

# Active Directory and Azure – Core Security Principles

Friedwart Kuhn, Heinrich Wiederkehr



## Who We Are

- **Friedwart Kuhn**
  - Head of Microsoft Security Team @ERNW
  - 15+ years experience in security assessments, administration, publications and trainings
  - IT security professional with a focus on Windows Security and Active Directory Security
- **Heinrich Wiederkehr**
  - Member of Microsoft Security Team @ERNW
  - 5+ years in security assessments and trainings
  - IT security professional with a focus on Windows Security and Active Directory Security

## Agenda

- Who We Are
- Intro & Current Active Directory Threat Landscape
- Common Core Security Controls for Active Directory
- Limits of Common Controls: Cross Forest Security Dependencies
- New Core Security Controls for Active Directory and Azure



## Why should you care about on-premise and cloud AD security?

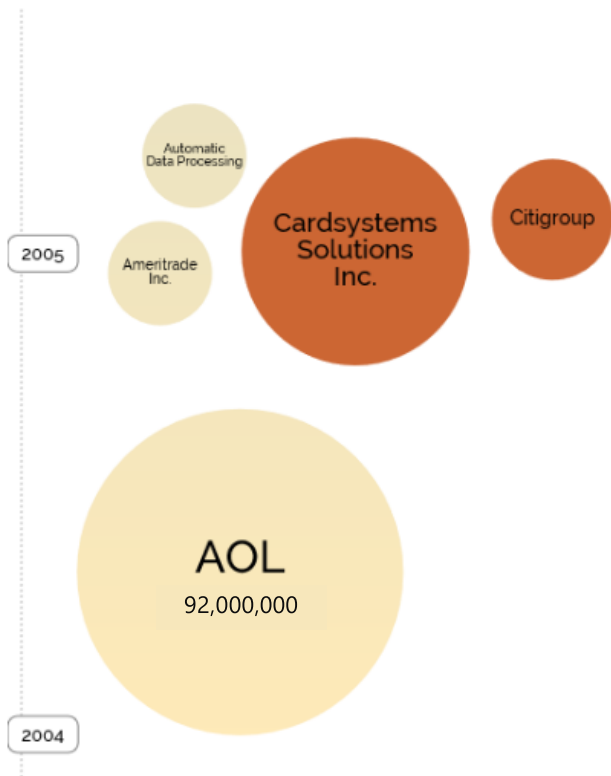
- Active Directory (AD) is the main authentication backend in nearly every organization
  - Holds the keys to the crown jewels!
- AD is heavily targeted by attackers that are using powerful, publicly available tool sets
- AD cannot be seen as a standalone entity
  - Connections to other ADs (e.g. via trust relationships) or the Cloud (e.g. via Azure AD Connect) open up new threat scenarios
  - This creates far-reaching “security dependencies”





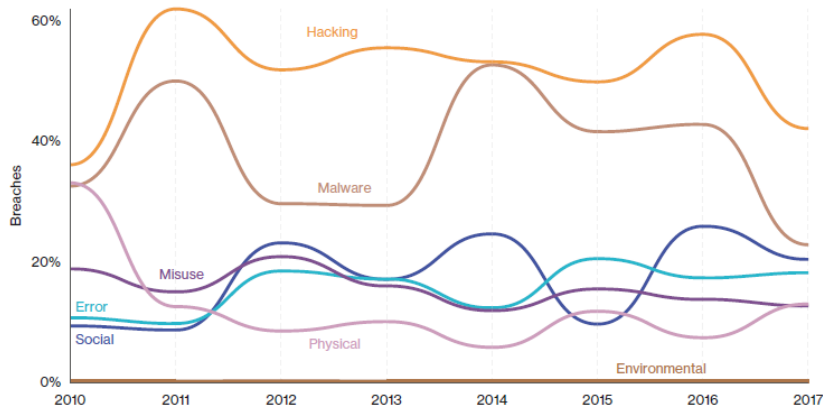
## Current Active Directory Threat Landscape

# Credential Theft Is Today's Crisis

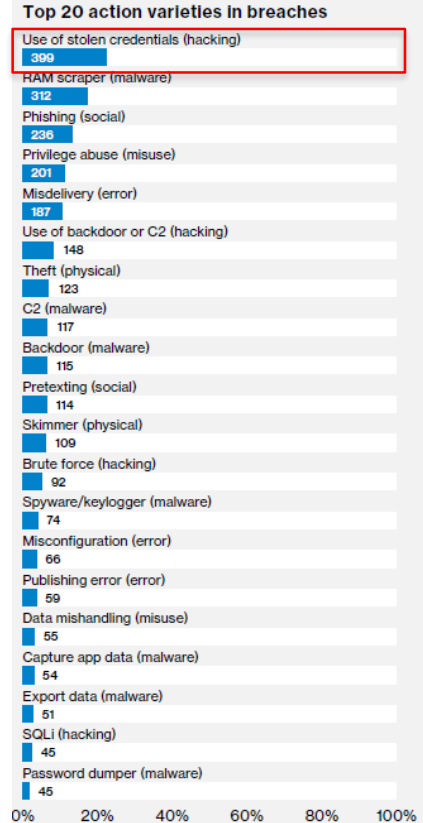


# Relevance of Credential Theft Attacks

Actions in breaches



Data from DBIR 2018, cf.  
[https://www.verizonenterprise.com/resources/reports/rp\\_DBIR\\_2018\\_Report\\_en\\_xg.pdf](https://www.verizonenterprise.com/resources/reports/rp_DBIR_2018_Report_en_xg.pdf)





## Paradigm Shift in Security Realities

- Active Directory attacks are in many cases:
  - easy to perform (PtH in 48 hours)
  - not detected
  - difficult to recover
- “Assume Breach” is the (new) mindset
- **Identities** become the new “**perimeter**” in the corporate network and the cloud
- The overall strategy is **containment**, not prevention

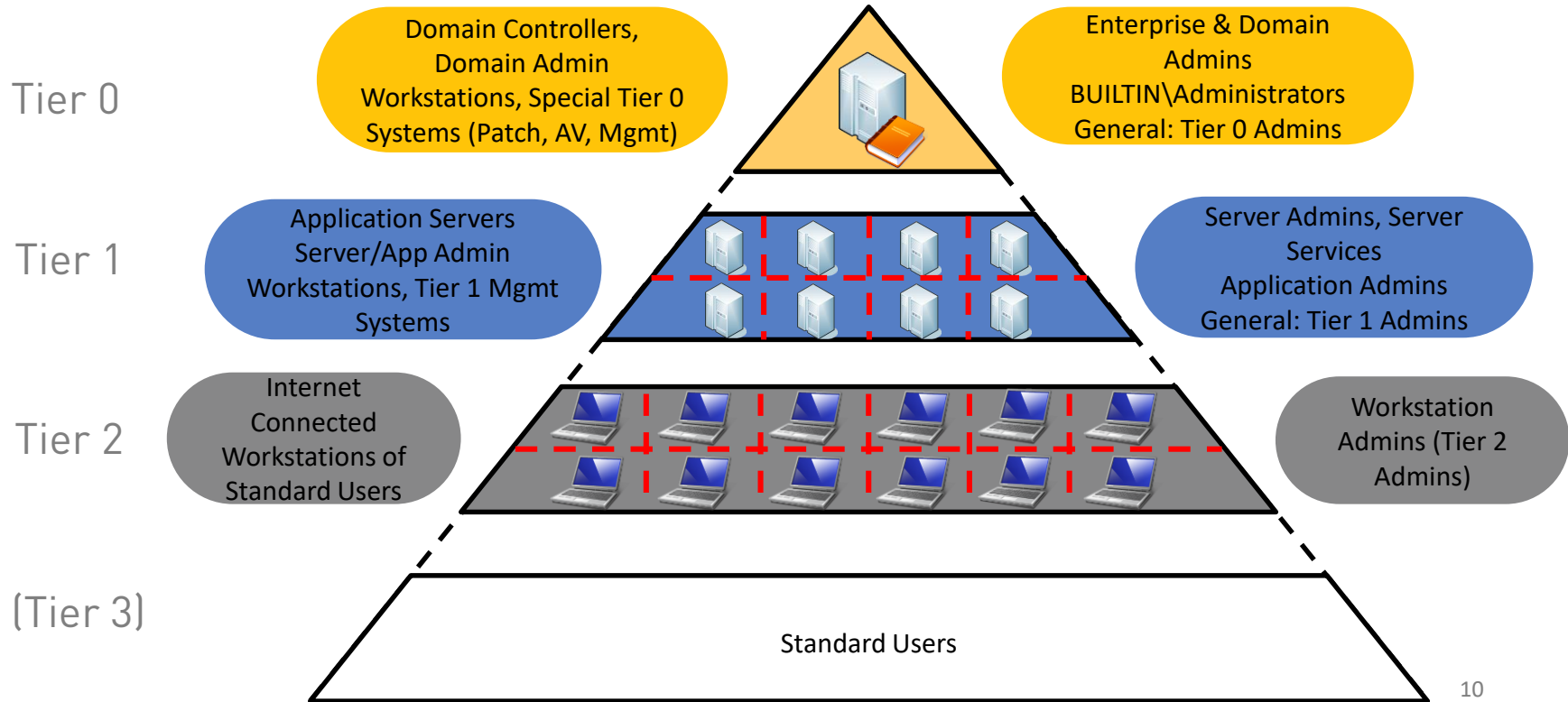




## Common Core Security Controls for Active Directory

- Admin Tiering
- Clean Source Principle
- Management of Security Dependencies

# Control 1: Implement Administrative Tiers





**Control 1a: Classify:** *Every single* security principal, system, or application **has to be classified as belonging *only* to one tier**

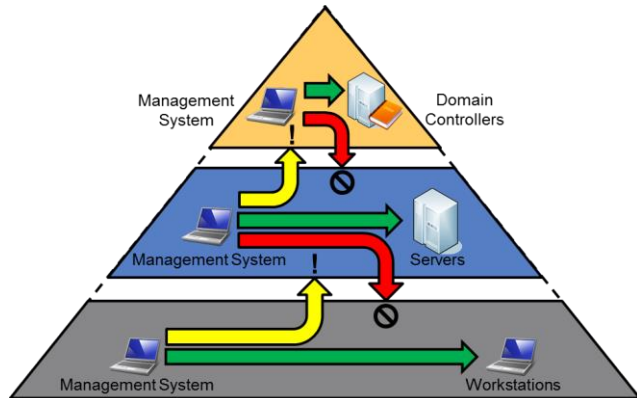


**Control 1b: Restrict Logons:** Security principals of a higher tier ***must never log on to a resource on a lower tier*** (→ Implement logon restrictions)



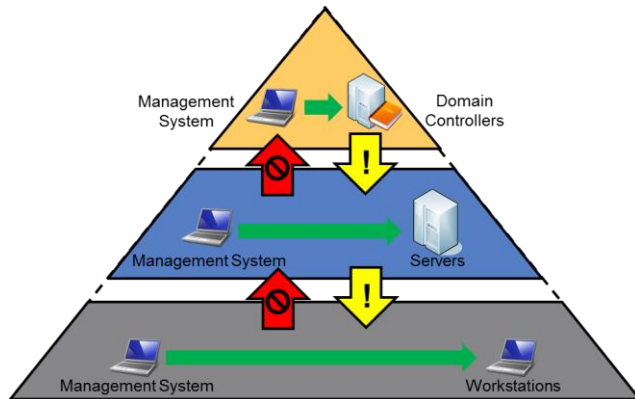
**Control 1c: Restrict Control:** Security principals of a lower tier ***must never control resources of a higher tier*** (→ Implement control restrictions)

## Control 1b: Implement Logon Restrictions




- The objective of logon restrictions is to limit credential exposure (especially of privileged accounts) to the minimum necessary
  - Administrators (and other accounts) of a higher-privileged tier should not be able to logon to systems and applications of a lower tier
    - Sample: If a Domain Admin logs on to a workstation, the whole domain is at risk, if the workstation is compromised. (This should not be the case.)
  - Accounts of a lower tier should be allowed to logon to a system of a higher tier *only as required by their role*
    - Sample: a standard user that works on a file server
  - Implement logon restrictions
    - Via Authentication Policies & Authentication Silos (white listing approach for T0)
    - Via logon deny GPOs that restrict allowed logons for security principals of T0 on asset of T1 and T2 (respectively for security principals of T1 on asset of T2)

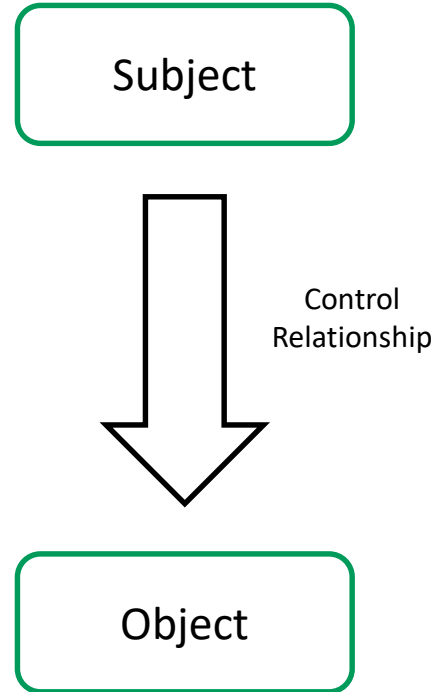
## Control 1c: Implement Control Restrictions



- The objective of control restrictions is to prevent privilege escalation in Active Directory
  - Administrators (and other accounts) of a lower tier should not be able to control systems, applications and accounts of a higher tier
    - Sample: If a server operator on a member server is member of the Enterprise Administrators group, he controls DCs. (This should not be the case.)
- Implement control restrictions through supervision/ hardening of:
  - Privileged group membership in Active Directory
  - Rights on sensitive Active Directory objects
    - (AdminSDHolder, Domain object, Domain Controller object, sensitive OUs, GPOs => all critical objects in T0 & T1)
    - Extended rights (e.g. replicating directory changes all...)
  - Delegation of sensitive user accounts & computer accounts trusted for delegation
  - Privileged local group membership
  - System privileges
  - NTFS rights
  - Registry rights

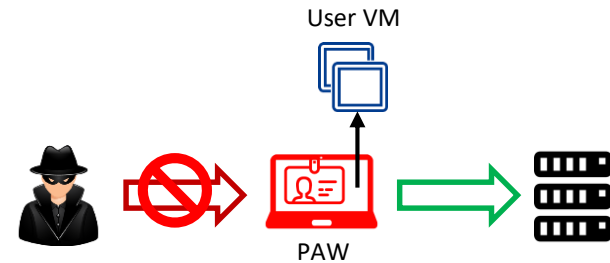
## Control 2: Implement Clean Source Principle

- Any subject in control of an object is a security dependency of that object
  - The assurances for all security dependencies **must be at or above the desired security level of the object** itself
-  **Control is transitive!** (For example if A controls B and B controls C, then A also indirectly controls C.)
- Most common areas of control are:
  - the hardware where systems are installed,
  - the installation media for the systems,
  - the architecture and configuration of the system,
  - and daily operations.



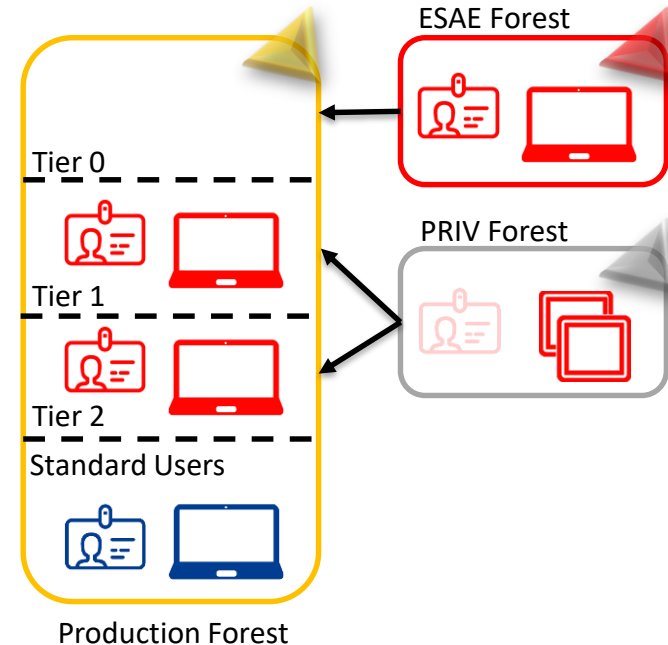
## Clean Source Principle: Privileged Access Workstations

- PAW hardware profiles can be:
  - **Dedicated hardware**
    - Separate dedicated devices for user tasks vs. administrative tasks
  - **Simultaneous use**
    - Single device that can run user tasks and administrative tasks concurrently by taking advantage of OS or presentation virtualization. For example:
      - Adding a local user VM
      - Adding RemoteApp, RDP, or a VDI



## Clean Source Principle: ESAE/PRIV Forest

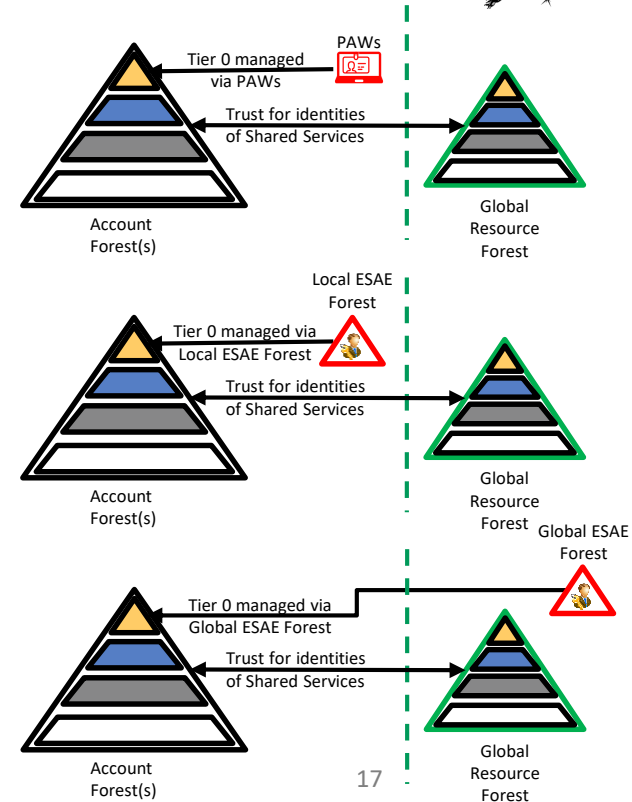
- Dedicated administrative forest
  - Hosts administrative accounts, workstations, groups
  - Environment has stronger security controls than the production environment
- **ESAE forest** moves all sensitive objects for Tier 0 administration to a separate forest
  - Except the krbtgt account and most likely service accounts
  - Balance between security benefit and operational effort unfavourable in a 1:1 relationship
    - Much better if one ESAE forest is used for multiple productive forests
- PRIV forest moves administrative identities for Tier 1 & 2 administration to a separate forest and combines this with a PAM solution (e.g. MIM 2016)





# Exemplary Secure Administration Environment Models

- Prerequisite: Admin Tiering must be implemented
- Option 1:
  - Tier 0 managed exclusively via PAWs
- Option 2:
  - Tier 0 managed by a Local ESAE Forest (utilizing PAWs)
- Option 3:
  - Tier 0 managed by a Global ESAE Forest (utilizing PAWs; used for management of multiple forests)
- Optional: Combining the administration model with a PRIV Forest



## Control 3: Understand and Manage Security Dependencies in Active Directory

- Clean source principle covers the **hardening of security dependencies** which could potentially open up new **attack paths**
- **Challenge** lies in the **identification** of these attack paths based on:
  - Group nesting
  - Local admin rights
  - Active user sessions
  - ACLs/ACEs on sensitive AD objects
  - GPOs and GPO links
- **Focus** on the **defender side** must shift from the hardening of single assets to a more **holistic view**

*"Defenders think in lists.  
Attackers think in graphs.  
As long as this is true,  
attackers win."*

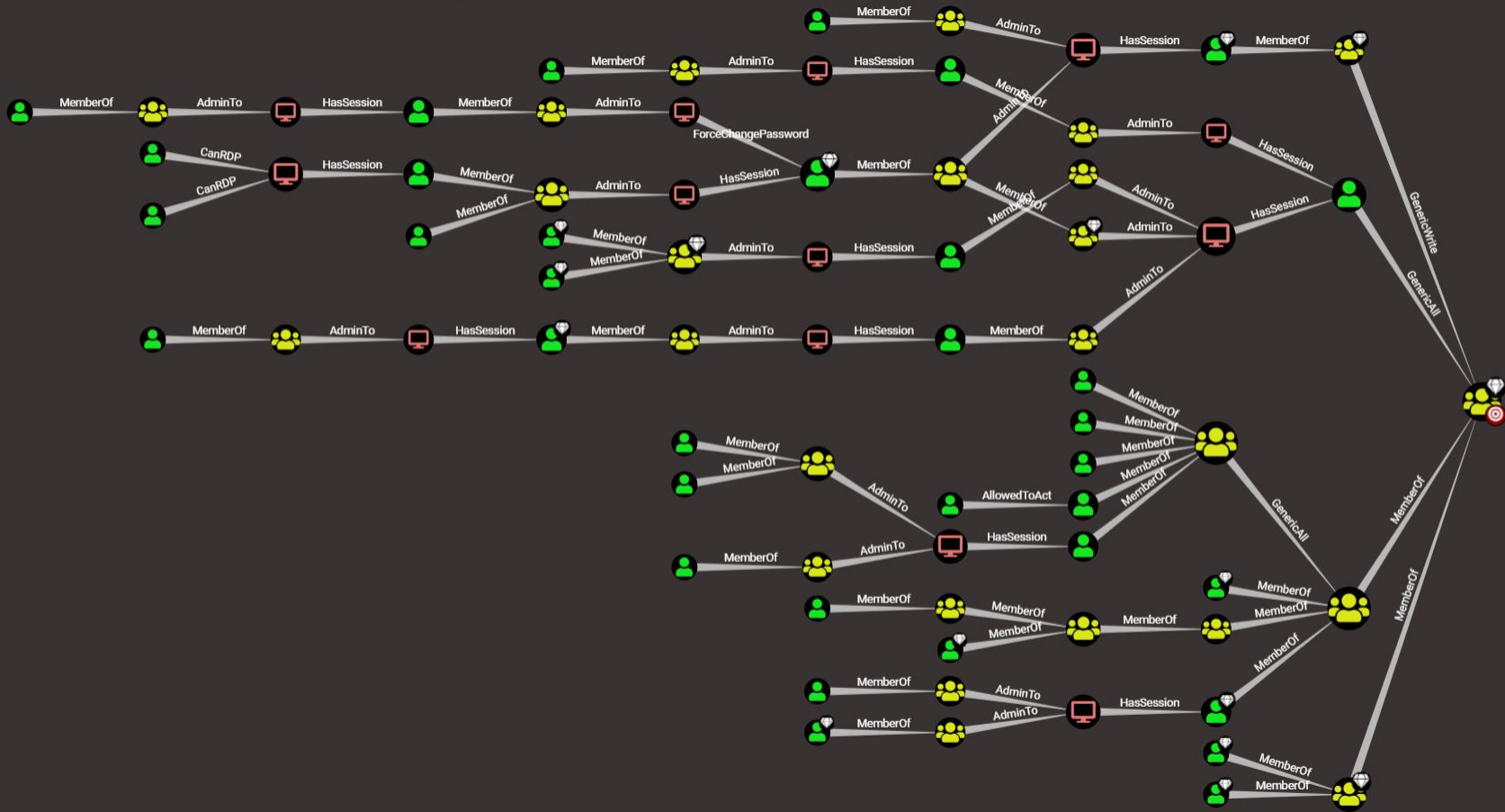
John Lambert,  
Microsoft Threat  
Intelligence Center

## Management of Security Dependencies in Active Directory

- Constructing the **attack paths** can be done **manually** by reviewing permissions, group memberships etc.
- Or by using a tool such as **BloodHound**
- **BloodHound** uses **graph theory** to **reveal relationships** between users, computers, groups, and containers
  - Reveals additional security principals which are highly privileged and represent “**shadow admins**”
- Should be defined as a **process** for a **regular procedure** to
  - Get a better understanding of the impact of your configurations
  - Track changes over time in your AD environments

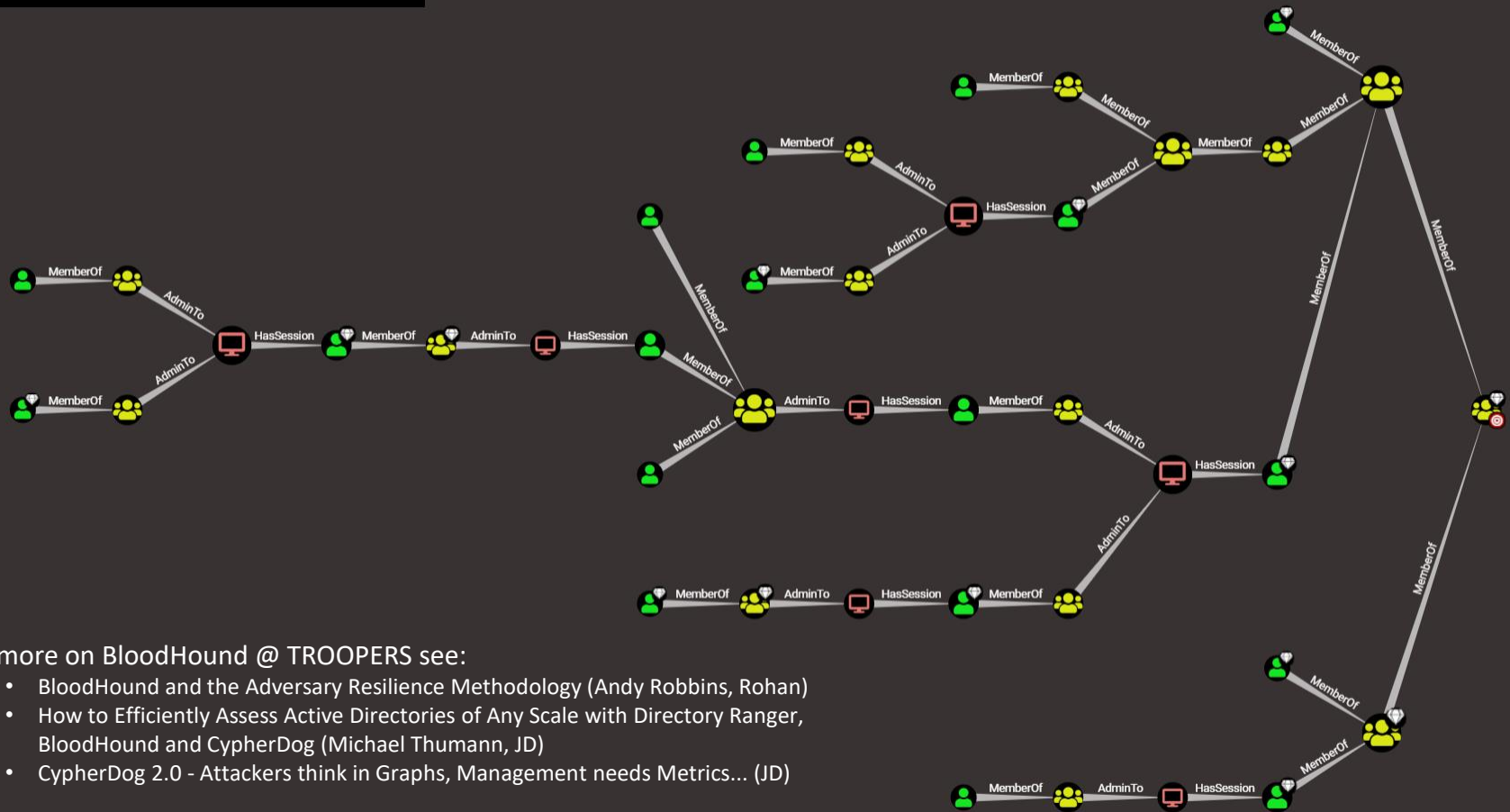


Start typing to search for a node...



Raw Query

Start typing to search for a node...

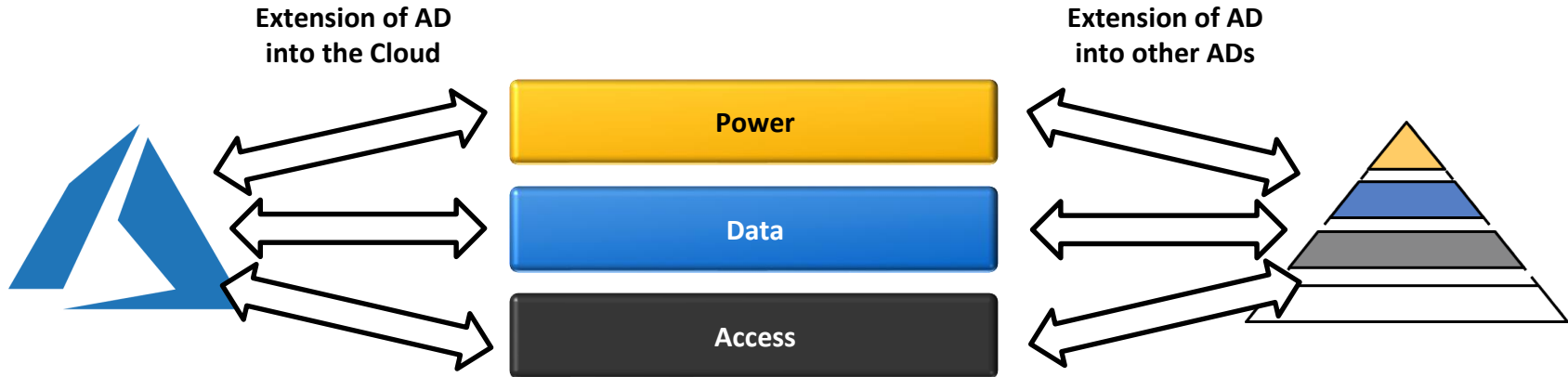


- For more on BloodHound @ TROOPERS see:
  - BloodHound and the Adversary Resilience Methodology (Andy Robbins, Rohan)
  - How to Efficiently Assess Active Directories of Any Scale with Directory Ranger, BloodHound and CypherDog (Michael Thumann, JD)
  - CypherDog 2.0 - Attackers think in Graphs, Management needs Metrics... (JD)

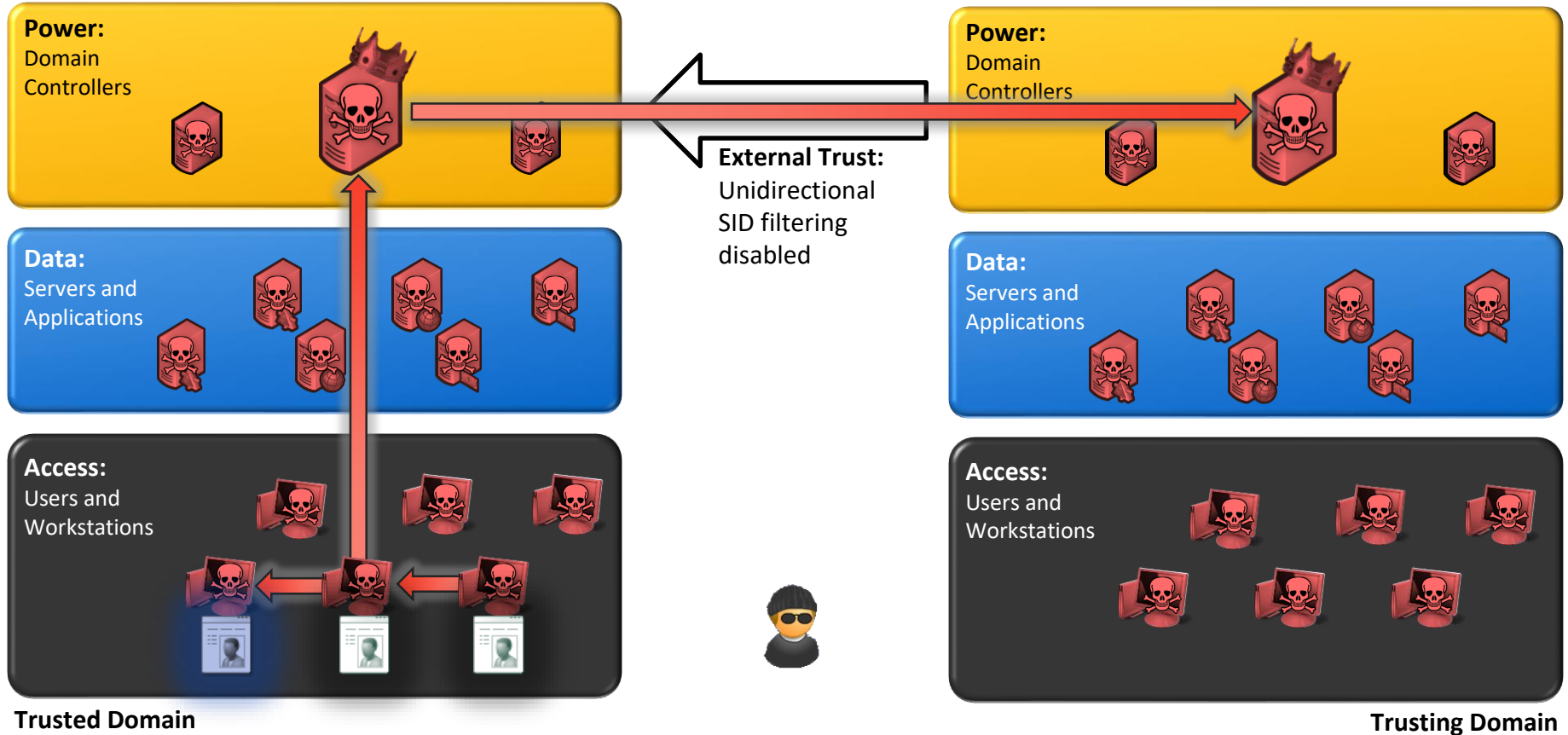


## Limits of Common Controls: Cross Forest Security Dependencies

# Security Dependencies May Extend Credential Theft & Reuse

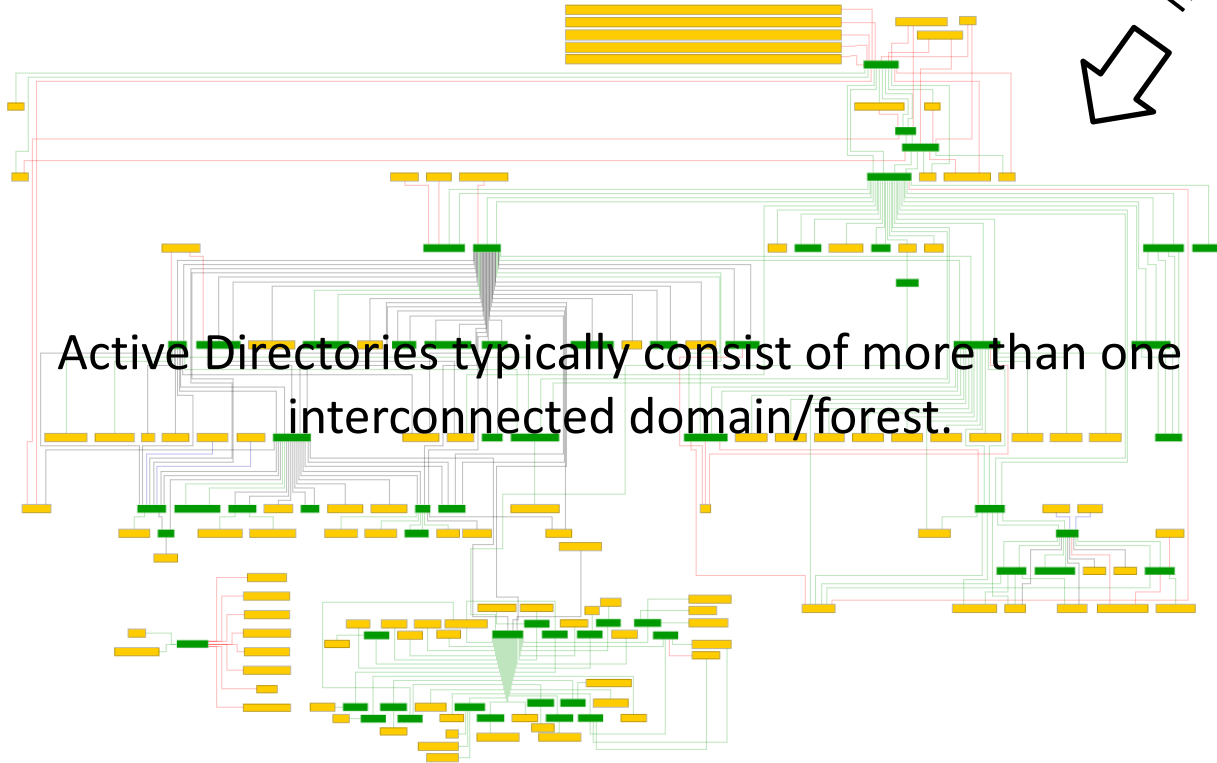



# Example: Pass-the-Credential via AD Trust Relationship



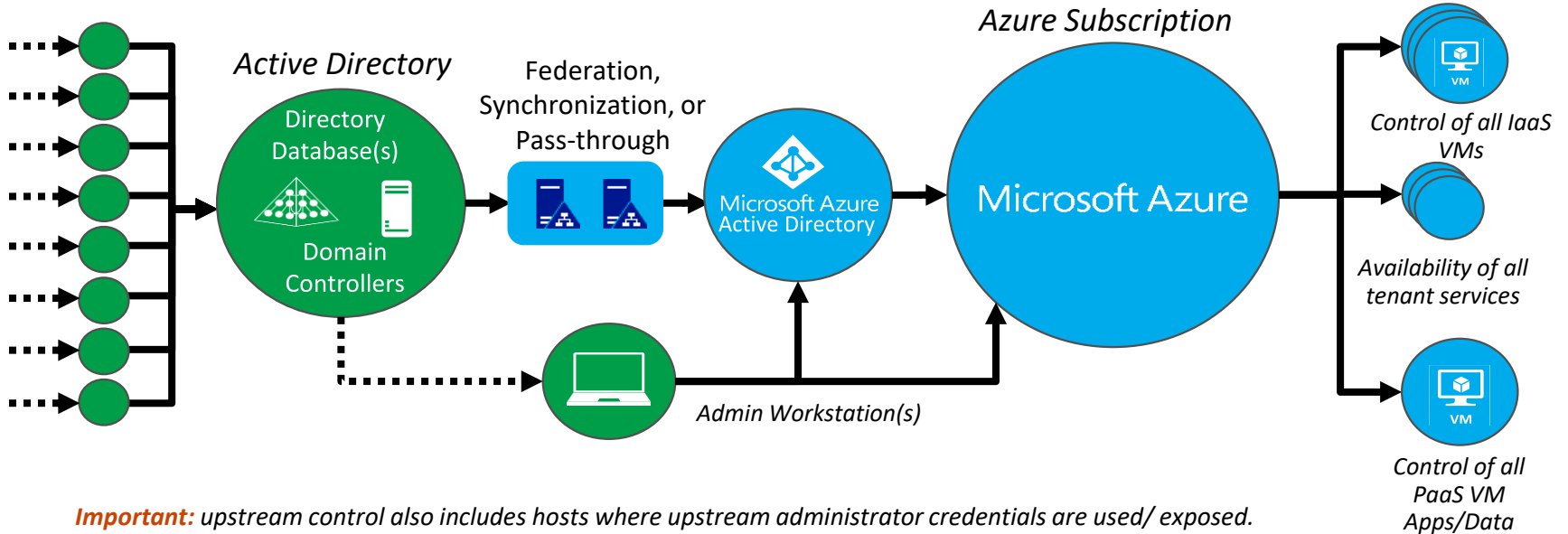


not a joke!



Active Directories typically consist of more than one interconnected domain/forest.

# Means of Control in Azure



**Important:** upstream control also includes hosts where upstream administrator credentials are used/ exposed.

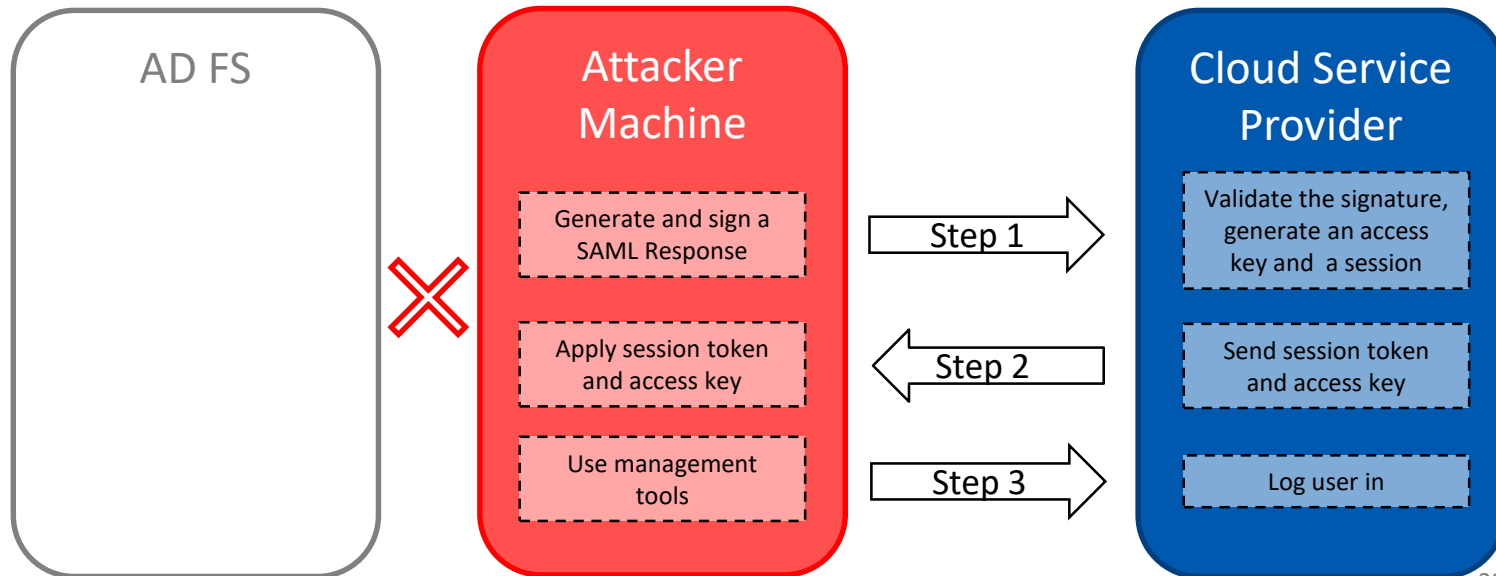


## Example: Golden SAML

- AD FS can utilize the **SAML protocol** to:
  - Exchange authentication and authorization data between an identity provider (e.g. on-premise AD) and a service provider (e.g. Azure)
  - Provide SSO for web applications
  - Based on public-key cryptography to sign (and encrypt) SAML responses
- **Compromise the token-signing private key** of the Identity Provider means **unauthorized access to any service** in a federation with any privileges
  - Similar to a Golden Ticket
  - Does not require the compromise of a Domain Controller, only an AD FS server
- CyberArk has published a blog post and a tool that implements this attack
  - <https://www.cyberark.com/threat-research-blog/golden-saml-newly-discovered-attack-technique-forges-authentication-cloud-apps/>

- For more on AD FS @ TROOPERS see:
  - I am AD FS and so can you: Attacking Active Directory Federated Services (Doug Bienstock, Austin Baker)

## Example: Golden SAML





## New Core Security Controls for Active Directory and Azure

- Hardening of Cross Forest Security Dependency Paths
- Admin Tiering in Azure
- Clean Source Principle in Azure

## Hardening of Cross Forest Security Dependency Paths

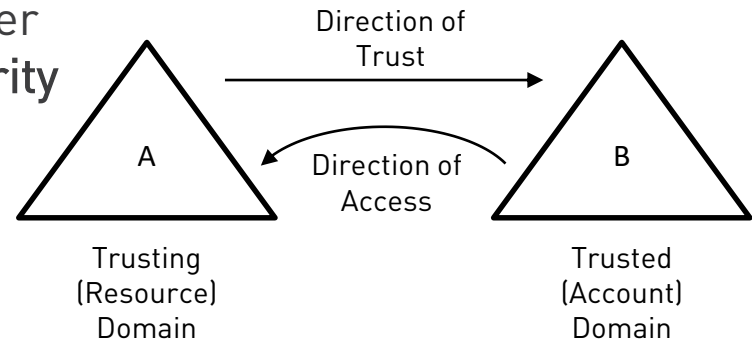
- Security of AD Trust Relationships
- Security of Azure AD Connections



## Security of AD Trust Relationships

## Security of AD Trust Relationships

- **Every trust relationship** to other ADs (other stage, DMZ, foreign) will **impact the security** of the own AD
  - Regardless of the trust direction!
- The **trust direction** influences whether **identities or resources** are exposed to the trusted/trusting AD



- For more on AD trusts @ TROOPERS see:
  - Not A Security Boundary: Breaking Forest Trusts (Will Schroeder, Lee Christensen)





## Implement Hardening of AD Trust Relationships

- **Prerequisite:** All ADs that have connections via trusts should ideally also implement administrative tiers
  - Guarantees an comparable level of security
  - If necessary, the tiers of the source AD can be extended into the connected AD



## Control 4: Implement Hardening of AD Trust Relationships

- When the need for a trust has been established, the following questions should be asked:
  - Which direction of the trust is technically required?
    - Unidirectional trusts should always be preferred
  - Is the trust required for a migration project? Must SID filtering be disabled?
    - SID filtering on external trusts should always be enabled
    - Forest trusts should not be treated as external trusts with regards to SID history and SID filtering

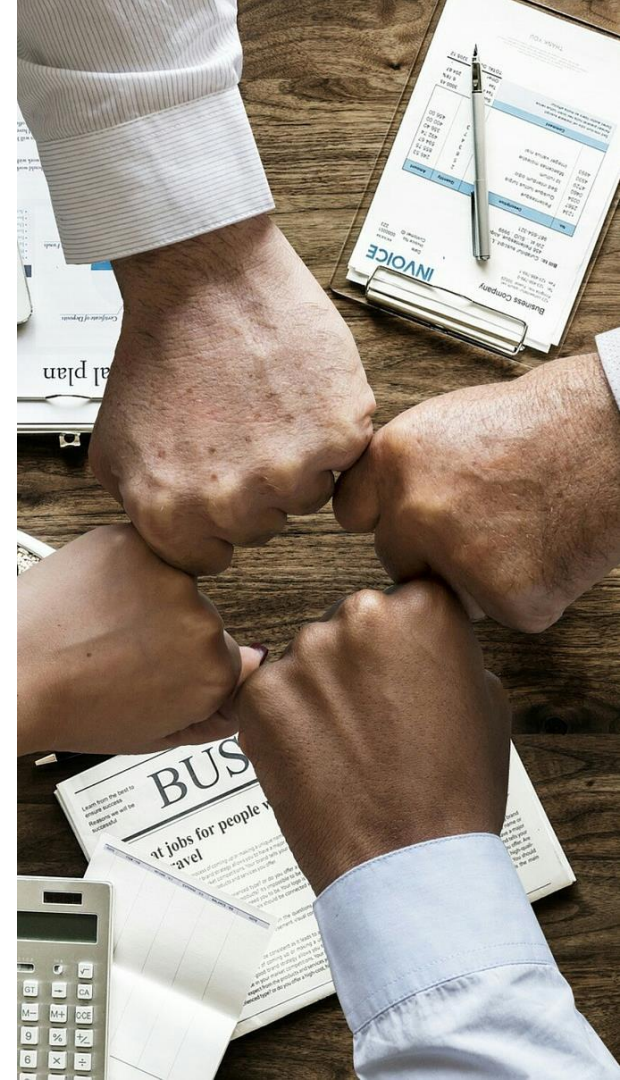
## **Control 4:** Implement Hardening of AD Trust Relationships

- When the need for a trust has been established, the following questions should be asked:
  - **Should all users of the trusted domain/forest be able to access all resources of the trusting domain/forest?**
    - Selective Authentication should be enabled if technically and operationally feasible
  - **Will the trust be used for administrative purposes?**
    - Personnel with highly sensitive privileges should use a separate account for administrating the trusting forest/domain



## Control 4: Implement Hardening of AD Trust Relationships

- After the aforementioned questions have been clarified:
  - Results should be documented
  - Trusts should be configured accordingly
  - Trust configurations should be regularly reviewed based on the documentation to catch drift (every 6 – 12 months)
- This process and general guidelines should be defined in a “AD Trust Policy”



## Security of Azure AD Connections

- Hardening Azure AD Connect Accounts and Systems
- Hardening of AD FS Authentication
- Hardening of Pass-through Authentication

## Control 5: Implement Hardening of Azure AD Connect Accounts and Systems

- System(s) running **Azure AD Connect sync engine** and **corresponding SQL database** should be treated and hardened as **Tier 0 system(s)**
  - Don't forget the basics, e.g. patching of Azure AD Connect
- The **ADSync service account** should run as a **Virtual Service Account** or at least a **Group Managed Service Account**, but not a normal user account
- The **AD DS Connector Account** should be hardened in accordance with **Microsoft Security Advisory 4056318**



Azure Active Directory Connect

## AD DS Connector Account Overview

- With express settings created with prefix **MSOL\_**
- Has a long complex **password** that **does not expire**
- Used to read/write information to Active Directory
- **Not protected by the AdminSDHolder object**
- Created directly under the on-premises AD **User container**
  - Members of the Account Operators group can escalate privileges

Permission through Express Installation	Used for
Replicate Directory Changes <b>Replicate Directory Changes All</b>	Password hash sync
Read/Write all properties User	Import and Exchange hybrid
Read/Write all properties iNetOrgPerson	Import and Exchange hybrid
Read/Write all properties Group	Import and Exchange hybrid
Read/Write all properties Contact	Import and Exchange hybrid
<b>Reset password</b>	Preparation for enabling password writeback

## Implement Hardening of Azure AD Connect Accounts and Systems

- Avoid using the Express Installation
- Avoid use of Account Operators group
- Move the AD DS Connector account into an OU that is only accessible by Tier 0 admins
- Delegate the Reset-Password permission only to Tier 0 admins
- Lock down of access to the AD DS connector account by implementing permission changes
  - Azure AD Connect version 1.1.654.0 (and later) implements these changes
  - Upgrade will **not retroactively** apply these changes



## Control 5: Implement Hardening of AD FS Authentication

- **Strict OS Hardening as a basis**
  - AD FS servers are as important as DCs!
  - Treat the AD FS servers as **Tier 0 systems** (no server administrators should have access)
  - **Protect the private key** used to sign/encrypt the tokens (e.g. with a HSM)
- **Use a Web Application Proxy (WAP)**
  - Only open necessary ports on the firewall
  - Limit number of endpoints enabled on the proxy
- **Best Practices for AD FS Authentication:**
  - Use the “Extended Protection for Authentication” feature
  - Use Extranet lockout protection

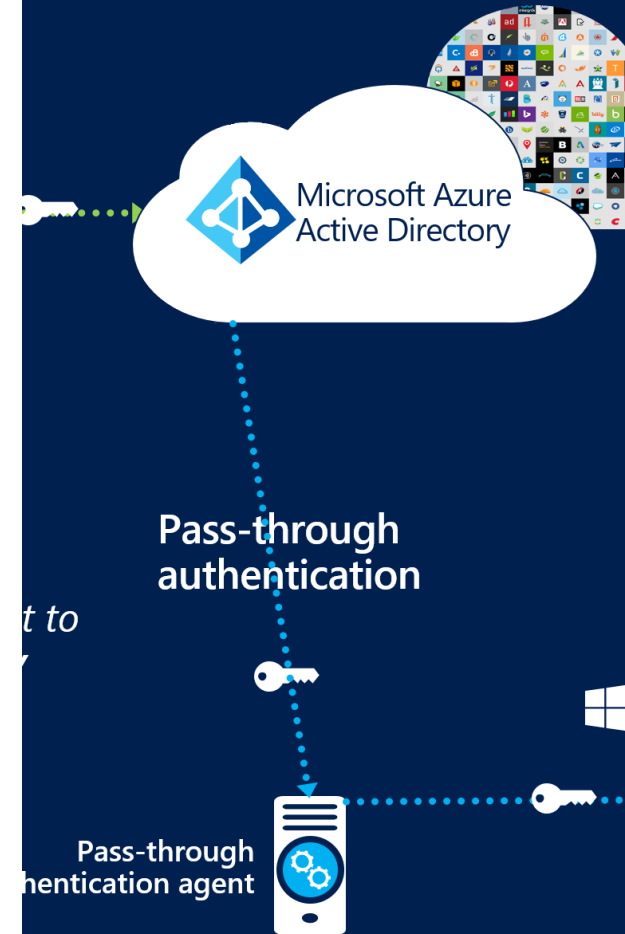


Active Directory Federation Services



## Control 5: Implement Hardening of Azure AD Pass-through Authentication

- Compromise of servers running the authentication agent would **expose Azure resources**
  - Systems should be treated as **Tier 0 systems**
- **Open ports** on the firewall for **inbound** communication **not required**
  - If outbound filtering is enabled:
    - Open the necessary ports for outbound communication of the agent
- **Patching and certificate renewal** is handled by **Microsoft**

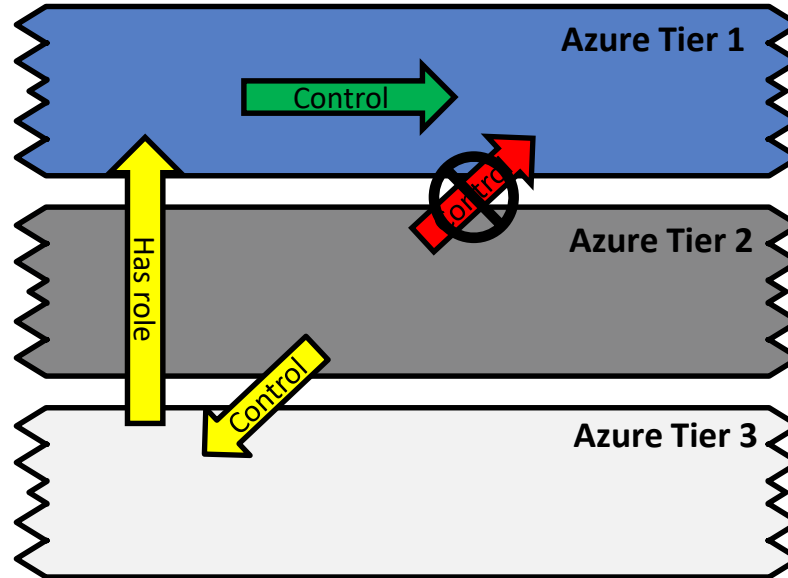


## Admin Tiering in Azure

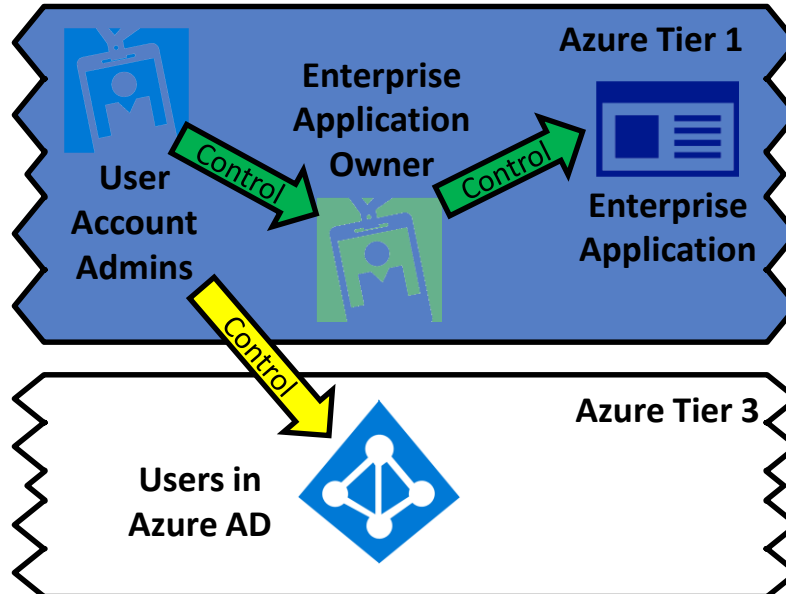
## Administrative Tier Model in Azure (?)!

- Credential theft and privilege escalation are relevant for Azure too... So are Administrative Tiers ;-)
- **Administrative Tiers in Azure are in *any case* relevant security controls**
  - In case of an extension of your on-prem AD to Azure
  - In case of a potential future connection between your on-prem AD and Azure
  - Even in case of a complete separation of your on-prem AD and Azure

## Example: User Account Administrators and Enterprise Application Owners (Issue)

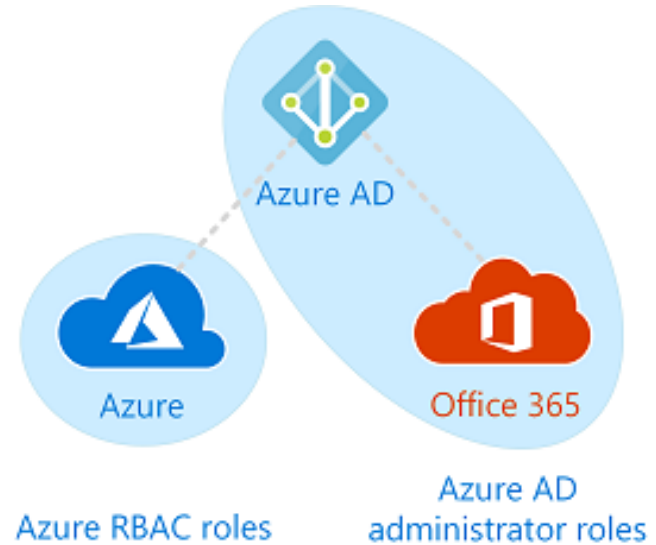


## Example: User Account Administrators and Enterprise Application Owners (Possible Solution)



## Administrative Role Types in Azure You Have to Keep in Mind...

- **Azure AD roles (tenant-wide)**
  - Over 30 roles for administration of Identities, Applications, Devices and SaaS (such as Office 365)
- **Azure “classic” administration model roles**
  - Account Administrator (tenant-wide), Service Administrators and Co-Administrators (subscription-wide)
- **Azure Resource Manager model (Azure RBAC) roles**
  - Over 70 fine-grained administrative roles for administration of Azure resources



## Tier 0 Equivalency in Azure

- Identities that grant the possibility to take control over an Azure tenant, have to be considered Tier 0
- Tier 0 equivalency in Azure corresponds to the following accounts
  - Global Administrator (AAD role)
  - Privileged Role Administrator (AAD role)
  - Billing Administrator (Update organization.trustedCAsForPasswordlessAuth property in Azure Active Directory) (AAD role)





## Tier 1 Equivalency in Azure

- Most Azure and Office 365 resources can be seen as equivalent to on-premise assets like
  - Enterprise servers (file servers, database servers, virtualization components etc.)
  - Services (patch management, AV, backups etc., Exchange Online)
  - Applications (SAP etc.)
- ... and therefore **as belonging to Tier 1**
  - The administrators controlling the subscriptions and resources as well as most administrative roles in Azure AD that are not considered Tier 0 have to be placed in Tier 1
  - User Account Administrators may belong to Azure T 1, depending on the accounts they manage.



## Tier 2 Equivalency in Azure

- Azure Tier 2 contains:
  - Systems /applications
    - Windows 10 machines joined to Azure AD
    - (If existent): VMs and applications (in Azure AD or Azure ADDS) that are classified as belonging to Azure T2
  - Administrative identities (such as):
    - Cloud Device Administrator
    - Device Administrators
    - Intune Administrator
    - Additionally local administrator of the devices
- But be careful as standard users in Azure AD can be authorized to have administrative privileges in Azure or Office 365 subscriptions





# Implementation Steps of Admin Tiers in Azure

- Basically, the same as in on-prem Active Directory
- Every single security principal, system, or application has to be **classified** as belonging only to one tier
- Implement **control restrictions**
  - Via AAD administrative roles and RBAC model roles
- Implement **logon restrictions** to prevent
  - Azure T 0 accounts from logging on to non-Tier 0 asset such as:
    - Azure T1 enterprise applications /services
    - AAD-joined (physical) Win10 devices (T2)
    - (If existent): VMs in Azure or in Azure ADDS that are defined as belonging to T2
  - Azure T 1 accounts from logging on to T2 asset such as:
    - AAD-joined (physical) Win10 devices
    - (If existent): VMs in Azure or in Azure ADDS that are defined as belonging to T2

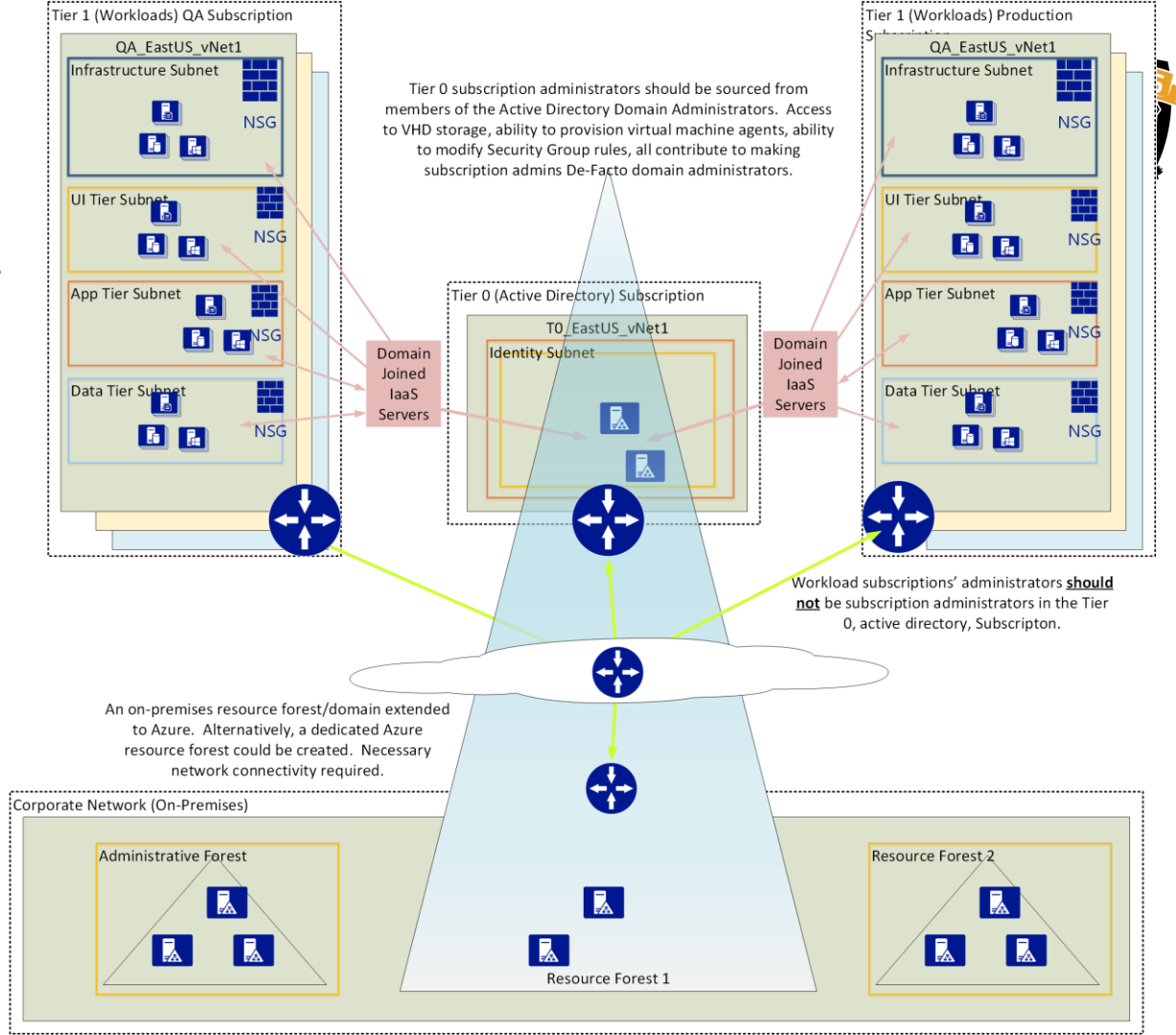




# Example: Admin Tiering for Tier 0 Assets Extended to Azure

See:

[https://mva.microsoft.com/en-us/training-courses/security-in-a-cloudenabled-world-12725?l=ciV5MdAcB\\_5904300474](https://mva.microsoft.com/en-us/training-courses/security-in-a-cloudenabled-world-12725?l=ciV5MdAcB_5904300474)



## Controls for Admin Tiering in Hybrid ADs

- **Control 6:** Implement Administrative Tiers in Azure (in an equivalent manner to on-prem AD)
- Separate on-prem AD-Administration from Azure Administration
  - Separate on-prem Admin Tiers from Admin Tiers in Azure
  - Use on-prem AD identities for on-prem AD administration
  - Use Azure identities for Azure Administration
    - ⇒ *Don't sync* on-prem admins of T0/T1/T2 to Azure
    - ⇒ *Don't extend* on-prem T0/T1/T2 into Azure (use instead Azure AD Domain Services)
    - ⇒ *Use separate T1 admins* for on-prem domain-joined servers in Azure in case you already extended your T1 into Azure

# Azure AD Privileged Identity Management

- Use Azure AD PIM if possible (requires E5 licence)
- PIM can be used to support the Least Privilege Principle and Admin Tiering by providing:
  - Just-in-time privileged access to Azure AD and Azure resources
  - Time-bound access to resources
  - Approval process to activate privileged roles (including a requirement for justification and sending of notifications)
  - Auditing capabilities (access logs, download functionality)
- Note: The following roles cannot be managed in PIM
  - Classic subscription administrator roles (Account Administrator, Service Administrator, Co-Administrator)
  - Roles within Exchange Online or SharePoint Online, except for Exchange Administrator and SharePoint Administrator



## Clean Source Principle in Azure

## Control 7: Clean Source Principle in Azure (Software Installation)

- Installation of software or usage of downloaded data should follow the same principles as in the on-premise AD
  - New sources of software are available in the form of the Azure Marketplace
  - The market place provides various forms of “product types”:
    - SaaS
    - Solution Templates
    - VM Images
- Pay special attention to VM images for IaaS from the Azure Marketplace as they are often outdated!





## Cloud marketplaces are supply chains

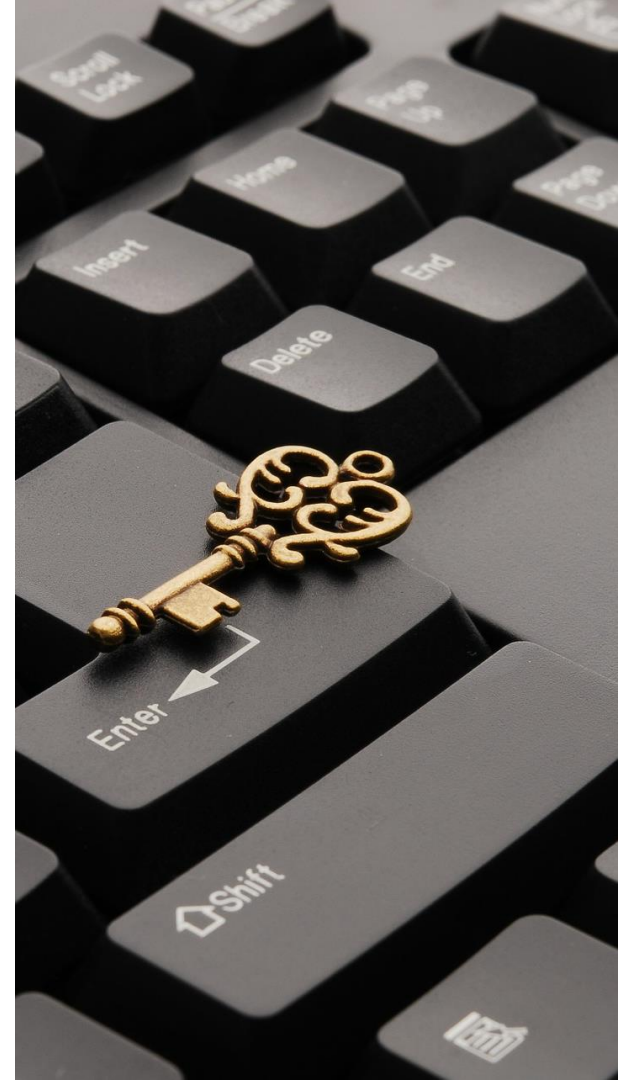
- Supply chain attacks are increasingly common
- Cloud marketplaces could be next
- Lots of resources; high value targets
- Minimal validation of 3<sup>rd</sup> party IaaS VM images
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party IaaS images are **OLD**
  - Average Azure Age: **123 days**
  - Average AWS Age: **717 days**
- Updating IaaS VM images is not retroactive



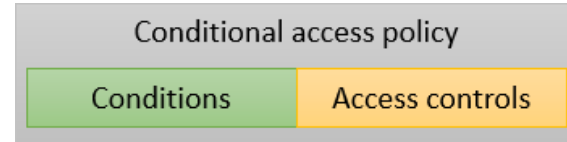


## Control 7: Clean Source Principle in Azure (Administration)

- Administration of high-value Azure assets also requires the use of PAWs
  - Alternatives do not exist
  - Microsoft also does this for all on-premise and Azure resources!
- Hardening the access path becomes more important
  - Management of resources does not only take place inside your own network, but also over the Internet
  - Securing the “edge” becomes a priority by utilizing traditional network-based isolation/segmentation using IP-based firewall and route ACLs
- Network-based controls should be supplemented with user and machine identity checks




## Azure AD Conditional Access



- **Conditions** ("when this happens"):
  - **Users and groups**
    - All or specific users/groups?
  - **Cloud apps**
    - All or specific apps?
  - **Sign-in risk**
    - Via Azure AD Identity Protection
  - **Device platforms**
    - All or specific OSs?
  - **Device state**
    - All or only unmanaged devices?
  - **Locations**
    - Any or specific locations?
- **Access controls** ("then do this"):
  - Grant or block access based on:
    - Multi-factor authentication
    - Compliant device (MDM)
    - Hybrid Azure AD joined device
    - Approved client app
  - **Example:** Block access for global administrators on unmanaged devices.

# Special Clean Source Principle Measures for Azure Administrators

- Use Azure Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)
  - Should be required **at least** for all individual users who are permanently assigned to one or more of the Azure AD admin roles: Global administrator, Privileged Role administrator, Exchange Online administrator, and SharePoint Online administrator
  - Ideally, enabled for **all** Azure AD admin roles
  -  Keep in mind: MFA should not be the sole protection mechanism for admin accounts!
- Use **work accounts** instead of Microsoft accounts
  - Microsoft accounts should be replaced by **individual cloud-based** or **synchronized accounts**
- Global administrator accounts should not have personal email addresses

“Only 0.73% of tenant admins have Multi-factor Authentication enabled.”

Microsoft Ignite 2017 BRK3016

## Core Security Controls Overview



# Core Security Controls Overview



- **Common Core Security Controls for Active Directory**
  - **Control 1: Implement Administrative Tiers**
    - Control 1a: Classify every security principal, system, or application as belonging only to one tier
    - Control 1b: Implement logon restrictions
    - Control 1c: Implement control restrictions
  - **Control 2: Implement Clean Source Principle**
    - Control 2a: Implement PAWs
    - Control 2b: Implement ESAE
  - **Control 3: Understand and Manage Security Dependencies in Active Directory**
    - Control 3a: Identify security dependencies in Active Directory
    - Control 3b: Supervise & harden security dependencies in Active Directory
    - Control 3c: Apply change management to security dependencies in Active Directory

# Core Security Controls Overview



- **New Core Security Controls for Active Directory and Azure**
  - **Control 4: Implement Hardening of AD Trust Relationships**
    - Control 4a: Implement unidirectional trusts
    - Control 4b: Disable SID filtering only within a well-defined time frame
    - Control 4c: Use selective authentication whenever possible
    - Control 4d: Use dedicated accounts for cross-forest administration
  - **Control 5: Implement Hardening of Azure AD Connections**
    - Control 5a: Harden Azure AD Connect Accounts and Systems
    - Control 5b: Harden of AD FS Authentication
    - Control 5c: Harden of Pass-through Authentication

# Core Security Controls Overview



- **New Core Security Controls for Active Directory and Azure**
  - **Control 6:** Implement Administrative Tiers in Azure including Logon Restrictions and Control Restrictions (in an equivalent manner to on-prem AD)
    - Control 6a: Separate on-prem Admin Tiers from Azure Admin Tiers
    - Control 6b: Separate on-prem administration from Azure administration (use on-prem AD identities for on-prem AD administration and Azure identities for Azure Administration)
    - Control 6c: Don't sync on-prem admins of T0/T1/T2 to Azure
    - Control 6d: Don't extend on-prem T0/T1/T2 into Azure (use instead Azure AD Domain Services)
    - Control 6e: Use Azure AD PIM if possible
  - **Control 7:** Implement Clean Source Principle in Azure
    - Control 7a: Clean Source Principle for Software Installation
    - Control 7b: Clean Source Principle for Administration





# DirectoryRanger

Log in

 @DirectoryRanger

Thank you for your attention!



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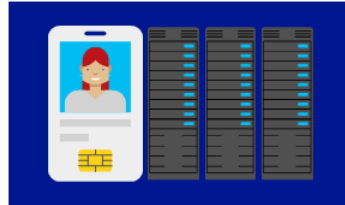




## Backup /Additional Information



**Attack Sophistication**  
Attack operators will exploit any weakness  
Target information on any device or service



**Exploiting Credentials**  
On-premises Active Directory controls access to business assets  
Attackers commonly target AD DS and IT Admins

**Attacks not detected**  
Current detection tools miss most attacks  
You may be under attack (or compromised)



**Response and Recovery**  
Response requires advanced expertise and tools.  
Expensive and challenging to successfully recover from.



## Sources

- Icons
  - <https://icons8.com/>

