Beyond Adaptations and Accommodations: Management Practice that Matters as the Key to Retention of Employees with Autism (Part 2)

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Abstract

United Nations declares that employment is a basic human right. Numerous public policies reference the devastating impact of unemployment on health and social inclusion and seek to promote the economic participation of people-with-disabilities. Some researchers reckon high levels of economic marginalisation are experienced by people with a disability in Australia, in comparison with other OECD countries. In the literature, 80% unemployment rates are reported among working-age people-with-autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This is a critical area of concern that is currently under-researched and poorly addressed. "ASD-ness" (ASD behavioural characteristics) can be regarded as personal differences rather than disorders. Acknowledged experts such as Drucker and Cliffton & Harter argue that individuals gain more when they build on their talents rather than focusing on improving weaknesses. The authors, therefore, take an ASD-ness-strengths-based-approach philosophy which, in a nutshell, regards ASD-ness as a source of employment-strengths and autistic behavioural challenges as personal differences not deficits.

Keywords: *positive-autism, management, Drucker, strengths-focused-employment, evocative-analytic-autoethnography*

1. Introduction

To recap, Part 2 investigates from 5.3. Key theme representation of Sections 5. Analysing Data, and Step 6. Reflections and concluding remarks as illustrated below (Figure 1):

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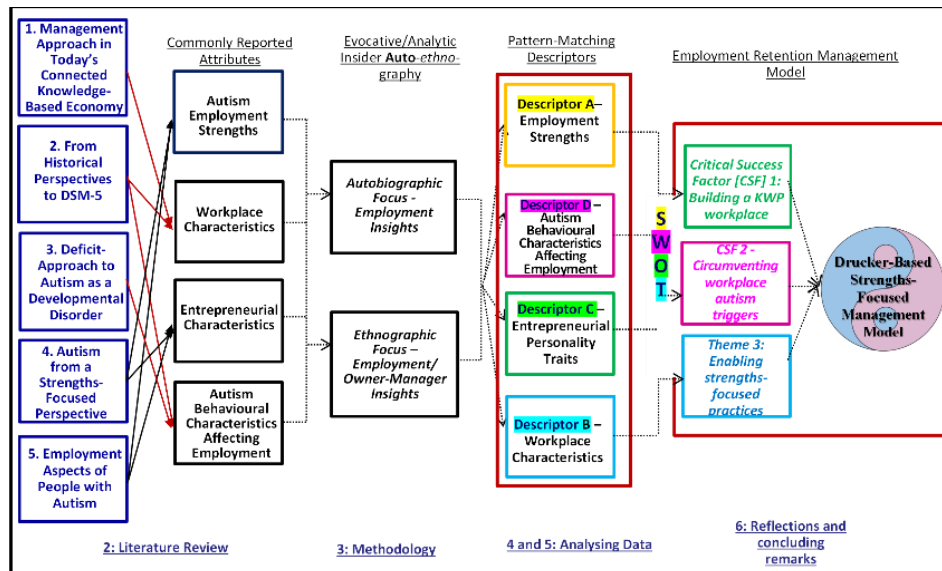
Figure 1. Investigation flowchart
Source: Developed for this research

2. Key theme representation - emerged themes presentation (SWOT matrix)

This SWOT presentation brought out the visual dimension of evocative-analytic autoethnography. Descriptors A (employment strengths) and C (entrepreneurial personality traits) were grouped as the Strengths (S) component of the SWOT (Table 1). Entrepreneurial personality traits were identified as employment strengths, contributing to the sustainability of employment in the auto-ethnographic analysis and in the interview accounts of participants. Descriptor B: Workplace Characteristics include both positive and negative attributes. Descriptors D only related to the researcher in this study. These themes in SWOT format also answered research question one 'What are the workplace factors critical to employment retention for people with autism?

Table 1. Grouped descriptor-based sub-themes parked in a SWOT matrix

'S' Themes	'W' Themes

Desc A: Employment Strengths
  'Personality' descriptor group
  'Cognitive and visual thinking' descriptor group
  'Fixation' descriptor group
Desc C: Entrepreneurial Personality Traits
  'Characteristics' descriptor group
  'Attitude' descriptor group
  'Philosophy' descriptor group
  'Self-focused' descriptor group
	Desc D: Autistic Behaviours Affecting Employment-Retention
	  'Social communication and interaction' descriptor group
	  'Behaviours not captured in DSM-5' descriptor group
	  'Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interest, or activities' descriptor group

'O' Themes	**'T' Themes**

Desc B: Workplace Characteristics (Positive Environment)
  'Management orientation' descriptor group
  'Career coach' descriptor group
  'Motivation' descriptor group
  'Leadership style' descriptor group
  'Environment' descriptor group
	Desc B: Workplace Characteristics (Negative Environment)
	  'Toxic culture' descriptor group
	  'Office politics' descriptor group

*Source:* Developed for this research

Four SWOT actionable management strategies (Table 2) identified were building strengths, minimising weaknesses, pursuing opportunities and isolating threats (Furgison, 2019). The integrated themes answered research question one 'What are the workplace factors critical to employment retention for people with autism?'

Table 2. Actionable management strategies with the SWOT-based Themes

	'S' Themes	'W' Themes

Intrinsic Factors	**Desc A**: Employment Strengths
	  'Personality' descriptor group
	  'Cognitive and visual thinking' descriptor group
	  'Fixation' descriptor group
	Desc C: Entrepreneurial Personality Traits
	  'Characteristics' descriptor group
	  'Attitude' descriptor group
	  'Philosophy' descriptor group
	  'Self-focused' descriptor group
		Desc D: Autistic Behaviours Affecting EmploymentRetention
		  'Social communication and interaction' descriptor group
		  'Behaviours not captured in DSM-5' descriptor group
		  'Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interest, or activities' descriptor group

Strategy	1. Build on strengths to pursue opportunities	2. Minimise weaknesses to isolate threats
	'O' Themes	**'T' Themes**

Extrinsic Factors	**Desc B**: Workplace Characteristics (Positive Environment)
	  'Management orientation' descriptor group
	  'Career coach' descriptor group
	  'Motivation' descriptor group
	  'Leadership style' descriptor group
	  'Workplace pollution' descriptor group
		Desc B: Workplace Characteristics (Negative Environment)
		  'Toxic culture' descriptor group
		  'Office politics' descriptor group

Strategy	3. Improve weaknesses to pursue opportunities	4. Use strengths to isolate threats

*Source:* Adapted from Furgioson, 2019.

The four SWOT-based actionable management strategies led to the conceptualisation of a potential management framework (Figure 2).
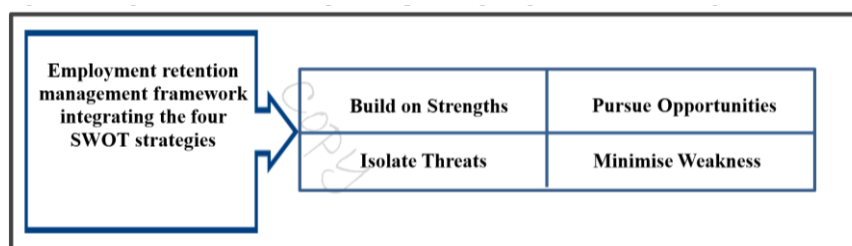
Figure 2. Management framework conceptual blueprint integrating the four SWOT strategies
Source: Adapted from Furgioson, 2019.

Figure 3 presents a step-by-step understanding of the context in which the evocative/analytic pattern-matched sub-themes visually presented in a SWOT format. This data analysis process also demonstrated the application of a pattern-matching analytical approach that has potential for wider application to narrative analysis in order to promote rigor, dependability and trustworthiness without subjugating the narrative to the language of the inquiry.
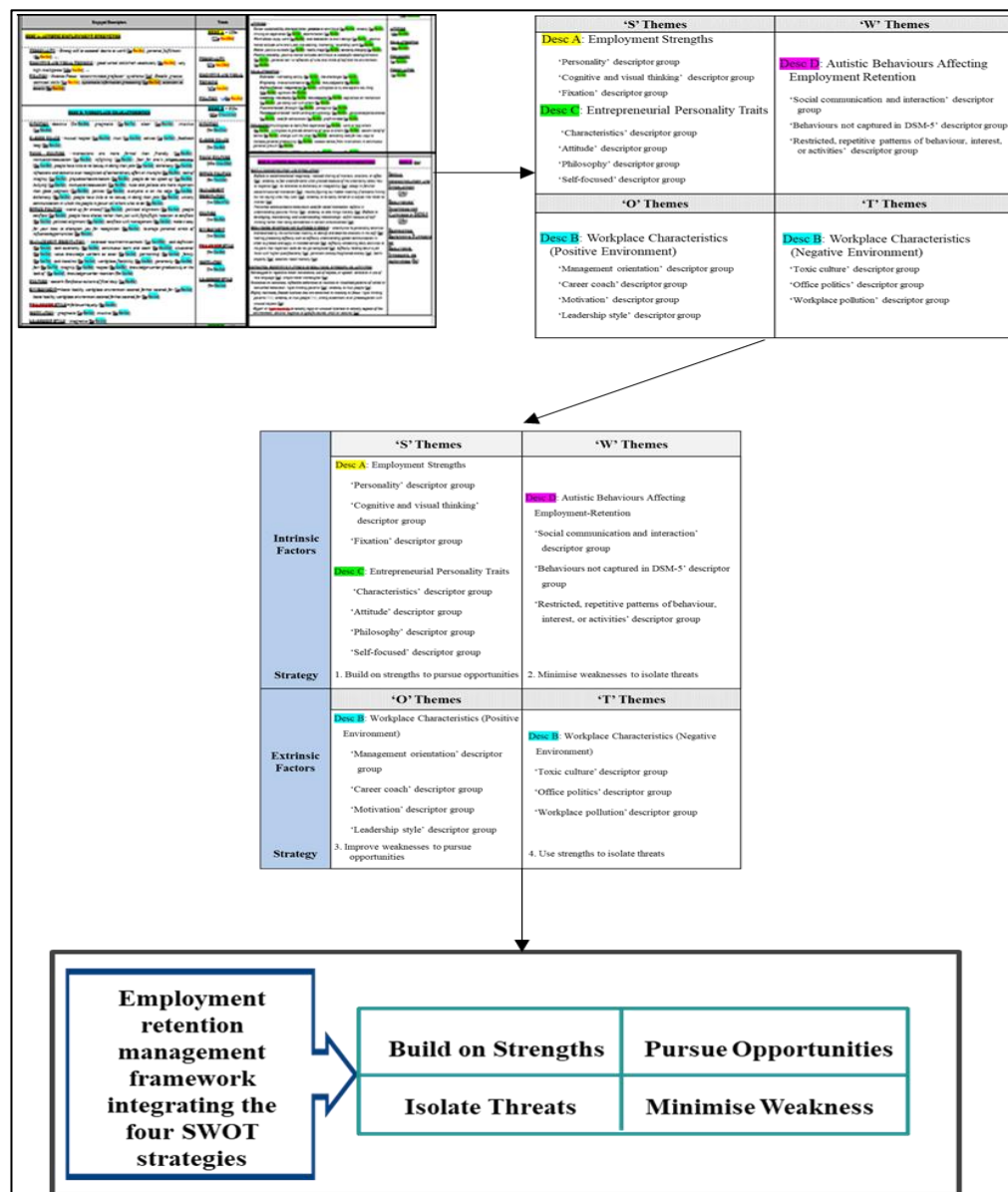
Figure 3. Stepwise integration of investigation process blueprinting the four SWOT actionable management strategies
Source: Developed for this research.

3. Reflections and concluding remarks

In addition to setting out to identify the workplace factors critical to employment retention for people with autism in how employment retention could be improved, this inquiry concludes with reflections and remarks.

3.1 Reflections on autism literature reviews: deficit-based approaches

Reflecting on the historical literature about autism it seems to me that it was a blessing in disguise that I was born in the war-torn period of 1948 in China and grew up as a refugee in the then poor countries of Taiwan and Hong Kong. I was not diagnosed then and more luckily, I was not 'treated', 'modified' or 'affected' by any autism programs, 'scientific' theories or eugenics programs related to the time-line events -

- Being born in Nazi Germany in the early 1940's, I would potentially have had my life shortened in a eugenics program such as the Am Spiegelground program led by Hans Asperger (Czech, 2018);
- Being born in the 1950's my Mother may have been blamed for my autism because of the "Refrigerator Mother Theory and I may have been institutionalised at a young age (Leventhal, 2007);
- Being born in the 1960's I may have been treated with drugs such LSD-25 (Alonso, 2017);
- If I was born in the 1970's or 80's I may have been sent to special school and subjected to Intensive Behaviour Treatment including receiving electric shocks from cattle prods (Dhossche & Stanfill, 2004; Wachtel, et al., 200);
- Being born in the 1990's I may have believed that vaccination caused my autism (Wakefield, 1998);
- Being born in the 2000's I may have undergone autism interventions and treatments (Mottron, 2017) such as speech therapy in order to speak sooner, commenced schooling earlier and been subject to bullying at an even more tender age;
- With the projected advances in prenatal screening and prenatal diagnosis for autism detection (Anwar, et al., 2018), if I were conceived in the future, my parents may have been persuaded to abort me in a eugenics program based on in utero genetic analysis;

I consider I was lucky not being sent to a special school or institution where I would have missed the chance to learn with neurotypicals and cope with the world built for neurotypicals. Although schools turned out to be a disaster (I was expelled from schools eight times), I learnt how to survive and battle through my life. I wonder would I ever have had a job or learned to be 'independent' if I was sent to a special school given the very low employment participation rates of children completing special education as identified by Kanaya, Wai and Miranda (2019, p. 57) "*children who received special education services did not fare better than children who were equally likely to have received services, but did not receive them*". If I were diagnosed as having autism at an early age instead of at 70, would that diagnosis have changed my life to focus on my deficits? Would I have a job? Would I still have changed jobs 28 times in 27 years? Would I have been unemployed and dependent on social security payments? Is autism a disorder that requires

interventions and treatments? … And many other questions I continue to ponder and to which I have no answers from the literature.

It is highly commendable that Mottron (2017) and other autism researchers as early as 2015 started reviewing autism as a difference, not a disorder. These researchers took a strengths-focused perspective. Research bodies such as the Autism CRC went further to mandate a strengths-focused approach in the National Guidelines for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia (Whitehouse, Evans, Eapen, Prior and Wray, 2018). Interestingly, a parallel was drawn with business and social researchers (Cliffton & Harper, 2003; Jacob, Scotts, Falkmer & Falkmer, 2015; Sorenson, 2013) who have made similar arguments for a strengths-focused business, employment and management practice. However, the uptake of a strengths-focused approach by medical, social, business professionals and autism researchers, appears to be a long process. I have not experienced a substantial move towards this strengths-focus trend up to the present time.

In 2019, I had my autism formally diagnosed at a teaching university by a Provisionally-Registered Psychologist. My assessment was still based on the deficit-based assessment tools of the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised [ADI-R] (Rutter, Le Couteur and Lord, 2003); Personality Assessment Inventory [PAI] (Morey, 2010) and the Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System, Third Edition [ABAS-3] (Harrison and Oakland, 2015). Disappointingly, my three assessment sessions were all deficits-focused. Although the Autism Collaborative Research Centre [CRC] has published The National Guidelines for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia [68], these were not followed. The result of my assessment was stated as

In the absence of any diagnosed medical condition, results collated from all assessment sources in addition to interview observations implicate a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association; APA, 2013) provisional diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder 299.00 (F84.0), Level 2 [severity level], without accompanying intellectual impairment, without accompanying language impairment … The ADI-R generates scores in three main domains of behaviour - abnormal reciprocal social interaction, abnormal communication, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviour. Considering … [Peter's carer] responses, Peter's scores all clearly exceed cut-off scores, suggest[ing] significant deficits in all three domains of behaviour. Table [3] outlines Peter's results compared to a sample of individuals with autism.

Table 3. My ADI-R scores

Domain	Cut-off Scores	Obtained Scores	Mean for sample of individuals with autism
Qualitative impairments in reciprocal social interaction	10	19	19
Qualitative impairments in communication	8	16	16.33
Restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviour	3	6	4.92

Source: Adapted from my autism diagnosis report at a research centre
at a university in 2019

The provisional diagnosis of ASD will require verification by a further professional, such as a psychiatrist … Once a diagnosis is confirmed, consideration could be given to consulting one of the ASD-specific treatment centres in Brisbane such as Tony Attwood's Clinic in Petrie, or Minds and Hearts in West End for interventions to assist Peter in enhancing social skills, communication skills, and skills in adaptive behaviour, to reduce the burden of impairment and improve relationships. For example, interventions may include components such as theory-of-mind training.

Such was my assessment experience. They were all deficit-focused assessments, and deficit-based intervention approaches.

In July, the same year, I had my autism confirmed by a Psychiatrist whose written report stated that –

On historical evidence alone, plus the ADI-R, I have no doubt Peter does in fact have ASD. Whether it is Level 1, 2 or 3 is moot, as he is now already 69, and therefore any interventions are not indicated anymore … I have today advised him to live his life, his way, without feeling the need to change too much. It is more practical to modify his environment, and mitigate the stressors he is exposed to, than to 'change' him per-se.

Contrary to my expectations that my assessment would again be deficit-based, my psychiatrist's positive view of autism and his recommendations, to my surprise, were not about changing me but modifying my environment and mitigating my stressors. These recommendations could be seen to coincide with one of my key findings on mitigating threats in addressing employment retention issues discussed in Part 1 of the paper.

However, there was little detail provided in this report into the mechanisms and strategies for achieving such changes, this was left up to me to figure out. Moving on from my reflections on the autism literature review, the next section

discusses the workplace employment and management sections of the literature review

3.2 Reflections on management in today's connected knowledge-based economy

Taylor's scientific method of management and its derivatives have been recognized as the most important contribution to the understanding of management in the 20th century (Drucker, 1999). Towards the end of the last century, Drucker's predictions were realized regarding changes to the role of management necessitated by a shift to a knowledge-based economy. Drucker's predictions were realized regarding the changes to the role of management necessitated by a shift to a knowledge-based economy. Drucker predicted that people would generate value with their minds (knowledge) more than with their muscle (labour) (Drucker, 1999; Wartzman, 2014), and therefore the role of management would change to managing knowledge workers and their productivity [KWP]. It was anticipated that more effective management of KWP would achieve a fifty-fold increase in the productivity of the knowledge worker comparative to the productivity changes achieved in the last century in manufacturing through industrialisation (Drucker, 1999; Wartzman, 2014).

Drucker's KWP theory was investigated to address research question two of "How can employment retention for people with autism be improved in a knowledge-based economy?" Drucker's six key KWP factors were reflected on in relation to my employment experiences and these are listed below in a table format (Table 4).

Table 4. Drucker's KWP theory and my employment retention

Key dimensions of Drucker's KWP Theory (1999)	My employment retention reflections
Knowledge worker: Drucker (1957) first coined the term *"knowledge worker"* as employees working with intangible resources. Drucker (1999) redefined *"knowledge workers"* as employees that know more about their jobs than anybody else in an organization.	I changed jobs 28 times in 27 years. Not only I performed better than anybody else in job interviews, I succeeded in all my jobs (all jobs were left on my own accord). Yes, at work, I thrived on being a *"knowledge worker"*. But being successful as a *"knowledge worker"* did not explain why I chose to leave jobs that I liked and in which I excelled.
Task: Knowledge workers need to define their own productivity improvement tasks - a form of job crafting. Even in restricted and routine jobs, knowledge workers can exert some influence on what is the essence of the work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001).	To advance personal productivity, I went beyond the tasks dictated to me in my employment contracts as evidenced in my 28 different employment positions (see Tables 4.2 – 4.3). My task as a knowledge worker, was to concentrate fully on productivity improvement. Everything else should be controlled by management as far as possible (Drucker, 1999). When this did not occur, I struggled and resigned.
Autonomy: "knowledge workers have to manage themselves … They have to have autonomy" (Drucker, 1999, p 84).	When working as an Experimental Scientist for the CSIRO, I was given full autonomy to conduct my research in a workplace free of sensory overloading distractions, bullying, discrimination and unethical practices but my inability to get along with my immediate supervisor was the main reason I left after staying there for three years. This aspect of the work environment linked to the lack of support for autism related behavioural challenges continued to compromise my employment retention.
Continuous Innovation/Continuous Learning and Teaching: Continuous innovation is more to do with problem solving than conceptualizing new ideas (Satell, 2018). Problem solving comes from a process of continuous learning and teaching (brain-storming) involving the genuine interests of team members, team consciousness and team commitment in solving an issue(s) at hand (Wong, Neck & Yu, 2013).	In my last job as an independent sales and management trainer and consultant, I stayed for over ten years until retirement. I attributed my long stay to my ability to innovate in each workshop because I looked at each workshop as a brain-storming (problem-solving) process to build a repertoire of sales and management knowledge. My great memory also allowed me to recall relevant cases immediately. Challenging social interactions with the employer were scaffolded by my life partner. Notwithstanding my ability to continuously innovate and continuously learn and teach I still opted for early retirement from full-time employment at the age of 60 but continue part-time.
Quality: Quantity does not define or limit the quality of knowledge work. A lack of quality is viewed as a restraint to productivity. In knowledge work, quality is the essence of the productivity output—not just a minimum standard of quality or a secondary consideration after quantity-based targets (Drucker, 1999).	Again, in my last full-time job as an independent knowledge worker (sales and management consultancy), the measurement of my performance was determined by the quality I delivered based on consistently positive customer feedback.
Asset: Knowledge workers are assets and mobile in employability. (Drucker,1999). Their value needs to be identified and retained in much the same way that organizations might motivate volunteers to remain involved (Drucker, 2008).	Being treated as an asset to be retained rather than a cost liability to be monitored and controlled transformed my relationship and social interactions with my last employer. I am proud of the quality of work I delivered and I was valued for my strengths. I have continued to help my most valued customers on a part-time basis long after my retirement and at times, as a volunteer.

Source: Developed for this research

In both of my longest staying jobs (three years at the CSIRO and 15 years as an Independent Consultant) the workplace infrastructure operated in a manner similar to the six key factors described in Drucker's KWP theory. Using a knowledge-worker productivity approach in the workplace was identified as critical to my employment retention. These were -

3.2.1 Critical success factor one: building a knowledge-worker productivity workplace infrastructure

As discussed, Drucker's KWP theory views knowledge-worker employees as job experts and as assets to retain (Drucker, 1999). My "fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity" (DSM-5 sub-criterion B_3) in sales and sales management meant that I am highly ranked in subject matter and expertise in the field of consultancy as witnessed through in my career as a leading sales and management consultant in organisations such as Target Marketing System* (TMS), Sales Performance International* (SPI) and ThinkInc! In these jobs, the employer organizations responded to me as a knowledge worker (independent consultant). I was viewed as an asset rather, than as a number in a head-count, to the engaging organisations. Sustaining the status of a subject matter expert (SME) was highly motivational for peak performance (Thomas, 2000) and this was maintained despite having a challenging work schedule (workplace environmental barriers) and extensive travel between Australia and overseas countries.

Although Drucker's KWP theory has provided a framework for identifying critical factors contributing to my employment retention, being treated as a knowledge worker did not stop me leaving the prestigious CSIRO Scientist position to join a textile factory in my earlier career or stop me to take early retirement at the age of 60 as a well-respected sales and sales management consultant. In both cases, my employment retention was affected by workplace triggers discussed below.

3.2.2 Critical success factor two: circumventing workplace autism triggers

The second critical success factor to employment retention was identified as circumventing workplace autism triggers that negatively impacted my employment retention as a person with autism. These are outlined below –

1. <u>Workplace people factors</u>
   a. Inflexibility and lack of adaptability and responsiveness to diverse communication styles and needs, results in work environments demanding that people with autism express, communicate and interact with management in a similar fashion to neurotypical co-workers. For example, in a formal productivity review, performance appraisal and other less formal staff meetings I experience a 'fight or flight' reaction to any experience of toxic culture and office politics rather than a 'grin and bear it' philosophy as was well demonstrated by the interview participants. This aspect is consistent with the *ASD-ness* sub-criterion of "*persistent*

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* TMS and SPI are amongst the top eight best sales methodology providers and collectively these two companies have trained over 1.65 million sales professionals over the last 20 years (Peralta, 2014)

deficits in social communication and social interaction" (DSM-5 Criterion A).

2. Workplace challenges

b. Lack of recognition or adaptability to specific workplace sensory environmental factors. Employment retention issues also arose for me due to distracting aspects of the environment, in my case, chemical pollutants, noise and other environment distractions, particularly when working in textile factories. This is consistent with "*hyper-reactivity to sensory input*" (DSM-5 Sub-Criterion B_4);

c. Regular unilateral technological changes in the workplace. Revision of IT access, portals and databases without warning or staff development opportunities were also very stressful and frustrating. This is consistent with "*insistence on sameness*" (DSM-5 Sub-Criterion B2 and its examples); and

d. Frequent unilateral work practice changes. Frequent unilateral work practice changes. For example, introducing new Human Resources compliance requirements, changing to a "non-dedicated" hot desk office arrangement. This aspect is consistent with "*insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions" rigid thinking patterns*" (DSM-5 Sub-Criterion B2 and its examples).

3. Dynamic nature of workplace operational demands

e. Frequent modifications to operational work processes often increases when an organisation is attempting to reactively respond to the dynamic nature of the marketplace. This makes it very challenging to adjust to non-routine workplace operational demands. This aspect is consistent with "*insistence on sameness, extreme distress at small changes, rigid thinking patterns*" (DSM-5 Sub-Criterion B2 and its examples).

Workplace stressors explained my inability to retain jobs (all jobs were left of my own accord). This also occurred in jobs that I liked and in which I excelled. Arguably these work challenges, specifically affecting me - may also be relevant to other employees with autism. To re-iterate, the aim of autoethnographic research is to create intrinsic and instrumental interest among readers for the experience of a person with autism. For readers to find points of resonance in their own experiences if they also happen to experience autism themselves and also for them to find resonance in the more than likely event that they know or work alongside someone who experiences autism. In addition, there may be other workplace stressors, not identified in the autoethnography, that are experienced by different people with autism. That would be worthy of further investigation. The presence of workplace stressors potentially creates points of dissonance (discrepancy in agreement/harmony between people/things) in a workplace. While most neuro-typical employees can cope with points of dissonance caused by workplace stressors as evidenced in the experience of the neuro-typical interview participants, points of dissonance can be significant barriers to people with autism, triggering stress and autonomic nervous system responses, including flight or fight reactions. It is anticipated that circumventing workplace stressors causing points of dissonance might possibly have

helped improve my employment retention. The change in my employment retention when challenging social interaction was scaffolded by my life partner supports this claim.

3.2.3 Critical success factor three: promoting strengths-focused practices

The third critical success factor to employment retention was identified as strengths-focused facilitators to enable strengths-focused practices. This is addressed below -

1. **Partnership.** As suggested by Participant A, his very stable workforce is due to how he treats employees. He said "It's really a partnership … rather than just employee-employer situation. We treat them like family, like fairly flexible work conditions they'll give you the reward back and you know if you treat them right, they'll treat you well" (see Part 1 - Figure 3 Vignette 2: Owner-Manager Style (Participant A). Viewing employees as business partners was also reported by Participant B. She suggested that, besides rewarding your employees with good pay, good growth, future employment and a good employer-employee relationship, that "In Hong Kong, to keep a senior staff member, it would be better to invite that person in as a business partner;

2. **Structured workplace demands.** Providing the time and opportunity for employees to structure their own workplace in response to workplace demands. In my line of work, the sooner I could appropriately structure my own work environment and work tasks, the sooner responding to the dynamic nature of workplace demands became routine. In my last job before retirement, my productivity was maintained consistent with the routine set by my employer organisations. The autism feature of "*insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines and ritualized patterns of verbal and nonverbal behavior*" (DSM-5 Sub-Criterion B_2) became a strength when this occurred;

3. **Structured communication and interaction.** Making communication and interaction in the workplace routine and patterned. My autism related characteristic of "*persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction*" (DSM-5 Criterion A) did not appear to be a problem when workplace communication and interaction was "structured and pragmatic". In my last job before retirement, workplace communication and interaction were limited to the quality of workshop delivery, updates by the employer organisations. Other office politics were handled by my unpaid life partner and did not affect my relationship with the employer organisations;

The third critical factor explained, contrary to my earlier career record of changing jobs 27 times between 1968 to 1995, that I was able to retain employment as an independent sales consultant for 15 years or so until retirement. These employment sustainability facilitators (positive workplace factors), may also be relevant to other employees with autism.

In retrospect, my employment strengths included persistence, despite experience of serious obstacles, regarding the challenging nature of the work roles and work tasks even involving personal danger and significant demands for

innovation. My capacity to focus and maintain attention, analytical skills in pattern matching and recalling facts and details and a single-minded drive to achieve assigned task goals were also important employment strengths.

I was determined to succeed and was willing to change jobs as many times as necessary to achieve success. My approach to creating success was analytical, tenacious and task focused, always looking forward for ways to increase personal productivity. This included taking on high level challenges and taking risks. I was confident I would find a solution to respond to these challenges. I enjoyed work and approached my work in a positive and dedicated manner. I also never doubted that I would be able to find a new position or a new opportunity.

These employment strengths made me a valuable employee in a wide range of employment roles and organisations in two different countries and cultures. These strengths also assisted me to successfully obtain 28 jobs in 27 years and despite the challenging employment roles I was assigned I was able to achieve job targets, often in a relatively short period of time. It is important to note that my lack of social communication and interaction skills were not a crucial factor in my failure to retain employment. My strengths characteristics made me a valued employee. However, important workplace characteristics that played a role in compromising my employment retention included workplace politics, toxic culture, non-consultative and unfair decision making and dynamic and poorly communicated demands. I was never going to be able to adopt a "grin and bear it" response similar to neuro-typical interview participants. While I had good collegial relationships and communication with my co-workers, my relationships with my immediate supervisors in my first 27 jobs were stressful. On a number of occasions my immediate managers would express their resentment that I might replace them in their current role. I did not aspire to supplant any line manager only to be treated fairly. I often felt that I was being negatively evaluated and judged without adequate grounds. This led to intolerable levels of stress for me. Interestingly more senior managers valued my work and achievements.

These characteristics of workplace politics and culture are not fundamental to workplace operation in fact they are likely to compromise the productivity of all workers. In each case, when I was exposed to unfairness and judgement, I started looking for new jobs and as soon as financially feasible I resigned. In some cases, I could not even delay resignation until I had secured new employment because of the extent of stress I experienced.

In comparison, Participants A and B demonstrated a perfect employment retention pattern. Both participants took a "grin and bear it" attitude into managing workplace toxic culture and office politics. They both progressed to senior executive roles in their career within the one organization. When they retired from work, they both ran and operated their own businesses. They adopted management styles which promoted some aspects of Drucker's philosophy of managing knowledge workers and their productivity. They actively worked to prevent toxic culture brewing in their operations and they both took an approach similar to the philosophy of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (The Golden Rule). They both have industry leading employee retention records as managers and both have run and continue to run successful businesses for decades.

The empirical findings (also see Part 1) gained from my autoethnographic investigation and the summary themes applied to the SWOT matrix and linked to the four SWOT strategies (see Figure 3) contributed to the development of an explanatory model in the form of a Drucker-based strengths-focused employment retention management model for people with autism. This involved –

- Critical success factor 1 [CSF-1]: Building a knowledge-worker productivity workplace;
- Critical success factor 2 [CSF-2]: Circumventing workplace autism triggers; and
- Critical success factor 3 [CSF-3]: Enabling strengths-focused practices.

This explanatory model linking the relationship between the critical success factors is illustrated below in the form of a schematic relationship (Figure 4).
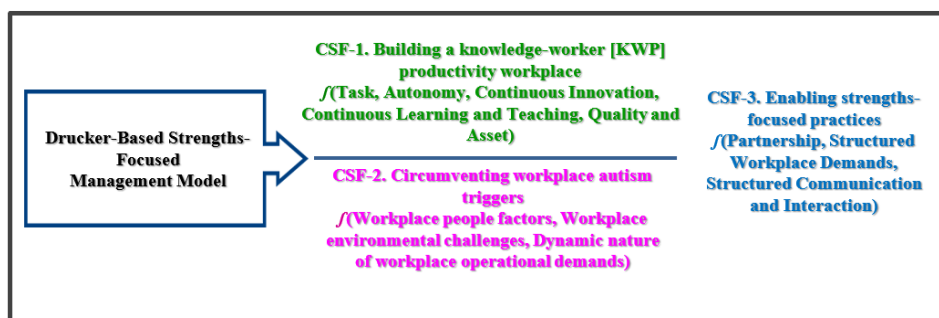
Figure 4. Drucker-based strengths-focused employment retention management model
Source: Developed for this research

This explanatory model is also consistent with the emergence of a more strengths-based framework to support both businesses and people with autism in today's knowledge-based economy. This model addressed research question two of "How can employment retention for people with autism be improved?". The empirical findings also provided evidence supporting the research proposition that "There is a significant role for Drucker's knowledge-worker productivity practice in investigating and developing support for the employment retention of people with autism" and a Drucker-based, strengths-focused knowledge-worker productivity model.

3.4 Concluding remarks

To sum up, it is envisaged that the insights gained from this evocative/analytic insider **auto**-*ethno*-graphic analysis will contribute to employment retention for people with autism in competitive employment. First by identifying the factors influencing the employment retention of people with autism. Second by providing evidence of the impact of a strengths-focused workplace practice and management approach, and the employment strengths

associated with characteristics of autism. Third by re-conceptualizing autistic behavioural challenges as personal differences not deficits. The following points were discussed:

1. It was proposed that strategies be developed to understand and minimize points of dissonance caused by workplace stressors identified as workplace people factors, workplace environmental challenges and the dynamic nature of workplace operational demands, affecting employment retention for people with autism;
2. Likewise, the facilitation of a strengths-focused practice was proposed. This practice included structured workplace demands and structured communication and interaction to enhance the employment retention for people with autism;
3. Application of Drucker's knowledge-worker productivity theory philosophy and its practical implementation is also consistent with a strengths-focused employment approach in today's knowledge-based connected economy (Wong, Neck & Yu, 2012).

However, the acceptance of a strengths-focused knowledge-worker productivity practice depends on organisation-wide practices and policies. This requires moving out of the taken for granted comfort of target based and deficits focused management practice and the deficit focused assessment and intervention approached applied to people with autism. For this to occur one key ingredient will be research and management in which the experiences of people with autism have a central and pivotal role. This research has demonstrated the innovative insights and understanding that can develop when research is informed by the experiences of a person with autism. I conclude that management practice that matters as the key to retention of employees with autism. Essentially, attainment of sustainable employment as a basic human right (UN, 2006, 2016, 2017) falls equally on management. Fixes for people with autism are beyond practices of adaptations and accommodations.

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