

The Best Normative Data For Opinion Survey Comparisons



There are many types of "Norms" in the "Normative Data Family". People often use the term "Norms" universally, and may not take time to consider the real differences between the types of norms and which is best to use for their particular case. Consider the following in choosing the best for your opinion surveys...



The experts who super charged the industry benchmarking craze, two of the top industrial analysts in the world, James Womack and Daniel Jones, authors of The Machine That Changed the World, have noted that there is a better way to make your organizations great. This excerpt is from their book "Lean Thinking" (pp.48-49) ...

Important differences between "Industry" and "Internal" Norms

What The Experts Say About Industry Norms and Leadership...

"Although we gave a boost to the benchmarking industry with our previous book, *The Machine That Changed the World*, which described the most comprehensive benchmarking ever attempted in a gigantic global industry, we now feel that [industry] benchmarking is a waste of time for managers that understand lean thinking.

"Lean bench markers who discover their performance is superior to their competitors' have a natural tendency to relax ... while mass producers discovering that their performance is inferior often have a hard time understanding exactly why (for example, General Motors and Volkswagen in the 1980s). They tend to get distracted by easy-to-measure or impossible-to-emulate differences in factor costs, scale, or "culture", when the really important differences lie in the harder-to-see ways value-creating activities are organized.

"Our earnest advice to lean firms today is simple: To hell with your competitors; compete against perfection by identifying all activities that are *muda* (waste) and eliminating them. This is an absolute rather than a relative standard which can provide the essential North Star for any organization. (In its most spectacular application, it has kept the Toyota organization in the lead for forty years.) However, to put this admonition to work you must master the key techniques for eliminating *muda* (waste)."

Industry Norms provide an "un-enlightened" perspective...

You can find out if your score is higher or lower than an industry group norm, but you cannot find out why. You do not know the stimulus that the "normative participants" were responding to such as policy or management changes, seasonal or economic factors... the key events that were driving opinion scores. Resources expended based on incorrect conclusions drawn from non-defendable external industry norms can, at best, be wasted, distracting your organization from efforts that would have been productive. At worst they can exacerbate a problem or create one where none previously existed.

Historical/Internal Norms provide an "enlightened" perspective...

An enlightened internal comparison allows you to consider the variation between two scores and understand why one is better or worse than the other. This is because you know the stimulus that the "normative participants" were responding to. To have enough information to be an "Enlightened Norm" it must usually be an internal norm (same period – different work groups) or historical norm (same work group – different time periods) from your own organization so you can ask "why" and obtain useful information. These comparisons lead you into enlightened action planning and a higher return on your investment.