

# Why Your Operating System Choice Is a Strategic Decision

Rethinking the Linux Decision for Hybrid Enterprises

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## Executive summary

Why pay for an operating system (OS) when you can get one for free? It is a reasonable question and one that surfaces whenever IT budgets come under pressure. Community Linux distributions are capable, well-documented, and free to download. For some workloads, they work just fine.

The challenge extends well beyond what any single distribution can do out of the box—it is the compounding cost of fragmentation, divergent lifecycle management, inconsistent vulnerability response, and operational practices that do not transfer across enterprise environments. Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) research shows that most organizations struggle to hire cloud expertise<sup>1</sup>—skills are scarce. And every time environments differ, that scarcity compounds: 84% of organizations said they need additional training when switching or adding cloud providers.<sup>2</sup> Differences have a cost. When Linux behaves differently across data centers and public cloud environments, teams must maintain parallel operational knowledge. In hybrid environments, those differences compound cost, delay incident resolution, and increase risk.

The true economics of Linux extend beyond subscription fees. They include patch velocity, compliance consistency, coordinated support, and the operational friction of managing multiple distributions. As Kubernetes adoption deepens and AI workloads increase, inconsistencies at the OS layer can ripple upward into application reliability and governance.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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Organizations typically pursue one of three paths: community distributions, cloud provider-specific Linux variants, or a commercially supported enterprise Linux standardized across environments. For enterprises prioritizing hybrid consistency, skills reuse, and integrated support, a unified enterprise Linux layer can reduce variability and operational overhead. One example is Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Microsoft Azure, which provides a jointly engineered, Red Hat and Microsoft Linux experience across on-premises and Azure environments.

In hybrid, AI-driven architectures, OS choice is no longer a tactical procurement decision. It is a strategic lever that can either amplify complexity or contain it.

## The hidden costs of OS decisions

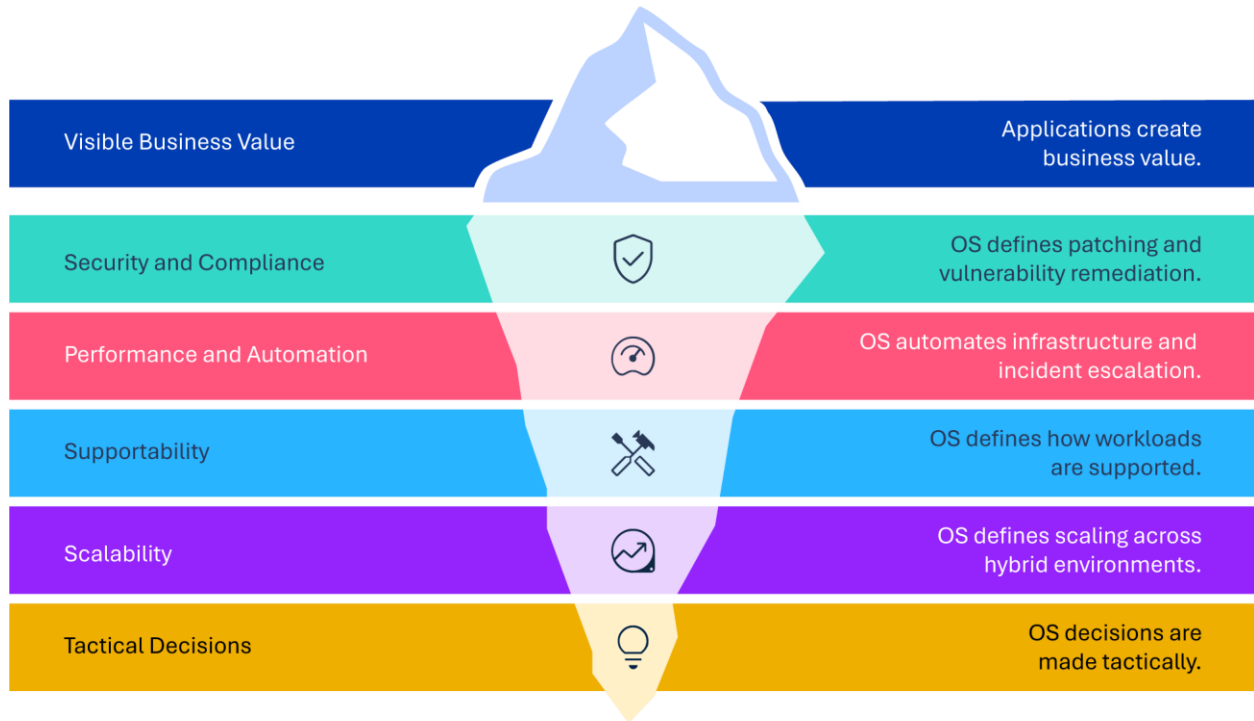
### The OS may not be exciting, but it is the foundation for infrastructure

OSs rarely drive boardroom discussions. They are often treated as interchangeable infrastructure components—a necessary layer beneath the applications that create visible business value. That assumption no longer holds.

The OS sits at the intersection of security, compliance, performance, automation, and supportability. It defines how workloads are patched, how vulnerabilities are remediated, how infrastructure is automated, and how incidents are escalated. In hybrid environments, the OS layer defines whether operational practices will scale cleanly across environments or fragment.

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Figure 1: OS decisions drive IT complexity



Source: Omdia

The stakes have increased. Most organizations (91%) are making or planning to make significant AI infrastructure investments. Eighty-two percent of organizations also reported that their IT infrastructure had become more complex over the previous two years. Additionally, 91% said the pace of IT change is accelerating.<sup>3</sup> In this dynamic and decentralized environment, the foundation matters more than ever.

When OS decisions are made tactically—distribution by distribution, environment by environment—complexity accumulates at the base of the stack. That complexity does not stay contained. It propagates upward into virtualization, containers, orchestration platforms, and application services.

### Skills gaps at the infrastructure layer

The infrastructure skills gap compounds this challenge.

The skills shortage is real and intensifying. Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) research shows that 68% of organizations struggled to hire sufficient expertise across the cloud

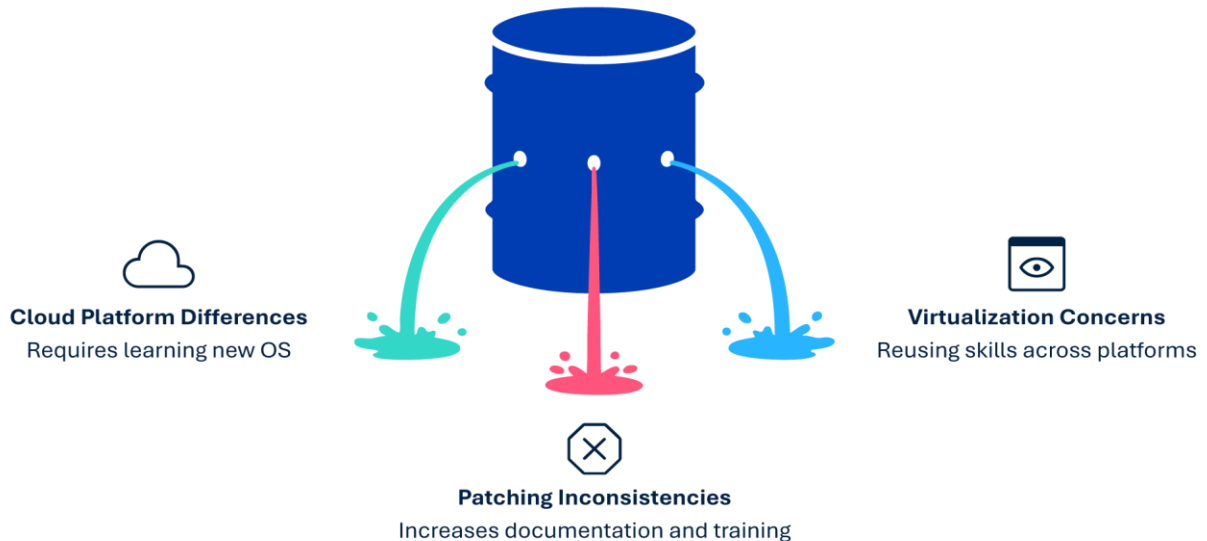
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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platforms they use.<sup>4</sup> When operations teams switch cloud providers, 84% reported requiring additional training. Meanwhile, 72% of organizations are hiring IT generalists rather than domain experts<sup>5</sup>—not by choice, but by necessity.

In this context, fragmentation at the OS layer becomes more than a technical inconvenience; it becomes a scalability constraint.

Figure 2: Infrastructure skills gap hinders cloud adoption



Source: Omdia

If Linux behaves differently across environments—through variations in lifecycle management, kernel tuning, patch cadence, or default configurations—teams must maintain parallel operational knowledge. Troubleshooting workflows diverge. Documentation expands. Automation scripts require environment-specific modifications. Institutional knowledge fragments.

The result is not catastrophic failure. It is persistent friction.

That friction shows up as slower onboarding, longer incident resolution cycles, greater effort in audit preparation, and greater dependence on a shrinking pool of senior engineers. Over time, these small inefficiencies accumulate into measurable operational costs.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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The skills gap also shapes virtualization decisions: 40% of organizations cited it as a top concern when transitioning to alternative hypervisor platforms.<sup>6</sup> They want platforms that let them reuse existing skills across virtual machines (VMs), containers, and clouds. A consistent Linux layer is part of that answer and is the common foundation beneath all three.

## The real cost of 'free' Linux

Community Linux distributions are widely deployed and cover a broad set of baseline capabilities. But the operational differences from enterprise Linux become visible in the areas that matter most at scale: vulnerability response times, patch validation and backporting, compliance documentation, escalation clarity, and coordinated lifecycle management across environments. The question is how these differences affect risk as complexity increases.

Infrastructure leaders consistently identify cybersecurity (35%), overall complexity (29%), and regulatory compliance (22%) as top challenges with their overall IT infrastructure environment.<sup>7</sup> These are precisely the areas where OS strategy becomes visible.

When a high-severity vulnerability is disclosed, response speed, patch validation, and coordinated guidance matter. When a production outage occurs at 2 a.m., escalation clarity matters. When compliance audits require evidence of consistent lifecycle management across environments, documentation and vendor accountability matter.

The economic comparison, therefore, is not subscription cost versus zero. It is structured support and coordinated lifecycle management versus internal labor absorption and fragmented accountability.

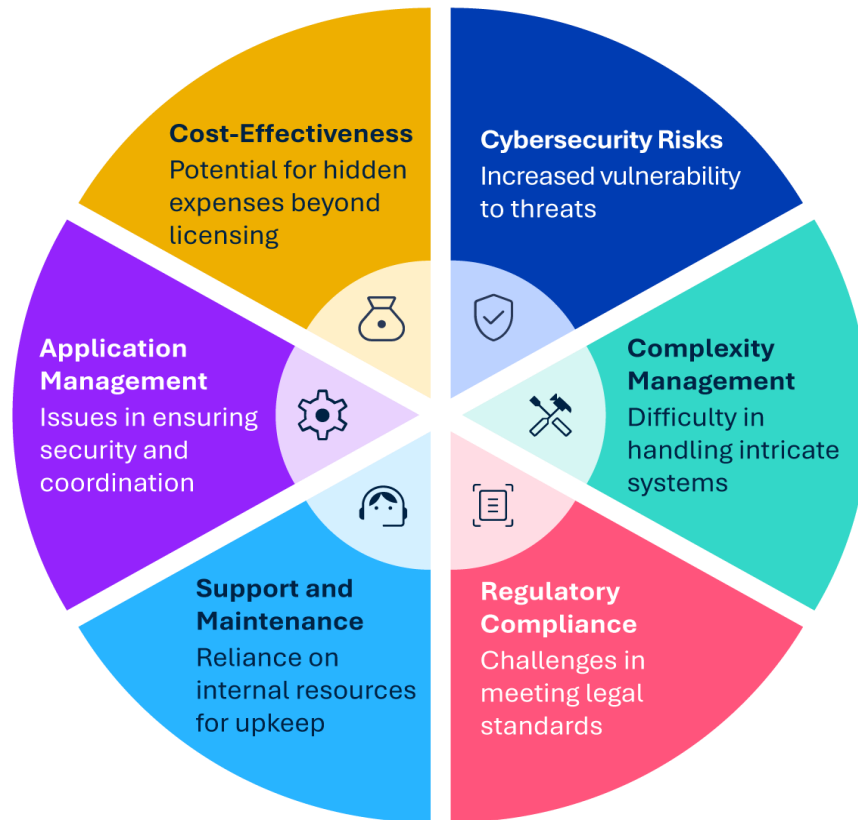
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<sup>6</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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Figure 3: The true cost of “free” Linux



Source: Omdia

Community models rely on distributed prioritization. Enterprise Linux vendors formalize patch service-level agreements, backporting strategies, and escalation paths. For organizations operating in regulated environments, additional controls might be required. For example, Red Hat’s Security Select Add-On extends common vulnerabilities and exposures coverage beyond critical and important vulnerabilities to include moderate and low-severity fixes, with defined response commitments and on-demand patching. This level of lifecycle assurance can be particularly relevant where auditability and risk exposure extend beyond only the most severe threats.

Cloud-provider distributions may optimize for a specific environment, but they do not necessarily address cross-environment consistency or enterprise-grade compliance controls across hybrid estates.

Each model carries trade-offs. The strategic question is not whether “free” Linux works—it does—but whether it reduces or amplifies operational variability and security exposure in a hybrid environment.

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Application management challenges reinforce this point. Nearly half of organizations (43%) cited meeting security expectations as a top challenge, 34% cited controlling costs, and 34% cited ensuring coordination between cloud and data center teams.<sup>8</sup> These are not problems that a free subscription solves—they all require additional staff time, consistent tooling, integrated management, and reliable support.

## Budget allocation and priorities

OS decisions often receive limited executive attention because they sit beneath visible innovation initiatives. Yet the OS underpins every major infrastructure investment category: on-premises data centers, public cloud, hosted private cloud, SaaS integrations, colocation facilities, and edge deployments.

At the same time, 76% of organizations reported reevaluating cloud strategies due to rising infrastructure costs.<sup>9</sup> AI initiatives are absorbing budget and talent: 62% have increased budgets to support AI, while 24% are deprioritizing other projects to fund it.<sup>10</sup>

In this environment, infrastructure layers must justify themselves not only through functionality but also through operational efficiency and cross-environment consistency.

An OS that reduces cross-environment variance simplifies skills reuse, accelerates incident response, and aligns patching and compliance processes across locations. Conversely, running different Linux distributions across data centers and clouds introduces subtle operational divergence that compounds over time.

This is where OS strategy directly intersects with hybrid cloud strategy. For organizations running workloads on Azure, for instance, procurement mechanisms like Azure Hybrid Benefit and the ability to apply Microsoft Azure Consumption Commitment (MACC) toward enterprise Linux subscriptions provide financial flexibility, lowering the economic barrier to standardizing on a single OS across hybrid environments.

As enterprises operate across multiple public clouds while retaining significant on-premises infrastructure, the decision is no longer simply which Linux distribution to run. The real question becomes how many operational models the organization can afford to maintain.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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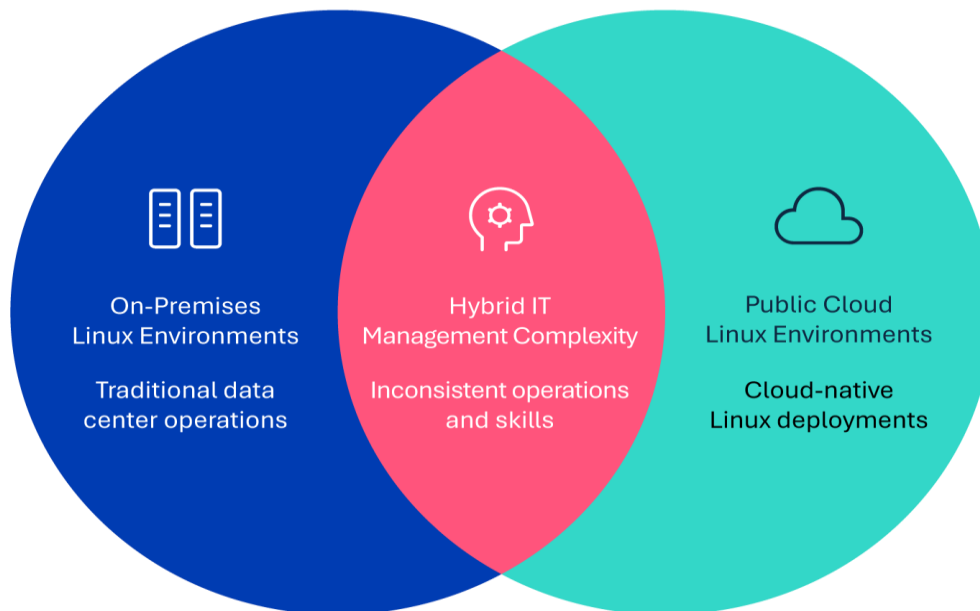
# Standardization across the hybrid cloud

## Hybrid is the reality

Multicloud and hybrid environments are no longer edge cases—they are the norm. Ninety-two percent of organizations use two or more public cloud providers today.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, 86% expect to continue operating hybrid environments spanning on-premises and public cloud infrastructure.<sup>12</sup>

Data centers are not going away: 41% of enterprises expect to operate six or more data centers within five years, up from 25% today. The reasons vary, including the need for on-premises infrastructure to support new AI initiatives (66%), support for business growth (63%), global or regional expansion (47%), and the ability to scale on-premises infrastructure for data locality or compliance requirements (39%).<sup>13</sup>

Figure 4: The challenge of hybrid IT management



Source: Omdia

<sup>11</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

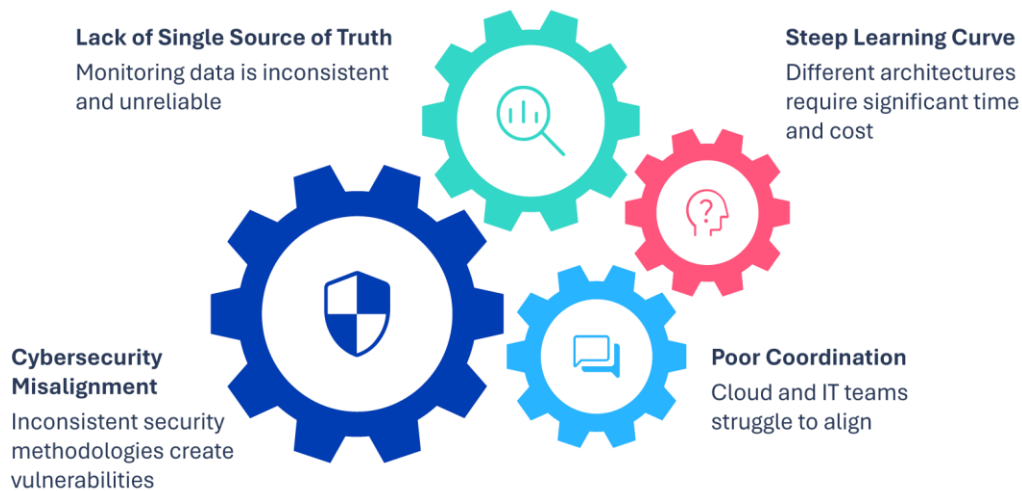
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**Hybrid is not a transitional state. It is the permanent operating model.** This creates a management challenge. If on-premises Linux environments use different configurations, different patching schedules, or different management tools than the cloud Linux environment, operational complexity increases significantly.

## The fragmentation problem

Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) research highlights the coordination challenges organizations face, with 47% citing ensuring proper coordination between cloud and IT teams as one of their biggest hybrid management challenges, while 36% highlighted the time and cost to learn different architectures, 35% struggled to establish a single source of truth for monitoring, and 34% cited building alignment on cybersecurity methodology.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 5: Inefficient hybrid cloud management due to fragmentation



Source: Omdia

Current approaches to consistency vary. Forty-seven percent of organizations reported prioritizing best-of-breed solutions for individual environments, with minimal emphasis on cross-environment consistency, essentially accepting fragmentation as the price of perceived optimization. Additionally, 41% said they prioritize solutions that deliver a consistent experience across locations, including cross-cloud consistency approaches. Only 12% have made cross-cloud consistency a primary technology strategy.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

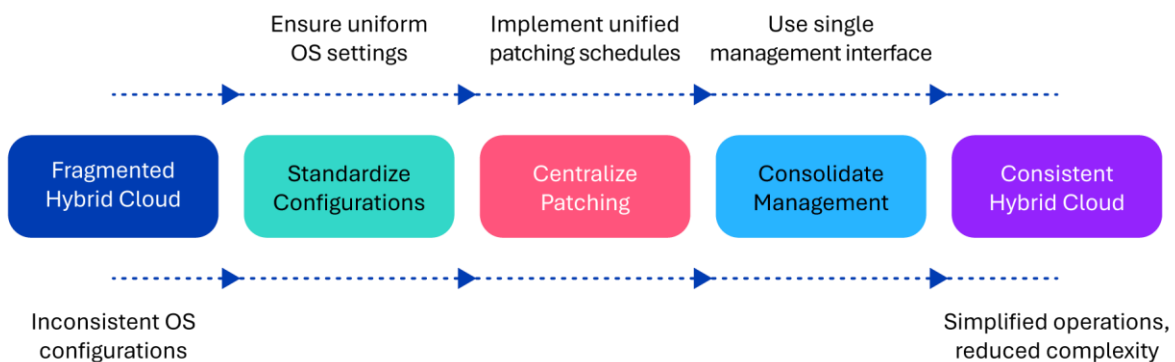
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The implication is clear: Most organizations are managing fragmented environments and absorbing the operational and organizational costs. A consistent OS does not eliminate complexity. Rather, it provides a foundational layer for reducing it across environments.

## The case for consistency

The case for consistency is supported by the data: 84% of organizations said that consistency of experience across data center and cloud delivers significant operational benefits.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, 89% are actively investing in consolidating management experiences,<sup>17</sup> while 83% said they need to increase self-service provisioning for application teams.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 6: Achieving hybrid cloud consistency



Source: Omdia

Container technology has helped some organizations improve consistency—45% said containers have improved their multicloud strategies, 37% have accelerated public cloud use, and 35% have been able to consolidate their on-premises footprint.<sup>19</sup> But containers are an abstraction layer; they still run on something. A consistent OS beneath the container runtime simplifies troubleshooting, security patching, and capacity planning.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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# Joint engineering and cloud optimization

## Red Hat and Microsoft: Joint engineering in practice

Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Microsoft Azure is an example of a software vendor and a public cloud vendor collaborating on a jointly optimized OS experience across on-premises infrastructure and the Azure cloud platform. Built on years of tightly integrated engineering, Red Hat and Microsoft provide built-in Azure-specific configurations that ensure performance, integration, observability, and coordinated support. Azure-specific optimizations include tuned performance profiles pre-configured for common Azure instance types, built-in telemetry that feeds into Azure Portal dashboards, and integration with Azure management tooling for consistent operations alongside other Azure resources.

Why does this matter? Eighty-six percent of organizations said cloud provider certifications are critical or a top evaluation criterion when selecting infrastructure. Additionally, nearly all organizations (93%) reported working with third-party service providers for at least some of their cloud operations. When evaluating those partnerships, organizations value the enhanced security (37%), improved service quality (37%), improved cost efficiency (32%), better support (28%), and improved access to expertise (26%) third parties provide.<sup>20</sup> The Red Hat–Azure partnership aligns with these evaluation criteria by reducing support ambiguity and clarifying shared responsibility across OS and cloud layers.

What distinguishes the Red Hat–Azure combination from running RHEL on other clouds is the depth of the integration. RHEL instances appear alongside other Azure resources in the same operational interface—with the same alerting, the same compliance views, and the same automation capabilities. This means operations teams do not need to context-switch between separate management consoles for their Linux estate and their broader Azure environment.

## Managed services integration

Organizations use a variety of tools to manage their infrastructure, including IT service management tools (65%), cloud management platforms (63%), data center infrastructure management (49%), infrastructure as code tools (48%), and application programming interfaces (46%).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

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The challenges with current tooling are revealing: 36% cited the high cost of tools, 23% cited different preferences across teams, 22% cited a lack of a clear automation strategy, 22% cited difficulty scaling across locations, and 21% cited incompatibility with legacy infrastructure.<sup>22</sup>

When Red Hat Enterprise Linux instances appear alongside other Azure resources in the same management interface, with the same monitoring and alerting capabilities, the operational overhead drops. This is not a replacement for specialized Linux administration skills, but it does mean those skills can focus on Linux-specific challenges rather than navigating multiple management interfaces. Red Hat Lightspeed extends this approach by providing AI-driven recommendations across platforms, helping teams identify and remediate critical vulnerabilities faster and reduce unplanned downtime.

## The operational value of enterprise support

The value of enterprise support becomes clearest during incidents. When a critical vulnerability is disclosed or when an unexplained performance degradation affects production, having a support contract means having someone to call—and having that call answered by engineers who understand both the OS and the cloud environment it runs in.

Organizations cited tangible benefits from public cloud services: improved security (66%), improved risk management (63%), better access to innovation (63%), increased scalability (61%), improved time to value (60%), and faster deployment and configuration (53%).<sup>23</sup> These benefits are easier to realize when the underlying OS is optimized for the cloud environment and backed by coordinated support.

Coordinated support across the OS and cloud stack reduces escalation loops, shortens mean time to resolution, and clarifies responsibility boundaries. Rather than navigating fragmented vendor interactions, teams operate within a coordinated support framework.

Enterprise support does not eliminate incidents, it reduces uncertainty during resolution, and, in complex hybrid environments, reduced uncertainty has measurable operational value.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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# A platform for modern workloads

## Ready for AI, even if you are not there yet

AI has moved from experimentation to production for most organizations. Over three-quarters of organizations (76%) now have AI in production: 44% in early production and 32% in more mature deployments. Only 8% remain in pilot or proof-of-concept stages. Additionally, 91% are making or planning to make significant AI infrastructure investments.<sup>24</sup>

Where is this investment going? Sixty-five percent of organizations are investing in public cloud providers for AI, 62% in AI software and tools, 57% in data protection and data management, 52% in automation and orchestration tools, 51% in high-performance computing infrastructure, and 47% in on-premises AI hardware such as graphics processing units and tensor processing units.<sup>25</sup>

On-premises AI is growing, not shrinking: 92% of organizations are actively pursuing or exploring “privatizing” AI by deploying it in their own data centers. Thirty-six percent already have on-premises AI deployed, 26% are in pilot, and 28% are planning deployment within 12 months. The drivers are predictable: greater control over AI operations (45%), data privacy and sovereignty (42%), control over infrastructure lifecycle (41%), cost predictability (39%), and performance and latency requirements (37%).<sup>26</sup>

For organizations building AI infrastructure, the OS layer plays a foundational role in security and stability. Red Hat Enterprise Linux provides a security-hardened foundation that helps protect sensitive data during both AI model training and inference workloads. Furthermore, broad hardware certification across leading AI accelerator vendors helps Red Hat Enterprise Linux bridge the gap between specialized AI hardware and the software stacks required for production AI deployments.

These infrastructure demands translate directly into day-to-day operational needs. Two capabilities in Red Hat Enterprise Linux illustrate how the platform is evolving to meet them: command line assistant and image mode.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

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## Command line assistant: AI-powered productivity

Seventy-eight percent of organizations are prioritizing generative AI for content creation and coding assistance, while 61% are prioritizing process automation, and 57% are prioritizing agentic AI for autonomous task execution.<sup>27</sup>

Red Hat Enterprise Linux command line assistant addresses these priorities at the infrastructure layer. Instead of searching documentation or Stack Overflow, administrators can ask questions in natural language and receive suggested commands. This does not replace expertise—organizations still need to understand what the commands do before running them—but it does reduce the friction of working with unfamiliar systems or remembering obscure syntax. Red Hat Lightspeed also provides proactive vulnerability scanning and remediation recommendations across the fleet, helping teams address security issues before they become incidents.

For organizations standardized on Azure, these capabilities integrate with Azure-native services like Azure Monitor for observability, creating a single operational view that spans both the OS and cloud layers.

Junior administrators can be more productive, and senior administrators can spend less time on routine lookups and more time on complex problems. The AI does not replace the team; it amplifies what the team can accomplish.

## Image mode: A bridge to cloud-native

Containers represent 21% of production applications today. Over a quarter (27%) of these container applications are deployed on premises, and the same percentage of organizations are using Kubernetes-based application platforms to create a cloud-like on-premises experience.<sup>28</sup>

Image mode for Red Hat Enterprise Linux applies container principles to OS lifecycle management by treating the OS as an immutable image, similar to how containers work. Updates are atomic, with the new image either being deployed successfully or rolled back completely. Configuration drift is eliminated because the image is the universal source of truth. This stateless approach toward OS management is a key foundation for achieving cloud-native scalability. For organizations not yet running Kubernetes, image mode provides a practical entry point into container-based operations. Teams can adopt container principles for OS management first, building familiarity with image-based

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<sup>27</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

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workflows, and then scale to full Kubernetes-based application platforms like Red Hat OpenShift when workload complexity demands it.

# The Microsoft-Red Hat partnership

## A jointly engineered foundation: Red Hat and Microsoft

The Microsoft-Red Hat partnership provides certification assurance. Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Microsoft Azure reflects a deeper level of vendor collaboration than is typical for Linux-on-cloud offerings. The two companies maintain a tightly integrated engineering partnership and a globally distributed, coordinated support organization operating on a follow-the-sun model, which means that, when an issue spans both the OS and the cloud layer, there is an established process for joint troubleshooting rather than finger-pointing between vendors. This collaboration has also produced jointly managed offerings like Azure Red Hat OpenShift, which provides a fully managed OpenShift environment running natively on Azure. The breadth of the portfolio matters because it enables organizations to start with Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Azure and expand into container orchestration and application platforms without introducing a new vendor relationship or a different support model.

For organizations already running workloads on Azure, the integrated support model reduces the operational risk of running enterprise Linux in the cloud. For organizations already running workloads on Azure, the integrated support model reduces the operational risk of running enterprise Linux in the cloud. For organizations still evaluating providers, the depth of the engineering partnership is a meaningful differentiator, one that reflects years of investment by both vendors in making RHEL and Azure work as a single, coordinated operational experience. The commercial integration reinforces this: Organizations can apply MACC and Red Hat Hybrid Committed Spend funds toward Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Azure, and Azure Hybrid Benefit allows switching Red Hat Enterprise Linux VMs between pay-as-you-go and bring-your-own-subscription billing. These procurement mechanisms deliver real cost savings and spending flexibility: Organizations can consolidate OS spending through existing Azure commitments rather than navigating separate budget approvals for each environment.

## A natural path to expansion

Eighty-four percent of organizations said data center modernization is a top IT priority. Additionally, 67% percent are maintaining or increasing on-premises investment with a

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focus on creating a cloud-like experience. Only 3% of organizations said they are exiting on-premises data center environments completely.<sup>29</sup>

This is where platform standardization pays compound interest. Organizations that invest in a consistent Linux foundation—skills, tooling, and operational practices—find that adjacent technologies become easier to adopt when they share that foundation. Container orchestration, automation, and AI infrastructure are all simpler to operationalize when the underlying OS is familiar territory.

The tradeoff is real: Organizations running multiple Linux distributions across environments face migration effort to consolidate, retraining, re-certifying automation, and re-validating configurations. The question is whether the operational benefits of consistency outweigh the flexibility of mixing distributions. For organizations prioritizing hybrid cloud manageability, the data suggests consistency wins.

## A compliance-ready foundation

Compliance requirements affect nearly every organization: 94% reported that their AI data has compliance or sovereignty requirements—47% said most of their data has such requirements, and another 47% said at least some does.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, 22% cited regulatory compliance as a top challenge with their overall IT infrastructure environment.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, 29% said compliance with regulations is a top driver for on-premises AI deployment.<sup>32</sup>

This is another area where enterprise Linux earns its keep. Community distributions leave compliance tooling as an exercise for the user—security hardening, audit logging, and framework alignment are do-it-yourself projects. Red Hat Enterprise Linux ships with security profiles mapped to common regulatory frameworks, automated compliance scanning, and documentation auditors actually recognize. None of this guarantees compliance—that depends on configuration and operations—but it shifts the starting point from “build it yourself” to “configure what’s already there.” On Azure specifically, Red Hat and Microsoft test and verify these security profiles against Azure infrastructure.

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<sup>29</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [Private AI, Virtualization, and Cloud: Transforming the Future of Infrastructure Modernization](#), July 2025.



## Conclusion

The OS decision is easy to overlook and hard to undo. Organizations that choose based on subscription cost alone often discover the hidden costs later: fragmented environments that multiply operational complexity, skills gaps that widen when every environment behaves differently, and security incidents that could have been prevented with better vendor support.

The data makes the case for standardization: 68% of organizations struggle to hire expertise for each cloud platform, 84% said consistency across data center and cloud delivers significant operational benefits, 92% are pursuing or exploring on-premises AI that requires a solid foundation,<sup>33</sup> and 86% said vendor certifications are critical evaluation criteria.<sup>34</sup>

This is where Red Hat Enterprise Linux for Microsoft Azure fits. It provides a consistent OS foundation across hybrid environments, backed by joint engineering from Red Hat and Microsoft and integrated support from both vendors. It includes modern capabilities like the AI-powered command line assistant and image mode for organizations moving toward cloud-native operations. And it serves as a natural foundation for the broader Red Hat portfolio.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Source: Enterprise Strategy Group (now Omdia) Complete Survey Results, [IT Transformed: Inside the Convergence of Hybrid Cloud and AI](#), July 2025.

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For organizations evaluating their Linux strategy, the question is not whether community Linux works—it does. The question is whether the hidden costs of inconsistency, the security risks of unsupported software, and the operational drag of fragmented environments are worth the savings on subscription fees. For many organizations, the answer is no.

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### Get in touch

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