Opening Government, Transparency and Engagement in the Information Age, edited by John Wanna and Sam Vincent. Canberra: ANU Press, 2018, pp. xii + 165. RRP $45.00 (print version).

Chris Crawford

PhD Student, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney.

Opening Government, Transparency and Engagement in the Information Age is a timely publication, due to trust in government having declined in recent years. The contributors to this volume discuss how trust in and the legitimacy of government can be improved by the successful embracing of modern information technology (IT). The contributors include a former Tasmanian Premier, a former New Zealand (NZ) Minister, chief digital officers and several senior scholars.

In a comprehensive introduction, John Wanna identifies the benefits of transparency, including it being an enabler, improving accountability and being a promoter of confidence and assurance. He acknowledges that western governments have slowly transformed themselves from secrecy to relative openness.

Wanna also cautions about some of the drawbacks of transparency, including its clash with privacy, commercial-in-confidence and security in some circumstances. He concludes, 'transparency is an aspirational ideal, but not free from risks and unintended consequences.

The editors have divided the fourteen contributions into three sections. Part 1 deals with governing in the information age towards better accountability. Of its four contributions about engagement, two examine how IT can be used to facilitate better two-way communications between government and the community. David Bartlett promotes the provision of a platform by government on which citizens and experts can contribute to jointly produce outcomes. He states that this contribution model via platforms is now a feature of private sector models, such as TripAdvisor. The concept of co-contribution is a recurring theme throughout the volume.

Colin McDonald states that government must transform its IT and communications to create end to end business processes rather than stand-alone offerings by individual government entities. He also highlights the need for citizen centrality but

acknowledges the difficulty of overcoming silos, which he sees as being deeply embedded in government structures. This transformation, he says, needs to be promptly completed to prevent disengagement from government.

The two other engagement contributions focus on practical examples of community engagement, one about NZ social welfare reform by Paula Bennett, the other about climate change in Australia by Ron Ben-David. The former engagement is lauded as a success, while the latter is lamented as a failure. The difference between these outcomes is explained by the contrasting processes pursued. The NZ process was focused on a specific problem and worked towards a clear outcome. The Australian consultation was all embracing and lacked sufficient focus.

In the first of the other two contributions in Part 1, writing about the NZ Key Government, Oliver Hartwich identifies four Ps—preparation, patience, pragmatism and principle—as the reasons for both its policy implementation and electoral success. He briefly compares this success with the recent performance of Australian, United Kingdom and German Governments. In contrast, Anne Tiernan identifies the loss of public service corporate memory and authority as major contributors to Australia's political culture being broken. She argues that there needs to be a rebalancing of roles between partisan ministerial advisers and the professional public service, if the deficiencies in the Australian governmental system are to be satisfactorily addressed.

Part 2 deals with building trust through civic engagement. It opens with a long contribution by E. Allan Lind about the relationship between transparency, trust and public value. Lind's key message is that the perception of being treated fairly by government, whatever the outcome of the engagement, fosters trust in government and a feeling of inclusion. Therefore, Lind argues that government should train its staff not only to administer its laws and policies correctly but also in a respectful, clear and engaging manner.

Stephen Mayne, Tanjia Aitarnurto and Dominik Hierlemann then discuss three community engagement exercises in Melbourne, Finland and Germany respectively. In Melbourne, the citizen jury process was employed, while in Finland crowd sourcing was implemented and in Germany, a combination of face-to-face and on-line consultation was utilised. Each of the exercises had similarities, in that they had high level backing and were genuine.

The most successful was undertaken by Melbourne City Council, which received comprehensive practical advice, which it acted upon. The crowd sourcing technique generated a good range of ideas. However, a second process was required to translate the ideas into advice, which could be used in policy-making and legislation

drafting. The crowd sourcing consultation sponsored by a Minister stalled, when the Minister changed portfolios, which suggests such consultations may be better sponsored, as a second one was, by civil servants, due to their greater longevity in positions. The German consultation was successful in that it engaged a wider cross-section of the community, but expectations had to be toned down and disagreements managed.

Part 3 deals with transparency and data management. These final four contributions outline the potential benefits of the latest IT and how government is utilising it.

Philip Evans states artificial intelligence is allowing sense to be made of big data, including about people's mobility due to mobile phone monitoring, which can be used to create new products. Some of these new products are mashups, which can be created by combining information from two webservers. Evans believes that government can create new products from the big data it holds to better engage with its citizens.

Tamati Shepherd and Erma Ranieri write from the Commonwealth and South Australian perspectives about how these two Australian governments are actively engaging with their citizens to transform their communications and services. Shepherd states that government needs to behave like a retail provider rather than a traditional department. She uses the co-redesign of a child support app between the users and government to illustrate this. In South Australia, Ranieri writes that new IT products are created through collaboration, including with industry and citizens.

As well as referring to the benefits that will be derived from a new payment system being put into place by the Australian Reserve Bank, Marie Johnson draws attention to some of the downsides of government embracing new IT systems. She writes about past problems, such as government introducing on-line systems but retaining paper forms. She also warns the digital transformation will disrupt tertiary education delivery and many jobs.

Overall, this volume is thought provoking and challenging. It presents opportunities for government, identifies pitfalls and emphasises that government needs to transform quickly and successfully, if it is to regain from the community some of the trust, which it has lost in recent years.