
WISDOM FOR IT GOVERNANCE: A PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ART OF WAR

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Abstract

In a cyber-war age, it is not an exaggeration to compare the importance of IT governance systems of organizations as national defense systems that protect national security. The high-speed development of information technology has triggered a surge in its applications and related investments, which has greatly promoted the way of working within organizations. As a disruptive model, information technology has penetrated all aspects of the organizations, and even played some important alternative roles. Even in the era of peace, international competition has never stopped but has intensified, having formed a competitive trend in the development of global information technology. Facing the current complex business environment, an organization needs to have well-addressed strategies. Consequently, IT governance within the organizations must be conducted and better strengthened. As it is a part of organizational governance, it is necessary to systematically and comprehensively ensure that information technology-related investments have organization value from a high level of strategic assessment, as well as reduce information technology-related risks, to guarantee organizations the whole performance and competitive advantages. The wisdom of IT governance is the top priority of IT governance. Because the organization's IT governance wisdom embodies a philosophical conception. It affects the formulation and implementation of IT governance strategies, and it is also the demonstration of full-scale capabilities. The lack of IT governance wisdom will cause a scarcity of

comprehensive positions, viewpoints, and methods, and ultimately fail to guide IT governance practices wisely. Therefore, IT governance wisdom is of great significance to successfully steer related work.

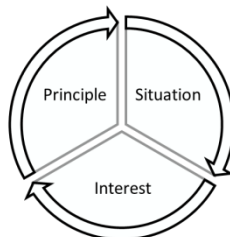
And this study takes, in particular, a direction to emphasize the strengthening of this kind of awareness of overall wisdom in IT governance within organizations. With this extremely specific interest, a practical treasury of wisdom of predecessors was identified. *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu is the earliest extant military book in China and the earliest military work in the world. It is a representative embodiment of Chinese culture and wisdom in the large collection of books. Sun Tzu, a Chinese military strategist used *The Art of War* — a treatise on military philosophy, which is known as the sacred canon of military strategies, to reveal the laws of war and competition especially on the high unification of theories and methods. This is also the main reason why *The Art of War* certainly has been always respected by militarists and all over the world with its enduring appeal. Because it was the earliest essay to reveal the most profound and abundant adaptable wisdom — “Sun Tzu has clearer vision, more profound insight, and eternal freshness” in the field of pragmatic books (Tzu & Griffith, 2005, p. 5). Different and more valuable is that Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* is caution for arising a war and if it is inevitable, one should strive to win with wisdom not reckless (Tzu & Griffith, 2005, p. 5). The value of knowledge and learning lies in certainty, and the value of wisdom lies in guiding more rational trade-offs in practice with critical thinking and spirit (Tzu & Griffith, 2005, p. 5). Due to the time-honored history, different culture, language forms and other objective obstacles, the wisdom of this jewel of the ancient Chinese military is not well known by people outside the military field. It is thence the duty of this study to ensure that the elaboration is properly representative of the quintessence of *The Art of War*. The importance of strategies-gathering is self-evident in the wider context, not only for the military but also for organizations, especially in the time dominated by information technology. IT governance is a crucial part for governance systems of organizations in the digital age, in which IT governance has become one of indispensable cores. Thus, how much actual value does it have for IT governance of organizations on the occasion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)? How to further enrich wisdom for practical combat performance on the basis of existing IT governance theories? To seek to understand these reflections, the research will further explore the following issues, specifically:

- *What is IT governance good for?*
- *Why is it said that good IT governance is a key factor for organizational success?*
- *Why could the philosophy of The Art of War be a reference solution for IT governance?*
- *How can the wisdom of The Art of War be used for IT governance?*

This study aims to analyze IT governance from the perspective of the philosophical thinking of *The Art of War*, while it might have been unknown to IT governance. The research adopts the qualitative approach and starts from the literature review. Through the historical retrospect of the evolution of origin of IT governance, the study aims to clarify its status and issues encountered in the application of related theories. Then they will be analyzed with the philosophical point of view in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, to enlighten us about the future strategic development direction and measures of IT governance to face up to the new challenge brought by highly intensive digitalization. Specifically, through the study of the inherited strategies, the purpose of this research is to provide a reference solution for IT governance within most organizations in the process of formulating strategies in a manner of wisdom expansion to efficiently respond to challenging changes in the digital era.

Through the elaboration and analysis of a series of previous questions, this research has brought two main research results. We have found that the period when the origin of IT governance concept came into being, namely, no earlier than the late 1990s, highly likely at the beginning of the 21st century. Then, from digital perspective, we analyzed important features which are the high priority of good IT governance. Firstly, it innovatively created added business value. Secondly, it promoted the inclusion of organizational strategies to the height of digitalization. Thirdly, the strategic significance of IT governance to guarantee performance mechanism within organizations. Besides, we have also argued the application of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* wisdom to IT governance thinking from three aspects to optimize organizational governance, which are: ‘道’ (*dào*), the so-called ‘Principle’; ‘势’ (*shì*), the so-called ‘Situation’; ‘利’ (*lì*), the so-called ‘Interest’. They are also corresponding respectively, the three main reasons of good IT governance are an organization's success' key factor, namely: principle of IT governance, horizontal comparison of IT governance, flexibility of IT governance. The origin of the concept of IT governance indicates that it is aimed at better serving the overall governance of organizations.

Figure 1. The three essences of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*



The realization of organizational governance needs to be fulfilled by IT governance implemented with the principle as the starting point, the overall vision as the focus, flexibility as the implementation ability. As IT governance is a repeatable, rational process to collect ideas, select projects and prioritize the implementation of these ideas and projects (Hites & Block, 2010). And IT governance is due to support the organization in achieving its strategic objectives (Bhattacharya, 2018; Wautelet, 2019). Additionally, we are entering the second phase of the digital transformation, as well as the exploration of IT governance continues. At this critical moment, we aim to introduce a philosophical perspective to help people view issues in this field more rationally and more wisely. We have all reasons to believe that the wisdom of IT governance will bring out a huge impact on the overall governance of the organization in the IT era.

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