

Identity Management

Highly automated processes for access rights increase security

Kela – The Social Insurance Institution of Finland set up a project to improve their security and risk management. The basis of their new system is an identity management solution which was implemented with support from MATERNA.



Kela provides social security benefits for all the residents in Finland and also for citizens living in foreign countries but belonging to the Finnish social security. The administration employs about 6,000 people.

The situation at Kela before introducing the new system was such that the existing access rights were maintained on several different systems. Thus, the classification of access rights had become complex making administration even more complicated, too. The controlling tools being used were also cumbersome and outdated and some of the maintenance was even done manually. In addition, the increasing co-operation with external partners created a new demand for more efficient and secure identity management. This all created additional administration and support costs.

Therefore, Kela started the development of a new system for their identity management. Their main goal was more security. But they also planned to reduce the workload of the help desk and of identity management functions. Employees should also be enabled to work productively more quickly.

The new solution had to fulfil identity management as well as access management requirements. User and identity management includes approval processes and provisioning of access rights to the target systems, e.g., Active Directory, SAP

and Lotus Notes. Password management includes password synchronisation for target systems and also a self-service function so that employees can release passwords by themselves. As Kela operates in the public sector, they have to use the “public procurement tendering process“. The main principles of the provisions on public procurement are an open and efficient tendering procedure and the equal and non-discriminatory treatment of tenderers.

Their request for proposal for the new identity management solution included implementation and user training. Apart from the suitability of the solution for the requirements they also put emphasis on vendor references and the vendor's broad expert knowledge. The requirements were weighted according to a coefficient. Finally, the tool decision was made for products from BMC and the implementation partner MATERNA Finland. The basic functions and the workflow had already been implemented in November 2007. New target systems like Content Manager and Lotus Domino and further automation functions such as resetting passwords as a self service were then implemented in 2008 and 2009.

Identity management implementation

MATERNA designed and implemented the solution and implemented the workflows with BMC's Remedy Action Request System. The workflows manage the request and approval processes for access rights. Furthermore, experts from BMC and MATERNA implemented the provisioning of user and identity information to the target systems and password management by using BMC's Identity Management platform. The system is also integrated into SAP HR. This has the advantage that employee's basic information, organisational structure, the information for the manager and superior as well as back-ups and approval information is automatically transmitted to the identity management system and does not need to be entered several times.

The new system is very comprehensive and fulfils several tasks including account management (user creation, user deletion), maintenance of access roles and task roles as well as

Practical tip

“Our experience shows us that it is best to develop a clear picture of the goals and to thoroughly define the requirements specification. The new system is easy to use technically, but understanding identity acceptance and control principles requires guidance and training. Therefore, reserve enough time for communication, information sharing and training of managers during the project.”

Leena Soikkeli, Information Security Manager, Kela

password management (password synchronisation, password self-service exemption) and the management of responsibility areas. It also covers the provisioning of user and access rights information to the target systems and identity creation, modification and removal. To round it off the system also contains a search function, reporting and monitoring tools as well as identity management control.

Automation on several levels

The new solution supports the organisation’s processes in several ways: Kela now has a centralised database and decentralised maintenance e.g. which is accessible for managers and superiors. This means that managers and superiors can request new access rights or change existing ones using the implemented web portal. The real work of modifying access rights is then done automatically by the identity management solution. In addition, several tasks are automated such as the automated approval process on a workflow basis, automatic provisioning to target systems and password self-service exemption. Access rights are also removed automatically when an employee leaves the organisation.

“One of the main benefits is the increased automation in our identity management,” says Leena Soikkeli, Information Security Manager with Kela. Another benefit is that identity information is stored centrally in one place. All access rights are documented from creation through to modification and removal. The immediate managers and superiors make all decisions related to the access rights directly. Thus, “records” are no longer needed. Access to the system is authorised and made available quickly – the process only takes a few minutes. If needed, access rights can also be approved in advance for new employees. In addition, the access rights control can be tested in the test environment. “A systematic definition of identity and access roles is now part of the design of information systems at Kela,” says Leena Soikkeli.

The new system is quite a success for Kela and the objectives that were set up for the reform of identity management have been achieved. Taking into consideration how widely

the system is integrated, it has worked well and Kela did not have major problems. However, the complexity of platforms and databases comprising the system makes it a challenge for maintenance.

Only very few development needs came out after the project had been finished which reflects the success of the implementation. “We are also very happy with MATERNA. The development and technical support we got was very skilled, professional and quick. They familiarised themselves easily with our environment, made proposals and implemented the solution quickly and on schedule,” summarises Leena Soikkeli. Coming soon is an upgrade to the next version of BMC’s Identity Management platform which brings the tailored Remedy workflow even closer to the identity management. ■

Benefits of the solution

- High degree of automation
- Centralised identity information
- Quick approval of access rights
- Advance approval of access rights
- Automatically documented access rights
- Reporting and monitoring tools
- Systematic definition of identity and access roles
- Test environment for access rights control

About Kela

Supervised by the Finnish Parliament, Kela is an independent social security institution with its own administration and finances. Kela looks after basic social security for all persons resident in Finland. The terms and conditions of the benefits provided by Kela are defined in legislation. Typical situations in which customers contact Kela include childbirth, study, sickness, unemployment and retirement.