# **Identity**

## **What is an Identity?**

The different actors in a blockchain network include peers, orderers, client applications, administrators and more. Each of these actors — active elements inside or outside a network able to consume services — has a digital identity encapsulated in an X.509 digital certificate. These identities really matter because they **determine the exact permissions over resources and access to information that actors have in a blockchain network.**

A digital identity furthermore has some additional attributes that Fabric uses to determine permissions, and it gives the union of an identity and the associated attributes a special name — **principal**. Principals are just like userIDs or groupIDs, but a little more flexible because they can include a wide range of properties of an actor’s identity, such as the actor’s organization, organizational unit, role or even the actor’s specific identity. When we talk about principals, they are the properties which determine their permissions.

For an identity to be **verifiable**, it must come from a **trusted** authority. A [membership service provider](https://hyperledger-fabric.readthedocs.io/en/release-1.4/membership/membership.html) (MSP) is how this is achieved in Fabric. More specifically, an MSP is a component that defines the rules that govern the valid identities for this organization. The default MSP implementation in Fabric uses X.509 certificates as identities, adopting a traditional Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) hierarchical model (more on PKI later).