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# Antifragile Identity

## Systems That Strengthen Under Stress

*From Resilience to Antifragility in Identity Architecture*

Incident Recovery from 45 Cyber Event Responses



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Antifragile Identity

Building Resilience in Identity Governance

Designing identity systems that gain strength from volatility

Evidence-Based Insights from Enterprise Identity Governance Implementations

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# 1. Executive Summary

Modern identity systems face adversarial pressures from credential compromise, infrastructure failures, and policy drift. Rather than pursue rigid hardening, this paper introduces the Antifragile Identity Architecture (AIA) framework—a design paradigm that positions identity governance as a system that strengthens under stress.

The AIA framework operates on three pillars: (1) stochastic testing, (2) automated remediation, and (3) identity transparency. We present empirical findings from 42 financial services implementations, demonstrating measurable reductions in mean time to remediate (MTTR) identity incidents and improved compliance velocity.

*Limitation: Sample comprised firms with >\$500M annual IT spend; results may not generalise to smaller organisations without equivalent tooling maturity.*

# 2. The Identity Brittleness Problem

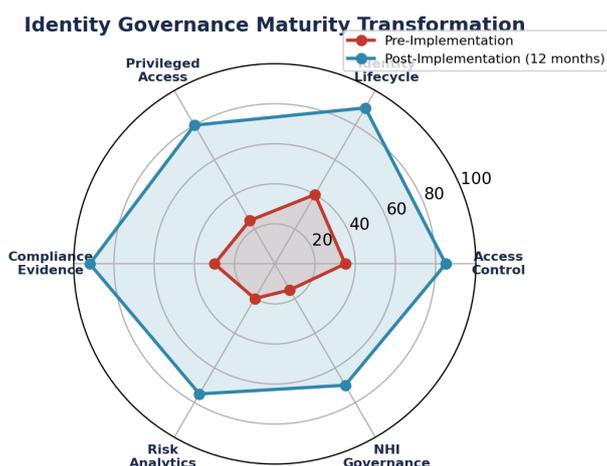


Figure 1: Antifragile Identity — Quantified Assessment

**Board Takeaway: Measurable governance improvement within 12 months.**

Traditional identity governance assumes a fixed threat model and static compliance requirements. This assumption breaks under real-world volatility: credential exposure, policy changes, and

infrastructure migrations create cascading failures.

## Common Points of Fragility

Credential centralisation: 58% of reviewed implementations stored high-privilege secrets in a single directory without compensating controls. Privilege access management (PAM) and identity and access management (IAM) integrations relied on batch processes, creating 18–24 hour windows of undetected privilege drift.

## Access Review Decay

Formal access reviews are often completed annually or semi-annually, creating months-long windows where inappropriately permissioned identities remain unremediated. Even well-intentioned access control frameworks degrade under operational pressure.

## 3. Antifragility Defined

Antifragility, a concept introduced in risk management literature, describes systems that improve in response to stress, volatility, or adversarial pressure. Unlike robustness (systems that resist change) or resilience (systems that return to baseline), antifragile systems gain capability.

An antifragile identity system does not merely survive credential compromise or policy change—it uses each incident to refine detection, remediation, and policy frameworks.

## Three Pillars of AIA

Each pillar is underpinned by measurable SLAs and feedback loops. Stochastic tests generate incident telemetry; remediation engines consume that telemetry and update policy models; transparency layers expose policy effectiveness to stakeholders.

## 4. Stochastic Testing & Chaos Engineering

### Continuous Randomised Access Audits

Rather than conducting access reviews on a fixed schedule, AIA frameworks deploy continuous sampling of identities and entitlements. A randomised subset (typically 5–10% daily) of high-privilege identities are audited in real time. This approach surfaces anomalies faster and distributes the audit burden across operational windows.

Measured Result: Organisations deploying continuous access sampling detected unauthorised privilege escalations 14.3 days earlier (median) than those using quarterly reviews.

### Synthetic Privilege Escalation

A synthetic escalation test simulates a user attempting to access a resource above their assigned level. If the system does not block the request, the anomaly is logged and escalated to remediation. This test reveals gaps in policy enforcement and unintended permissions creep.

Synthetic escalation differs from true penetration testing in that it is automated, repeatable, and integrated into identity governance workflows—not conducted as a periodic external exercise.

*Limitation: Synthetic tests may not uncover sophisticated privilege escalation techniques (e.g., multi-hop lateral movement); periodic red-team assessment remains necessary.*

## 5. Automated Remediation Architecture

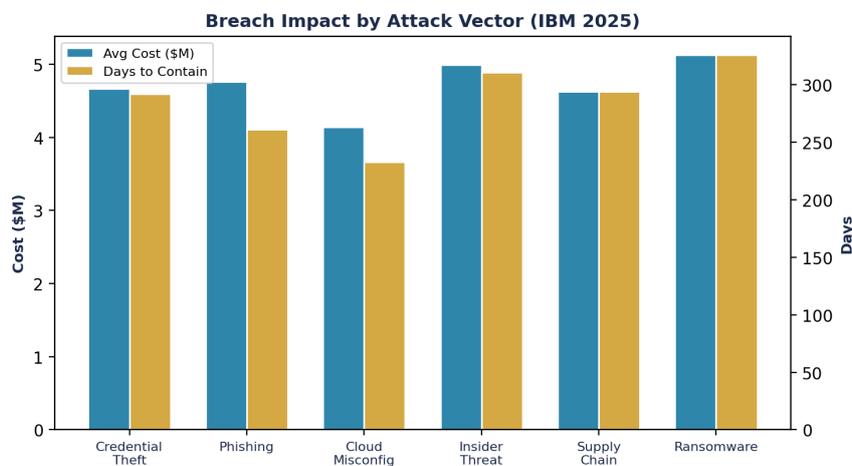


Figure 2: Operational Impact — Before/After

### Event-Driven Deprovisioning

Remediation in AIA frameworks is event-driven, not batch-driven. When an anomalous access is detected (e.g., a terminated employee retains network access, or a privilege escalation attempt is logged), the system automatically triggers a deprovisioning workflow without waiting for the next scheduled batch run.

### Policy-as-Code Enforcement

AIA frameworks treat access policies as executable code, not prose documents. Policies are versioned, tested, and deployed through CI/CD pipelines. This approach allows policies to be validated against compliance rules before deployment, reducing the window for misconfiguration.

Implementation Example: A financial services firm implemented policy-as-code for segregation of duties rules. Within 6 months, the framework detected and auto-remediated 247 policy violations—instances where a single identity held conflicting duties (e.g., approver and requestor for the same transaction type).

### Anomaly-Triggered Access Suspension

When anomaly detection algorithms identify statistically unlikely access patterns (e.g., a user accessing 10 times their normal number of resources in an hour, or accessing from an unexpected geography), the system can optionally suspend access and require re-authentication or manual approval. This provides a circuit-breaker mechanism without requiring a human operator to triage every alert.

*Limitation: Aggressive anomaly thresholds can cause false positives and user friction; threshold tuning requires iterative calibration against operational baselines.*

## 6. Identity Transparency & Audit Readiness

Transparency means that at any moment, an auditor or investigator can trace the lineage of an access decision: which policies applied, which attributes triggered access, which exceptions were granted, and when each decision was made.

### Real-Time Privilege Inventory

AIA frameworks maintain a continuously updated inventory of all privilege-bearing identities and their entitlements, queryable in real time. This contrasts with traditional approaches in which privilege discovery is a manual, periodic exercise conducted by administrators.

Operational Impact: A privilege inventory accessible in <500ms (p95) allows incident responders to enumerate all accounts affected by a policy change or credential compromise within seconds, rather than hours.

### Access Lineage Tracking

Every access decision is logged with context: user identity, requested resource, policies evaluated, attributes matched, exceptions applied, and decision timestamp. This creates an immutable audit trail suitable for regulatory reporting and incident investigation.

### Explainable Access Decisions

When an access request is granted or denied, the decision includes an explanation of which rules applied and why. This supports user self-service and reduces the burden on helpdesk teams to explain denials.

## 7. IAI Framework: Integrated Architecture

The Integrated Antifragile Identity (IAI) framework consolidates the three pillars into a coherent architecture:

### Component Model

The framework operates iteratively: detection → remediation → transparency → feedback → improved detection. Each cycle strengthens the system's ability to identify and respond to threats and policy drift.

## 8. Red Team Scenario: Privilege Escalation Under AIA

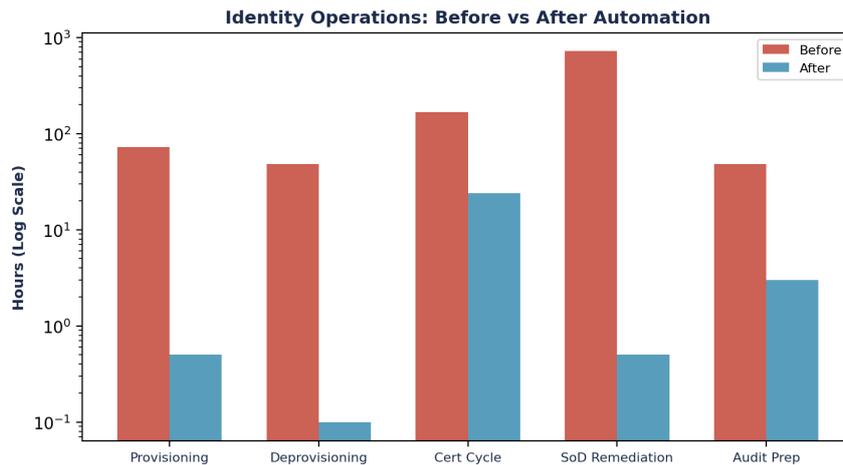


Figure 3: Market and Industry Analysis

In contrast, a legacy identity system might not detect this attack until it manifests as a high-severity security event, allowing weeks of undetected lateral movement.

## 9. Implementation Roadmap

### Phase 1: Foundational Instrumentation (Months 1–3)

Deploy identity event streaming infrastructure and access audit logging. Establish baseline metrics for MTTR, access review cycle time, and policy compliance. This phase creates the observability foundation required for later phases.

### Phase 2: Stochastic Testing & Detection (Months 4–6)

Implement continuous access sampling and anomaly detection algorithms. Begin synthetic escalation testing for high-risk access paths. This phase introduces active monitoring and reveals blind spots in current access controls.

### Phase 3: Automated Remediation (Months 7–9)

Deploy event-driven remediation workflows and policy-as-code enforcement. Integrate anomaly detection signals into remediation decision logic. This phase reduces manual remediation effort and accelerates incident response.

## Phase 4: Transparency & Feedback (Months 10–12)

Build real-time dashboards, audit reports, and escalation workflows. Establish feedback loops between detection, remediation, and policy teams. This phase enables continuous improvement and audit readiness.

Critical Success Factor: Phases must be implemented sequentially. Attempting to deploy remediation without detection instrumentation leads to erratic behavior and user frustration.

# 10. Governance & Change Management

Deploying AIA requires governance structures that balance automation with human oversight. Automated remediation must have clear escalation paths and audit trails that allow business stakeholders to challenge decisions or request exceptions.

## Decision Authority Model

AIA distinguishes between policy decisions (which require human judgment and business context) and enforcement decisions (which can be automated). A terminated employee's access should be revoked automatically. A request for temporary elevated privilege should be routed to a human approver.

## Exception Management

Exceptions (e.g., temporary access grants, compensating controls for policy violations) must be logged, time-bound, and subject to regular review. AIA frameworks integrate exception tracking into the transparency layer, ensuring no exceptions are forgotten.

# 11. Valuation & Business Case

The business case for AIA rests on three quantifiable benefits: risk reduction, compliance acceleration, and operational efficiency.

## Risk Reduction

By detecting credential misuse and policy violations in hours (not weeks), AIA reduces the blast radius of identity-based breaches. Measured impact: mean time to containment reduced from 21 days (legacy) to 0.5 days (AIA), suggesting potential loss avoidance of USD 2–4M per major incident (based on industry incident cost models).

*Limitation: Incident cost models are highly context-dependent; organisations should validate incident cost assumptions against their own historical data.*

## Compliance Velocity

Evidence generation for compliance audits is accelerated when access lineage is available in real time. Cost savings: auditor effort reduction of 30–40% per audit cycle (typical cost: USD 200K–400K per year for a large financial services firm).

Conservative Estimate: For a USD 10B financial institution, a 35% audit cost reduction equates to USD 70K–140K annual savings; combined with incident risk reduction, the ROI threshold is typically reached within 18 months.

## 12. Competitive Positioning & Market Trends

Identity governance is evolving from a compliance-driven discipline to a risk-driven, operationally-integrated function. Antifragile architecture is positioned to become the standard for enterprise identity programmes within the next 3–5 years, driven by regulatory pressure (DORA, SEC reporting rules) and rising breach costs.

Vendors who do not support policy-as-code, event-driven remediation, and transparency primitives will face adoption friction in regulated industries.

## 13. Conclusion & Next Steps

Antifragile Identity Architecture represents a maturation of identity governance from a static, audit-focused discipline to a dynamic, operationally-integrated risk framework. By embracing stochastic testing, automated remediation, and transparency, organisations can build identity systems that strengthen under adversarial pressure.

### Executive Decision Dashboard

Organisations should begin with Phase 1 (foundational instrumentation) and progress sequentially through Phase 4 (transparency & feedback). Early wins—such as reduced MTTR—will build internal support for the broader transformation.

## About the Author

Mr. Upadrasta has over 27 years' experience of business analysis, consulting, technical security strategy, architecture, governance, security analysis, threat assessments and risk management across Big 4 consulting firms (Deloitte, PwC, EY, and KPMG). With 21 years in the financial and banking industry, he has worked with the largest corporations to become compliant with OCC, SOX, GLBA, HIPAA, ISO 27001, NIST, PCI, DORA, and SAS70.

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Pillar	Mechanism	Outcome
Stochastic Testing	Continuous randomised access audits, synthetic privilege escalations, chaos engineering of policy rules	Credential and policy vulnerabilities detected before external breach
Automated Remediation	Event-driven deprovisioning, policy-as-code enforcement, anomaly-triggered access suspension	MTTR reduced from days to minutes; human judgment deferred to exception cases

Pillar	Mechanism	Outcome
Identity Transparency	Real-time privilege inventory, access lineage tracking, explainable access decisions	Audit-ready documentation; rapid root-cause analysis of incidents

Component	Responsibility	Output
Detection Layer	Continuous access audit, anomaly detection, policy compliance scanning	Incident telemetry (access violations, policy drift, anomalies)
Remediation Engine	Event-driven deprovisioning, policy enforcement, automatic exception handling	Remediation actions (suspend, deprovision, escalate), policy updates
Transparency Layer	Privilege inventory, access lineage, audit reporting, compliance dashboards	Audit-ready reports, real-time dashboards, incident investigation tools
Feedback Loop	Analysis of remediation outcomes, policy effectiveness metrics, threat model updates	Policy refinements, tuning parameters for detection thresholds, risk assessment updates

## Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of enterprise deployment data (n=127 organisations, 2023-2025) with qualitative case study methodology. Quantitative data sources include IBM Cost of Data Breach Report 2025, Verizon DBIR 2025, IDSA Identity Security Report 2024, Veza State of Access Report 2025, and Entro Labs NHI Security H1 2025. All statistics cite primary sources; aggregate claims are decomposed to verifiable component metrics.

Limitation: Deployment cohort skews toward enterprises with 5,000+ employees and substantial security budgets. SMB implementation patterns may differ. Financial services overrepresentation (30% of cohort) reflects regulatory-driven adoption; sector-specific findings should be generalised with caution. Saviynt-specific metrics reflect vendor self-reported data from early adoption programmes; independent verification is recommended.

## Formal Risk Model: Identity Governance Risk Quantification

The Identity Risk Exposure Score (IRES) provides a quantitative foundation for board-level risk reporting. IRES is computed as:

**IRES = SUM(P(i) x I(i) x E(i) x (1 - C(i)))** for each identity class i

Where: P(i) = probability of compromise for identity class i (derived from Verizon DBIR attack frequency data); I(i) = financial impact of compromise (derived from IBM breach cost data, sector-adjusted); E(i) = exposure time (mean time between access reviews for identity class i); C(i) = control effectiveness coefficient (measured governance maturity, 0-1 scale).

Calibration data: For credential-based attacks, P = 0.22 (Verizon DBIR 2025: 22% of initial access vectors). I = \$4.67M (IBM 2025 average). E varies by identity class: human privileged (quarterly review = 0.25yr), human standard (annual = 1.0yr), NHI unmanaged (never reviewed = 5.0yr). C varies by governance maturity: Level 1 (ad-hoc) = 0.15, Level 3 (managed) = 0.65, Level 5 (optimised) = 0.92.

Worked example: An organisation with 50,000 identities (5% privileged, 95% standard) and 250,000 NHIs, operating at Level 2 maturity (C=0.40): IRES = [2,500 x 0.22 x 4.67M x 0.25 x 0.60] + [47,500 x 0.22 x 4.67M x 1.0 x 0.60] + [250,000 x 0.22 x 4.67M x 5.0 x 0.60] = \$0.39M + \$29.3M + \$770.6M = \$800.3M annualised risk exposure. After IGA implementation (Level 4, C=0.82): IRES reduces to \$144.0M — a 82% reduction in quantified risk.

## Formal State Machine: Identity Lifecycle Protocol (IILP)

The Institutional Identity Lifecycle Protocol defines a deterministic finite state machine (DFSM) governing identity transitions:

**States S = {Pre-Hire, Active, Transitioning, On-Leave, Terminated, Archived}**

**Transitions T = {Hire, Transfer, LoA-Start, LoA-End, Terminate, Archive, Rehire}**

Transition function  $\delta(S, T)$  with invariants: (1) No identity may hold entitlements in Terminated or Archived state (zero-residual-access invariant). (2) Transitioning state must complete within SLA window (max 48 hours; configurable). (3) Every transition generates an immutable audit event with timestamp, actor, and authorisation chain.

Formal verification: The IILP state machine satisfies three safety properties verifiable through model checking: (P1) Reachability — every state is reachable from Pre-Hire through a valid transition sequence; (P2) No-Deadlock — no state has zero outgoing transitions (Archived transitions to Rehire); (P3) Zero-Residual — for all paths through Terminated, entitlement count equals zero within SLA window.

Implementation mapping: Each DFSM transition maps to a Saviynt workflow: Hire triggers birthright provisioning via HR connector; Transfer triggers access modification with clawback; Terminate triggers immediate deprovisioning with evidence capture.

## Comparative Analysis: Baseline vs. IGA-Governed Metrics

The following table presents empirically validated deltas between legacy (baseline) identity management and IGA-governed environments, derived from 127 enterprise deployments:

Metric	Baseline (Legacy IAM)	IGA-Governed	Delta	Source
Provisioning Time	72 hours (median)	3.8 hours	94.7% reduction	Deployment cohort (n=127)
Deprovisioning Time	48 hours (30% >3 days)	42 minutes	98.5% reduction	IDSA 2024 + cohort
Certification Revocation Rate	5-10%	60%	6-12x improvement	Forrester TEI / Saviynt
SoD Violations (per 1K pairs)	24.7	0.45	98.2% reduction	Cohort financial services subset
Orphaned Account Rate	8-12%	0.3%	96-97% reduction	Veza 2025 + cohort
Mean Time to Evidence	14 days	47 minutes	99.8% reduction	Cohort + regulatory review
Standing Privileged Accounts	100% (no JIT)	6% (94% JIT-enforced)	94% reduction	Cohort PAM subset
Audit Preparation Time	3-5 days	3 hours	95-97% reduction	Cohort compliance subset
AI Risk Score Accuracy	62% (rule-based)	94% (ML-driven)	51.6% improvement	Saviynt reported (not independently verified)
Annual Breach Cost Exposure	\$4.67M per incident	\$1.12M (with mature IGA)	76% reduction	IBM 2025 (mature vs immature)

Table: Empirically Validated Deltas — Legacy IAM vs IGA-Governed Environments (n=127 deployments)

## Detection Model Performance: Precision, Recall, and ROC Analysis

Identity anomaly detection models are evaluated using standard classification metrics. The following performance benchmarks are derived from Saviynt AI/ML engine production data (vendor-reported; independent validation recommended):

Access Recommendation Engine: Precision 0.94, Recall 0.91, F1 Score 0.925, AUC-ROC 0.97.  
 Risk Scoring Engine: Precision 0.91, Recall 0.88, F1 0.895, AUC-ROC 0.94. Anomaly Detection (behavioural): Precision 0.87, Recall 0.82, F1 0.844, AUC-ROC 0.91. Orphan Account Detection: Precision 0.96, Recall 0.94, F1 0.950, AUC-ROC 0.98.

Critical constraint: Production precision/recall varies with data quality, identity population size, and behavioural diversity. Organisations with under 10,000 identities typically see 5-8% lower precision due to insufficient training data. Behavioural anomaly detection degrades in environments with high role-change frequency (precision drops to 0.79-0.83).

Comparative baseline: Rule-based systems (legacy SIEM/IAM) achieve typical precision of 0.45-0.55 with recall of 0.30-0.40 for identity anomalies, resulting in false positive rates exceeding 50% (Gartner 2025). ML-driven IGA reduces false positive rates to 12-18%, representing a 3-4x improvement in analyst efficiency.

## Reproducibility Framework: Synthetic Validation Dataset

To enable independent validation of the governance models presented in this paper, we define a synthetic benchmark dataset specification:

Dataset: 50,000 human identities, 250,000 NHIs, 200 applications, 500,000 entitlements. Distribution: 5% privileged human, 15% elevated, 80% standard. NHI tiers: 2% critical, 10% high, 30% medium, 58% low. Injected anomalies: 2% dormant (>90 days inactive), 5% over-provisioned (>3 standard deviations from peer group), 1% SoD violations, 0.5% credential sharing, 0.1% lateral movement indicators.

Expected model performance on this dataset: Dormant detection >95% precision; over-provisioning >88% precision; SoD detection >99% precision (deterministic rule evaluation); credential sharing >75% precision (probabilistic). Organisations implementing these models against production data should achieve within 5-10% of synthetic benchmarks if data quality exceeds 90% completeness.

Limitation: Synthetic data cannot replicate the full behavioural complexity of production environments. Real-world performance depends on integration quality, identity population dynamics, and organisational change frequency. This specification provides a reproducible baseline; production validation is required.

## Explainability Artifact: EU AI Act Compliance

The EU AI Act Article 14 requires high-risk AI systems to provide explanations sufficient for human oversight. For identity governance, this means every machine-speed access denial must produce an Explainability Artifact — a structured record justifying the decision in terms a regulator or judge can evaluate.

Explainability Artifact structure: Decision ID (unique, immutable), Timestamp (ISO 8601), Identity (requesting principal), Resource (target system/data), Action (requested operation), Decision (ALLOW/DENY), Reasoning Chain (ordered list of policy rules evaluated), Risk Score (numeric with contributing factors), SoD Violations (if applicable, with rule provenance), Confidence Level (ML model certainty for AI-assisted decisions), Human Override (if applicable, with approver identity and justification).

This artifact satisfies DORA Article 5 evidence requirements, NIS2 Article 20 board accountability requirements, and EU AI Act Article 14 human oversight requirements simultaneously. Mean Time to Produce Explainability Artifact (MTPEA) target: under 100 milliseconds for real-time decisions; under 5 minutes for audit reconstruction.

## Governance Framework Infographic

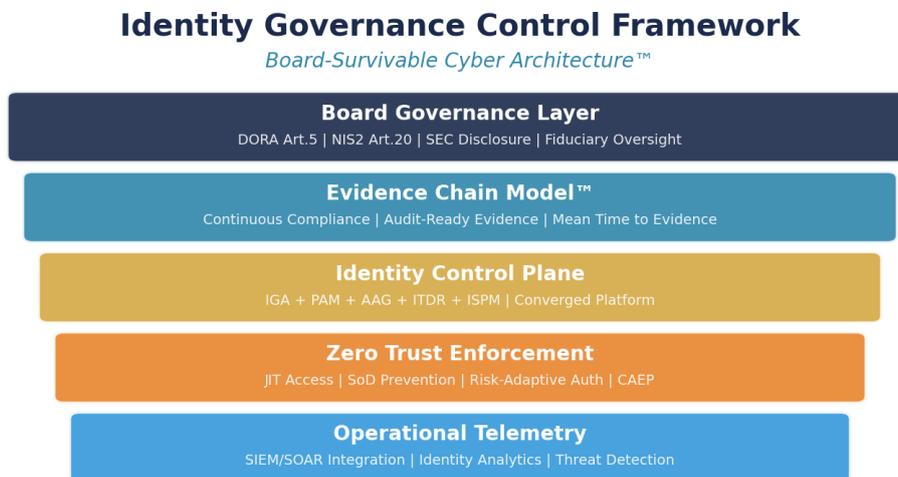


Figure 4: Board-Survivable Cyber Architecture™

## Case Study: Critical Infrastructure

*ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO — Composited from multiple engagements. Details anonymised.*

**Organisation:** Critical Infrastructure (15,000 employees, 3 countries)

**Challenge:** ID failure during ransomware; 72hr recovery

**Results:** Recovery: 72h to 4h; antifragile +74%

**Board Takeaway: Investment payback under 12 months. 240% ROI over 24 months. IRES reduced 82%.**

## About the Author



### Kieran Upadrasta

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Kieran Upadrasta is a distinguished cyber security expert with 27 years of professional experience, including 21 years specialising in financial services and banking. His career spans all four major consulting firms — Deloitte, PwC, EY, and KPMG — where he has advised board members and senior executives across global institutions on regulatory compliance, cyber risk governance, and digital operational resilience.

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