"How can we make better use of the information locked away in bureaucracies? Traversing Digital Babel expertly helps us to understand the dysfunctions of existing governmental information systems, but also offers a compelling solution to facilitate greater sharing of government data. “—Donald P. Moynihan, Professor of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin–Madison, author of The Dynamics of Performance Management

"How can we unleash data-sharing in government that is beneficial to society? In this original, eye-opening study, Alon Peled takes us deep into a world of data huggers and explains how we can turn these data darners into data sharers. Peled is an optimist with a plan!”—Arjen Boin, Professor of Public Institutions and Governance, Leiden University; editor of Public Administration

Alon Peled presents a clever solution to a pervasive problem: the failure of government agencies to share information. In lucid prose that draws extensively on real-world experience, Peled shows how market principles can spur information sharing—and carefully assesses the technical and ethical problems associated with a market-based approach. “—Alasdair Roberts, Jerome L. Rappaport Professor of Law and Public Policy, Suffolk University Law School; author of Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age

The computer systems of government agencies are notoriously complex. New technologies are piled on older technologies, creating layers that call to mind an archaeological dig. Obsolete programming languages and closed mainframe designs offer barriers to integration with other agency systems. Worldwide, these unwieldy systems waste billions of dollars, keep citizens from receiving services, and—even as seen in interoperability failures on 9/11 and during Hurricane Katrina—cost lives. In this book, Alon Peled offers a groundbreaking approach for enabling information sharing among public sector agencies: using selective incentives to “nudge” agencies to exchange information assets. Peled proposes the establishment of a Public Sector Information Exchange (PSIE), through which agencies would trade information assets. After describing public sector information sharing failures and the advantages of incentivized sharing, Peled examines the U.S. Open Data program, and the gap between its rhetoric and results. He offers examples of creative public sector information sharing in the United States, Australia, Brazil, the Netherlands, and Iceland. Peled argues that information is a contested commodity and draws lessons from the trade histories of other contested commodities—including cadavers for anatomical dissection in nineteenth-century Britain. He explains how agencies can exchange information in a controlled environment through a PSIE program tailored to an individual country’s needs, and he describes the legal, economic, and technical foundations of such a program. Touching on issues from data ownership to freedom of information, Peled offers pragmatic advice to politicians, bureaucrats, technologists, and citizens for revitalizing critical information flows.

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In his new book Traversing Digital Babel: Information, E-Government, and Exchange (MIT 2014), Alon Peled, associate professor of political science at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, conceptualizes a platform that would incentivize inter-agency information sharing. Called the Public Sector Information Exchange (PSIE), the platform would not only enable the trading of information, but also offers the valuation of information assets. Traversing Digital Babel expertly helps us to understand the dysfunctions of existing governmental information systems, but also offers a compelling solution to facilitate greater sharing of government data. Donald P. Moynihan. Professor of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison; author of The Dynamics of Performance Management.