

Operational transparency increases trust, support of government

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As multiple published reports indicate, trust in government has reached historic lows and frustration with government performance has reached record highs. New research in the journal *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* finds that in co-productive settings, such as government services, people's trust and engagement levels can be enhanced by increasing operational transparency.

The researchers of the study, "Surfacing the Submerged State: Operational Transparency Increases Trust in and Engagement with

Government," conducted three tests to showcase this.

"We leveraged data from a mobile phone application developed by the City of Boston where residents submit service requests; the city's goal was to increase engagement with the app. Users who received photographs of government addressing their service requests submitted 60% more requests than users who did not receive photographs," says author Ryan Buell of Harvard Business School.

In another study, Buell, alongside co-authors Michael Norton, also of Harvard Business School, and Ethan Porter of George Washington University, looked at residents of Boston who interacted with a website that visualized both service requests (e.g., potholes and broken streetlamps).

"We found that efforts by the city's government to address those requests resulted in people being 14% more trusting and 12% more supportive of government," continued Buell, a professor of technology and [operations management](#) at Harvard. "However, in a case when operational transparency reveals government to be less responsive, people were no more nor less trusting and supportive of government than residents who received no transparency at all."

Additional analysis revealed that operational transparency increases trust and engagement in two ways—through consumers' increased perceptions of effort by the government and increased perceptions that engagement is impactful.

"Responsiveness increases feelings of personal efficacy, which boosts willingness to engage both directly and indirectly through the other causal paths," says Buell.

More information: Ryan W. Buell et al, Surfacing the Submerged

State: Operational Transparency Increases Trust in and Engagement with Government, *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* (2020).
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