

IE 101 | Innovation and Entrepreneurship 101

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Case Study: VMware Scaling Innovation in Mobile

VMware Scaling Mobile Device Management

VMware was one of the first commercially successful companies to virtualize the x86 architecture. This case starts with VMware's effort to move toward mobile virtual platforms and then shows how the company scaled through acquisition, integration, and engineering discipline.

An innovation project may start within one team or approach, but then move to scaled execution using an acquisition.

Figure 12. VMware's mobile innovation and scaling path.

Initial Conditions

The case begins with VMware's acquisition of Trango in 2008 to extend its virtualization capability onto mobile devices. At the same time, the market moved toward Mobile Device Management, where enterprise apps and data could be managed securely on employee devices.

TECHNICAL NOTE: Mobile Device Management and mobile virtualization offered related benefits, but the market adopted a different technical approach than the first VMware mobile virtualization path.

Story

VMware's original story was an A x B model: virtualization applied to the growing mobile market. The technical demo was compelling, but the business story and organization had not developed enough. AirWatch had the opposite strength: a compelling contextual story about enterprise customers needing personal and professional mobile identities on the same device.

The AirWatch business story was well developed, but the scalability of the technology was not. The core VMware organization was well suited to aid in this next phase of growth.

Execution While Learning

After the acquisition, VMware teams joined the AirWatch team to strengthen the business. The work had start-up speed, but it also required enterprise-grade engineering infrastructure. Security capabilities had to be strengthened, vulnerabilities closed, and the product made ready to scale.

Behaviors

Scaling means the product works not only for one user or ten users, but for hundreds, thousands, millions, or more. That requires culture change. Early teams may be driven by sales and by changing the world. Later, teams must also be driven by making the product great and doing the disciplined work that makes systems reliable.

Scaling is different than initial creation. It requires a culture change for the team, including an appreciation of experienced professionals, platform discipline, and leadership behaviors.

Trust also becomes central during scaling. A new boss must earn the trust of a team that has already contributed, and marketing and engineering must believe in a genuine one-team approach. The leadership behaviors that helped VMware scale were transparency, openness, and collaboration.