KNOWLEDGE BASE ARTICLE

Explaining Persistent-ID

The article explains how Persistent-ID in Shibboleth authentication helps maintain user continuity across sessions. It highlights challenges when switching authentication systems and suggests a hybrid solution to retain Persistent-ID.

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Persistent-ID in Shibboleth Authentication

Persistent-ID is used in Shibboleth authentication by Service Providers (SPs) from the attributes released by an Identity Provider (IdP). These attributes determine who is authorised to access content on the SP's servers. Persistent identifiers are unique to a given user and remain consistent across sessions. They enable continuity between sessions at a given SP, facilitating user registration, personalisation of the account or session, and remote saving of work. This means users don't have to set up their account each time they access the resource in question.

Core Attributes for UK Federation Members

For UK federation members, two core attributes can be described as persistent identifiers:

- eduPersonPrincipalName (ePPN)
- eduPersonTargetedID (ePTId)

ePPN can be linked to a specific user and thus needs to be released with caution. ePTId is generally what is meant by persistent-id or targeted-id because it’s pseudonymous, meaning it is unique to any given user when accessing any given SP. This version of persistent-ID is generated by the software and uniquely identifies the user. It is used in library licensing for paid resources. Therefore, any changes to the setup of the calculation of the coding for the eduPersonTargetedID attribute, including the entityID of the issuing IdP, will change the

attribute value. This severs the connection between that institution's users and any of their information saved at SPs, disrupting the information saved on the SP's server.

Changing Authentication to AzureAD from LDAP Authentication

The challenge for all parties involved here is that switching to AzureAD breaks Persistent-ID, so users can lose SP content. Any change, therefore, needs to be carefully considered. Essington ITS Ltd offers a hybrid solution that retains persistent-ID. Please contact us if you are interested.

References

- **UK federation:** https://www.ukfederation.org.uk/content/Documents/AttributesForAuthorization
- **Shibboleth Atlassian site:** https://shibboleth.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/IDP4/pages/1265631673/PersistentNameIDGenerationConfiguration

Persistent-ID Shibboleth UK federation