

BRIFING PAPER

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Sharing
Moodle
Instances
with
CAPDM
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Introduction

Many organisations do not want to take on the complexity and responsibility of running their own Moodle or Totara system, and ask us to undertake this as a service for them to use.

Moodle's open source, zero-license fee approach has allowed us to settle on a site management approach that we have found tends to minimise any possible problems for ongoing site administration and sharing. We call this approach the '**three instance**' approach, so named because it requires us to setup and manage 3 separate instances of Moodle, to be used in parallel to let us operate the service together, robustly.

This briefing paper explains the three instance approach, and how it is used collaboratively to deliver a sustainable online learning capability.

Three Instances

The three instances are:

1. **Developer** (usually something like yourco.xxx.xxx)
2. **Quality Assurance** (usually yourco.courseworker.net)
3. **Live** (usually yourco.courseworker.net)

The **Developer instance** is used by our (and maybe your) programmers only, for developing new code modules and features and Alpha testing them before rolling them out. You will probably never see this version of your site - we use it internally, and often we keep it on a local server, not on the Amazon EC2 cloud servers we use for QA and Live services.

The **Quality Assurance (or "QA") instance** is the one we share with you as a testbed though some of our customers refer to it as a "Staging" instance. It has no students or tutors registered on it, just course developers, integrators and testers who often work sharing three default and test user accounts: **admin** (admin permissions set); **tutor** (editing teacher permissions set); and **student** (student permissions only).

We load all new courses and code modules onto this QA instance first, and test and proof them there first before rolling them out onto the Live instance. We suggest our customers do the same, and use the QA instance to experiment with any Moodle features or functions they want to try out.

It can also be used for internal training if you like, but it can sometimes look a little ragged as we also use it to test the integration of new versions of Moodle and interim security patches, new CSS/Bootstrap styles, new functions and code modules, and third party tools such as Turnitin, BBB, Mahara.

The **Live instance** is the one the marketing and sales teams, students and tutors actually use 24/7/365. There is no development done on this instance, and updates to it are done at scheduled times/points only to minimise the impact of possible problems resulting from the update. This is the instance that gets daily

off site backups, and is linked to the live student content database.

In the beginning, we usually setup a shared Moodle site and use it to develop an initial course design or two, and some exemplar courses. This involves taking representative content; tagging it up in the DocBook 5 open standard and batch generating it in PDF, Moodle and other formats in the customer's chosen corporate styling. These outputs and Moodle site can then be tested internally and with selected customers, to refine them for optimum use and value.

This early work is often called a **proof-of-concept project**, as it can be used not only to test out new product (course) designs, but also their production and delivery environment cost and configurations.

The resulting Moodle instance often then becomes the QA one, since existing course authors and developers are used to using it. Once business approval to proceed is given, new **Developer** and **Live** instances are established and the QA site is back-fitted-out from the final Live site design and administration accounts are shared for use.

At this point we have a proven course design, production approach and Moodle staging and delivery environment, which can be integrated into your administration and enrolment system and operated continuously.

The underlying driver of successful ongoing service operation is to be able to manage successfully the processes of change.

Subject matter continuously changes, usually requiring courses to be refreshed or re-developed annually at least, and sometimes as often as monthly. Internet technologies and standards are constantly changing, often requiring refreshed content and styling that can handle new web browsers and services. Moodle instances need to be constantly updated to get new features, security patched and user administered. Business and product plans evolve and require re-implementation.

Managing change is a key aspect of operating a sustainable learning delivery capability, but a shared set of operating procedures and schedule of change points helps too.

By sharing a three instance management approach with CAPDM, you should be able to operate a sustainable and robust learning delivery capability for

Usual Startup

Ongoing Operation

Conclusion

your organisation, and keep it at the edge of the evolving learning technologies and designs.

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