Similarities and Differences in the Value Assigned to Lifestyle Attributes of High-Tech Employees: A Value Stretch Analysis

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This manuscript is a summary report on the third of a series of lifestyle studies carried out at the peak of Israel's post-industrial era at the end of the twentieth century. Israel was then heavily integrated in the global economy, and its high-tech industry, mainly start-ups, have attained global reputation. Similar to the other two studies it was carried out using the 'Value Stretch Model'. It was aimed at exploring the disparities and similarites in the subjective evaluation of their lifestyle attributes of Israels Hi-Tech employees identified according to their gender and their occupational roles: R&D workers versus all the rest of the employees. The field survey was carried out via the Internet as a 'snowball' sample, yielding one hundred workable questionnaires. Two hypotheses are examined indicating that only age distinguishes between gender and type of employment: male workers are older then female and most of them are engaged in R&D. As a homogenous group, the employees did not reveal many differences in their evaluation of their lifestyle attributes.

Keywords: *Value stretch model, lifestyle attributes, subjective evaluation, Hi-Tech employees, R&D workers.*

Our main hypothesis is that there is a significant difference in the values that each of the above sub-groups assigns to lifestyle attributes. Significant differences exist in the values allotted to the attribute according to gender (male and female), which reinforce the occupational R&D workers versus all the non-R&D workers. The lifestyle attributes stretch along a virtual value stretch continuum (for the essentials of this stretched model see Kipnis, 2004b) from subjective future preferences down the scale to the employed person's current tolerance of reality. The surveyed values of the lifestyle attributes were collected through the Internet directly into the format of a value stretch model. The results were analyzed with diverse statistical tools.

The study was initiated at the height of the boom in the Israeli high-tech industry but the fieldwork was taken during the nadir of the high-tech recession (Kipnis, 2002). The marks of the economic crisis are manifested in the results.

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METHODOLOGY

The lifestyle attributes were measured and explained through several groups of population characteristics, which formed the independent variables. Note that knowledge-rich industry that offers its employees a broad variety of positions, ranging from diverse services to administration and to R&D, a typology of the employed could result in a diverse variety of lifestyles. Altogether fourty-eight lifestyle attributes were found relevant (see Kipnis, 2004b) and clustered into six sub-groups: socio-economic attributes, value-rich attributes, culture-oriented attributes, family-oriented attributes, job-epitomizing attributes, attributes of leisure, and attributes related to housing and neighborhood factors. The Internet sample was assembled by the snowball method and yielded and one hundred completed questionnaires.[2]

FINDINGS

Among the sampled employees, fifty-seven were R&D workers, fourty-one males and sixteen females. The non-R&D workers numbered fourty-three: seventeen male and twenty-six female. Pearson and chi square tests were used to check for inherent similarities between the sub-group of R&D workers' subgroup and that of the other employees. Of the variable distributions examined, those of gender and profession were rejected at the level of $\alpha \cong 0.03$. Only employee distribution by age groups revealed a significant degree of similarity with $\alpha > 0.05$.

When the attitudes to lifestyle attributes were examined, no significant differences were found between R&D and non-R&D workers. Significant differences in their attitudes to lifestyle attributes appeared between genders in some aspects at the levels of *preferences* and in other features at the level of *expectations*. At the level of *preferences* significant gender disparity was isolated in the *cultural* and *housing* groups of attributes; at the level of expectations important gender differences were found among the *socio-economic* and the *cultural* groups of attributes.

Other notable observations are that except for the family-linked attributes, the male interviewees ranked the lifestyle attributes at all three levels of the value stretch model higher than the females. When lifestyle attributes of gender and occupation (R&D and non-R&D workers) were compared, significant ranking disparities were found in the *socio-economic*-linked attributes at all of the model's levels. Female R&D workers found these attributes more important than male R&D workers, and they aspired to attain them at the long term, but their striving to achieve them in the short run term was the same as that of the males. At the tolerance level, socio-economic attributes were ranked higher by the females, probably because they had not yet realized them, and were prepared to assign these attributes higher values. The opposite results were recorded for non-R&D workers, for whom the differences were less significant than for males employed in R&D. The latter were more ambitious to reach a socio-economic status in both the long and the short term. In addition,

they were less prepared for making 'concessions', as evinced in the small satisfaction gaps. This finding seemingly stems from the fact that males working in non-R&D jobs hold more senior positions than females. Finally, small differences in the values assigned to *family* and to *cultural* valued attributes point to the steady desire of the sampled population to realize the *preferences* and *expectations* of these attributes.

Some of the results reflect the high-tech recession situation. Notable are those of *employment* and *leisure* sub-groups of attributes. The *employment* sub-group yielded small satisfaction gaps, thereby attesting that high-tech workers probably did not hesitate temporarily to accept lower status job at their tolerance state, if the high-tech crisis prevailed. However, they disclosed signs of hopes that their work prospects would improve at the short term, as indicated in their level of expectations. Of interest too are the small, in some cases negative, reconciliation gaps revealed by the leisure attributes. This might tell us that male and the non-R&D workers view leisure, mainly the popular leisure attributes, as a *preferred* need to be realized in the short run. However, owing to the high-tech crisis, when long-term economic security was not fully secured, the interviewees were unwilling to express (at the time) long term *preferences* for extensive and prestigious leisure activities.

Except for *family* and *residence* lifestyle attributes, the *reconciliation gaps* of the R&D and of the non-R&D employees was smaller than their *satisfaction gaps*. This might be explained by the fact that high-tech employed tend to some extent to defer to the long run the creation of a family and to satisfy their housing expectations. In contrast, they endeavor, and they seem to believe that they can, to reach their desired attainments, and rapidly realize their lifestyle attributes of *consumption*, popular *leisure*, and *professional* employment.

DISCUSSION

Our study implies that there are no or only negligible differences in the social, economic, and demographic attributes between the two sub-groups of the sampled high-tech employees. More specifically, both sub-groups are of the same socio-economic status and tend to define their economic status as high. Most of the interviewed people were young, almost all had a university degree, in most cases in science and engineering. While many of the females were employed as secretaries and in human resources tasks, the bulk of R&D workers were male. Notwithstanding the wide income disparities between the two sub-groups, their earnings were, by any standard, far higher than that of the average of the nation at large. Finally, the rank order of the fourty-two lifestyle attributes at their minimum requirement level of tolerance suggest that those employed in the Israeli high-tech industry are basically secular, display liberal attitudes, and exhibit a strong family stance. They also assign moderate values to materialistic lifestyle aspirations, by placing low values on status symbols and prestigious purchases. Although the latter might have reflected the

high-tech crisis situation, the fact is that they allotted insignificant values to owning an expensive car, living in a prestigious apartment building, celebrating family events ostentatiously, wearing designer clothes, dining at expensive restaurants, and the like.

Their aspired rewards were nested in their professional work perspectives. Thanks to their realistic views on the contemporary dynamic labor market, they no longer envisaged their employment prospects beyond the following two to three years. They also did not hesitate to frequently change their places of work for higher professional advantages. As a result they did not set high value in tenured job positions, apparently a unique phenomenon among [Israeli] high-tech employees, and they were ready to trade off salary for other work rewards such as challenging and independent work, creativity, and job mobility. E-working, self-employment, and working abroad do not rate high. 'Working from home', despite its assumed advantages, does not appeal to high-tech workers, who believe in formal and in informal brainstorming and innovative group sessions. Some 75 percent of the interviewees rejected this type of work arrangement. Some even viewed working from home as another attempt to blur the boundaries between employment, family and leisure (Blumen, 2004).

THE FUTURE OF THE HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY

This study is one among many vital steps aimed at better understanding of the high-tech industry and its needs, particularly the subjective ambitions and aspirations of its labor force. A secondary objective of the study was to help reassess the role that a value stretch model can play in defining the essential human inputs for high-tech industry development planning strategy. As indicated, major emphasis was placed on the human resource—the employee, by identifying his/her characteristics, preferences, needs, and expectations. If we accept the notion that the global economy moves in cycles, the high-tech industry should have a future and it is only a matter of time until it recovers (see Kipnis, 2004a). Being a planning-oriented study, this research provides a basis for our internalizing the trends and needs of the high-tech industry and of its employees, in terms of their preferences and expectations, and according to their perceived priorities.

NOTES

1. For more detailed analysis see Kravchyk, 2003, and Kravchyk and Kipnis, 2004.

2. A snowball sample is one in which the questionnaire is passed from one person to another.

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