

A close-up photograph of two people's hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or dependency. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an office environment.

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WHOM CAN YOU DEPEND ON?

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM CISCO SHUTTERING INTERCLOUD?

When Cisco last December revealed a major shift in its cloud strategy, the headlines were brutal: "[Cisco's Intercloud: Stick a Fork in It](#)" and "[Cisco Officially Throws In The Towel On Intercloud](#)."

Pulling the plug on its planned [\\$1 billion investment in Intercloud](#), which it had envisioned as a network of public cloud services, was an abrupt turnaround. And while the company pledges a smooth transition for customers, the development is nonetheless likely to generate some angst among enterprises.

GLOBAL AMBITIONS

The premise was ambitious from the get-go: "Much like Cisco was a key player in building the global Internet, we are now at the heart of building the global Intercloud," was how company [cloud executive Fabio Gori positioned the strategy](#) when it was announced in early 2014.

It was an effort "to stake out higher ground in the battle for cloud supremacy," [CRN asserted](#). It was viewed by many as a bid to counter the market power of leading hyperscale cloud providers such as Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, and Google Cloud.

But, as [Network World observed](#), "Going out and building data centers to compete with Amazon, Microsoft, and Google didn't seem like a prudent strategy." Instead, said Network World's Brandon Butler, Cisco opted to provide "software that allows

workloads to be migrated among various public clouds, and back and forth between the public cloud and customers' own private clouds, across various hypervisors."

AIMING FOR SEAMLESS OPERATIONS

Creating interoperability among cloud providers was and remains an admirable goal of the intercloud concept.

"It is based on the idea that no single cloud can provide all the infrastructure and computing capability needed for the entire world," writes Lavanya Rathnam at [Cloud News Daily](#). If a particular cloud has reached its maximum capacity it should be able to "borrow" from another cloud seamlessly, "so the user has no idea whether it is coming from a single cloud or from a combination of clouds," Rathnam adds.

But we're not at that level of cloud transparency today. "You can use a cloud broker to move VMs from cloud to cloud, but you still need different VPNs for each cloud," Mary Branscombe [writes in CIO](#). Each cloud has its own resource management interfaces.

NOT THE ENDGAME

"IaaS was never an endgame, it was a very limited on-ramp," [writes noted analyst Tom Nolle](#), president and founder of CIMI Corp., in his dissection of Cisco's reversal. Nolle predicts that "the future battle for cloud supremacy ... won't be about the cloud at all, but about how we build distributable, efficient applications."

That's small comfort for enterprises trying to navigate their own cloud strategies. "This core competency may not be resident inside the organization," [Russ Banham writes at Forbes.com](#). He points out that simply using cloud isn't sufficient, companies need to do it well. So, for many, a key element will be selecting the right partner to help guide the process.