

Survey finds that “Definitions are everywhere and can come in many forms.”

We asked respondents their opinion on the veracity and accuracy of twenty-four statements within one section of a wide ranging ten part survey on definitions. **100% of the respondents agreed that definitions are everywhere and can come in many forms.** Each statement had five choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree from which to select.

Following close behind were the following statements.

- Definitions are often used to control behaviors. **88%** (34% strongly agreed/54% agreed).
- Definitions are often used to allocate resources. **89%** (26% strongly agreed/63% agreed).
- Even a bad definition is a definition. **85%** (14% strongly agreed/71% agreed).

In different questions, 89% also believed that definitions provide a short hand (and/or shortcuts) for living everyday life, work and commerce while 91% felt that their field of work uses many unique or specific definitions. The latter referred to the broad fields (in descending rank order) of human services, technical, business, financial, professional, healthcare, artistic/creative, sales and general. Also notable was a solid consensus on the following statements.

- Good definitions advance understanding and communications **86%** (40% strongly agreed/46% agreed).
- Definitions are often formalized perceptions. **85%** (18% strongly agreed/67% agreed).

Equally revealing was the fact that respondents often used the term definition in a broader and nontraditional context. That is, beyond its customary dictionary meaning. More than one-half had used ‘definition’ to describe values, laws, behaviors, social norms, descriptions and scientific terms while about 45 percent have also applied it to cultural rituals, duties, legal, relationships, religion, rules, customs and mathematics. Indeed of the 38 choices for using the term definition 36 had an everyday usage rate of more than twenty percent.

The most common responses in rank order for another question - “The characteristics of good definitions might include which of the following (27 choices) attributes?” – were intelligent, clear-sighted, informed, wise, knowledgeable and insightful. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents were intrigued with “sapient”. These two questions served to field test “sapient” as a basis to describe the type of definitions and their application to be identified and implemented.

In addition, 55% said that they ask for an exception to be made when a definition gets in the way of what seems fair and equitable. However, just two wrote-in the idea of seeking a re-definition. Again, the term definition is widely used and yes, it is applied in many different forms.

This on-line survey was by invitation, anonymous and completed in 2008 with a 42 percent response rate. This was a well educated population with a college degree in common. It was not random. It was also a non-statistically tested small sample of under a hundred people, but very revealing none-the-less.