Platform engineering: Conditions for Success

The internal platforms landscape and Evolutionary PlatformOps

position paper

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Executive Summary

Across industries, platforms have become central to digital transformation and business enablement. Yet in many organisations, they are still treated primarily as technology stacks; collections of tools and infrastructure managed for uptime rather than for clearly defined and aligned outcomes.

At a time when economic uncertainty, competitive pressure, and increasing regulationdemand higher productivity, lower cost, and greater resilience, this narrow view has become untenable. The 2026 Gartner CIO Agenda Preview notes that nearly two-thirds of CIOs expect significant change to their outcomes within the next two years and calls on technology leaders to strengthen adaptability, reprioritisation, and scenario planning in order to meet value targets.

In this context, particularly within large and complex enterprise environments, speed, resilience, and adaptability depend on acknowledging and strengthening the internal platforms landscape as a whole.

Platforms do not exist in isolation: they rely on, enable, and constrain one another, and their success is shaped as much by organisational, operational, and governance dependencies as by the technology they contain.

This paper is grounded in a lens that views internal platforms as systems of value operating within a shared enterprise ecosystem. From this perspective, platform success depends on treating platforms as interconnected systems rather than standalone products, and on recognising that platform engineering efforts must evolve in step with the environments in which they operate.

While drawing on established thinking from Team Topologies, Platform-as-a-Product, Platform Engineering, and modern IT service management, this paper extends those ideas to address the realities of complex enterprise environments. It is grounded in over two decades of hands-on experience designing , operating, managing and evolving internal platforms across public and private sectors, where these concepts meet organisational constraints, legacy systems, regulatory demands, and day-to-day operational trade-offs.

When this paper refers to internal platforms, it refers to any platform that exists within the organisational ecosystem. It acknowledges that different platforms play different roles; that some functions are not named or classified as platforms when they arguably should be; that shared and foundational platforms are often harder to evolve; and that Platform Engineering principles can bring value across the entire platform landscape — not only at the application edge.

To support this, the paper outlines an evolutionary approach to platform operations, a deliberately connected set of key considerations, and the role of Platform Engineering and Internal Developer Platforms (IDPs) in creating the conditions for sustainable platform success.

A Special Note on Platform Engineering

Not every organisation needs a highly complex landscape of pipelines or full end-to-end automation, and not every organisation requires an Internal Developer Platform (IDP). The level of sophistication must always be appropriate to context.

What is consistently true, however, is that Platform Engineering principles are relevant across the entire internal platform landscape.

Many organisations have already invested in automated workflows, pipelines, and self-service interfaces, yet still find themselves with environments that have become overly complex, difficult to maintain, and misaligned with the end-to-end lifecycle of their solutions and components. In these cases, the issue is rarely the absence of tooling, but the absence of coherent application of platform engineering principles.

The adaptability and speed required today to remain aligned with security, governance, IT service management, and the broader enterprise landscape are achievable. However, in practice and based on experience they can only be sustained when the key considerations outlined in this paper are considered. This enables a holistic approach; one that treats platforms not as isolated technical assets, but as systems operating within, and interacting across, the wider organisational ecosystem.

This becomes especially critical for core or foundational platforms; those that provide services relied upon by many teams, such as infrastructure or identity and access management. These platforms were not originally designed to evolve at the pace now expected of them, and new platforms are often introduced into legacy ecosystems without the conditions needed for long-term success.

Without deliberate adaptation, internal platforms quickly become bottlenecks to the very progress they are meant to enable. Ultimately, the message is simple but urgent:

‘How you design and operate your platforms
— and the services they provide —
determines whether they become engines of value
or anchors of inertia.’

The Challenge

Most organisations talk about “platforms,” yet the term is used inconsistently, often reduced to a collection of technologies or a specific toolset rather than understood as an integrated system for value delivery.

Because of this, many so-called platforms remain technology centric. They lack the clarity, services definition, and operating model needed to translate technical capability into meaningful outcomes. A platform operating model must enable the platform itself and account for the wider enterprise context it lives within; without this interconnected view, even the strongest technology foundations struggle to deliver value.

In complex enterprises, this fragmentation is amplified by organisational silos, legacy processes and a traditional approach to how Services are managed and how controls for security, compliance and overall Governance are designed and applied.

Teams, functions that don’t class themselves as platforms but just another team in the flow of activities very often emerge in isolation or as shadow IT, each optimised for local efficiency but rarely aligned to the overall flow of value.

The result is a patchwork of disconnected teams, platforms and services.
Duplicated investment, inconsistent standards, unclear boundaries and ownership, un-happy and frustrated developers, functions and teams that depend on these platforms. An old vs modern continuous battle with no bridge in between.

In many cases, organizations invest on new teams or functions to ‘optimise’ the flow of value across their platform landscape and these inadvertently add to the very complexity they aim to reduce, introducing yet another layer of coordination, governance, or tooling. Instead of simplifying, they often reinforce existing silos under a different name. A familiar example in many organisations is the way Cloud Centers of Excellence which get set up without clear interaction models and integration into broader value streams, and as a result, can and very often do drift into this ‘silo’d’ pattern, despite their original positive intent.

These challenges are not unique to any one industry: platforms or functions conceived to enable agility, speed, and innovation often end up slowing delivery, complicating governance, and constraining innovation. For many leaders, this has created a false sense of maturity, investments have been made, modern tools are in place, yet the organisation still struggles to realise value at pace, there is no clear return on investment, benefits expected not realised.

External pressures are also intensifying. Economic uncertainty has sharpened the focus on cost-to-serve, while new regulatory mandates such as the ones from DORA and NIS2 in Europe, or emerging cybersecurity and resilience frameworks in the UK, Middle East, and Asia-Pacific, demand greater transparency and operational discipline.

At the same time, the acceleration of AI adoption is exposing ‘not creating’ a deeper structural gap, most legacy platform operating models and core/foundational platforms were never designed for continuous evolution, experimentation, actual data use, or safe deployment at scale. Adopting AI will not fix that, but exacerbate and expose an existing gap.

Evolutionary PlatformOps & Key Considerations

The intent is not to add to the list of jargon but to highlight that evolution provides the right lens for platforms operations and their landscape transformation. True transformation is continuous, a disciplined process of learning, adaptation, and improvement that strengthens an organisation’s ability to respond and grow.

At the enterprise level, no platform operates in isolation. Each forms part of a connected landscape, an ecosystem of platforms that collectively underpin the organisation’s capacity to deliver value. The seven key considerations described in this paper articulate the essential aspects that shape this evolutionary journey.

They do not prescribe specific tools, structures, or techniques. Instead, they provide a cohesive way of thinking that helps organisations interpret, combine, and apply established frameworks, concepts, and disciplines with intent and awareness of context.

By focusing on evolutionary change and applying a broader, landscape-level lens through these considerations, organisations (particularly those seeking to move beyond legacy processes and operating models) can build the capabilities required for sustainable progress. The aim is not to reinvent existing approaches, but to make the connections between relevant perspectives clearer and more actionable for those designing and operating platforms as systems of value.

The Seven Key Considerations

1. Platforms – Evolving Landscape Awareness

Each platform team cultivates awareness of its position within the broader landscape, understanding how it creates value, what it depends on, and what depends on it. Collectively, the platforms maintain a living understanding of the ecosystem: what exists, why it exists, and how each element contributes to organisational value.

This is not a fragmented exercise where enterprise and individual platforms hold separate truths; rather, individual and shared understandings coexist and are maintained together, ensuring coherence across the whole ecosystem. Through this ongoing awareness, each platform continuously aligns its purpose with evolving business priorities, maintaining visibility and alignment across dependencies.

2. Platforms – Value flow & experience

Understand how people, systems, and processes consume, interact with, and experience platform services within your specific context. This consideration applies to all relevant stakeholders, including:

- people who directly consume platform services,
- people responsible for building, operating, supporting, and managing those services,
- and people who depend on platform information or outcomes indirectly as part of wider enterprise functions and processes (for example, governance, risk, compliance, or financial management).

Value flow and experience are not limited to direct users or high-visibility interactions. They apply across the platform ecosystem, regardless of whether the impact is direct or indirect, large or small. As such, strategies for improvement and change must account for this full range of stakeholders, rather than focusing on selected groups in isolation.

Equally important is the presence of mechanisms and enablers that allow demand signals, feedback, and friction points to be captured and interpreted beyond project or delivery phases, and throughout live, operational use. These signals should be treated as vital indicators of value flow, informing how service interactions are refined, barriers are removed, and platforms continuously evolve in how they deliver and enable value.

3. Platforms – Services & Products of Value

Shift the focus from fitting everything into a predefined “-as-a-Service” or “product” category to understanding what type of product and/or service it needs to be and for whom. The principle is simple: a product or service exists to enable someone or something and to create value.
Invest time and effort on working out what makes up a platform product or service in your context, and how that relates to what it enables.

A **platform product** is what is intentionally designed, packaged for consumption and continually improved over time.
A **platform service** is how that product is delivered, operated, and supported over time.

Services and products coexist and co-evolve. Productising your platform and defining service offerings are two sides of the same value conversation, not separate or competing activities.

From there, products & services should evolve with attention to consistency and cohesion of experience, alongside technical integrity. The goal is a flexible, interconnected mesh in which productised platforms evolve together rather than in isolation.

4. Platforms — Adaptive & Purposeful Orchestration

Internal platforms create value by adopting and embedding modern engineering and operational practices as part of how value is delivered. As technology components, features, and tooling evolve, so too must the ways in which services and products are orchestrated and delivered.

Platform Engineering practices provide a foundation for this adaptability, enabling teams to determine the appropriate level of orchestration required in their context, which may include investment in an Internal Developer Platform (IDP).

While the degree of solution sophistication should adapt to context, the application of Platform Engineering principles should remain consistent across the platform landscape. These principles underpin effective PlatformOps and enable adaptive, purposeful orchestration that supports flow across platform boundaries, allowing services to integrate, scale, and evolve as the ecosystem grows in complexity.

5. Platforms — Learning Operations

Modern platform operations must expand their focus from learning through technology to learning with technology. Data insights, telemetry, and observability remain essential, but they are only enablers. Meaningful learning emerges when the platform organisation operates as a human learning system, one in which people are empowered to interpret data, connect signals, and act on what they observe.

Observation precedes observability. Before tooling is designed or metrics are defined, people must first learn to notice patterns, anomalies, and opportunities for improvement. Technology can surface signals, but it is human curiosity, judgement, and context that turn those signals into knowledge.

Leadership plays a critical role in creating the conditions where this kind of learning is possible and valued. Building trust, autonomy, and space for reflection allows learning to become part of daily operations rather than a retrospective exercise. Telemetry and data support this process, but it is human sense-making, experimentation, and collaboration that ultimately drive sustained improvements in reliability, efficiency, and value creation.

6. Platforms — Evolutionary Governance

Governance is essential. Yet the notion of “control” often feels heavy and constraining because it is frequently misapplied. Modern governance is not about controlling people; it is about governing technology in a way that enables people and the wider system to operate safely, confidently, and without constant uncertainty. Principles and guardrails need to be established early and used to guide both platform design and day-to-day operations, while remaining capable of evolving alongside the ecosystem they serve.

Effective governance does not freeze accountability in time; it makes accountability visible, explicit, but most importantly, adaptable.

Defining roles and responsibilities, whether through a RACI or similar mechanism is not the issue. The challenge arises when these tools are treated as static artefacts rather than living inputs that can be analysed and should prompt ongoing adjustment as platforms and services evolve.

The evolutionary nature of governance lies in embedding it into the platform lifecycle itself; Platform Engineering practices play a key role here, translating governance intent into mechanisms, automation, and feedback loops.

However, this can only work when there is clarity upfront: what needs to be governed, who is accountable, and how decisions ripple across people, platforms, and value flow.

7. Platforms - Products on Products (The Extended Ecosystem)

Platforms exist within a wider ecosystem and depend on technologies and services provided by multiple suppliers, from cloud providers to specialised tools and APIs.

The products and services delivered through platforms are built on top of other products and services, many of which sit outside direct organisational control.

This products-on-products reality highlights two important points: suppliers are not merely vendors, but active participants in the flow of value; and once an organisation builds a product on top of another product, accountability for the resulting internal product remains its own.

This is not a new challenge, but it has become increasingly complex and critical. The pace of change now affects both supplier offerings (which traditional procurement and contract cycles struggle to keep up with) AND the way organisations define, manage, and evolve their own internal products.

To operate effectively under these conditions, platforms require a modern approach to both internal product management and supplier relationship management. This includes treating internal products built on external services as first-class products in their own right and managing supplier relationships in ways that support continuous alignment and adaptability rather than static scope and transactional oversight.

Practices from Service Relationship Management and modern Product Management can be adapted here (not to enforce control), but to orchestrate collaboration and joint improvement. In this way, these practices become enablers of platform evolution and the sustained delivery of products and services of value.

Industry evidence & Insights

DevOps Research and Assesment (DORA)

Recent research from the DevOps Research and Assessment (DORA) program (now part of Google Cloud) continues to reinforce the link between platform maturity, developer productivity, and organisational performance.

The 2024 Accelerate State of DevOps Report identifies platform engineering and the emergence of internal development platforms (IDPs) as key enablers of fast, reliable software delivery. It highlights that teams supported by effective platforms achieve measurable gains in productivity and flow, provided those platforms remain user-centred and evolve alongside team needs.

The 2025 DORA Report builds on these findings, observing that high-quality internal platforms amplify the benefits of AI and automation, directly improving organisational performance and resilience (Google Cloud, 2024; Google Cloud, 2025).

Together, these studies suggest that when platforms are designed as integrated systems, they become strategic assets that accelerate delivery and strengthen enterprise agility.

GARTNER

Similarly, Gartner positions platform engineering as a mainstream strategic capability. In its 2024 research, Gartner predicts that by 2026, 80% of large software engineering organisations will have established platform engineering teams to provide reusable services, components, and tools via internal platforms.

This reflects a growing recognition that platform-oriented operating models are becoming foundational to achieving scale, consistency, and improved developer experience (Gartner, 2024a; Gartner, 2024b.

This systems view of platforms is increasingly reflected in both industry research and real-world outcomes. Independent studies, field data, and regulatory developments all point to the same conclusion: organisations that treat their platforms as integrated, value-oriented systems consistently outperform those that manage them as fragmented stacks.

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Conclusion

Across public institutions, financial services, and large enterprises, the patterns are consistent. Organisations continue to invest heavily in modern tooling, cloud platforms, automation, and increasingly AI, yet many remain operationally constrained. When internal platforms and their surrounding ecosystems are not designed for continuous adaptation, these investments tend to amplify existing constraints rather than remove them.

The issue is rarely a lack of technology capability. More often, it is a failure to acknowledge and address the internal platforms landscape as a connected system, shaped by organisational structures, governance, dependencies, and evolving demands. In such environments, platforms become rigid, difficult to evolve, and increasingly misaligned with the outcomes they are meant to enable.

This paper has argued that effective Platform Engineering depends on creating the right conditions for success. Viewing internal platforms as systems of value within a broader enterprise ecosystem makes these conditions visible. From that perspective, Evolutionary PlatformOps emerges not as a methodology, but as an operating stance; one that accepts change as constant and prioritises learning, adaptation, and intentional evolution over static optimisation.

The seven key considerations outlined in this paper provide a structured way to think about that evolution. They are not a checklist, maturity model, or prescription. Their value lies in how they help leaders and practitioners surface trade-offs, recognise interdependencies, and make more deliberate decisions about how platforms are designed, operated, and evolved over time. For leadership, the message is clear.

'Platform engineering applied in isolation creates pockets of progress, not sustainable advantage'

Ultimately, how platforms are designed and operated determines whether they become constraints on progress or enablers of it.

Organisations that invest in the conditions that allow platforms to evolve are far better positioned to deliver resilience, flow, and long-term value in an increasingly complex enterprise environment.

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