KuppingerCole Report

WHITEPAPER

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IAM Projects Done Right: Everything as a Service

Delivering on IAM is not always easy. Many organizations have experienced IAM projects stalling. An approach for one-stop-shopping can help, where the implementation, the IDaaS style deployment (Identity as a Service), and operations and continuous evolution go hand-in-hand, resulting in an efficient and modern TOM (Target Operation Model).

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Content

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1 Executive Summary

While IAM projects have a reputation of being complex and bearing the risk of failure, making such projects a success is by no means "rocket science". It is a matter of thoughtful planning. It is a matter of proper execution. It is a matter of good project management and project governance.

Success is also a matter of choosing the right partners and technologies. Picking the right technology or technologies starts with the requirements analysis. While most organizations have some focus on that part, there is less emphasis on identifying the right partners. However, partners help in making projects a success, from guiding through the conceptual phases, supporting in the choice of tools, to implementation and operations.

These stages, starting with the implementation, followed by customization, and leading to operational support over years, are essential for making an IAM project a long-term success and for transitioning from project into production.

A key element in that transition and the ongoing operations is the definition of a TOM (Target Operating Model), which describes the various functions within an IAM organization, and the responsibilities for these functions. Responsibilities in modern, IDaaS based IAM implementations, are commonly split between multiple parties. Aside of internal IAM and business teams, there are commonly both MSPs (Managed Service Providers) and the CSPs (Cloud Service Providers) for the IDaaS service involved. Dealing with multiple parties requires a clear definition of provider and tenant responsibilities, as well as a strong IAM governance.

Another key factor for project success is getting away from traditional, customization-heavy approaches towards standards-based implementations that utilize the out-of-the-box capabilities of software. Wherever customization is needed, there needs to be an approach favorizing configuration over coding, and for segregating custom code via APIs (Application Programming Interfaces).

A one-stop-shopping approach can help in mastering the inherent complexity of IAM deployments and operations. It reduces the number of involved parties in a program or project, and thus simplifies the assignment of responsibility. The dependency on a single provider that arises in such approach must be balanced against the advantages. Aside of limiting the complexity within the TOM, advantages can stem from increased consistency in the approach for configuring and customizing the solution. The more the partner acts as both MSP and CSP, the higher also the chance that the partner will provide a high degree of standardization based on best practices in the solution, limiting the customization effort.

Making IAM programs and projects a success requires a thorough understanding of the requirements, well thought out decisions about the tools, the right organization, and the right partnerships.

2 Key Findings

- IAM projects frequently suffer from taking a technical perspective and not putting sufficient focus on the organizational aspects of an IAM program, from requirements definition to the TOM (Target Operating Model). It is essential that organizations spend sufficient time and effort in the planning phase.
- The TOM must become a central element in the planning. It defines the roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved, from internal teams to external service providers. It also describes the transition from project to the line organization.
- Another common pitfall arises from customization done wrong. In general, configuration must be favored over coding. Where coding is required, segregation of custom code is essential. Modern IAM architectures, based on microservices and exposing a broad range of APIs (Application Programing Interfaces) support such segregation.
- IAM involves many parties. Aside of the TOM, choosing the right partner is a key success factor. While specialized skills are important, dealing with too many partners frequently leads to issues in the projects and for operations. Thus, considering working with a strategic partner that supports deployment, customization, and operations should be evaluated as an approach for reducing complexity.

3 The broader perspective on IAM success: Beyond technical delivery

IAM projects, being cross-divisional and affecting many different systems, are more complex than most other IT projects. Success in these projects thus requires a thorough planning and a strong understanding of the requirements.

IAM projects have a reputation as being complex and bearing the risk of failure, which is a fair assessment. IAM projects require a thorough planning, due to their inherent complexity. Every IAM project is a cross-system, cross-departmental project, involving many parties and stakeholders. Such projects never are simple.

While there are many pitfalls in IAM, the three biggest failures that can be made are

- taking a tool-focused approach
- lacking a well-thought-out planning for the operations model
- missing to do a thorough requirements analysis

Success in IAM starts with a plan. IAM is way more than just a technical project of installing and running a tool.

At the end, it is about tools. However, it starts with analyzing the requirements, planning the project, and preparing the field of "people, processes & policies", ahead or (partially) in parallel to tools choice and implementation.

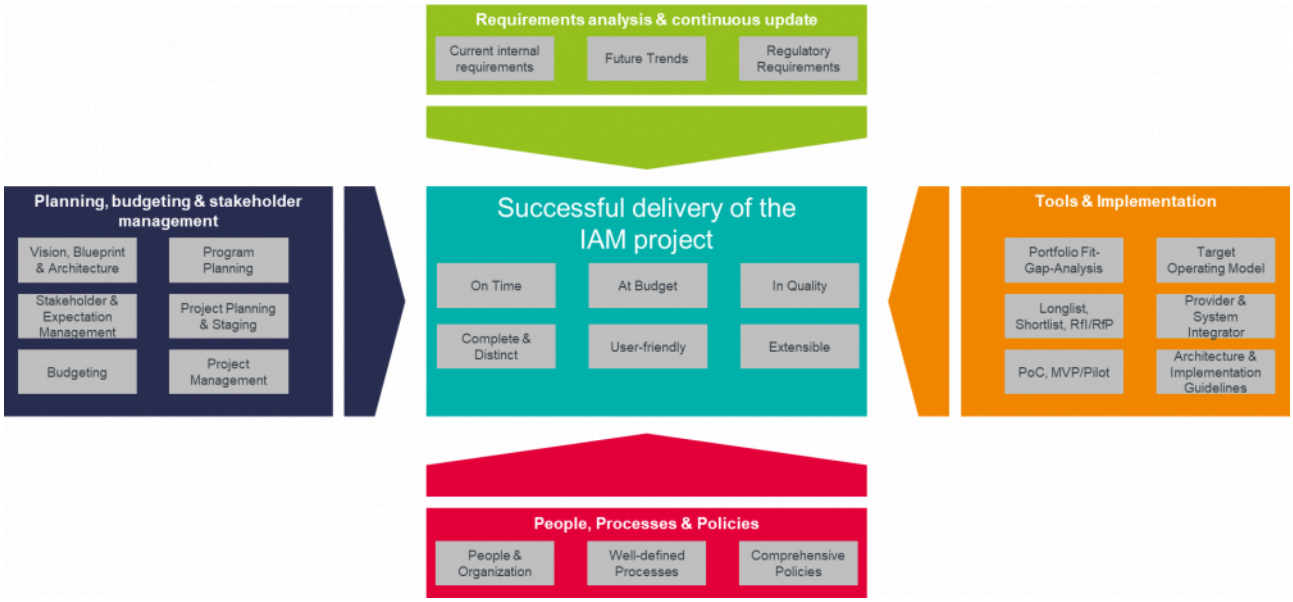

Figure 1: Success in IAM projects is based on a variety of factors - it is not only the tool, and it all starts with a good plan.

The KuppingerCole Analysts model for successful delivery of IAM projects describes four stages:

1. Requirements analysis & continuous update: The requirements within the organization, external drivers such as regulatory requirements, and the trends must be considered. When defining requirements, it is essential to not only look at the current state and known shortcomings but taking a broader perspective.
2. Planning, budgeting & stakeholder management: The planning phase involves a range of different activities. One is definition the high-level blueprint with vision and architecture. One is gathering the budget. One is the stakeholder management and the expectation management, including defining both the quick wins and the big wins in the program.
3. People, processes & policies: Success stays and falls with the people. Having the right team in place is essential, but it also requires defined processes and policies.
4. Tools & implementation: Finally, it is about identifying the right technology and making this work. This also includes the definition of a TOM, but also guidelines for architecture and implementation.

Projects must span all phases, starting with the first two, ensuring that teams and people, processes, and policies are in plans, and then selecting the right tool and enforcing a well-managed implementation.

The art is in limiting the number of partners involved, while having the right partners in place for the planning and execution stages. This includes defining how implementation transitions into production, into a defined TOM (Target Operating Model), where IDaaS (Identity as a Service) providers, system integrators and

consultancies, and the internal teams work hand-in-hand, with defined responsibilities. The foundation for a well-working TOM is set during the project work.

While IDaaS is not a must in this context, there is a logic within a modern TOM to shift towards some level of IDaaS. IDaaS spans a variety of as-a-service models for delivering and operating the IAM platforms. This can be a fully multi-tenant public cloud service, but also an MSP (Managed Service Provider) model where the MSP cares for deployment, patching, upgrades, and the operation. Most IDaaS models are in between these two extremes, i.e., single tenant, managed with IaC (Infrastructure as Code) approaches, and with a high degree of automation in operations.

4 The need for a modern TOM: Defining the roles of providers and tenants

IAM involves many different parties, from the business requesting and approving access and the internal IAM teams to external parties and CSPs providing the IDaaS solution. The roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined. A well-defined TOM is a key success factor for IAM.

One of the frequently overlooked aspects in planning for a successful IAM deployment and operations is the TOM. A TOM describes

- Deployment Model: This describes how and where the software is deployed. This also includes the operating model. For IAM, there is a wide range of options, from traditional on-premises installations to multi-tenant SaaS solutions.
- Functional areas: The various functions within an IAM program, from defining policies and implementing governance, must be defined, to assign responsibilities to roles.
- Responsibilities: The responsibilities within IAM must be assigned.

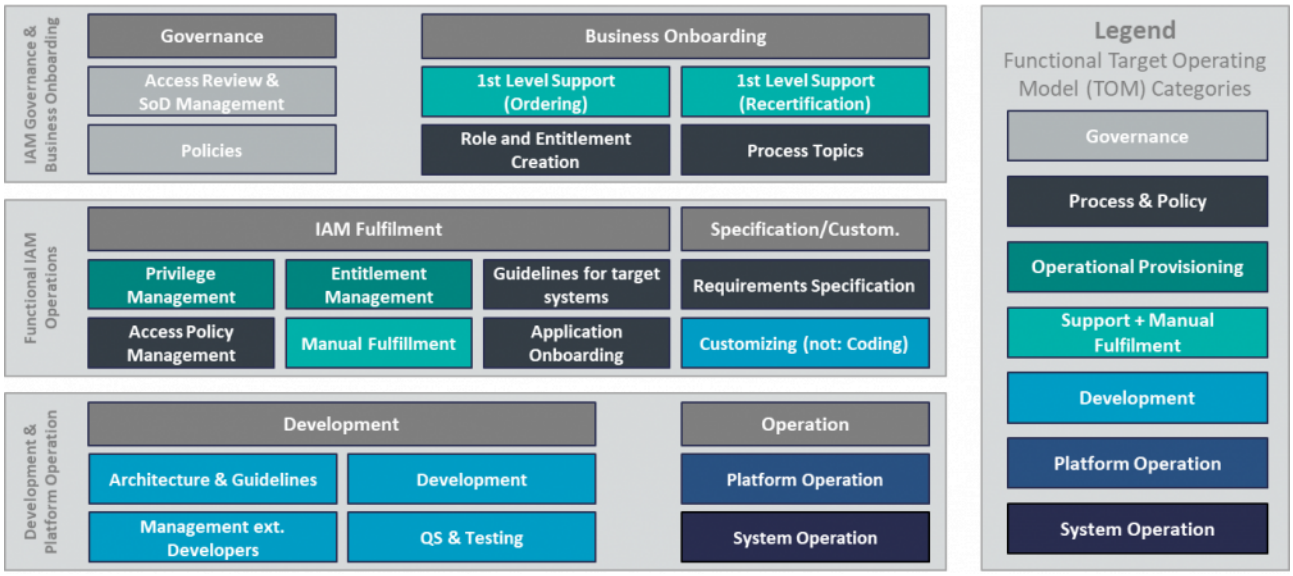

Figure 2: The functional categories of a Target Operating Model support in defining the responsibilities of involved parties.

Defining a TOM sets the foundation for the efficient and effective IAM operations, but also for splitting

responsibilities between the involved parties. Commonly, there are multiple parties such as

- Internal IAM team(s)
- Business teams
- System integrators
- Platform service providers

The internal IAM department commonly consists of multiple teams, from the business facing IAM team that supports in onboarding of users, in managing roles, and defines processes, to IAM Governance and IAM operations. Commonly, some of these teams transition from the project into operations, while others will change during this process, such as from system integration and basic configuration to continuous operations.

A defined TOM supports in understanding the different functions within IAM and assigning responsibilities to the various involved parties.

The assignment of responsibilities to various teams helps organizations in understanding and defining the tenant and provider responsibilities. In typical IDaaS deployments, there are two levels of providers, the IDaaS providers and the MSP that supports in operations and other tasks. A clear definition of responsibilities is mandatory and helps avoiding problems during the lifetime of the IAM implementation. The responsibilities of IDaaS providers and MSPs must be defined in the contracts.

While a well-thought-out TOM helps in coordinating between multiple involved parties, the rule must anyway be to keep the numbers of parties low. Having IDaaS and MSP combined provides the advantage of reducing the number of external providers and thus the friction that always exist, even in the best TOM.

5 The balance between standard and customization

In an ideal world, customers would be able to use an IAM solution without customization. The vast range of systems that must be connected, organizational specifics, and the wish for custom processes trigger customization. The art is to reduce the resulting complexity by following a well-defined process that reduces coding and segregates custom code from the standard solution.

Another success factor in IAM projects is staying in the standard wherever possible. This might also be referred to as "pragmatism". IDaaS has the advantage of providing more standardized capabilities than traditional IAM solutions. The focus is also on configuration, instead of coding. However, there always will be areas where coding is required, be it for specific custom features or for integration to other services. If coding is required, it is about segregating the custom code from the standard solution. Common IDaaS solutions provide comprehensive sets of APIs, which allow for such segregation.

Keeping the amount of customization under control starts at three places:

- Requirements Analysis: Requirements must be defined as functional or non-functional requirements, but not as technical implementation specifications. Too frequently, requirements don't focus on what needs to be provided, but how it needs to be implemented. This must be avoided. Furthermore, requirements must be prioritized. Discussions about whether requirements are relevant and to which extent help in setting focus and avoiding unnecessary customizations.
- Architecture & Implementation Guidelines: Architecture guidelines define the general approach for customizing, while implementation guidelines focus on how to do it right. Implementation guidelines should favor configuration over coding and force the use of a defined Identity API layer.
- Openness for other solutions: Frequently, there are several ways to fulfil a requirement. Moving away from "we always did it that way" towards a fair analysis of standard features helps in reducing complexity.

Both are elements of the abovementioned success factors for IAM projects. However, guidelines not only must be defined but enforced. The advantage is that modern IDaaS solutions simplify this, by allowing to create custom code in segregated microservices, abstracted via stable sets of APIs. Done right, custom code will remain unaffected by patches and updates.

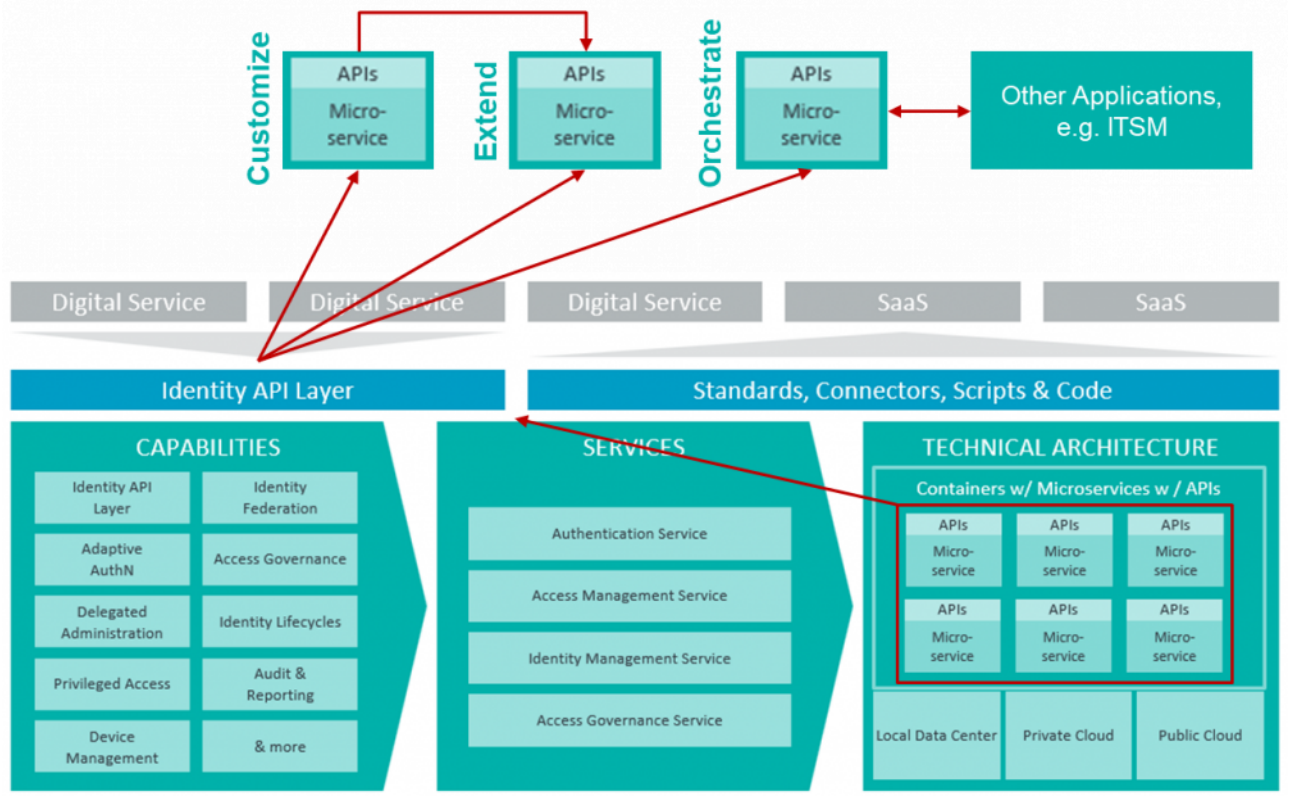

Figure 3: In a modern Identity Fabric, custom code can and must be well-segregated via APIs and put into separate microservices.

Well-planned projects and modern schemes for IAM help in mitigating inherent project risks and in increasing IAM efficiency.

Customization in modern IDaaS has become way simpler than ever before. With solutions following modern, microservices-based architectures, APIs have become the new normal, for both communication between the microservices, and for exposing capabilities. In a modern architecture such as the Identity Fabric defined by KuppingerCole Analysts, the external APIs are provided via a consistent and stable Identity API Layer. This allows to do customizations, extensions, and orchestrations for integration with other services in segregated microservices. These can even expose their own APIs.

6 The iC Consult & Service Layers offering: One-stop-shopping for IAM, across the globe

iC Consult, a leading global, independent advisory, system integrator, and services provider for Identity & Access Management (IAM), provides a one-stop-shopping approach for IAM, covering deployments and operations, but also providing a comprehensive MSP approach, and being able to support customers in industry-specific use cases and implementations.

iC Consult has established itself as the leading IAM system integrator globally, being present in Europe, North America and Asia. The company has partnerships with many of the leading IAM vendors, both traditional on-premises IAM solutions and modern IDaaS platforms. The functional coverage spans the entire IAM range from IGA (Identity Governance & Administration) to Access Management and PAM (Privileged Access Management), but also covers evolved areas such as PBAM (Policy-Based Access Management) and CIEM (Cloud Infrastructure Entitlement Management).

Additionally, iC Consult has a unit focusing on innovative, industry-specific IAM solutions, named xdi360, focusing on complex solutions such as CIAM (Customer IAM), identity for the connected vehicle, and other business-centric solutions.

The third part of iC Consult is Service Layers, which is focused on as-a-service deployments and operations of IAM solutions. Service Layers has created an umbrella around established, mature IAM solutions and delivers them as IDaaS, supporting all stages from deployment to the continuous operations. A specialization of Service Layers is their ability to operate solutions across the globe, including locations in North America, China, and Germany. This allows Service Layers to serve global organizations, specifically in manufacturing, which need a global IAM scheme, but local support in customization and operations.

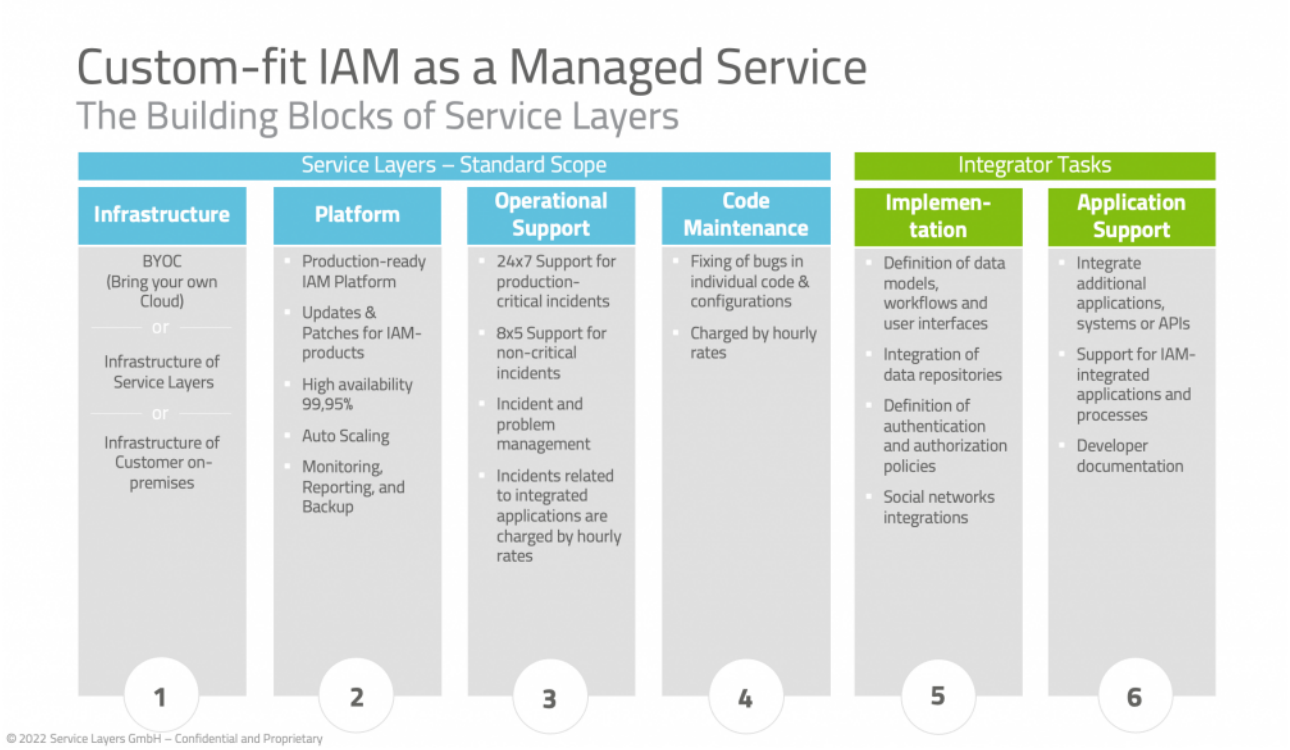

Figure 4: Custom-fit IAM as a Managed Service

iC Consult's value proposition deriving from these entities and their specializations is a one-stop-shopping approach for customers, covering strategic, business-centric IAM solutions, IAM implementation, customization, and operations. This is a rare combination in the market. While some of the global consultancies promise similar offerings, the degree of IAM specialization and the breadth and depth in experience with a variety of vendors is highly uncommon.

Looking at the complexities of an IAM project and its delivery across all stages from requirements analysis and defining the framework for implementation and customization to a successful definition and execution of a TOM, having lesser players involved can provide a significant advantage. A TOM where the IDaaS provider and the MSP providing additional services for operations and customizations are the same reduces interfaces and friction. An approach where the later MSP is at least involved in all stages from the start also reduces complexity. One could argue that this is about "putting all eggs in one basket". On the other hand, there are clear advantages of such approach. Customers always can opt for having other partners for critical stages such as selecting the service provider itself, tools choice, or some parts of guidelines and the structure of the TOM, to define the environment for the service provider.

Done right, a one-stop-shopping approach such as the one provided by iC Consult can reduce complexity and risks in IAM projects significantly and thus can drive project success.

7 Recommendations

For making IAM projects a success, the starting point always is planning. Never start with just picking a tool. Start with a plan. Critical success factors include

1. Understand your requirements.
2. Get the stakeholders on board.
3. Gather the required budget.
4. Plan your program and the projects within the program.
5. Define the processes and policies and set up a team.
6. Create the framework for implementation and operations, including a well-defined TOM.
7. Define your customization approach that doesn't break with updates and patches, allowing you to benefit from improvements of the selected tool(s).
8. Select the right partner(s) and ensure that you better have few, but well-selected partners, to reduce complexity of your project.
9. Manage and monitor your project.
10. Continuously analyze new requirements and their impact on the project.

Making an IAM project a success is not rocket science. It is about doing a project right, setting the right guardrails, and executing the project with the right partners and tools that fit to your requirements.

8 Related Research

Leadership Brief Leveraging Identity Fabrics on your way towards cloud based IAM
Leadership Brief Identity Fabrics: Connecting anyone to every service
Whitepaper The future of IAM lies in the cloud and as a service
Whitepaper Making IAM agile and working to the business
Executive View Service Layers Managed IAM
Whitepaper IAM: Globalization & Large-Scale Enterprise
Whitepaper Engineering successful IAM projects to support digital business

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