

Maslow's Hammer

From University of Michigan

There is an idea in psychology, often referred to as Maslow's Hammer, that describes the over-reliance on a specific tool. The basic gist is "In the land of the hammer, every problem is a nail.". And we, my friends, find ourselves in the land of the hammer.

For well over a decade, U-M has granted users the ability to create and manage their own groups in our LDAP directory with few restrictions. Groups names have to be long enough as to not overlap with the username namespace. Anyone with a valid username and password can create groups, which includes the 66% of our people registry whose only role is alumni.

For a period of time that was enough; users wanted only to manage email groups and they were happy. Needs change over time. Services evolved needing authorization and provisioning solutions. Resourceful users who needed to provision these services began to create and leverage groups in our LDAP directory as access control groups. Happy hour email groups were suddenly being used fulfill a variety of purposes for which they were not intended nor particularly well suited to.

Today there are over 85,000 groups in our LDAP directory. Group usage continues to grow and use cases continue to increase in complexity. We need to retool group organization and management - especially around access control. We want provide a better tool for campus to easily access and use commonly needed groups like departmental groups. We want these departmental groups to be automatically derived from institutional data instead of manually maintained. We would like to empower people responsible for an access group to tweak them as needed with include/exclude functionality. We would like to be able to accurately identify which groups are used for what and efficiently sync them to appropriate environments for provisioning. We want to monitor groups provisioning higher risk access as well as keep better records of group changes by whom/what, when and how.

'Tis the season for wish lists.

[blocked URL](#)