

TABLE A-12

Case study: Ubuntu Touch

(Innovation failure summary)

Variable	Description
Innovation	Developed as an alternative mobile OS to Android and iOS that would not lose support, especially security support, for older versions on older phones, launched in October 2013
Radical or incremental	Incremental
Category	Product
Sector	Mobile electronics and services
Failure timing	Launch stage, failure in April 2017
Failure root cause	<p>Poor performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running Ubuntu on mobile devices required hardware specifications that most phones did not ship with, meaning Ubuntu could not be installed • Ubuntu was shipped predominantly on a relatively unknown hardware brand, BQ, at a non-subsidized cost; most consumers prefer to stick with recognized brands (e.g., Apple and Samsung) that can be bought at subsidized costs through carrier contracts • Android and iOS had already captured the mobile market and provided consumers a wide offering of third-party apps to add desired functionality • Ubuntu phones shipped without the core features being ready, resulting in customers being exposed to a number of bugs and without the ability to perform a number of basic tasks (e.g., running WhatsApp messaging service; making and receiving phone calls in some cases)
Failure root cause timing	Product development
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales of phones loaded with Ubuntu Phone OS remained low • Development of an Ubuntu-based mobile OS was scrapped by Canonical Ltd., the company originally responsible for pioneering Ubuntu software, and picked up by the UBPorts Foundation as an open source community project comprised of volunteer developers
Business insight into the innovation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing market need (older phones losing security updates) cannot be addressed at the cost of other needs (e.g., phone functionality)
Pivot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ubuntu Touch became a niche mobile OS in predominantly European mobile markets
Pivot enabler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transfer of the Ubuntu mobile OS from Canonical to UBPorts enabled a larger community of volunteers to work on its development and better support the narrow market for which it is not used

OS = operating system.

Source(s):

National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics and SRI International, special research (2020) of 2010–20 open-access articles, including *MIT Technology Review*, *New York Times*, *Fast Company*, U.S. General Accountability Office, and *Defense News*.