Chapter 26. groups

26.1. about groups

Users can be listed in **groups**. Groups allow you to set permissions on the group level instead of having to set permissions for every individual user. Every Unix or Linux distribution will have a graphical tool to manage groups. Novice users are advised to use this graphical tool. More experienced users can use command line tools to manage users, but be careful: Some distributions do not allow the mixed use of GUI and CLI tools to manage groups (YaST in Novell Suse). Senior administrators can edit the relevant files directly with **vi** or **vigr**.

26.2. groupadd

Groups can be created with the **groupadd** command. The example below shows the creation of five (empty) groups.

```
root@laika:~# groupadd tennis
root@laika:~# groupadd football
root@laika:~# groupadd snooker
root@laika:~# groupadd formula1
root@laika:~# groupadd salsa
```

26.3. /etc/group

Users can be a member of several groups. Group membership is defined by the **/etc/group** file.

```
root@laika:~# tail -5 /etc/group
tennis:x:1006:
football:x:1007
snooker:x:1008:
formula1:x:1009:
salsa:x:1010:
root@laika:~#
```

The first field is the group's name. The second field is the group's (encrypted) password (can be empty). The third field is the group identification or **GID**. The fourth field is the list of members, these groups have no members.

26.4. usermod

Group membership can be modified with the useradd or **usermod** command.

```
root@laika:~# usermod -a -G tennis inge
root@laika:~# usermod -a -G tennis katrien
root@laika:~# usermod -a -G salsa katrien
root@laika:~# usermod -a -G snooker sandra
root@laika:~# usermod -a -G formula1 annelies
root@laika:~# tail -5 /etc/group
tennis:x:1006:inge,katrien
football:x:1007:
snooker:x:1008:sandra
formula1:x:1009:annelies
salsa:x:1010:katrien
root@laika:~#
```

Be careful when using **usermod** to add users to groups. By default, the **usermod** command will **remove** the user from every group of which he is a member if the group is not listed in the command! Using the **-a** (append) switch prevents this behaviour.

26.5. groupmod

You can change the group name with the **groupmod** command.

```
root@laika:~# groupmod -n darts snooker
root@laika:~# tail -5 /etc/group
tennis:x:1006:inge,katrien
football:x:1007:
formula1:x:1009:annelies
salsa:x:1010:katrien
darts:x:1008:sandra
```

26.6. groupdel

You can permanently remove a group with the **groupdel** command.

```
root@laika:~# groupdel tennis
root@laika:~#
```

26.7. groups

A user can type the **groups** command to see a list of groups where the user belongs to.

```
[harry@RHEL4b ~]$ groups
harry sports
[harry@RHEL4b ~]$
```

26.8. gpasswd

You can delegate control of group membership to another user with the **gpasswd** command. In the example below we delegate permissions to add and remove group members to serena for the sports group. Then we **su** to serena and add harry to the sports group.

```
[root@RHEL4b ~]# gpasswd -A serena sports
[root@RHEL4b ~]# su - serena
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ id harry
uid=516(harry) gid=520(harry) groups=520(harry)
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ gpasswd -a harry sports
Adding user harry to group sports
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ id harry
uid=516(harry) gid=520(harry) groups=520(harry),522(sports)
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ tail -1 /etc/group
sports:x:522:serena,venus,harry
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$
```

Group administrators do not have to be a member of the group. They can remove themselves from a group, but this does not influence their ability to add or remove members.

```
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ gpasswd -d serena sports
Removing user serena from group sports
[serena@RHEL4b ~]$ exit
```

Information about group administrators is kept in the **/etc/gshadow** file.

```
[root@RHEL4b ~]# tail -1 /etc/gshadow
sports:!:serena:venus,harry
[root@RHEL4b ~]#
```

To remove all group administrators from a group, use the **gpasswd** command to set an empty administrators list.

```
[root@RHEL4b ~]# gpasswd -A "" sports
```

26.9. vigr

Similar to vipw, the **vigr** command can be used to manually edit the **/etc/group** file, since it will do proper locking of the file. Only experienced senior administrators should use **vi** or **vigr** to manage groups.