The Evolution of Platform Engineering in the Public Sector: A Longitudinal Study of Adoption, Maturity, and Motivations (2024–2026)

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Abstract

Context

Platform Engineering and Internal Developer Platforms (IDPs) have become a leading approach to scaling software delivery, yet longitudinal empirical data on how adoption, motivations, and maturity evolve remains scarce.

Objective

This study tracks the evolution of platform engineering adoption, tooling, maturity, and motivations in the Norwegian public sector over two years (2024–2026).

Methods

We conducted a repeated cross-sectional survey with 35 organizations in 2024 (collected Q4 2023) and 45 in 2026 (collected Q4 2025 – Q1 2026), with 60% organizational overlap enabling panel analysis. We apply Fisher's exact tests to assess the statistical robustness of observed changes.

Results

IDP adoption reached 92% (n=48) and Kubernetes 83% (n=48) by 2026. Developer agility remains the primary motivation (91%, n=44), but secondary drivers shifted: security rose 25 percentage points (pp) to 82% (p=0.034, uncorrected), cost optimization rose 15pp to 52% (p=0.237), and recruitment declined 11pp to 36% (p=0.471). Only the security increase reaches $\alpha=0.05$ at the individual test level; it does not survive Bonferroni correction, though directional trends are consistent in the 27-organization panel. Using the CNCF Platform Maturity Model, we find that modal operational maturity shifted from Level 2 to Level 3, while measurement maturity remains at Level 1, with 49% of organizations (n=43) reporting ad hoc practices.

Conclusion

Platform engineering in the Norwegian public sector is transitioning from experimental initiative toward standardized infrastructure. Organizational emphasis is shifting from agility and recruitment toward security and cost optimization, though small sample sizes limit statistical power. The persistent gap between operational and measurement maturity poses a risk for teams expected to demonstrate return on investment.

Keywords: platform engineering, internal developer platform, DevOps, cloud-native, longitudinal study, public sector, Kubernetes