any of the remaining intrapersonal variables. After controlling for the intrapersonal variables, having a partner and performance experience were no longer significantly related to career success but gender, education and social support still remained significant predictors.

Finally, the professional context variables were entered. We found that both having a website and the musician's professional network were significantly and positively related to career success. These findings show that those musicians who invested in a website to support their musical activities as well as those musicians having an extensive professional network were more successful. After controlling for the professional context variables, gender, education, and networking were no longer significantly related to career success, but we still found significant associations for social support, Conscientiousness, and professionalism.

Considering the β-values, the overall association of the professional context variables with success appeared relatively strong compared to the background or intrapersonal variables. In

Table 1
Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of study variables ($N = 340$).

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Objective success	−0.12	0.38	–																					
2. Female	0.26	0.44	−.18**	–																				
3. Age	25.11	4.74	.08	−.20**	–																			
4. Education	2.04	0.69	.12*	−.03	.16**	–																		
5. Partner	0.63	0.48	.16**	−.04	.21**	.02	–																	
6. Social support	3.49	0.90	.30**	−.01	−.09	−.07	.10	–																
7. Music lessons	0.79	0.40	−.02	.14*	.09	.14**	.01	.06	–															
8. Conservatory	0.25	0.44	.13*	.17**	−.05	.08	.04	.16**	.24**	–														
9. Experience	7.47	4.73	.18**	−.05	.53**	.16**	.14**	.04	.16**	.17**	–													
10. Conscientiousness	3.18	0.78	−.20**	.13*	−.01	−.16**	−.09	.04	.02	.03	.01	–												
11. Introversion	2.33	0.79	−.07	−.24**	.04	.15**	−.11*	−.15*	−.08	−.02	−.09	−.05	–											
12. Agreeableness	4.03	0.49	−.08	.07	.03	−.17**	−.06	.16**	−.02	−.01	.06	.23**	−.31**	–										
13. Openness	4.06	0.53	−.09	.09	.01	−.12*	−.03	−.05	−.01	.00	.10	.17**	−.29**	.41**	–									
14. Neuroticism	2.78	0.71	−.08	.07	−.00	.02	−.10	−.09	−.04	−.04	−.13*	−.10	.40**	−.19**	−.01	–								
15. Perfectionism	3.55	0.70	.04	.02	−.09	−.11*	−.12*	.06	−.04	.05	−.03	.27**	−.08	.23**	.26**	.08	–							
16. Perseverance	3.16	0.81	.08	.02	−.19**	−.16**	−.18**	.03	−.00	.07	−.03	.03	−.14*	.15**	.24**	−.01	.33**	–						
17. Professionalism	3.51	0.78	.28**	−.01	−.02	−.10	−.03	.18**	−.02	.24**	.10	.11*	−.20**	.17**	.37**	−.01	.34**	.48**	–					
18. Networking	3.53	0.88	.31**	−.18**	−.06	.03	.05	.27**	−.02	.19**	.04	−.01	−.16**	.10	.07	−.12*	.14*	.23**	.41**	–				
19. Authenticity	3.05	0.73	−.04	−.07	.04	.00	−.01	.01	−.05	−.03	−.04	.06	−.01	.16**	.35**	.04	.15**	.21**	.27**	.10	–			
20. Self-perc. talent	3.29	0.68	.17**	−.04	.07	−.08	.03	.12*	.04	.15**	.19**	.13*	−.09	.11*	.31**	−.02	.20**	.33**	.53**	.19**	.24**	–		
21. Website	0.77	0.42	.43**	−.20**	.20**	.20**	.16**	.09	.06	.02	.15**	−.11*	.08	−.11	−.13*	−.07	−.05	−.01	.07	.20**	−.07	.06	–	
22. Prof. network	0.81	1.06	.46**	−.09	.02	.01	.14**	.22**	−.02	.13*	.22**	−.11*	−.07	−.03	.01	−.03	.10	.09	.30**	.31**	−.07	.16**	.23**	–

Note: $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$.

Table 2
Hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting objective career success ($N = 340$).

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	B	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β
Constant	−.67	.15		−.35	.28		−.40	.26	
Background									
Gender (0 = male)	−.15	.05	−.17**	−.10	.05	−.11*	−.07	.04	−.08
Age	.00	.01	−.03	.00	.01	.02	.00	.00	.00
Education	.07	.03	.12*	.06	.03	.11*	.04	.03	.07
Partner (0 = no)	.09	.04	.11*	.07	.04	.09	.03	.04	.03
Social support	.12	.02	.27***	.09	.02	.22***	.07	.02	.17***
Music lessons (0 = no)	−.07	.05	−.07	−.05	.05	−.05	−.05	.04	−.05
Conservatory (0 = no)	.08	.05	.09	.01	.05	.01	.03	.04	.03
Experience	.01	.01	.14*	.01	.01	.10	.00	.00	.04
Person									
Conscientiousness				−.09	.03	−.18***	−.07	.02	−.14**
Introversion				−.02	.03	−.04	−.04	.03	−.07
Agreeableness				−.06	.04	−.08	−.04	.04	−.05
Openness to Experience				−.08	.04	−.10	−.06	.04	−.08
Neuroticism				−.02	.03	−.04	−.01	.03	−.02
Perfectionism				.03	.03	.05	.02	.03	.03
Perseverance				.00	.03	.00	.00	.03	.00
Professionalism				.11	.03	.23**	.07	.03	.15*
Networking				.05	.02	.12*	.02	.02	.04
Authenticity				−.04	.03	−.08	−.02	.03	−.03
Self-perceived talent				.03	.03	.05	.02	.03	.04
Professional context									
Website (0 = no)							.25	.04	.28***
Professional network							.09	.02	.25***

Note: $R^2 = .18$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .13$ for step 2 and .12 for step 3 ($ps < .001$). $^{*}p < .05$. $^{*}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

addition, the relatively large increase in explained variance (ΔR^2 of .12) by these two variables, demonstrated the importance of the professional context variables.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the associations of the background characteristics, personal attributes and the professional context of a group of musicians with their career success. To our knowledge, this is the first large-scale study to investigate the career outcomes of pop musicians using a comprehensive research strategy. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, a relatively large number of variables was included in the analysis. For some of the predictor variables, such as gender and the Big Five, earlier research findings in the field of career psychology have shown significant and relatively consistent associations with career success (Judge et al., 1995, 1999; Ng et al., 2005). However, these results were often based on studies within corporate organizations, and it was unclear if these findings could be generalized to other professions, such as in this case, that of the pop musician. Other variables in this study were taken from studies on the personality of musicians (Kemp, 1996, 1997; Kogan, 2002; Stoeber and Eismann, 2007) and had not been directly related to career success in previous research.

For the background variables, we found positive associations of gender, age, educational level and having a partner with career success indicating that the more successful musicians were more often male, had higher educational levels and did more often have a partner. In addition, we explored musical socialization (i.e., whether respondents had followed music lessons, conservatory education and performance experience) as well as social support. Performance experience was positively associated with career success, which implies that the more successful musicians had more experience in performing. Also, we found a significant and strong positive correlation for social support with career success, indicating that in order to be successful it is important to receive support from important others, such as family members, partner and peers. These findings on the musician's background are in line with our expectations and earlier research findings (e.g., Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005). However, when controlling for all other variables in this study, only one background variable, social support, remained significantly associated with career success, demonstrating that this association is persistent when controlling for all other variables.

As Woody (1999) stated, an important omission in research on the career development of musicians is the relationship between personality and career success. In this study, we explored the association of a number of personality traits and other personal attributes with career success. With regard to the Big Five personality traits our findings differed considerably from previous research findings. We found no significant associations for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, or Neuroticism with career success. Moreover, contrary to earlier studies we found a significant negative association of Conscientiousness with career success. Whereas, for other occupations, being well organized and well planned is an important trait to be successful (Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005), our study shows that for musicians this is not the case. Rather, the opposite of being conscientious, which can be described as being sloppy and not well planned, or in positive terms, being spontaneous and flexible, was more important to be successful. This finding remained significant when controlling for all other variables. Although spontaneity and flexibility conceptually seem to relate to Extraversion, we did not find any significant association of Extraversion with career success.

In addition to the Big Five, we explored the relationship of perfectionism, perseverance, professionalism, networking, authenticity and self-perceived talent with career success. Contrary to our expectations, we found no significant associations with success for perfectionism, perseverance, authenticity. Apparently, neither of these characteristics was directly related to career success. We found that professionalism, networking and talent were significantly and positively correlated to career success, suggesting that the more successful musicians were actively involved in networking, scored high on professional attitude, and regarded themselves as talented. However, when controlling for all other variables in the regression analysis, only professionalism remained a significant predictor of career success. For talent, based on the correlations, we found that musicians who scored high on self-perceived talent were also more often engaged in networking and had a professional attitude, and these proved to be stronger predictors of career success. Regarding networking, a possible explanation is that, rather than the musician's attitude towards networking, actually having a professional network is much more strongly and more directly related to career success.

Finally, we found significant and relatively high positive correlations for having a website and the breadth of the musician's professional network with career success, demonstrating that those musicians who have invested in a website and who have many professional connections are more successful. Furthermore, in the regression analysis both having a website and professional context were significant predictors of career success when controlling for all other variables.

These findings are in line with our expectations and, once more, point towards the importance of the musician's professional context.

Based on our findings we conclude that when investigating the level of career success of musicians, their background, personality as well as their professional context should be taken into account as all of these were significantly related to career success. The strategy we proposed may prove to be valuable in further studies on pop musicians' career success and can also be used to study career success in other creative professions. We suggest that this strategy could provide a framework for studying the specific background, intrapersonal and professional context characteristics that are important in certain artistic careers. In the particular case of the pop musician, we argue that although background, and personality *do* matter, the most important category of career success predictors is the professional context.

Musicians who are connected to important intermediaries such as a manager or a booking agent are more successful. These intermediaries are important for the career development of musicians because they have access to a larger network of professionals in various parts of the music industry; including record companies, music media, the concert industry and music retail. In a way, when represented by these intermediaries, musicians are given a 'stamp of approval' that can help them gain access to the next step forward in their careers. The musician's professional network could be theorized as an approximation of the musician's reputation, since this reputation is largely determined by the reputation of the professionals that represent him or her. For example, if a musician is represented by a very well-known and respected management agency, this may have consequences for the career possibilities of this musician. Our study provides support for the idea that it is important to know the right people to help you advance in your career. In other words: it is not only important who you *are*, but it is equally important who you *know*.

In recent years, a number of educational institutions that focus on professional education for musicians were established in the Netherlands. Part of their curriculum is knowledge of the music industry and teaching musicians skills for networking and marketing. Likewise, Dutch musicians organizations, such as *Music Centre the Netherlands*, *Buma Cultuur* and Dutch musicians unions also offer workshops on professional skills such as networking. Our study shows that these kinds of initiatives could indeed help to further the careers of individual musicians.

Nevertheless, some caution is needed, as the nature of the data in this study is cross-sectional, it is difficult to make causal inferences about the relationships between the predictor variables and career success. For some predictor variables, such as the background variables, it is plausible that these were indeed the cause of career success rather than the other way around. On the other hand, for other predictor variables, such as the professional context variables, the causal direction of the associations we found is less straightforward. For instance, are musicians more successful because they are represented by a manager? Or did these musicians already have higher levels of success, making them more interesting for managers to offer their services to these musicians? We would argue that both notions hold some truth as managers can be important catalysts for musician's career success but, at the same time, managers would not invest their time and money in certain musicians if they were not confident enough about earning back their investments.

Of course, this also has implications for the interpretation of the associations of predictor variables that disappear in the final step of the regression analysis. We want to note that all of the associations in the first two steps of the regression analysis are still important, but because the professional network has such an important impact on career success, these associations are no longer found when controlling for professional network. In other words: though other characteristics and skills are relevant, having a professional network is the best single predictor of success.

Another limitation of our study is that the level of career success was based on self-report. Although we expect that our respondents have provided us with realistic and honest estimations of the amount of sold CDs, airplay, and performance frequency, it would be worthwhile to add data from other resources such as radio station playlists, official sales figures or income tax figures. A similar point can be made in regards to the respondents' perception of their musical talent. In our study, we measured talent using self-report questions, a more objective measure of musical talent, such as an extensive musical aptitude test, may show different outcomes for the relation between musical talent and career success.

What the results in this study do not clearly show is how the individual musician's career is shaped. Yet, from the survey data we do know that musicians often have to have more than one act, and in addition they have to rely on other jobs, either music related work such as teaching or working short contracts as studio-musicians, or non-music related work. This is also an indication that becoming or being a professional musician is an ambition that is characterized by high levels of insecurity and financial as well as emotional hardships. Furthermore, though this study solely focuses on objective career success, it is likely that many musicians consider the realisation of their artistic aspirations, that is, the quality of their artistic output, as an equally valid indicator of their success. This subjective notion of artistic career success and the way it is related to musician's objective career success should also be taken into account in future research.

Our research findings offer a number of important insights into the career development of musicians. However, this is only a first step and additional research is needed to study the relationships in more detail as well as to explore the importance of predictors of career success that were overlooked in this study. Moreover, we call for longitudinal studies in which musician's careers are followed over a number of years, that take into account the different predictors of career success presented in this study. This kind of research will shed more light on the career development of musicians and the secret of their success.

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Appendix A. Characteristics of musicians in sample

See Tables A1–A3.

Table A1
Number of acts per respondent.

Number of acts	Frequency	Percentage
1	146	42.9
2	99	29.1
3	58	17.1
4	18	5.3
5 or more	19	5.6

Table A2
Distribution of vocals and musical instruments among respondents.

	Frequency	Percentage
Vocals	248	72.9
Guitar	181	53.2
Piano/Keyboard	121	35.6
Bass	87	25.6
Drums/Percussion	62	18.2
DJ/Producer	29	8.5
Other	56	16.5

Note: percentages add up to more than 100 because respondents could have multiple answers.

Table A3
Distribution of musical genres among respondents.

Genre	Frequency	Percentage
Pop	218	64.1
Rock	188	55.3
Singer/Songwriter	141	41.5
Hip Hop	74	21.8
Jazz	64	18.8
R&B	60	17.6
Dance	59	17.4
Funk	55	16.2
Metal	52	15.3
Blues	45	13.2
Punk	37	10.9
Reggae	21	6.2
Other	61	17.9

Note: percentages add up to more than 100 because respondents could have multiple answers.

Appendix B. Scale items developed by authors

All answer options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) except for social support 1 (*no support*) to 5 (*a lot of support*).

Social support

With regard to your musical career, how much support do you receive from:
- your friends?
- your mother?
- your father?
- other family members?

Perseverance

- If I had to choose between a partner and music, I would choose music
- I would give ten years of my life to be successful
- For music I will put everything else aside, even friendships
- I live only for music

Professionalism

- I see myself as a professional musician
- I am very different from musicians who only make music for fun
- I take my career as a musician very seriously

Networking

- I am engaged in networking activities to help my musical career progress
- I have access to a network of people who can help me in my career as a musician
- Because I know the right people, I can get things done easier

Authenticity

- The music that I make cannot be made by any other musician
- My music is very different from music made by other musicians
- When people hear my music, they immediately know that it was made by me

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