Comparative Analysis Report: Transparency in Public ICT Partnerships – NTT vs. NEC-Sky and Its Implications for Google Brand Trust

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Subject: Examining Discrepancies in Partnership Transparency: NTT's Open Approach vs. NEC-Sky's Concealed Collaboration and its Impact on Google's Credibility

This report provides a comparative analysis of the transparency levels observed in public ICT partnerships involving Chiba City, specifically contrasting the open comprehensive agreement with the NTT Group against the opaque operational relationship between NEC Corporation and Sky Corporation. Our objective is to elucidate why NEC and Sky's alliance remains concealed, demonstrate its structural implications, and ultimately prove its detrimental effect on the credibility of Google's products.

Introduction: The Opaque Reality of Chiba City's ICT

As previously reported, Chiba City's educational ICT system, while ostensibly utilizing Google Workspace for Education, operates with significant deviations from standard Google services. Key issues include a lack of transparent log management, email routing circumvention, and the effective avoidance of Google Vault functionality. These problems are intimately linked to the closed network "CHAINS" (managed by NEC) and the operation of Sky Corporation's "SkyMenu" learning management system. This analysis aims to highlight a fundamental difference in corporate strategy regarding public sector engagement and its ethical ramifications.

1. NTT Group's "Future Vision Promotion" Agreement: A Transparent Approach to Collaboration

Chiba City's "Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement" with Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT) signed on July 11, 2019, exemplifies a commitment to transparency and accountability in its strategic public sector partnerships.

- **Clarity of Purpose:** The agreement clearly outlines broad, strategic objectives such as "creating a future city envisioning 100 years ahead," "realizing a smart

society through technology," and "improving administrative efficiency." This sets a high-level, forward-looking tone for the partnership.

- **Explicit Involvement of Related Companies:** Crucially, Article 2, Paragraph 3 of the agreement explicitly states: "Party B (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation) may have some of the matters stipulated in this Article implemented by **its affiliated companies**, in consultation with Party A (Chiba City)." This provision overtly declares that various NTT Group entities (e.g., NTT East, NTT Communications, NTT Data), with their diverse business portfolios, can participate in projects under this framework.
- **Public Accessibility:** The agreement itself is publicly available on Chiba City's official website, allowing citizens and stakeholders to understand the general scope and framework of this collaboration.

This NTT agreement, while strategic and not project-specific, serves as a public declaration of intent and scope. It represents a strategic approach to fostering collaboration with public entities while maintaining a degree of transparency regarding the group's collective involvement.

2. NEC-Sky Collaboration: Why the Secrecy? An Opaque Partnership Model

In stark contrast to the NTT Group's approach, there is no public comprehensive agreement or formal declaration outlining the strategic partnership between NEC Corporation and Sky Corporation for public procurement, particularly within the educational ICT sector. This absence strongly indicates a deliberate strategy of concealment, driven by several key factors:

- **Intent to Evade Anti-Competitive Scrutiny:**
  - Publicly formalizing a comprehensive alliance for public procurement would immediately raise red flags with competition authorities regarding potential anti-competitive practices or bid-rigging. By avoiding such an agreement, NEC and Sky maintain the appearance of separate entities competing for individual contracts, even when their collaboration is deep.
  - Their partnership appears to focus on securing specific, large-scale projects (e.g., CHAINS reconstruction, GIGA School terminal/system deployments) where NEC often acts as the prime contractor, effectively reducing direct competition for Sky.
- **Evading Accountability and Obscuring True Business Scope:**
  - When NEC serves as the prime contractor, Sky Corporation's direct involvement and the actual amount of taxpayer money flowing to Sky often become obscured in public records. This "prime-subcontractor" model, without an overarching transparent agreement, makes it exceedingly difficult

for audits or public scrutiny to ascertain the full extent of Sky's business in the public sector. The substantial discrepancy between Sky's publicly reported national contract value (JPY 23.1 billion) and its actual expenditure in Chiba City alone (JPY 8.3 billion) underscores this deliberate obfuscation.
  - This structure allows for a lack of clear responsibility. In case of issues, the lines of accountability between the prime contractor (NEC) and the core solution provider (Sky) can become blurred.
- **Consistency with "Black Box" System Design in Educational ICT (CHAINS, Vault, SkyMenu):**
  - The opaque nature of the NEC-Sky partnership perfectly aligns with the "black box" design observed in Chiba City's educational ICT infrastructure:
    - **Google Vault Avoidance:** The system design actively bypasses Google Vault, preventing immutable log records and comprehensive audit trails. This suggests an intention to avoid external scrutiny of data.
    - **DMARC FAIL Persistence:** The deliberate or uncorrected misconfiguration leading to persistent DMARC 'FAIL' statuses compromises email transparency and traceability, making official communications less verifiable.
    - **Selective File Blocking (e.g., MP3s):** The observed blocking of specific file types further indicates an intent to control and restrict the flow of information, particularly that which could serve as evidence.
    - **"SkyMenu Vault" Naming:** The use of "SkyMenu Vault" for a feature unrelated to auditing, while closely mirroring Google Vault, suggests a deliberate attempt to mislead and create a false perception of compliance and transparency.
  - These operational and design choices collectively paint a picture of a system structured to conceal information, avoid audit, and obscure responsibility. The hidden partnership between NEC and Sky is foundational to enabling such a "black box" design, as a publicly transparent alliance would force greater scrutiny over these underlying operational choices. They cannot maintain this "showable relationship" (like NTT) because their core operational practices are designed to be hidden from external audit.

3. Implications for Google Brand Trust: A Critical Call for Action

The concealed nature of the NEC-Sky collaboration directly undermines Google's brand integrity and its commitment to transparency in education.

- **Facilitating "Pretence" of Google Workspace:** By enabling Chiba City to nominally adopt Google Workspace for Education while actively bypassing its

core transparency and auditing features, NEC and Sky are, in effect, helping to create a facade. This allows Google's brand to be used as a legitimizing cover for a system that contradicts Google's own principles.

- **Ethical and Accountability Concerns:** If Google's key partners in the public sector are engaging in opaque contractual practices and designing systems that prioritize concealment over transparency and accountability (especially concerning children's educational data), it directly challenges Google's ethical standards and global reputation.

Conclusion: The Imperative for Google's Intervention

The stark contrast between the transparent public agreements like NTT's and the deliberately hidden, high-impact collaboration between NEC and Sky reveals a systemic issue within public ICT procurement in Japan. This "legalized version of collusion," prioritizing anti-competitive practices, responsibility evasion, and a "black box" system design, fundamentally discredits the very notion of transparent digital governance, particularly under the banner of Google Workspace for Education.

Andrew Price, as a leader in technology and ethics, Google faces a critical juncture. Can Google afford to tacitly endorse or passively overlook a situation where its brand is utilized to mask a system designed for audit evasion and information opacity? We urge Google to:

1. **Conduct an immediate and thorough investigation** into the detailed contractual relationships and operational integrations between NEC, Sky, and municipalities utilizing Google Workspace for Education in Japan.
2. **Evaluate the ethical and brand implications** of partners engaging in practices that appear to deliberately circumvent transparency and accountability in public sector deployments.
3. **Take decisive action** to ensure that all partners operating within the Google ecosystem adhere to the highest standards of transparency, ethical conduct, and data governance, particularly in sensitive sectors like education.

The integrity of Google's brand and the future of transparent digital education depend on this decisive intervention.

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