Making the business case for contributing to open source

InnerSource practitioners edition

Tobie Langel, Principal, UnlockOpen *(@tobie)*

Why should companies ***contribute*** to open source?

Common good

The Right Thing To Do™

Paying it forward

Etc.

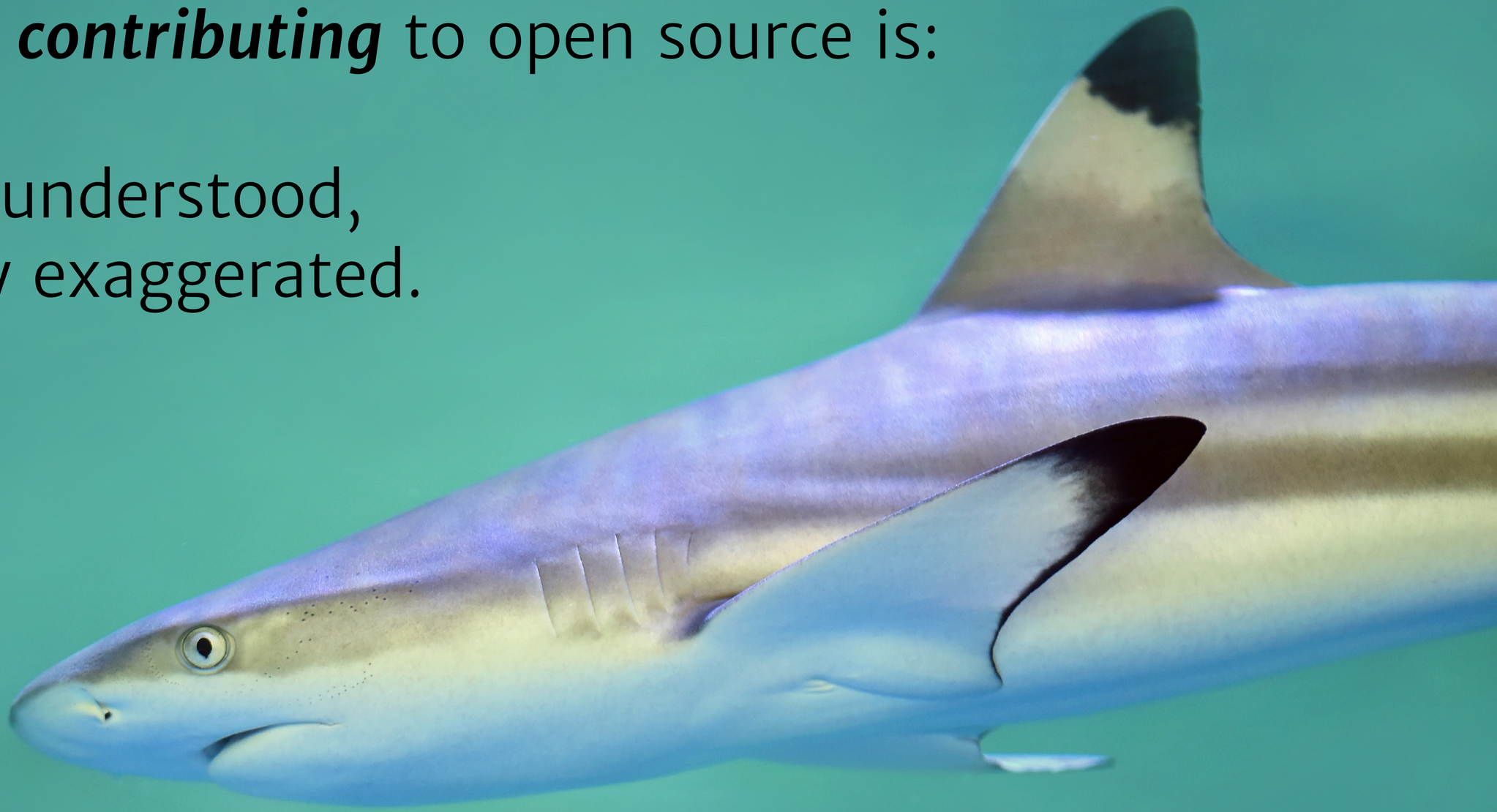
Lack
know-how
The Right
Thing To Do™
Increased
Risk
Wasted
resources
Paying it
forward
Common
good
Lost IP
Lost
competitive
advantage

The **ROI** of ***using*** open source is well understood.

The **ROI** of ***contributing*** to open source: not so much.

The **risk** of ***contributing*** to open source is:

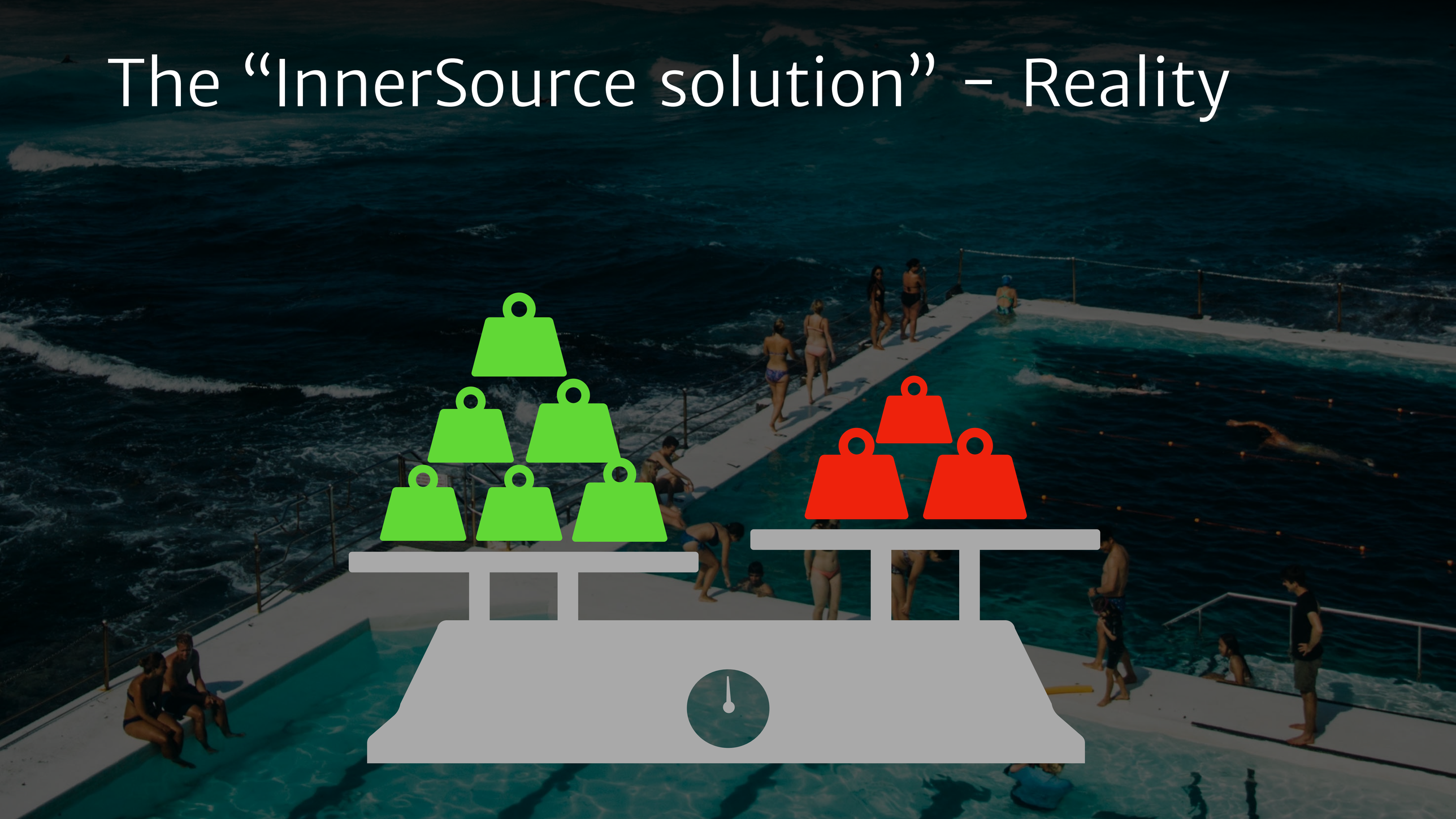
- not well understood,
- generally exaggerated.



The “InnerSource solution”

The “InnerSource solution” – Perception

The “InnerSource solution” – Reality

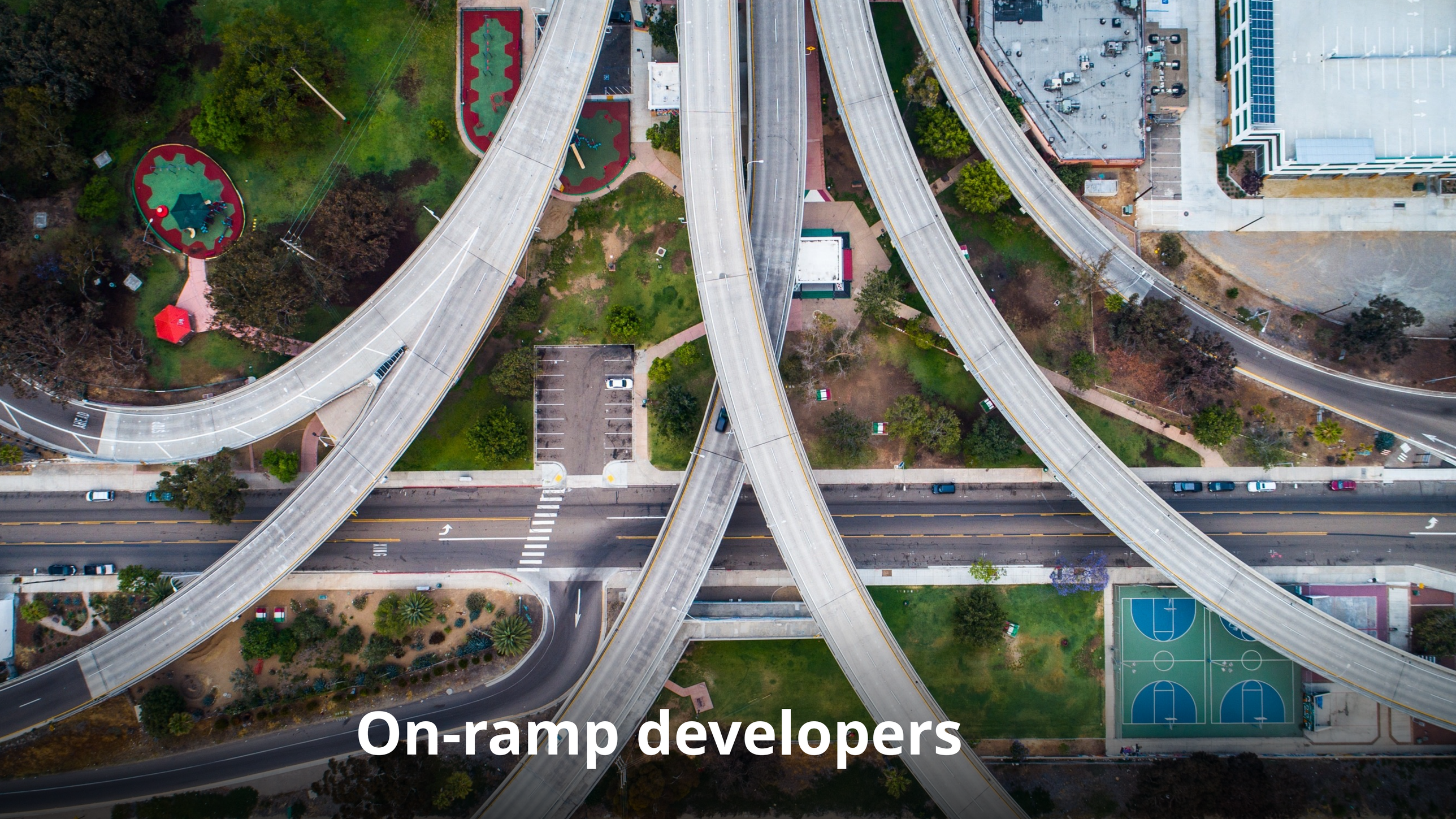


Understanding the value of contributing to open source

1. **Strategic benefits**
2. Second-order benefits

Commoditize Your Complement

Company	Focus	Complement
Google		
intel		
redhat		
facebook		OPEN Compute Project®

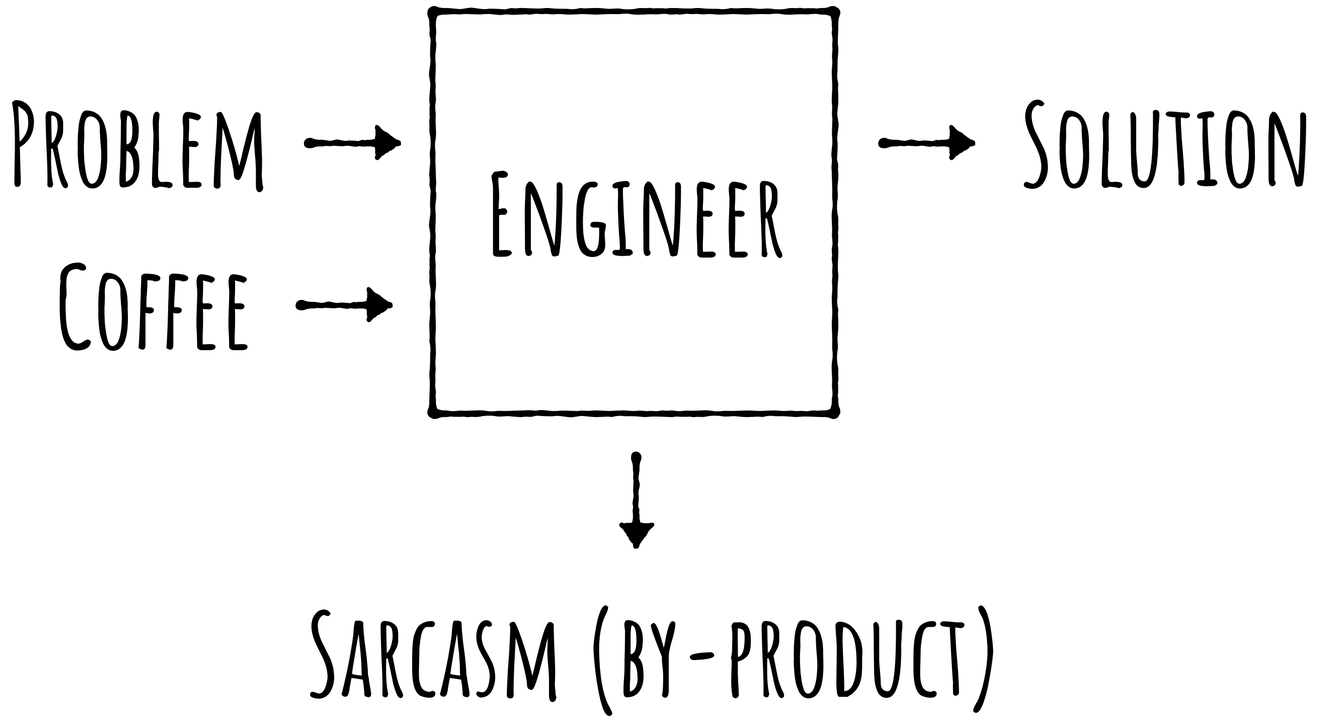


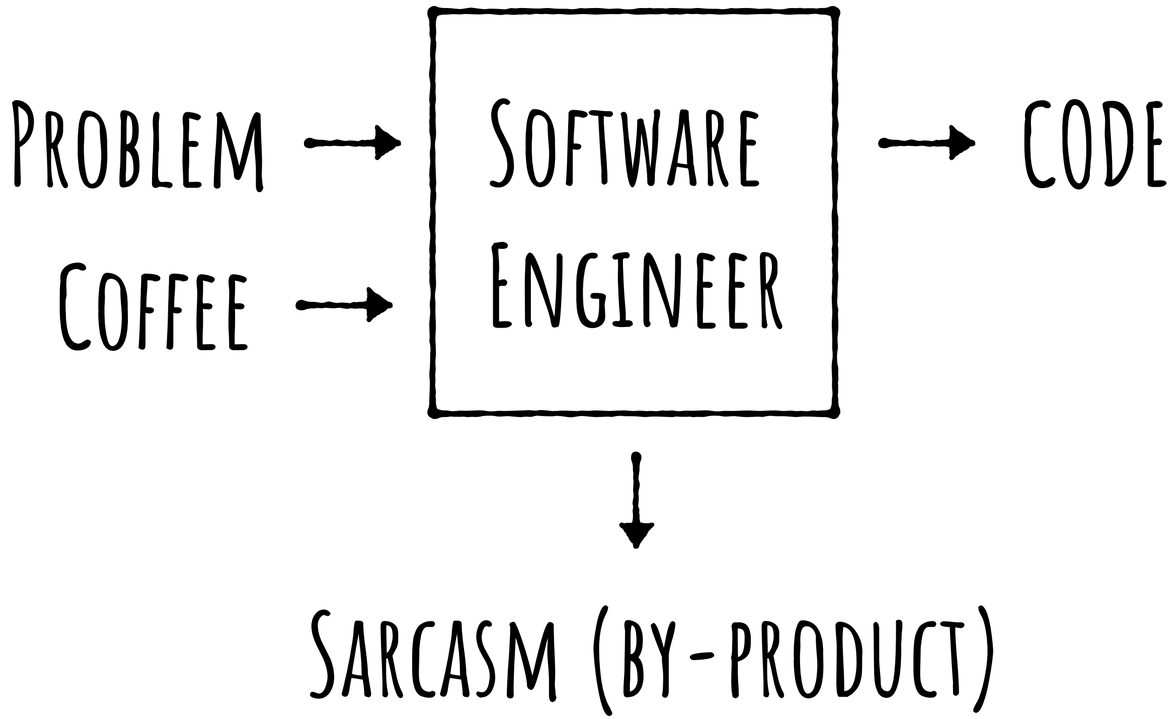
On-ramp developers

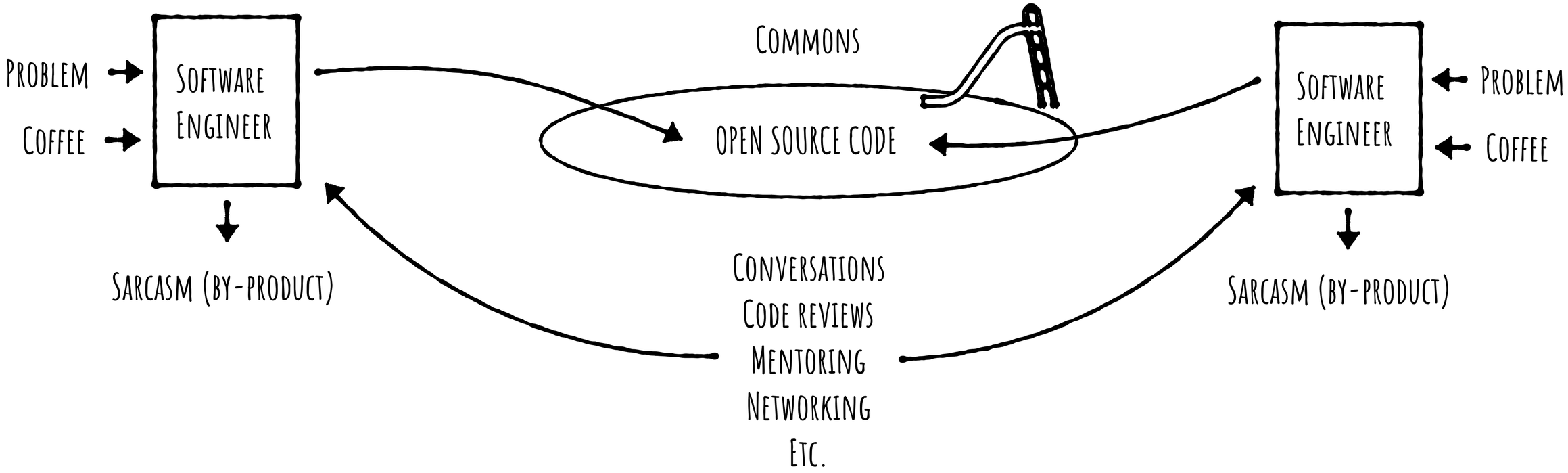
Understanding the value of contributing to open source

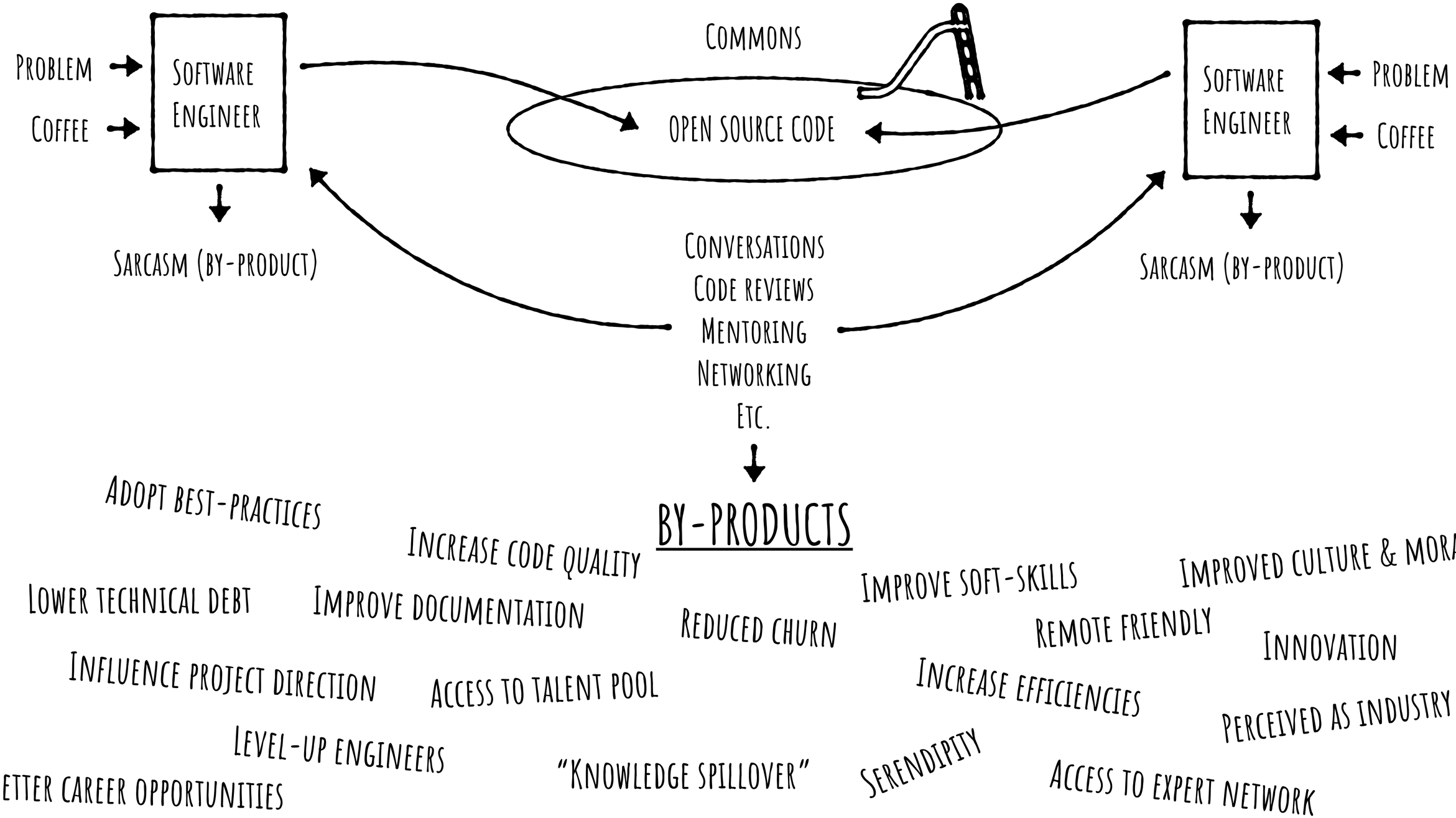
1. Strategic benefits

2. **Second-order benefits**


Problem
Coffee
Engineer
Solution
Sarcasm (by-product)


Problem
Coffee
Software Engineer
Code
Sarcasm (by-product)


Problem
Coffee
Software Engineer
Sarcasm (by-product)
Commons
Open source code
Conversations
Code reviews
Mentoring
Networking
Etc.
Software Engineer
Problem
Coffee
Sarcasm (by-product)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Software Engineer
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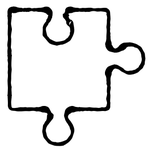
Sarcasm (by-product)
By-products
Adopt best-practices
Increase code quality
Improve soft-skills
Improved culture & morale
Lower technical debt
Improve documentation
Reduced churn
Remote friendly
Innovation
Influence project direction
Access to talent pool
Increase efficiencies
Perceived as industry leader
Level-up engineers
"Knowledge spillover"
Serendipity
Access to expert network
Better career opportunities

BY-PRODUCTS

PROJECT



Improve documentation

Increase code quality

Lower technical debt

Influence project direction

INDIVIDUAL

Level-up engineers

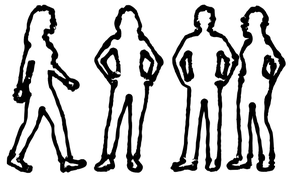
Adopt best-practices

Improve soft-skills

Access to expert network

Better career opportunities

TEAM



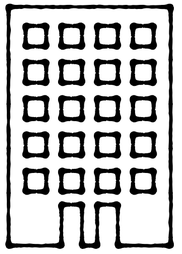
Increase efficiencies

Serendipity

Innovation

"Knowledge spillover"

ORGANIZATION



Improved culture & morale

Perceived as industry leader

Access to talent pool

Remote friendly

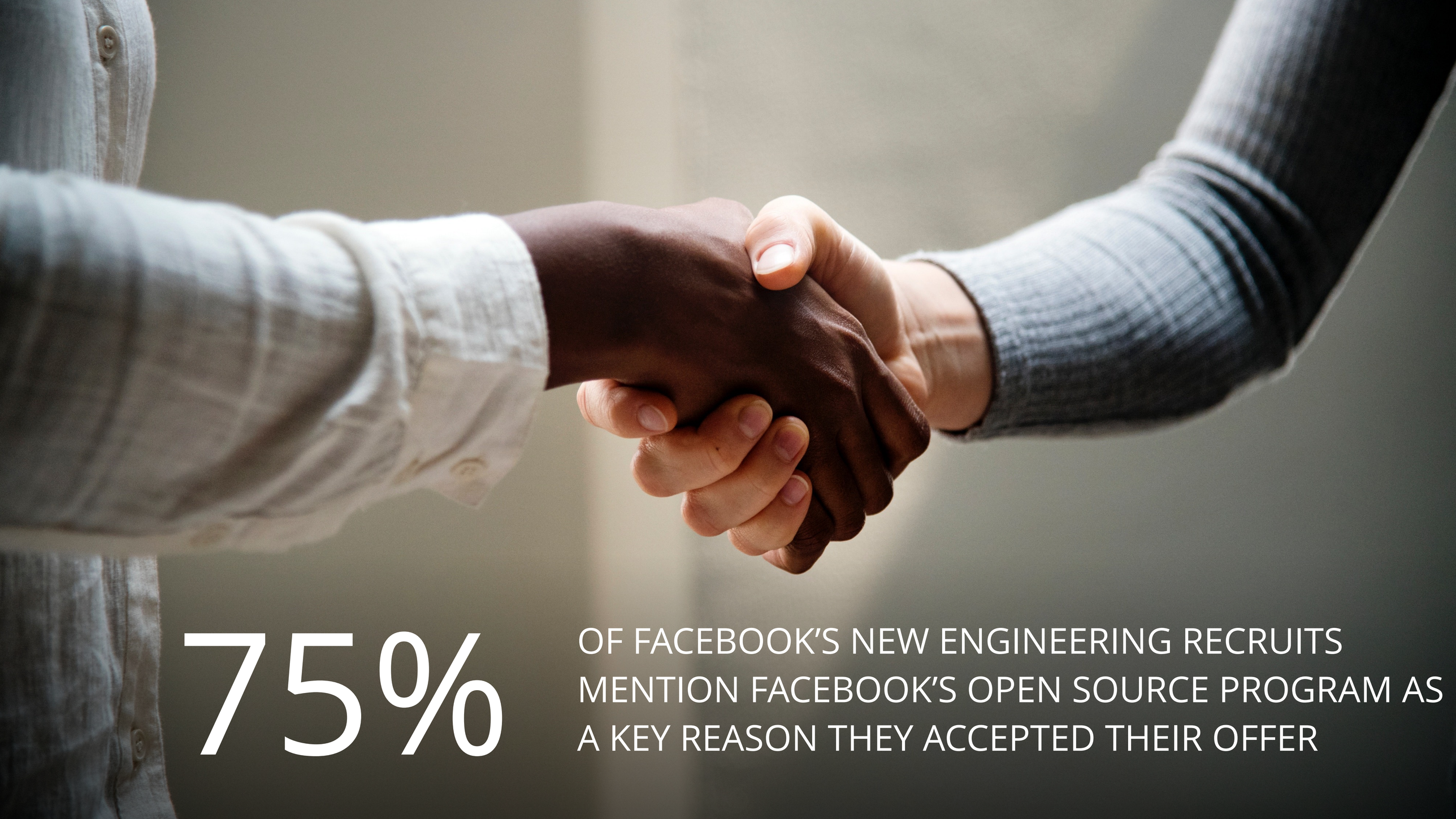
Reduced churn

2×

TWICE AS EFFICIENT

Contributing firms capture up to 100% more productive value from usage of open source than their free-riding peers.

Source: Franck Nagle, Learning by Contributing, 2017.



75%

OF FACEBOOK'S NEW ENGINEERING RECRUITS MENTION FACEBOOK'S OPEN SOURCE PROGRAM AS A KEY REASON THEY ACCEPTED THEIR OFFER

trivago

"But we also noticed some effect that we didn't expect. All the public visibility [sponsoring Webpack] have given us lead to a situation where we suddenly became one of the most interesting companies to work for as a JavaScript developer. [...]"

"We've hired a lot of really great engineers who mentioned during their job interview that our sponsoring for Webpack was one of their primary motivations for applying, [...]"

—Patrick Gotthardt, Lead JavaScript Architect, Trivago, 9 July 2018.

Lack
know-how
Increased
Risk
Wasted
resources
Lost IP
Lost
competitive
advantage

Mitigate the risk of
contributing to open source

Lost competitive advantage

“I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been.”

—Wayne Gretzky

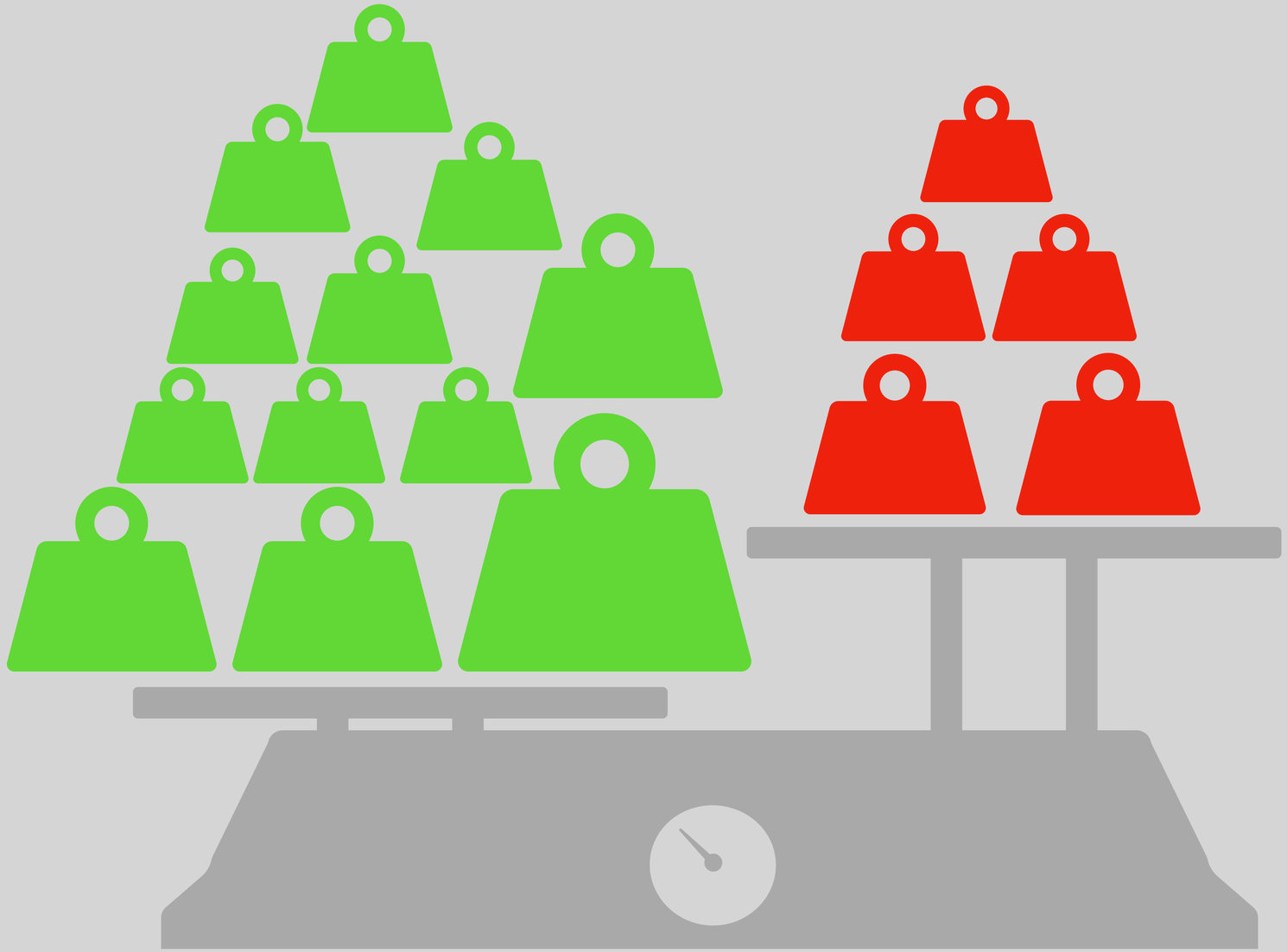
Photo: Rick Dikeman, 1997 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Photo: O'Reilly AI Conference, 2016 (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Lost IP

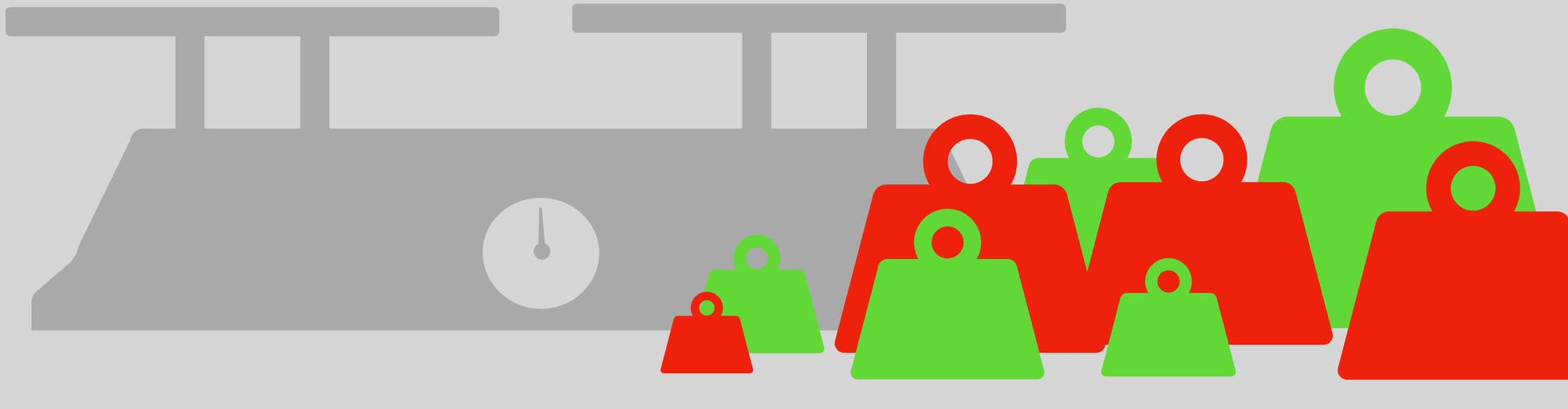
"In today's world of fast-paced internet services deployment, owning IP has become considerably less important than turning research results into innovative products as quickly as possible, and deploying them at scale."

—*Yann LeCun, Business Insider, Aug. 3, 2018.*



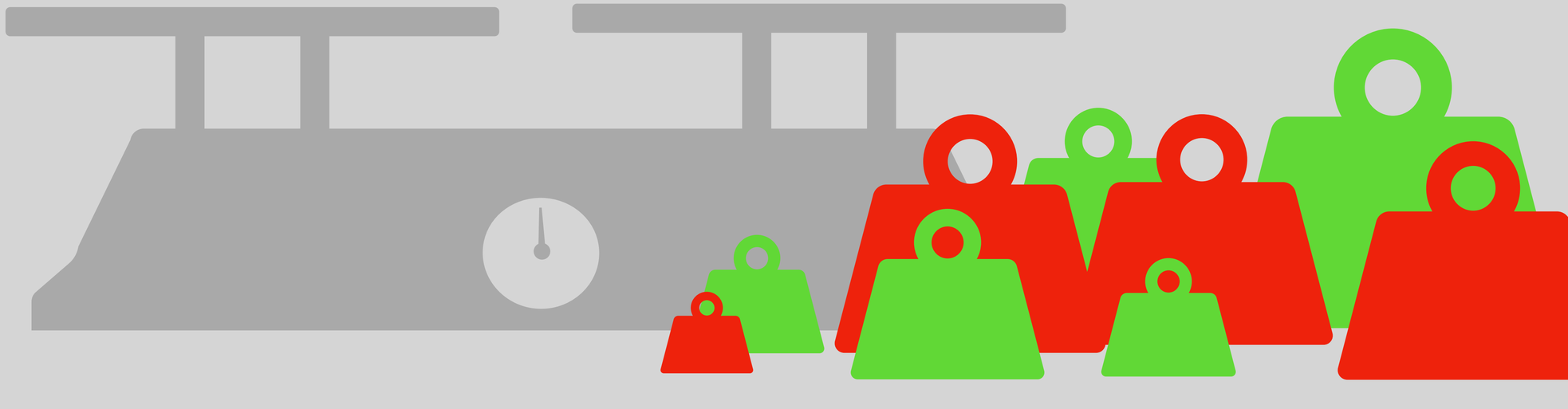
Now it’s your turn!

- **Framework** to think in terms of **business tradeoffs**.
- A **toolkit** of **benefits** and **mitigation strategies**.
- See how it applies to ***your*** organization.



Now it’s your turn!

- Be reasonable.
- Show empathy to other’s needs in the organization.
- Aim for small wins. Start small.
- Remember it’s a mindset shift.



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Thank you!

Photo: Robert Linsdell (CC BY 2.0)