ARCHITECTURE · IAM REFERENCE BLUEPRINT

A blueprint for the identities your old IAM platform was not built for.

Reference architectures most enterprise IAM programs follow were drawn for a 2018 world. By 2026 machine identities outnumber humans 144 to 1, and a new class of agentic AI workloads is creating short-lived, high-privilege credentials at machine speed. This is the blueprint that holds.

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Pillars: governance, authentication, authorization, monitoring	Identity classes: workforce, customer, machine, AI agent	Integration surfaces where most programs actually fail	IAM domains: IGA · PAM · AM · CIEM · CIAM · PIAM · vIAM

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AUDIENCE	CISOs, IAM Architects, Platform Owners
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§ 01 · THE FOUR IDENTITY CLASSES

Govern each class with the right tool. Don't pretend they're one problem.

The first failure in most IAM programs is collapsing four very different identity classes into one operating model. Each class has its own lifecycle, its own authentication assumptions, its own threat model, and its own governance cadence. A blueprint that does not treat them separately ends up either over-controlling humans or under-controlling everything else.

IDENTITY CLASS	LIFECYCLE DRIVER	PRIMARY CONTROL	RIGHT TOOL CATEGORY
Workforce	HR system of record (joiner / mover / leaver)	RBAC tied to job role, with SoD checks and certifications	IGA platform (SailPoint, Saviynt) with HR connector
Customer	Self-registration or partner provisioning	Risk-based authentication, consent, fraud signals	CIAM platform (Okta CIC, Ping, Auth0)
Privileged human	Privileged role grants and break-glass workflows	Vaulted credentials, session recording, just-in-time elevation	PAM platform (CyberArk, BeyondTrust, Delinea)
Machine & AI agent	Pipeline event, deploy event, agent invocation	Workload identity federation, ephemeral tokens, secret rotation	Cloud-native + NHI governance (SPIRE, Astrix, Entro, Aembit)

THE 2018 ASSUMPTION THAT NO LONGER HOLDS

The 2018 IAM playbook assumed humans dominated the directory and machines were a rounding error. That assumption is now inverted. In cloud-native environments the ratio runs 40–100 machine identities per human user — and crosses 500 to 1 in the most automated estates.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

A program that uses one platform to govern all four classes ends up with HR-driven certification cycles applied to ephemeral workloads, and risk-based fraud scoring applied to nightly batch jobs. The governance noise is loud; the actual coverage is thin.

> **Quarterly access reviews of four million service accounts is a fiction. Activity-based certification is the only operating model that survives the math.**
>
> — PRACTITIONER FIELD NOTE

§ 02 · THE FOUR PILLARS

What the blueprint actually consists of.

01 PILLAR · IDENTITY GOVERNANCE

Know who and what exists, and what they can reach.

An IGA platform connected to the HR system of record for human identities, plus a parallel governance surface for non-human identities that ingests inventories from cloud providers, secrets vaults, and CI/CD systems. Activity-based certification replaces calendar-based certification for machine identities.

02 PILLAR · AUTHENTICATION

How the identity proves itself at the point of access.

Phishing-resistant MFA (FIDO2 keys or platform passkeys) for all interactive logins; SMS retired. For machine workloads, workload identity federation issuing short-lived tokens — never long-lived static credentials. The 217% rise in MFA fatigue attacks is the warning that push alone is not an end-state.

03 PILLAR · AUTHORIZATION

What the identity is allowed to do once authenticated.

Least privilege as a default; RBAC for predictable patterns; ABAC for context-sensitive decisions; JIT elevation for high-impact actions. The blueprint requires authorization decisions to be consistent across *all* access paths to a resource — not just the front door.

04 PILLAR · MONITORING & RESPONSE

Identity events as first-class security telemetry.

ITDR — the discipline of treating authentication, authorization, and entitlement-change events as security signals — with detection logic for the anomalies EDR and SIEM tend to miss. ITDR is now distinct from SIEM in mature programs, often via dedicated tooling from CrowdStrike, Microsoft, or Silverfort.

A common gap, named.

Authorization controls in the IAM platform are routinely bypassed by direct database access, console access on cloud resources, or SaaS admin consoles that were onboarded with SSO but not with SCIM. The result is a platform that *looks* governed at the front door and is wide open at the side. Closing that gap is the difference between a Defined and a Managed program in §05.

ITDR ≠ SIEM

SIEM aggregates logs. ITDR understands identity. The detection logic that catches cross-tenant SSO anomalies, dormant reactivation, and service accounts that suddenly become interactive is not in the default SIEM ruleset — it has to be modeled against identity behavior.

§ 03 · REFERENCE ARCHITECTURE

Eight integration surfaces every 2026 IAM program must operate.

Each surface is a well-defined boundary where identity data flows between the IAM platform and the rest of the enterprise. In our consulting practice these eight surfaces are also where most programs are broken: an HR connector pushing stale data, an SSO integration that skips MFA, an OAuth grant that no one owns, a secrets vault that is not in the inventory.

01
HR → IGA
JML events, org structure, manager hierarchy.

02
IGA → IDP
Provisioning, group memberships, attribute changes.

03
IDP → Apps
SSO assertions, JIT provisioning, deprovisioning.

04
PAM → Targets
Vaulted credentials, session brokering, command audit.

05
CIEM → Cloud
Effective permissions, role assignments, policy violations.

06
Secrets → Workloads
Short-lived credentials issued at runtime to authenticated workloads.

07
CIAM → Customer apps
Authentication, MFA, fraud signals, consent records.

08
ITDR → SOC
Identity event telemetry, detection signals, response actions.

#	SURFACE	WHAT FLOWS ACROSS IT	COMMON FAILURE MODE
01	HR system → IGA (system of record)	Joiner / mover / leaver events; org structure; manager hierarchy	Stale HR feed creates ghost accounts and orphaned access
02	IGA → identity providers (Entra, Okta, Ping)	Provisioning instructions, group memberships, attribute changes	Drift between IGA-managed and IDP-direct group memberships
03	IDP → applications (SSO, SCIM)	Authentication assertions, JIT provisioning, deprovisioning	Apps onboarded with SSO but not SCIM, leaving local accounts
04	Privileged access (PAM) → target systems	Vaulted credentials, session brokering, command auditing	Direct console access bypasses PAM; privileged credentials in scripts
05	Cloud IAM (CIEM) → cloud providers	Effective permissions, role assignments, policy violations	IAM Identity Center / AWS SSO drift; unmanaged policies
06	Secrets vault → workloads	Short-lived credentials issued at runtime to authenticated workloads	Hardcoded secrets in code, .env files, CI/CD logs
07	CIAM → customer-facing apps	Authentication, MFA, fraud signals, consent records	Self-built auth that bypasses CIAM; weak password policies
08	ITDR → SOC and identity providers	Identity event telemetry, detection signals, response actions	Authentication logs sit in IDP, never reach the SOC

THESE EIGHT SURFACES ARE NOT OPTIONAL

A 2026 IAM blueprint that omits any one of them is operating with a known gap. We publish this list because the same gap shows up in 80%+ of the programs we assess on day one of an engagement.

§ 04 · AI AGENTS IN THE BLUEPRINT

What changed when agents started authenticating.

The IAM blueprint of 2018–2024 did not have AI agents in it. By 2026 they are an architectural concern, not an emerging one.

Three architectural decisions to make explicit.

1. Authenticate as an NHI, not as the human. Every AI agent authenticates as a non-human identity, never as the human who invoked it. Treating the agent as an extension of the user, even briefly, breaks accountability.

2. Time-bound by default. An agent that needs database write access for a thirty-second task should not hold that access for an hour, much less indefinitely.

3. Log separately from human activity. Agent activity is logged in a way that lets the SOC detect drift from its original purpose.

PATTERN · BOUNDED EPHEMERAL IDENTITY

Each AI agent invocation creates a fresh NHI bound to the specific task, with scoped permissions, TTL shorter than expected duration, and credentials issued through workload identity federation. Supported by SPIRE, AWS IAM Roles Anywhere, GCP/Azure Workload Identity — should be the default, not the advanced config.

§ 05 · MATURITY LADDER

Where most enterprises are, and what each step costs.

STAGE	WORKFORCE IAM	PRIVILEGED ACCESS	MACHINE + AI IDENTITY
Initial	Multiple directories, manual provisioning	Shared admin accounts, no vault	Hardcoded secrets, no inventory
Developing	Single IDP, password-based MFA, ticket-driven	Vault deployed for some accounts; partial session capture	Some secrets in vault; no rotation, no governance
Defined	IGA platform, role model, certifications, SCIM	PAM enforced for all interactive privileged access; JIT for some	NHI inventory exists but is incomplete; manual reviews
Managed	Phishing-resistant MFA default, CIEM live, ITDR feeding SOC	Standing privilege near-zero; all sessions recorded and analyzed	Workload identity federation; automated rotation; JIT issuance
Optimized	Continuous certification; behavioral risk scoring	Adaptive privilege; real-time anomaly response	Bounded ephemeral identity for AI agents; full activity-based governance

§ 06 · HOW WE HELP

Four engagement models, mapped to where the program is broken.

IdentityLogic Consulting fixes broken IAM programs across the seven domains the blueprint covers: **IGA, PAM, AM, CIEM, CIAM, PIAM, and vIAM**. The mapping below is how we line up against the architecture issues in this paper.

ENGAGEMENT MODEL	WHERE IT FITS	WHAT WE DELIVER
Advisory	No current architecture; fragmented platforms; audit findings stacking up	Current-state assessment across seven domains; target architecture mapped to the eight integration surfaces; platform selection; three-horizon roadmap with prioritized risk reduction
Implementation	Strategy is set; engineering execution is the gap	End-to-end SailPoint, Saviynt, Okta, CyberArk, BeyondTrust, and Ping engineering by practitioners who have shipped at Fortune-500 scale, including HR integrations, SCIM provisioning, custom workflows, and cutover planning
Managed Support	Live IAM platform; operational drift; certification cycles slipping; NHI inventory rotting	Steady-state run-and-improve: connector health, certification cycles, policy tuning, NHI inventory and rotation, secrets governance, monthly governance reporting to the CISO
Fractional Leadership	No IAM owner — or the seat is vacant and a full-time hire is six months out	vIAM (virtual IAM leadership) covering strategy, vendor management, audit response, and stakeholder communication on a fractional basis

SCHEDULE A FREE 30-MINUTE IAM ASSESSMENT CALL

Practitioner conversations, not sales pitches.

We work primarily with security leaders and IAM architects who already know they have a program problem. IdentityLogic Consulting LLC is a Minority-Owned Small Business based in Arlington, VA.

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SOURCES

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