

# IT Governance in Public Organizations: A Systematic Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

Despite being one of the widely researched topics, information technology governance (IT governance) in the context of public organizations is less explored. A systematic literature review is conducted to provide an overview of the current status of the research area and propose future research directions. Databases indexing the reputable journals and top conference proceedings in the information systems area were searched to collect articles for analysis. A total of 109 relevant articles were identified and included in the analysis of the literature review. The findings of the literature are presented according to the research questions, and potential research directions are proposed.

## KEYWORDS

Best Practices, Exploratory Studies, Frameworks, IT Governance, Literature Review, Models, Public Organizations

## INTRODUCTION

Information technology (IT) governance, defined as “the decision rights and accountability framework for encouraging desirable behaviors in the use of IT” (Weill & Ross, 2004, p. 2) has become indispensable to support, as well as sustain the growth of businesses. In the information systems (IS) literature, IT governance has been one of the topics garnering the interest of many researchers in the last 20 years (Almeida, Pereira & da Silva, 2013). This interest is no surprise given the role of IT for today’s organizations. IT has increasingly become not only the supporter but also the driver of efficiency, growth, and sustainability for organizations. This pervasive use of technology in organizations regardless of size, sector or industry has created dependency on IT which in turn brought new challenges for leaders (Almeida et al., 2013; Al Omari, Barnes & Pitman, 2013). Indeed, IT governance has been recognized to be one of the critical issues that determine whether organizations succeed in achieving their overall organizational objectives using IT (Dawson et al., 2016; Weill, 2004; Weill & Ross, 2004; Wilkin, Campbell & Moore, 2013). The attention given to IT governance by researchers and practitioners is further justified as the empirical evidence show that organizations that managed to design and implement effective IT governance that instills favorable behaviors are likely to improve their return on IT investments. Weill & Ross (2004, p. 3-4) describe effective IT governance as “an actively designed set of IT governance mechanisms that encourage behavior consistent with the organization’s mission, strategy, values, norms, and culture”. The authors argue that organizations have various IT governance mechanisms they can choose

DOI: 10.4018/IJITBAG.2018070103

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from to help them encourage desirable behavior. These include committees, budgeting processes, approvals, IT organizational structure, chargeback, etc. According to Dawson et al. (2016), the trend in the continued introduction of IT across industries indicates that the issue of IT governance will remain of interest to practitioners and researchers alike. Particularly, studies have shown that IT governance has become an important issue for the leaders of public organizations with the interest of maximizing the value from their expenditure in IT (Rusu & Viscusi, 2017). Despite the long list of previous IT governance studies focus on examining various IT governance propositions, Brown & Grant (2005) argue that only a few researchers have investigated IT governance in public organizational settings. This gap in the literature is also reflected in previous studies (for instance, Campbell et al., 2010; Scholl et al., 2011; Winkler, 2013) that proposed future studies to investigate IT governance in public organizational settings. From the IT governance perspective, such studies are justified given the inherent difference between the private and public organizations. For instance, according to Nicoll (2005), the accountability required in public organization is much more stringent than in the private sector. Besides the variety and volume of IT services provided by public organizations is by far greater than private organizations (Winkler, 2013). However, sectoral differences are largely ignored when it comes to IT governance and business-IT alignment literature (Campbell et al., 2010; Rusu & Jonathan, 2017). This study intends to address the gap in IT governance literature in public organizations by performing a systematic literature review with the aim of furthering our understanding of the topic. The main objective of this study is to shed light on the overview of previous IT governance studies in public organizations and to identify potential future research directions.

The remainder of the paper is structured as the following. In the next section, the detailed research method is presented. In the subsequent section, the results of the review will be discussed according to the research questions. The last section presents the conclusions that provide a summary of the main findings and suggestions for future research.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Systematic literature reviews, particularly in diverse disciplines as information systems, are invaluable as they help researchers to identify research gaps and inspiration for future research directions (Vom Brocke et al., 2015; Weber & Watson, 2002). Previous studies are sources of research designs and frameworks that help us develop an understanding of a research domain. A systematic literature review is chosen for this study to identify, evaluate and synthesize the collection of previous studies produced by researchers (Fink, 2010; Okoli, 2015). Systematic literature reviews also provide readers with a comprehensive report on the current state of knowledge in the research area (Templier & Parè, 2015). The methodology chosen for the review has looked to address the lack of overview of IT governance studies in the public organizational context. This systematic literature review has two main objectives: (1) to identify, classify and summarize the current IT governance studies in the public organizations settings, and (2) to reveal potential future research directions. In consistent with similar literature reviews in the IS discipline (e.g., Brown & Grant, 2005; Webb, Polland & Ridley, 2006), the review was conducted by following the guidelines as suggested by Kitchenham et al. (2009), and Okoli & Schabram (2010), and Webster & Watson (2002).

### Research Questions

Formulating research questions is deemed necessary to help in systematically presenting the analysis of the articles collected. Research questions are also suggested to be invaluable in determining the content of a systematic literature review (Attard et al., 2015; Iden & Eikebrokk, 2015). For this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

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