

Measuring Identity and Access Management Performance - An Expert Survey on Possible Performance Indicators

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Abstract: Currently existing digital challenges such as securing access, proof of compliance with regulations and improvement of business performance are urging companies to implement structured Identity and Access Management (IAM). Over the past decades, the introduction of IAM represented a critical task for companies trying to get their complex IT infrastructures comprising hundreds of systems, thousands of accounts and millions of access right assignments under control. However, once introduced, the identification of potential IAM malfunctions remains an unsolved challenge. Within this paper, we want to provide a first step into the direction of sustainable IAM maintenance, by introducing indicators that are able to capture the efficiency of a rolled-out IAM. We firstly derive IAM performance indicators via a structured scientific approach and later evaluate their relevance by surveying IAM experts.

1 INTRODUCTION

Identity and Access Management (IAM) has become one of the core topics to tackle insider misuse of access, complying with regulations and achieving transparent management of digital identities and entitlements in enterprises. Complexity and the so called identity explosion (Fuchs and Pernul, 2008) forces companies to tackle the problem of users' correct access to systems, a crucial task in terms of security and efficiency (Hovav and Berger, 2009). While traditionally system-specific administration of accounts and permissions was conducted, nowadays companies centralize their user management to provision, control and analyze their digital identities throughout all connected systems. However, newly arising technologies like highly volatile cloud infrastructures or industry 4.0 require even more sophisticated IAM solutions and demand a steady increase in performance of an organization's IAM. Up to now, the measurement of IAM performance is an issue only attracting little attention and remains an unsolved problem. While there are many approaches (Windley, 2005; Royer, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2009; Kunz et al., 2015) that offer guidelines on how to adopt IAM in good practice, only little notion has been dedicated to judge whether an existing IAM is able to cope with current requirements from business, technology or regulation.

Up to now research offers partial approaches to estimate the quality of certain IAM capabilities, however, there is only little support in rating the overall performance of a specific instance of IAM. Consequently, companies struggle with knowing the general maturity of their IAM leading to possibly flawed decisions on future IAM investments or risking an insecure IAM infrastructure not capable of meeting today's increasing demands. In order to address these issues, our paper's main contribution is to suggest but more importantly to verify performance indicators for IAM.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents related work concerning which approaches exist for measuring the performance of specific IAM capabilities. Within Section 3, we outline our overall methodology, before Section 4 introduces the construction of 19 performance indicators by applying the Goal-Question-Metric (GQM) paradigm (Basili et al., 1994). In order to evaluate these for relevance, we conducted a survey with 32 participants specialized within the field of IAM, leading to a generalizable expert opinion on our indicator candidates, which is described in Section 5. These results together with other interesting findings of the expert's answers are discussed in Section 6. Finally Section 7 shows limitations of our approach and concludes with future work.

2 RELATED WORK

Existing IAM research mainly focuses on specific technical or organizational features of IAM infrastructures and does not cover performance indicators of IAM in general. Literature in research and practice (Witty, 2003; Bresz et al., 2007; Hermans, 2008; Dell, 2011; Harvard, 2014; Fisher, 2016) underlines that risk reduction, IT cost reduction, compliance requirements, data and process quality and business facilitation are the main drivers for modern IAM in organizations. These drivers can act as starting point for the development of performance indicators for long-term IAM maintenance. For instance, Royer et al. mention the importance of assessing and evaluating IAM systems within several publications (Royer, 2007; Royer and Meints, 2008; Royer, 2013). They transfer the concept of balanced score cards to IAM thus presenting a generic methodology for estimating an IAM system's performance. Following similar goals as ours, they mostly focus on financial aspects to evaluate the value of IAM systems. We argue that the overall performance of IAM as a cross-cutting enterprise functionality must be taken into consideration.

(Höllrigl et al., 2008) define several evaluation dimensions to compare architectures for access control in federated environments. In (Schell et al., 2009) they use these dimensions as a basis to derive metrics for an IAM system's performance evaluation. However, they mostly focus on architecture and consider performance as a quantifiable measure defined by how long various systems' activities are taking. Performance in our terms is having a broader perspective than their focus on an IAM systems' capability of timely processing decisions. Staite et al. (Staite and Bahsoon, 2012) perform a systematic literature review as well as an architectural trade-of, analysis method (Kazman et al., 1999) to derive requirements and metrics for authentication and user profiles in Identity Management architectures. These metrics, however, focus on the technical implementation of an IAM architecture. Peterson et al. (Peterson, 2006) provide indicators to measure and manage the risk within IAM systems. They show some valuable metrics that can assist in judging whether the execution time of requests and the delivery of access rights are in acceptable condition. Their approach is focusing only on the fields of risk reduction and process quality improvement and leaves out other necessary categories.

An overall perspective and judging from a top-level goal that IAM centers around has not yet been addressed. Furthermore, the approaches do not verify their indicators via conducting a survey, thus not validating their suggestions in practice.

3 DEVELOPMENT OF IAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

3.1 Overall Methodology

Having outlined the research field that this publication contributes to, in the following Section our methodology for conducting this research is briefly described. To the best of our knowledge, there exists no comparable approach for developing general performance indicators for IAM in such a focused and structured way. The overall process follows the five steps depicted in Figure 1 and is based on the GQM paradigm which is widely respected for its capability to develop qualitatively or quantitatively measurable factors derived from overall goals. Initially developed for the field of Software Engineering, its basic assumption is that measurement must fulfill three goals (as described below). Transferred to IAM, measurement must be:

- Centered around an overall strategy (i.e. various goals)
- Holistic (i.e. considering all involved organizational and technical entities such as both, processes and resources)
- Interpretable within the IAM context

Generally speaking, GQM is tackling the problem of metric development via a divide and conquer process. According to (Assmann et al., 2002) it comprises three layers, namely a goal layer, a question layer and a metric layer. Each layer deals with a specific question as (Basili et al., 1994) indicates:

1. **Goal:** which goals are to be achieved by the measurements?
2. **Question:** which questions can define these goals more precisely?
3. **Metric:** which metrics can answer these questions?

For executing the GQM paradigm within IAM, we followed the presented methodology which suggests a generic six-step approach that can be followed by answering all three questions above. For a detailed description of this process please refer to the initial publication. Note, that in this publication, we treat the terms metric and IAM indicator synonymously, as the metrics that are identified via the GQM can be considered as performance indicating measurements.

3.2 IAM Goals

Following the GQM paradigm, in a first step goals for IAM have to be formulated as mission statements.

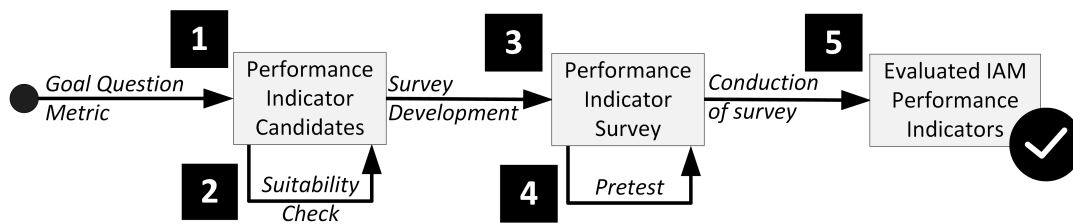


Figure 1: Methodology for Suggesting IAM Indicators.

Goals are structured hierarchically, which raises the requirement that the GQM goals for IAM have to be on the same hierarchical level in terms of granularity. The overall goal of IAM, as (Bresz et al., 2007) summarizes, is to 'initiate, capture, record and manage the user identities and related access permissions to the organization's proprietary information'. Building on existing research and practice (cf. Section 2) this generic goal can be decomposed into the following sub goals which are further used in the remainder.

Risk reduction: IAM focuses on preventing resources from unauthorized access. To reduce risks arising from an unstructured management of identity data, IAM provides several means, e.g. giving an overview over the data and allowing inspection and correction of wrong access privileges (Meier et al., 2013).

IT cost reduction: Literature (Bresz et al., 2007; Witty, 2003) and practice (Gartner, 2009; Software Engineering of America, 2015) indicate, that IT-Helpdesk costs are mostly connected with password problems of end users. IAM proposes new technical measures to tackle these problems. On the one hand technologies such as SSO are enterprise-wide and application-wide deployable, and on the other hand user-friendly portals for self-service can be delivered.

Improvement of process and data quality: With an established IAM, companies are better supported in maintaining and improving their data quality. Without a centralized IAM system multiple error sources occur while connecting and integrating data from company-wide systems (Windley, 2005; Bertino and Takahashi, 2011).

Regulatory compliance: With the ongoing trend of digitalization, national and international regulators are imposing the need of auditing and managing access within a companies' applications upon enterprises. While there are general regulations such as the Sarbanes Oxley Act (United States Congress, 2002)

or the soon effective EU General Data Protection Regulation (Council of the European Union, 2016), more and more industry-specific regulations such as the HIPAA (United States Congress, 1996) or Basel III (Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, 2011) are challenging organizations into presenting audited and well-proven access infrastructures.

Business facilitation: Lastly, another important sub-goal of IAM is, similar to all IT-related activities, allowing a smoother and non-disrupting business experience. While in traditional scenarios, users have to order access rights in various forms, centralized IAM provides a standardized and understandable request process for identities, user accounts or access rights (Windley, 2005).

3.3 Abstraction Sheets, Deriving of Questions and Development of Performance Indicators

Following the applied methodology for the conduction of the GQM, in a next step, we created so called abstraction sheets (Assmann et al., 2002; Basili et al., 1994) for each of the stated goals. These serve as a decomposition of the proposed sub-goals into several parts which can be transferred later into items that can be questioned within our survey. Abstraction sheets are composed of two main elements. Firstly, intention, quality aspect, subject und perspective are summarizing in short what the main components of the goal are (e.g. *compliance with regulations via IAM as observed by managers*). Secondly, for this first aspects quality issues (e.g. *number of violations of compliance rules*) and environmental factors (e.g. *automated reporting*) are raised. These quality issues are further mapped onto our IAM performance indicators.

While this list of questions is not designed to be exhaustive, we argue that these are the main compliance issues that can be tackled via structured IAM and suffice for describing the overall objective within IAM. These questions were developed with respect to (Assmann et al., 2002)'s eight points for meaningful survey questions.

Following these principles for each sub-goal, we arrived at a set of questions, each indicating a possible performance indicator that in return can be assigned to a goal. Note, that the indicators might correlate with various goals, however we assign them to the goal that initially raised the respective question.

4 STUDY OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN IAM

4.1 Development of the Survey

Following the presented methodology we conducted a survey among IAM experts in order to validate and evaluate the presented IAM indicators. For this purpose we created an online questionnaire which is structured as follows:

Firstly we inquired demographic features (e.g. project status or company size). Secondly the participant was asked for IAM goals relevant to his company. As a result only questions concerning the selected goals were presented, whereas each question references an IAM performance indicator. Thirdly for each indicator we raised two questions. The first collects if the company did already achieve an improvement through IAM regarding the indicator. If no improvement was achieved up to that point, the second question relates to if there is an improvement planned. Before conducting the actual survey we started a pretest to validate our questions regarding suitability, interpretability, problems during procession, question order, possible technical problems and temporal requirements.

For this initial evaluation we inquired three IAM experts and lead a short interview afterwards. While no major issues in length, order, structure and time were criticized, phrasing of the questions had to be improved for interpretability. Furthermore, another major adaption to the sample population was needed: As one of the three pre-testers was an IAM consultant, he stressed that answering the questions was hard as he had various projects in mind and could not guarantee replying consistently without getting confused due to the number of his different clients. In order to avoid data distortion we reason that IAM consultants involved in several projects should be suspended from the sample and respected this in the conduction of the survey as the description of our sample shows (cf. Section 4.2.1). Having developed the questionnaire, an evaluation method for assessing the validity of an indicator for IAM is needed before conducting the study, in order to consistently judge the suitability

of IAM indicators. Figure 2 shows the process we applied to each of the candidates in order to evaluate its applicability in practice: Summing up the process, we have two main criteria for the validation of an IAM indicator:

1. Relevancy of an IAM goal
2. Statement of participants of improvement of IAM through the indicator

The relevancy of the IAM goal (meaning that the IAM goal was answered as relevant to the participant's company) is a filter criterion that justifies whether the sample is large enough to have significance. As pointed out, only indicator questions concerning selected IAM goals were raised. The second criteria is split into two sub-criteria.

Firstly, if at least 50% of the respondents (16 out of 32) consider an indicator as already IAM-improving, we argue that it is relevant to companies. Secondly, if the aggregated amount of the participants' IAM improvements of the past combined with planned enhancements through the indicator shows more than 75% (24 out of 32) response rate, we argue, that the combined percentage is high enough to indicate relevance of the investigated indicator.

Additionally, we introduce a category of results where an indicator is likely to exist, but where the quantity of answer is not significantly high enough (aggregated amount of already improved or prospective planned answers between 50% and 75%). We reason, that if a company has already achieved betterment of their IAM through an indicator, this should be weighted stronger than if they only expect future results.

4.2 Results

In alignment with the evaluation process introduced in Section 4.1 (cf. Figure 2), four of five IAM goals received a sufficient score of acknowledgement (cf. Figure 2). IT cost reduction was answered as relevant only by 11 participants (~34%) which means in our terms that we cannot make valid statements on this topic, thereby excluding the corresponding indicator candidates. However, we will include the indicators discarded in the discussion in order to reason upon possible causes for their little impact.

4.2.1 Participants and Demography

We only invited potential participants with dedicated background in IAM. As already mentioned in Section 3.1, they have to judge a single company's IAM, therefore preventing the confusion of multiple

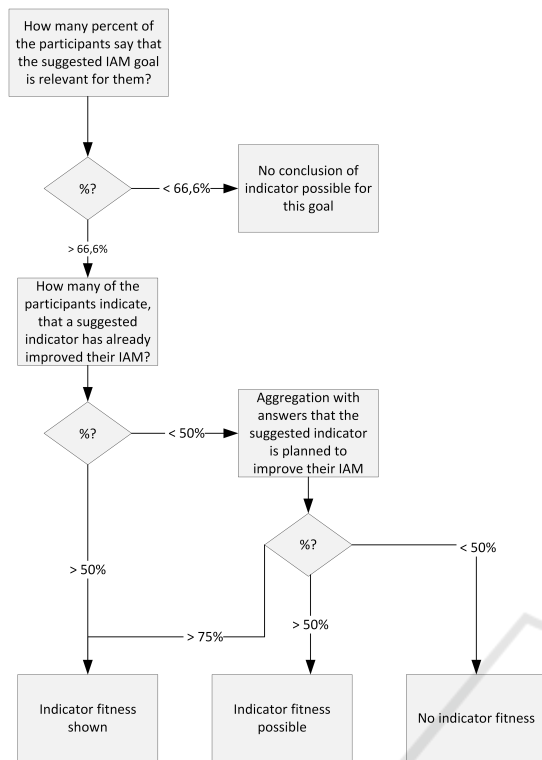


Figure 2: Evaluation Process.

projects. Second, they have to be employed in operational or strategic IAM. Based on these requirements we sent out 73 invitations. 32 out of these 73 people fully conducted the survey (~41%). All participants are located within the DACH region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). The average processing time of the questionnaire survey was 11 minutes and 30 seconds, the median was 8 minutes and 18 seconds which matched our expectations.

For our demographic evaluation we analyzed our respondents in regard of their company’s size, industry branch, IAM project progress and their job position within IAM. It showed that the majority work for companies with more than 5.000 employees, which matches the fact that IAM is currently a topic mostly relevant for larger enterprises. The distribution among industrial sectors is displayed in Table 1. Eight of our participants did not make a statement regarding industry, thus their answers can not be applied in the discussion. However, the given sectors can be divided into strongly regulated sectors (rows number 1 and 2) and average regulated sectors (rows number 3 - 8). This fragmentation will later find application within our discussion.

Within the questionnaire we asked the participants how far IAM within their company is processed using a scale from 0% to 100% with steps of 10%. Thus our interviewees can be divided in 'early project state'

(from 0% to 30%), 'medium project state' (from 40% to 70%) and 'advanced project state' (from 80% to 100%). We determined that eight participants are located in an early state, while 12 respectively are either at a medium state or have already advanced their IAM. We further analyzed if there is a connection between the project state and other demographic features like company size or industry sector regulation. We could not identify any significant connection concerning these characteristics. This leads to the assumption that there seems to be a strong individual dependency concerning how IAM is focused by enterprises.

Table 1: Participant’s Industry Sectors.

#	Industry Sector	Participants
1	Finance / Insurance	11
2	Pharmacy / Medicine	1
3	Automotive / Supplier	5
4	Metal industry	3
5	Service	2
6	Food	1
7	Software / Hardware	1
8	Others	8

4.2.2 IAM Indicator Evaluation

Generally speaking, the goals risk reduction, improvement of data and process quality and compliance requirements achieved highest scores of relevancy in the answers of the participants with 25, 26 and 26 positive answers respectively (out of 32). Naturally, these goals are correlating with the basic functionalities of a company-wide IAM which typically are implemented first. The protection of internal assets (risk reduction) represents a major goal of companies utilizing IAM to strengthen their IT security thus avoiding possible malicious activities by allowing unwanted access. Similarly, data and process quality improvements lead to smoother and less erroneous user management workflows therefore presenting a highly valuable goal for companies burdened by challenges in correlating data from various systems. Compliance achievements are an unwanted but necessary issue in order to allow a company to meet their industry’s specific requirements.

The goal of business facilitation achieved a high score as well, indicating that issues such as user satisfaction and less disruption of business are a much preferred topic that IAM can deliver as well. Such topics are typically approached once basic IAM functionality is up and running. On the other hand, IT cost reduction caused by IAM is a goal which is less in favor as our received responses demonstrate. This could reason in the fact, that initially, IAM increases IT costs substantially (Cser, 2017), whereas a later

Table 2: IAM Goals and IAM Indicator Scores.

IAM Goal	IAM Indicator	Improved	Planned
<i>Risk reduction</i>		25	
	Number of security incidents due to user and entitlement management	14	6
	Number of security incidents due to critical role and access right combinations	11	5
	Duration until deactivation of employee access rights	24	1
	Duration until emergency deactivation of employee access rights	18	1
<i>IT cost reduction</i>		11	
	Costs for entitlement and access management	4	0
	Support costs for user management	10	1
	Costs for data storage of user data	7	3
<i>Data and process quality</i>		26	
	Development of data quality	25	0
	Error rate within access management	18	3
	Error rate within identity and account creation	21	1
<i>Compliance requirements</i>		26	
	Reduction of compliance violations	18	6
	Number of successful audits	21	4
	Duration until complete solution of a compliance incidents	11	8
<i>Business facilitation</i>		22	
	Reduction of administrative effort	19	3
	Improvement of user satisfaction	13	5
	Duration until employee readiness	19	2
	Duration until access model adjustment	13	4
	Number of failed authentication requests	8	2
	Processing duration of user requests	13	2

general decrease through e.g. automation is not yet perceived by our survey participants.

Table 2 displays our proposed IAM goals together with their indicators. The 'improved' column specifies how many participants already achieved an improvement concerning the indicator while the 'planned' column expresses how many participants plan an improvement of the corresponding indicator in the future. For each IAM goal we present the number of participants which described the goal as relevant for their company. In accordance with the evaluation process (cf. Figure 2), we define the suggested indicator candidates for the IAM goal IT cost reduction as not suitable as it is only relevant to ~34% of our participants. Thus, 16 possible indicators remain out of the four suitable IAM goals for further check of relevancy. Please note that this does not necessarily mean that the indicators raised for IT cost reduction do not exist. However on the sample data, we cannot make a significant statement about the validity of the candidates. The criteria presented in Figure 2 was reached by nine IAM indicators.

The next category consists of indicators which show potential fitness. These do not fully match our requirements yet do have a score high enough to pos-

sibly represent indicator fitness within certain scenarios or environments. In the field of risk reduction 'duration until emergency deactivation of employee' and 'security incidents due to critical access right combinations' fulfill the categories' demands. Correlations with the industrial background of participants' replies show, that these indicators might mainly be relevant within the focus of finance and insurance companies thus not being highly valuable for all of our participants. Furthermore 'duration until complete solution of compliance incidents' and 'user satisfaction' fall into this category. This suggests that only some companies focus on topics which do not directly effect the core IAM or correspond to topics which only occur with a certain probability.

Finally, five candidates did not show indicator fitness. Apart from the ones within the goal cost reduction, the two other indicators correspond to the goal of business facilitation. The first indicator is 'number of failed authentication attempts' with only ~31% (score of 10). The last discarded candidate is the 'duration until user requests are processed'. This also represents an interesting finding as from our perspective this candidate is connected with the indicator 'user satisfaction'. This could ground in enterprises focus-

ing rather on other issues for increasing user satisfaction such as integrated portal usage.

5 DISCUSSION

In the following we present a discussion of the derived results. Five of our presented IAM indicators did not show indicator fitness. Firstly, IT cost reduction does not seem to be within short and mid term focus of IAM in general which results in three discontinued indicators. Secondly, the number of failed authentication requests did not show any indicator fitness. This can be explained as this topic can be handled very well on a technical level by IAM systems thus it does not receive a lot of attention among IAM experts. Thirdly the processing time for user requests has hardly been improved or planned to be improved in future. This is remarkable as it represents a main point of contact of users to IAM and thereby we expected a positive response to this indicator. We tried to find a correlation concerning other demographic features yet none produced significant results. Thus we conclude that this topic is already handled very well by today's companies as the negative impact might strongly impact the overall performance of the company itself.

Influence of project status on IAM indicators:

The presented indicators show different performance regarding the IAM project state. As expected not all indicators can be developed on an equal speed. For example the number of successful audits strongly increases at beginning IAM projects. So ~75% of our participants within an early project state, ~75% within a medium project state and ~90% within an advanced project state have increased this indicator. However indicators like user satisfaction increase at a later project state. Only 25% of our participants within an early project state could improve this issue while ~45% within a medium project state achieved an improvement and ~63% within an advanced project state increased this indicator. This firstly shows that companies in general begin with issues concerning core IAM indicators during their project and secondly that the presented indicators can further be split up according the project state in order to optimally support organizations.

Influence of industry sector on IAM indicators:

Regarding the presented industry sector partition (strongly regulated and average regulated) we could determine further differences. Average regulated companies perceive IAM as a support function and

thereby focus on indicators which facilitate effort and business. For example 75% of our participants in average regulated industry sectors achieved an improvement in the duration it takes to adjust the access model in place while this was only achieved by ~33% of participants within strongly regulated industry sectors.

On the other hand 75% participants in strongly regulated industry could reduce the number of security incidents due to role and access right combinations while this was achieved by only ~30% of participants with average regulations. According to these observations the presented indicator catalog could further be elaborated regarding industry sectors and currently available legal requirements.

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Having discussed and presented our findings, we want to briefly outline limitations and summarize our contribution before providing a short outlook for future work. In general we perceive three limitations of the conducted survey. Firstly, a response rate higher than the 41% of our invited candidates would have backed our results even more. However, for qualitative research such as our study, we argue that our received responses are high enough. Additionally, a potential selection bias (e.g. over-representing project managers) might exist, but cannot be suppressed due to the fact that to the best of our knowledge no research exists on the general distribution of job profiles for IAM. Lastly, all of our participants are all located in the German-speaking countries, however, due to the international background of most of our participants' companies operating worldwide, our findings can be transferred to other nations with similar preconditions as well.

In a nutshell, within this paper we were able to demonstrate relevancy and existence of several IAM indicators that help analyzing an existing IAM. By evaluating their relevance in practice, we were able to provide researchers and practitioners with valuable results towards how IAM performance can be expressed either in a quantifiable or qualitative manner. Utilizing our results, the first step towards a holistic IAM measurement framework has been taken. Consequently we are planning on establishing such a framework with our suggested and approved indicators as baseline. By doing so, we aim at delivering a tool for sustainable IAM measurement and maintenance.

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