

Change what a metric *means*, break the comparison

One mechanism of institutional communication — how quietly redefining a reported measure destroys comparability with the past while the label stays the same.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to the way institutions communicate — press releases, official statements, guidance documents, corrections, embargoes — the packaging between a record and the public, examined the same way regardless of which institution or which side it favors. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with primary documents, regulations, and nonpartisan scholarship listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS — INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

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Redefined Metric Breaks the Series

Mensura Mutata

Governing precedent / case Metric and definition changes **Status** Recurring in dashboards and reporting

OBSERVED SPECIMEN	AGENCY AND COMPANY PERFORMANCE METRICS
<i>An institution reports a metric — “cases,” “cleared,” “on-time,” “active users” — then changes what counts under that label: a new case definition, a different clock for “on-time,” a broader “active” threshold. The label stays the same while the definition moves, so a jump or drop at the changeover looks like real performance rather than a redefinition. Unlike a documented statistical-agency methodology change, these are often announced quietly or not at all, and the pre- and post-change numbers are presented as one continuous series.</i>	

THE HOOK	THE MECHANISM
The metric's name is unchanged, so a definitional shift reads as a real move in the thing measured.	Redefining what a label counts breaks comparability across the change; without a disclosed break or a bridged series, the discontinuity is invisible.

Field mark: when a reported metric jumps at a specific date, ask whether its *definition* changed — a redefined measure under the same label is not the same series, and the break is often unannounced.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

REFERENCE · STANDARDS

GAO, standards for consistency and disclosure in performance reporting.

<https://www.gao.gov/>

Nonpartisan guidance that changes in how a measure is defined must be disclosed to preserve comparability.

REFERENCE · CDC

CSTE/CDC surveillance case-definition changes as a documented (contrast) example.

<https://ndc.services.cdc.gov/>

How a formal, dated definition change is handled — the standard a quiet redefinition falls short of.

Reading a Metric Over Time: A Gut Check

four questions before a jump in a dashboard convinces you something really changed

- 1 Watch the changeover date**
A jump at one date can be a redefinition, not a result.
- 2 Ask what ‘counts’ now**
The label can stay while the definition moves.
- 3 Demand a bridge**
Comparable series disclose the break or show old and new.
- 4 Contrast with agencies**
Statistical agencies document changes; a silent one is a flag.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 10 of the Institutional Communications section within Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens is listed on the cover. This section joins Elections, Federal Laws, and Official Data Reporting within Civics, with local government planned beyond it. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.