Protean Careers or the Nature of Careers in Music?

This qualitative study explores the concept of the protean career, among female music creatives. While research on music creatives and their ability to work across different fields focuses on music graduates, this research investigated music creatives, with and without music degrees. The findings from the research, correlates with the findings from previous research. However, findings that are unique to this study are the despair experienced by participants as their careers are “paused” and there was no perceived return on their investment. In the context of this study, having a music degree did not play a major role in employability as all the respondents have spent years honing their skills in playing their instruments and possess other skills as well. Proficiency on an instrument is important for a career in performing, whereas a music degree was more relevant for educational settings, with music graduates enjoying more job security.

Keywords: music creatives; females; music industry; career development

Introduction

This study explores the concept of the protean career, as it relates to the lived experiences of female music creatives, as they manage their careers to ensure employability. The concept of lifelong learning and the employability of graduates developed from Hall’s work with organisations on career planning for employees in the 1970’s (Hall, 1996). While Hall was concerned with how the individual could remain in employment in an ever-changing workplace, due to technological advancements, his ideas of lifelong learning and employability, driven by the individual, also gained traction in education policies and vocationally oriented degrees that were developed to ensure the employability of graduates (Delanty, 2001, pp. 108–110; Kivinen, 2002, p. 191; Pocklington & Tupper, 2002, p.145).

Theoretical Framework

While research on protean careers centres on organisations, music graduates have also been the focus of research on lifelong learning and the protean career. This is because a music degree is unique in so far as it enables the music graduate, irrespective of specialisations, to complete diverse undergraduate courses, such as choral and instrumental conducting, arrangement, performance, pedagogy, music technology and research (Author
The resultant diversity of knowledge and skills enables employability and supports the concept of the protean career. The music graduate can successfully navigate across different fields in music, with varying degrees of success. Burnard, (2012, p.216) identifies these fields as, (1) the field of music, that includes different genres such as contemporary, classical, jazz, folk, and popular music; (2) the field of technology, inclusive of digital media, mobile technology, recording studios, social networks and YouTube (3) the field of industries, which includes copyrights, recording, broadcasting, publishing and film (4) the field of commerce, which is inclusive of marketing, music producers, recording companies, and (5) the field of cultural production and social spaces, which includes pubs, clubs, music halls, YouTube, religious sites, events, music schools, festivals, academies, studios, and conservatories.

Musicians can therefore have multiple roles and move across these different fields. An example from a research study, is a female professional musician, who fulfills the roles of singer-songwriter, and composer. Another musician working in an urban contemporary music space, works as music workshop leader, singer, songwriter, and recording artist pianist (Burnard, 2012, pp.82-86). In another study, Triantafyllaki (2014, p.249) describes an artist who plays many instruments, the saxophone, piano, clarinet, flute and oboe, and who is also a classroom music teacher and a bandleader. This coincides with Burnard’s (2012, pp.79,82) view that it is essential to cultivate multiple identities to fit into multiple spheres in the industry. In an earlier study, Bennett (2007) also found that musicians follow several paths, such as performing, working in educational settings while also relying on professional and peer networks for jobs. Bennett’s (2007) study revealed that more than 70% of the participants received more than half their income from teaching and close to 90% had a secondary occupation. This matches a more recent study by Bartleet et al., (2019, p.282) that highlights that in order to ensure employability, musicians were combining music careers with jobs not in the field of music. These findings are also supported by research conducted by Bennett and Hennekam (2018, p.1455) and Goodwin (2019, pp.122-123). Research also shows us that in the field of music, musicians are seldom guaranteed a “job for life” so they are often self-employed and manage their careers to be employable and to remain employed (Brown & Thomson 2019, p. 66; Partti, 2019; Bennett, 2014, p. 236; Bridgstock 2005, pp. 41-44). Bridgstock (2005) also states that creatives are often under-employed, with the average artist spending 80% of their time in art-related activities while earning two-thirds of their income from the arts.

From the foregoing descriptions we find that the research on creatives, including musicians, share similarities to research on protean careers in the other fields; individuals need a generic skillset in addition to the specific specialisation. For example, in order to work in different fields, the musician needs to manage themselves and make opportunities for themselves. Added
to that the musician makes use of social networks to find gigs. Musicians also have transferable skills that enable moving across different fields from teaching to performing to recording. Research identifies several attributes that an individual following a protean career orientation needs to navigate and manage different jobs. These are employability, self-management, transferable generic skills, career management, adaptability, identity and human capital. Music creatives who are self-employed, work outside of an organisation, and although they may not necessarily set out to follow a protean career orientation, they would need to adopt, albeit in a nuanced way, some of these attributes, to be employable and to remain in employment.


Researchers also state that to remain employable, individuals should develop skills in their own disciplines as well as transferable skills that can be helpful in pursuing diverse occupations (Bridgstock 2009, p.32; Sauls, 2020). Transferable generic skills include teamwork, leadership and organisational skills (Bennett, 2014); networking, community engagement, commercial knowledge, versatility, interpersonal skills and the ability to manage a rapidly changing environment (Partti, 2019, p.143; Hillman, 2019), artistic identity, and the utilisation of the digital environment (Hillman, 2019). Moreover, the combination of business and creative skills is also essential for success (Burnard, 2012, pp.109, 114; Leal, 2015, pp.66-69; Leal, 2018, p.134). These business skills include marketing, branding and promotions (Hillman, 2019; Partti, 2019).

Furthermore, Burnard (2012) provides examples of how the changing nature of the music industry as a result of modern technology has contributed to expanding the industry by changing transactions between record labels and musicians, spreading and creating music, as well as generating new positions such as creators, producers and performers (Burnard, 2012, pp.21, 22, 249). Technology provides a network of places and spaces and connects musical worlds by enabling participation among various places and fields (Burnard, 2012, pp.228, 249). Through technology creatives adopt new methods of creating, marketing and distributing their music digitally online, including through Soundcloud, YouTube or Facebook and social networking with their fans (Bennett, 2014, p.236; Burnard, 2014, pp.3, 217, 230, 233; Lebler, 2007, p.206). One of the respondents in Lebler’s (2007, pp.217-218) study stated
technology changed the way he listens to music, and has assisted in the song writing process, as technology enables playback and self-reflection. Technology also enables artists to create music alone in the privacy of their homes (Partti, 2019). Added to this, creatives also perform music in new settings, such as live coding which involves creating music live in front of an audience via a laptop, which becomes the instrument (Burnard, 2012, p.235).

Keeping up to date with changing technologies, implies lifelong learning and involves different facets. For example, musicians may be required to manage online music exams or to implement a new curriculum. Developing new skills may be through education, work experience or through collaborating with others, such as developing an online presence such as webpage, FaceBook and Instagram. These examples echo the literature, on employability (Direnzo et al, 2015, p. 12; Cortelazzo et al, 2020, p. 4; Bridgstock, 2009, pp. 35-36; Bridgstock, 2011; Hall, 2003; Hall, 1996, p.9; Hall & Moss, 1998, p. 25; de Vos & Soens, 2008, p. 449; Chui et al., 2020, p.2; Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007, p.246; Gubler et al., 2014, p.546; Park, 2009, p.637; Sargent & Domberger, 2007, p.546; Bennett & Hennekam, 2018, p.1455; Canham, 2016, p.410; Goodwin, 2019, pp.123-124; Bridgstock, 2009, p.38; Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007, p.253; Direnzo et al., 2015, p.14).

Creatives and musicians appear to share several parallels with those of the protean career. However, do musicians actively pursue a protean career or is it the nature of being a musician? The research question that guided this study was: How do female music creatives successfully navigate the music industry to ensure employability?

Method

This qualitative study used a narrative strategy of inquiry. The purpose of adopting this approach was to understand the experiences from the participants’ point of view in their context. The data was collected through one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions, conducted via Zoom and in person (Neuman, 2014). The focus group interviews were like normal conversations and made the respondents feel at ease (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 180). Ethics clearance was granted to conduct the research and respondents were assured that participation was voluntary, and their anonymity and confidentiality were also guaranteed (Creswell, 2009, pp. 181-183).

The conversations focused on, biographical information, such as age and the roles participants had in the music industry; entrepreneurial and creative skills to ascertain which skills helped their employability and their perceptions of the music industry in their context.

Purposive sampling was implemented (Neumann, 2006, p.222). The fourteen female music creatives, who participated in the study, are active in
the music industry. Their ages ranged from 23 to 37, and they were recruited via social media posts, word of mouth, snowball sampling and telephone calls (Creswell, 2009, pp.181-183). The respondents who shared their experiences, included vocalists, songwriters/composers, arrangers, those who work at radio stations, DJs, sound engineers and producers, beat creators, teachers, church musicians performing and recording artists. In the table below, the numbers allocated to each respondent, corresponds with the order of their enrolment to the study. Participants included both music graduates and those with no music degrees. The music graduates specialised in either music technology, performing arts (classical) and music education. The participants with no music degrees mainly had other types of qualifications.

Profile of Participants

Table 1. Profile of participants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Vocalist; sings in the church. Has a music diploma and busy completing a music degree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Singer-songwriter and composer. Plays piano, organ, violin and guitar. Classically trained and has a qualification in Mental health. Has recorded music and uploaded to FB; does her own makeup, costumes and sound. She has FB, IG and YouTube accounts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>School Music teacher with teacher licensure. Plays piano, French horn, accompanies choir. Operates small graphic design business.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>School Music Teacher and teaches privately. Plays the piano and flute in worship band.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Sound engineer, producer, music teacher, vocalist and church worship leader. Worked for a community radio station; taught sound engineering, singing, and beginner guitar and piano.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Teaches variety of brass instruments, plays French horn, is a performer and has a part-time arranging business, with the music available on YouTube.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Music teacher and performer in classical and popular music; plays classical piano and jazz saxophone. Works as a librarian.</td>
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<td>30s</td>
<td>Singer, songwriter, guitarist, event organiser,</td>
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<td>Respondent</td>
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**Findings**

The qualitative software programme Atlas.ti was used for the coding process. A variety of first cycle coding methods were utilised that generated a total of 740 codes from the interviews. The data moved from codes to
categories via a process of axial coding. The codes generated from the first
cycle, were reviewed and codes grouped together under umbrella terms. For
example, the codes “google” and “home studio” were grouped under the
umbrella “technology.” Eventually nine categories, with sub-categories were
generated from the data. These are:

1. Environment
2. Education
3. Creative skills
4. Entrepreneurial traits
5. Investing with no return on investment (ROI)
6. Music careers being ‘paused’ and individuals not in desired positions
7. Ambition
8. Technology
9. Experiences, accomplishments and career navigation

After the interviews had been transcribed a copy of the transcription was
given to the participants to ensure that they were satisfied and not
embarrassed by the information. The results of the study were made known to
the participants.

Environment

All respondents were negative about their environment. Respondent 11
stated that “it needs rejuvenation and is not a supportive environment… it is
not profitable”.

Respondent 6, added, “…No one is booking artists here.”

Respondent 3, a songwriter and composer indicated that the country does
not have a law stating how much artists should earn per minute for music
aired on the radio, which was different to the UK, which pays fees per minute
of airtime.

Respondent 10 explained that one cannot fully grow in the existing
environment. Respondent 7, who commenced her career in Johannesburg,
continuously spoke about the numerous people with whom she networked in
that city; she also mentioned that in her hometown there were no commercial
studios; they were either home studios or at tertiary institutions.
Respondents 3, 6, 7 and 8, also shared examples where performances did not
generate sufficient income.

7
Education

Formal education

Respondents stated that there exists a disconnection between industry and academia. Respondent 4 said that the university was not keeping up with advances in technology and the needs of industry, whereas a private institution adapted their course offerings over time. She said what was needed was a music technology module “… just for one year that just teaches you how to produce from your own DAW [Digital Audio Workstation]”, as this is what a creative need. Several respondents highlighted the need for management and business modules to be included in music degrees, as they often did not sign a contract for their performances and did not negotiate a rate of payment.

Trial and error

Respondent 11, learnt about the industry through trial and error and learnt “the hard way” about drawing up contracts for bookings and recording agreements in writing. She also explained that “…you have to cater to the audience…” Over time she and her partner had learnt to read people to understand what types of music they enjoy.

Respondent 13 shared that one learnt procedure, such as invoicing students’ parents when teaching private music lessons. All these administrative tasks provided security, as did a contract. “…you need to have it in writing so that you have security so they can’t back out and you can’t back out as well, because it goes both ways. … I also learnt that on my own.”

WIL

Respondent 13 had informal work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities at undergraduate level. She performed in university concerts and at a local venue. She also learnt about pedagogy and how to apply different methods to different students. At school, her first encounter with the music industry was with the local symphony orchestra. “That was the first stepping-stone of learning the industry and how everything works, and not just musically, but even admin-wise [in] making sure people pay the fees, knowing how many people there are, ‘should we cater for lunch?’, ‘where should we have it?’ ‘How many chairs?’”
Teacher licensure

The teacher licensure that follows on from the BMus degree was perceived to have benefits for teaching. Of the seven music graduates, only one had teacher licensure. The music teachers without teacher licensure, struggled with music pedagogy. Respondent 4 shared that, in teacher licensure “You actually get to learn that stuff ... ‘cause the BMus degree doesn’t actually teach you how to teach.”

Learning by Gathering Information from People

Respondent 3 copied what she saw other musicians doing online and observed their marketing processes. Respondent 8 communicated with fellow musicians for information and respondents 4 and 13, collected new information from speaking to colleagues.

Short learning Courses

Respondents 2, 3 and 9 used knowledge they had gathered from short courses, like sound engineering, IG marketing, and a DJ and music business courses.

Learning through Observing

Respondent 7 made a point of observing other people’s processes and ways of working. Respondent 14 spoke about her observations of business traits, such as another DJ’s branding and the way her image had grown in the industry.

Creative Skills

The participants felt that they have a fair balance of creative and entrepreneurial skills, with 11 of the 14 respondents acknowledging that they honed more of the former. Creative activities were embedded in their lives from a young age, whereas they only began to develop entrepreneurial traits at a later stage of their lives.

Respondent 8: “...I’m not sure about my entrepreneurial skills.”
Respondent 10: “I think I get distracted quickly with my creative side...”
Aside from the participants verbally stating that they nurture their creative skills, it was revealed that a substantial amount of their time was spent on creative activities that included those that were not related to performing music such as sound production, drawing sketches, dancing, creating elements of movement for the audience, writing poetry and books and editing videos, among others. This was beside their primary creative roles such as playing with other musicians, practicing, performing, recording, creating beats, and so forth.

The participants in the study assigned themselves creative titles such as vocalist or makeup artist but nobody referred to herself as a businesswoman.

**Entrepreneurial traits**

Three of the respondents, (2, 7 and 14), who are non-music graduates, felt that they had a fair balance of both skillsets. Respondent 7 said that she was working towards being an entrepreneur in the industry and Respondent 14, is qualified in Business. Respondent 2 has practical experience as an events manager and has founded a project.

**Branding and marketing**

Non-graduates were more aware of branding. Respondent 2 worked in merchandising during which time she wore the brand’s clothing to attract customers to approach her for the product. She incorporated this method of marketing in her music career. Respondent 9 dyed her hair and styled it in a specific way and wore a branded T-shirt for her group performances.

Respondents 13, 4 and 8 stated that they did not have guidance regarding marketing methods such as identifying a target market.

**Copyrighting**

The respondents were not aware of how to copyright their music as they had never learnt about it, although there were attempts at becoming knowledgeable about this.

*Respondent 13:* “... it’s like more on the business side of things and when you study music you don’t get taught the business side of things.”

*Respondent 4:* “It [copyrighting] doesn’t feel like a thing that’s made normal for us to do.... I feel like the last time we touched on copyrights was in high school. SAMRO was like a page in your matric exam. That was it.”

*Respondent 1:* “I actually don’t know anything.”
Respondent 3 attempted to copyright her music without success. She also did not receive much help from SAMRO. Respondent 7 learnt about copyrighting independently. She was also frustrated about not earning an income from her music.

**Investing with no ROI**

The creatives rarely realised any return on their investment. They indicated that they put in more than they got out.

*Respondent 7: “… but we do it for the love hey.”*

From a young age, the creatives had invested their lives in music in order to master their instrument. Respondent 1 began studying music in grade four in primary school; Respondent 3 was classically trained from the age of six on the piano and Respondent 5 had 17 years of learning her instrument. During high school, Respondent 8 invested in vocal and drumming lessons, and Respondent 10 studied music as a subject and began singing lessons. Respondent 3 revealed that a year before the interview she had performed live on several occasions. However, all the income earned from these gigs was used to pay for her music expenses and no profit was accumulated. At the time of the interview, she had received no income from her music career but claimed to not view this as a money-making business.

*Respondent 3: “… as opposed to it [music] doing something for me. I don’t expect it to do anything for me …”.*

She performed numerous tasks such as sewing gig outfits and creating artwork for album covers. During the 2020 lockdown, she recorded music videos of herself to upload on social media as free content for viewers, where she was responsible for doing her hair and makeup, sewing her performance outfits and controlling the sound.

*Respondent 3: “In these days you sort of have to be everything. You are the creator, you are the performer… you have to market yourself, you have to produce… A lot of time and blood and sweat and tears goes into it”. She spoke about releasing consistent content online for viewers. “It’s hectic, as the processing and editing of videos are time consuming and expensive… It’s such a long story just to do one thing. And then it ends up being free content after all those hours of work…. So you put a lot of time and years go by… with no income and just doing it for love…”. 
Finances were also invested in her career. In the past, she had hired somebody to manage her social media marketing. This was only a three-month process “to get it off the ground, ‘cause it’s quite expensive.” She shared that over one month she paid someone to post twice a week but had only accumulated a few followers. During the time she also hired someone for web design. She continued to invest in her music career, as she was still paying for classical vocal training.

Respondent 8 also performed numerous tasks, such as taking on roles such as instrumentalist for bands, assisted with the sound setup, helped other artists with advertisements, posted content online and had arranged performance slots for other artists and herself.

Performances

The majority of Respondent 13’s performances were unpaid, as they were for charity, raising funds or raising awareness. Respondent 6 spoke about the music festival that she hosted and organised at a hotel in her hometown. The amount of “effort and money” invested in organising the festival was “ridiculous”. No profit was generated from the festival, as the funds were donated to charity. Respondent 8 shared that she performed on an album with two musicians. “They kind of kicked me out in a sense – replaced me.” Because of this, she did not receive any royalties, despite having invested time, effort and funds in the album.

Some of the other respondents also spoke about performances not generating sufficient income.

Respondent 6: “We will sing for free because we love it so much…”
Respondent 8: “…for the love of it, I don’t necessarily always get paid for gigs.”
Respondent 3: “… they think, okay but we are paying for one hour or two hours of you playing but it’s not, they are paying for 20 or 30 years of you practising, playing your instrument – that’s what they paying for.”

At the time of the interview, Respondent 7 was in the process of researching the industry and commencing her career. She and her colleague had strategised a marketing and music-release plan. This was an investment, and it was too early to tell whether she would generate adequate ROI. The same respondent had also invested time in perfecting her production skills.
Music Careers Being ‘Paused’ and Individuals not in Desired Positions

Not Navigating

There was a sense of some of the other creatives’ careers being paused, which was quite the opposite of successfully navigating the industry. Respondent 6 claimed that there were approximately three people who wished to musically collaborate with her, however, there was not much space or time in their daily schedule to practise or visit the studio. She has been unable to collaborate as she has a full-time job at a beauty clinic. She felt that “everything is standing still at the moment” … her music career was dormant, as “there is nothing going on.”

Respondent 13, who had completed her final year of music studies in 2019, was not in a music-related position in 2020.

Respondent 13: “… this year I sort of took a year off from music… I haven’t done a saxophone gig in a while.”

Respondent 10: “I think lately I’ve been feeling like I’m a little out of touch with the music industry.”

Respondents 5 and 13 were also not prepared to take risks, which was a contributing factor to their positions in the music industry remaining static. Additionally, the lack of external funding sources was also suggested as a reason for not taking risks.

Despair

A sense of despair was detected among the participants as they felt frustrated that they were not able to successfully navigate their careers. Respondent 13 believed that if one takes a risk and puts oneself “out there,” this can negatively affect one’s ego if one fails at the task. “…we feel that sense of rejection because as musicians, we constantly get given the ‘no, no, no, no,’ so why say yes to something” that may not succeed? The idea could turn out to be “potentially amazing.” However, musicians think that the outcome will be the “same old rejection.”

Respondent 10, who was a teacher but studied sound engineering, asserted that it was difficult to have a studio because there were so many people creating music “in their bedrooms…. Why would someone come to a fancy studio in a small town like X, if they can go to someone who’s their neighbour who’s probably also good at doing this stuff?”

Respondent 6 spoke about her music career being dormant. The artist did not have anybody to help or manage her. She said that this demotivated
artists, as they adopted the attitude of “what does it matter anyway if I do it or not, because no one is even gonna care.” She mentioned the Facebook page that she and a colleague attempted to promote and described the page as dormant, forgotten and overlooked.

When the researchers asked who had already achieved career satisfaction, one of the respondents asked “… will you ever reach that stage?”

Music career paused

Respondent 1 would like to be a music teacher.

Respondent 1: “… for me I’m nowhere where I want to be. I’m not even ... halfway there ... trying to climb up step by step.”

Respondent 11: “… that’s why we have to do a lot of cover music because … that’s what pays the bills, you know.”

When respondent 11 commenced her music career, she believed that the pinnacle of achievement was to become well-known with fans buying her (original) music. “You know, what everyone’s sort of idealistic version of what it means to be a performing musician.” Her mindset has changed over the years. “Now I’m happy to just call myself a working musician.” Before lockdown, she and her partner had contracts performing on the Australian cruise ships.

Respondent 10 felt that she was adopting a teaching position for now until she was able to do what she desires in the industry. This respondent also taught English. Once her music business had begun to flourish, she planned to discontinue teaching English, as it was not her passion. “It’s kind of just to generate an income in the meantime.” The respondent always desired to have a studio. She had experience in teaching production and sound engineering and indicated that teaching something and performing the task were two different things. She would therefore like to further her skills in these fields.

Respondent 12 had an arranging business that she would like to manage full-time, however, at the time of the interview her teaching job was generating an income.

Ambition

Some of the creatives exhibited signs of ambition. Respondent 12 announced that if she was accepted for a Masters’ degree overseas she would make it her mission to begin an affiliate programme to assist young brass instrument players to attain an overseas education at a conservatory. “Heaven
forbid if I don’t get in. I have all these dreams and I [need to] just get in first. I want to help the country.”

Respondent 2 explained that she wished to be “as big as Simba” and wanted her ginger beer to be “as big as Coca-Cola,” which is why she executed everything she has learned in the past to achieve her goals and dreams. After the lockdown was declared, Respondent 2 did not wait and do nothing, as music was her only chance in life. “I’m a creative, so my mind doesn’t need to be locked down because the systems have locked down.”

**Technology**

Education and accessing content

The creatives utilised technology in several ways. Respondents used Google for information on chords for songs, backgrounds of artists and pedagogical methods. Watching videos for educational purposes, such as interviews, performances and music business was a major trend. Respondent 3 attended her online music lessons during lockdown. Respondent 8 used Instagram as a platform for learning, followed a drumming page, accessed tutorial videos and links to educational content to download and purchase. Respondent 7 learnt about the business of music, such as royalties, sync licensing and copyright organisations on the internet. She also accessed online content including sound applications for her studio work.

Communication and connecting

Technology was also used for communicating and connecting with fans. 

*Respondent 9:* “Social media is a powerful weapon for fan base maintenance.”

Respondent 8 posted information about shows on Instagram and Facebook. Respondent 14 had implemented a DJ incubation programme that operated in three cities and used technological platforms to host sessions. The music teachers made use of online platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. Respondent 7 remained in connection with the networks she formed in Johannesburg “… it doesn’t really feel like I’m far away.” Respondent 12 shared that she joined an online room hosted by one of the influencers she followed.
Home equipment was used for arranging and recording music. Respondent 12 arranged using a laptop and sound equipment. Respondent 3 shares content on social media, as “it’s got quite a nice camera so I can use that on the fly.” During the lockdown, she used a software programme for composition, recorded videos of herself, edited them, and managed the sound recording while her husband managed the video recording. She also recorded an extended play album in 2019 and her first full album in 2020. Respondent 6 records herself singing, sends it to her guitarist, and “the song gets turned into instrumental as all the other musicians add their bit.” Respondent 13 shared: “So if you have the basic equipment … and basic understanding you can … just put out a song …” Respondent 4 said that one did not have to depend on large record label companies to release their music, as SoundCloud was an appropriate platform for this.

Respondent 10 worked for a recording company, which is a home studio from where they operated their business and were able to create an artist development programme.

Respondent 7: “… even if I don’t have a keyboard, I can just do everything on this laptop… sometimes I use my cell phone as well to produce the songs.”

Respondent 11 and her partner frequently recorded their music from home. “… and it’s amazing what you can achieve just with your home studio. We can actually do so much just with the stuff we have at home.”

Sharing music, Facebook and livestreaming

Respondent 9 created videos of herself rapping and DJing to post on social media. She also recorded 15 songs in 2020, which are accessible on Spotify and iTunes. She said that if she had an opportunity to sign with a record label, she may not go through with it. She has experimented with the software Mixcraft. “Using musical software that people use to produce my own songs, like, three-minute, four-minute songs.” She also discovered Cubase and Fruity Loops Studio, and realised that she could record and build a production around her music with this type of software. Respondent 12’s arrangements could be viewed on YouTube and the compositions were published on the internet. Similarly, respondent 7, stated “… I have people from all across the globe … get access to my music…”

Respondent 3 marketed herself and sold tickets on Facebook, while Respondent 2 live streamed performances to Facebook to showcase her music.
and used her mobile device with the sound desk for live streaming purposes.

Respondent 11 and her partner began live streaming their performances to “keep on people’s radar… it was good because it got us work when things started picking up again. Now people have contacted us.” Respondent 12 published her music through a website that copyrights for users, as she did not know how to copyright her music.

Experiences, accomplishments and career navigation

Identity and Area of Specialty

All the respondents were active in specific genres and had well-defined roles in the music industry, with some of them working across music fields and also in other arts. These are inclusive of Respondent 2 who has found her original style without imitating existing artists and creates original music for wellness; Respondent 14 who has established herself as a deep soulful house DJ; Respondent 4 who is comfortable with her identity as a music teacher; and Respondent 5 who specialises in teaching students who find learning music challenging.

Networking

Respondent 7 networked by visiting other studios, while respondent 11 formed relationships with potential venue owners for performances. Respondent 10, a sound engineer collaborated with other sound engineers from the artist development programme in which she was involved. She also networked during her time as an intern at a community radio station. Respondent 12 narrated that, “I was an assistant lecturer there at the Swakopmund Music Festival [in Namibia] …” World-renowned musicians participated in this project and one of them invited the lecturers, including the participant, to play at her opera festival.

Respondent 4 spoke about being social and a people’s person had also benefitted her. “It’s networking, we literally have to network… people skills, it’s like super, super important”. She said,

“people will remember your positive attitude and want to work with you again and they will spread a positive message to others about you.”

Adaptability and transferable skills

The most prominent signs of adaptability were seen among the non-graduates. They also spent a large amount of time on creative activities not always linked to music making. Within the field of music, all the participants
in the study also adopted different roles and moved across different fields of music.

**Discussion and conclusions**

Much of the research on music creatives and their ability to work across different fields focuses on music graduates. This research investigated the lived experiences of fourteen music creatives, those with music degrees and those with no tertiary music qualifications. The findings from the research, albeit in a different context, is mainly like the findings from research cited in the theoretical framework. All the respondents are employable, manage themselves and their careers, have transferable generic skills, are adaptable, have an identity as an artist and possess human capital. The music creatives in this study work across different fields of music and all the music creatives are also employable even those without music degrees. This is because in the context of this study, all the respondents, including those without music degrees have spent years honing their skills in playing their instruments and possess other skills and qualifications as well. The ability to be proficient on an instrument is important for performance, whereas having a music degree, is more relevant and valued in educational settings.

Although the disjoint between courses at tertiary institutions and the music industry was highlighted as a cause for concern, this did not impinge on the musicians, as they learnt informally, through short courses and through online resources. They were thus able to find the information they needed, experimented and were successful at using diverse technology and learning business acumen.

The researchers did not impose a protean career orientation model on the lived experiences of the participants in this study. None of the respondents in the study had purposefully chosen a protean career orientation. The protean career orientation appeared to be something that happened to them because they work as musicians, and they did what was needed to be employed, which is like a protean career orientation. The musicians had embarked on a career path, in some cases, perhaps naively, and circumstances changed which meant that they had to be resilient, transfer skills, learn new skills, and network to be employable, with music not being their only or primary source of income. Music teachers appeared to enjoy greater career stability in the field of music, were more confident, as they were employed by an organisation and had a steady income, were more financially secure and did not need to find new “hustles”, although music teachers in this study chose to engage in other roles as well. The roles in which music graduates engaged were more focused and intentional.
There are also several findings that are unique to this study. These are the despair experienced by participants as some of them felt that they are not moving forward in their careers or that they have “paused” in their music careers, and that there was no return on the investment of learning to play an instrument, or investing financially in their careers, such as enrolling for formal courses or paying for marketing. Respondents found other sources of income and/or adapted to the worldwide lockdown, so other factors contributed to their despair. The context in which they live, is a developing country with a poor economy and this could be a contributing factor, to them not being as successful financially. The bigger economic picture was not mentioned by any of the respondents. The music creatives appeared to believe, that their talent, hard work and ability to adopt many roles should lead to success in the music industry and enable them to make a living from music. Faced with this viewpoint, the researchers did not point out to the respondents that if success was measured according to resilience, talent, creativity, personal drive, adaptability and being employable, they would all be considered successful. The creatives who participated in this study are keen to organise themselves as a community of practice for networking and skill sharing to successfully navigate music careers.

This research was conducted in a specific context, and there are no claims to the generalisation of the findings. The findings based on both music graduates and non-music graduates provides points of interest. This study does add to the global academic discussion on the working lives of music creatives and provides insights on their perceptions.

References

Author. (2019).


