Why contribute to open source?

The strategic benefits of contributing to open source for businesses & individuals

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Principal, UnlockOpen

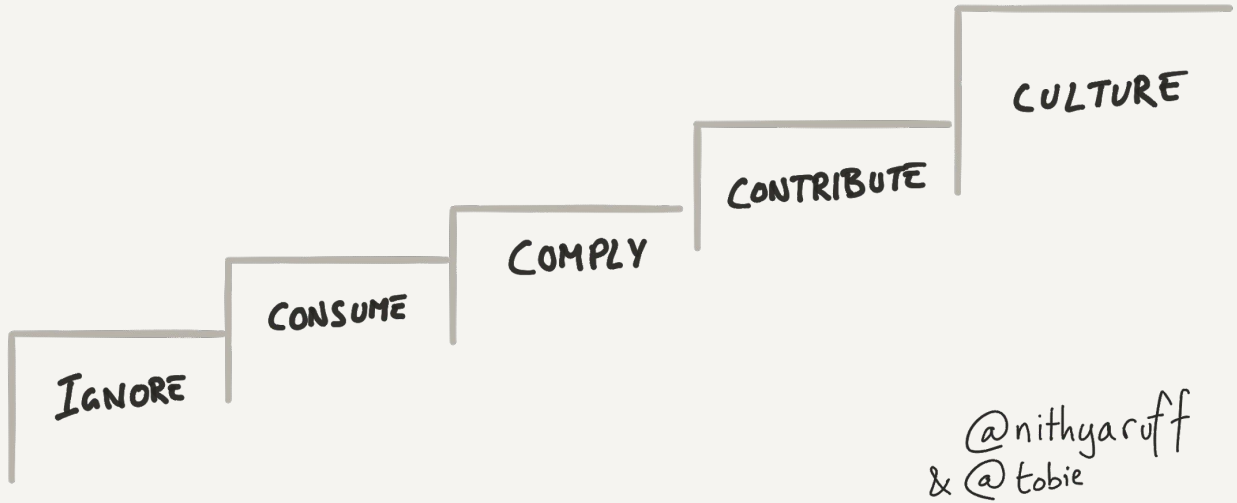
Original motivations

- Intrinsic motivations.
- “Scratching your own itch.”
- Hobbyist and hacker culture.
- Focused on building tools for their personal usage.
- Reputation as a currency (for sharing).
- Practitioners are a somewhat homogeneous group.

What changed?

- Massive growth of tech.
- Massive adoption of open source.

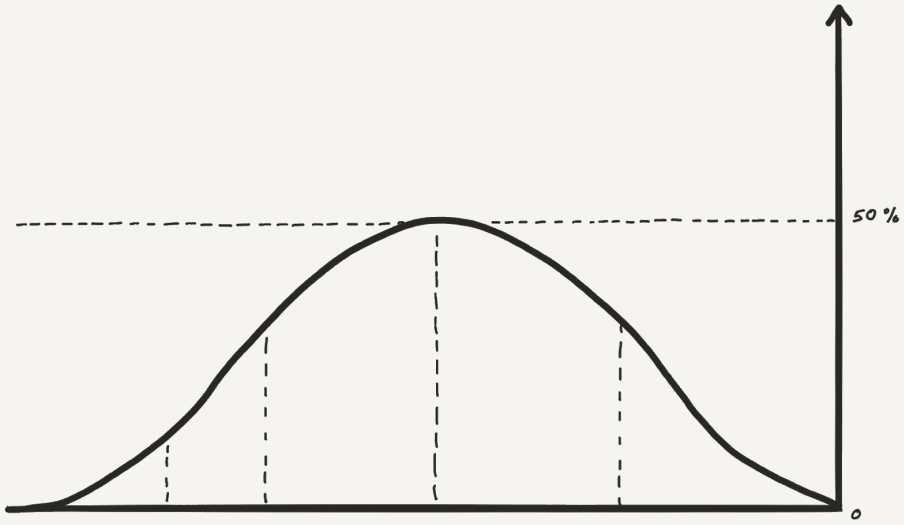
The open source journey



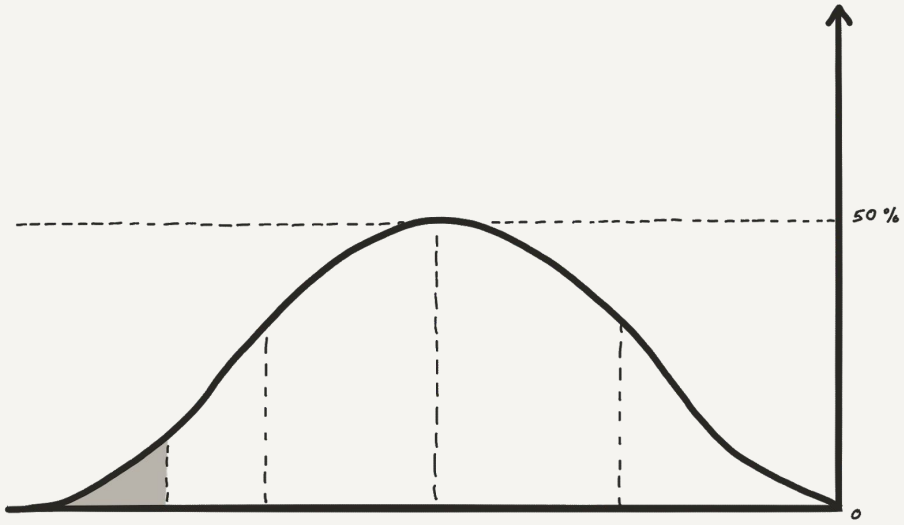
Which basically translates to

- **Ignore:** *“Open source is for hippies, we’re doing real business here.”*
- **Consume:** *“Open source is ‘free.’ Let’s use it!”*
- **Comply:** *“Oh, there’s a license? Let’s get a lawyer.”*
- **Contribute:** *“Might as well upstream that fix so we don’t have to maintain a fork.”*
- **Culture:** *“Wow, the model of building open source software works better! Let’s adopt that, too.”*

Technology adoption lifecycle

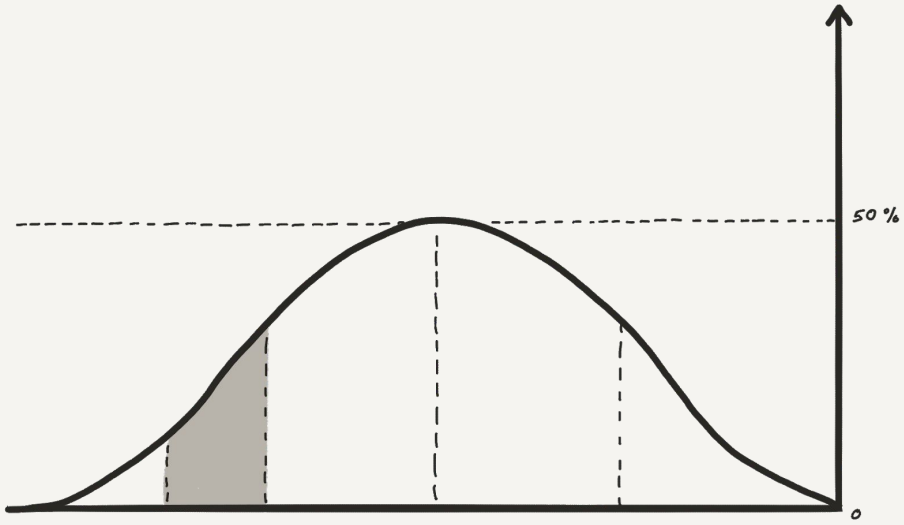


Innovators



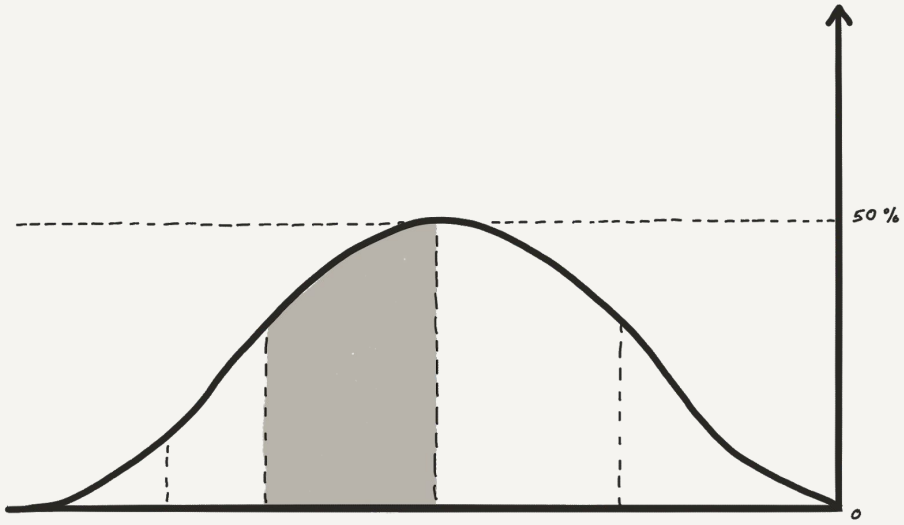
2.5%

Early adopters



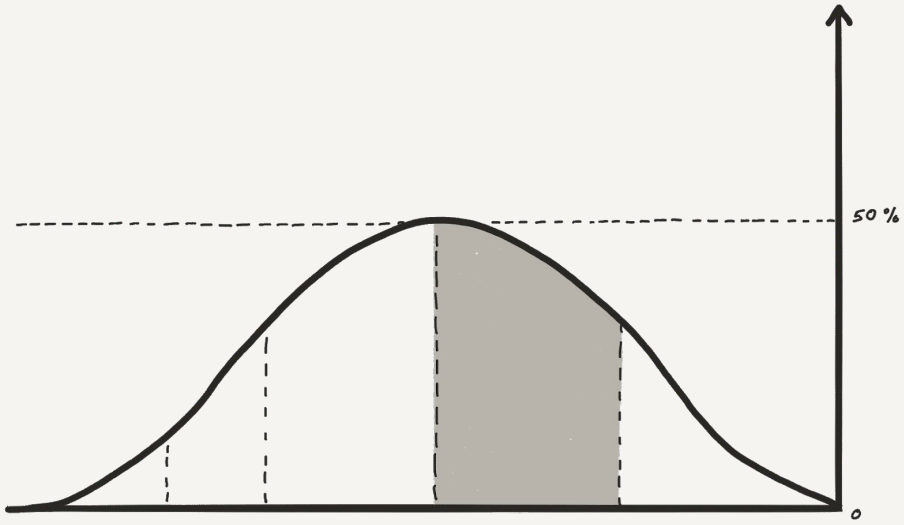
13.5%

Early majority



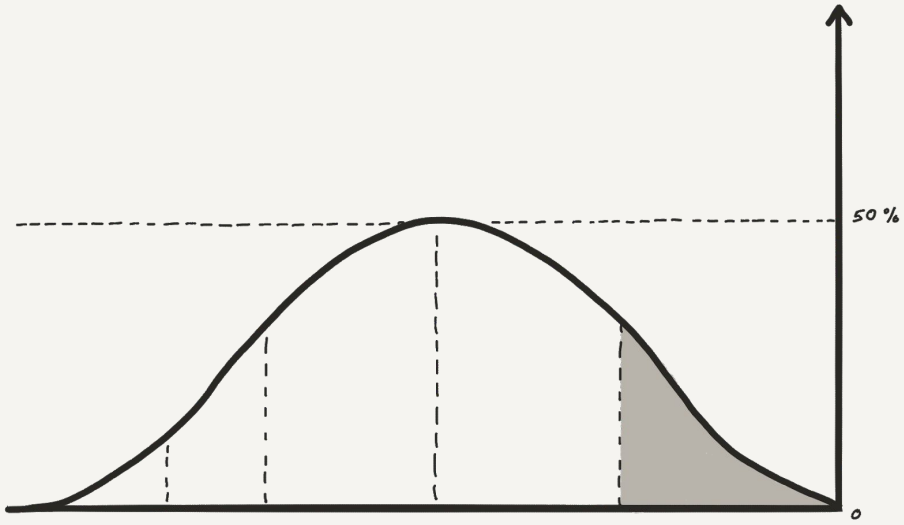
34%

Late majority



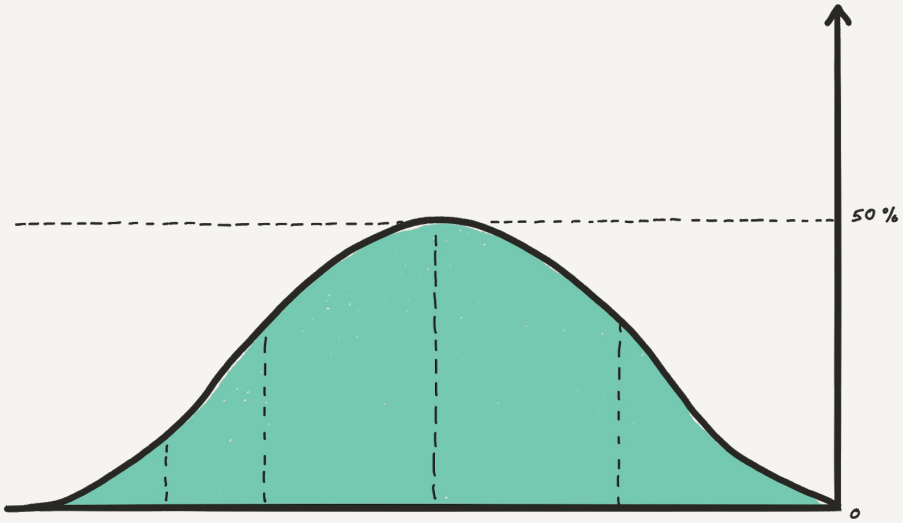
34%

Laggards



16%

Consume

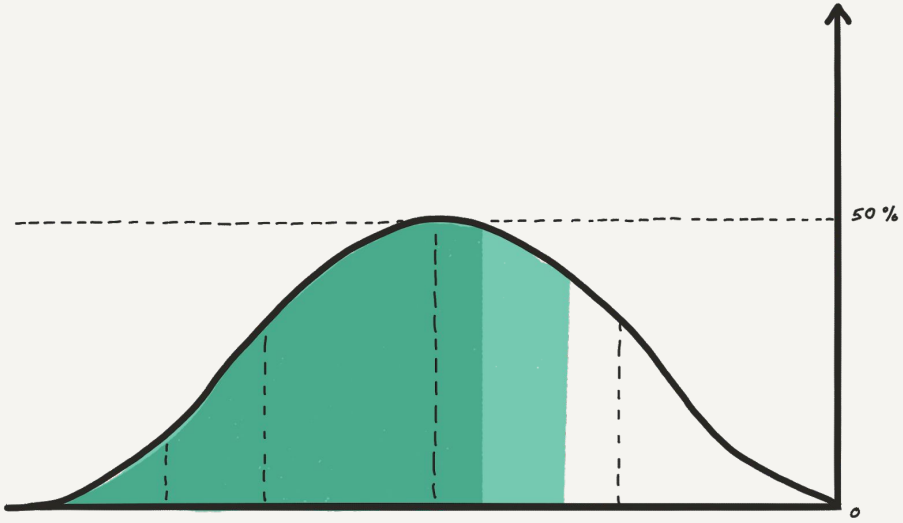


100%

Industry: financial services

Source: 2019 OSRAA Report

Comply (use in products)



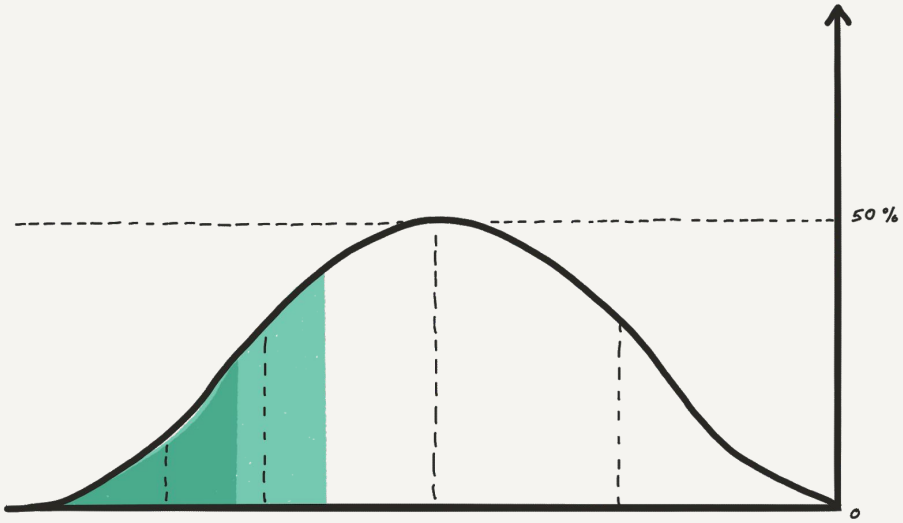
73%

often: 58% — sometimes: 15%

Industry: financial services

Source: "Open Source Programs in the Enterprise – 2019" Survey

Contribute



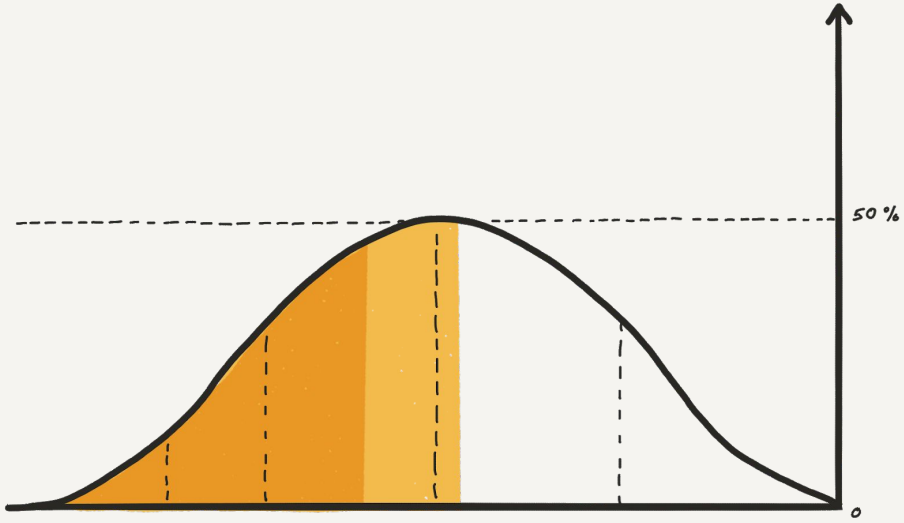
29%

often: 10% — sometimes: 19%

Industry: financial services

Source: "Open Source Programs in the Enterprise – 2019" Survey

Contribute



56%

often: 28% — sometimes: 28%

Industry: tech

Source: "Open Source Programs in the Enterprise – 2019" Survey

OK... but concretely, what does this mean?

A very different context

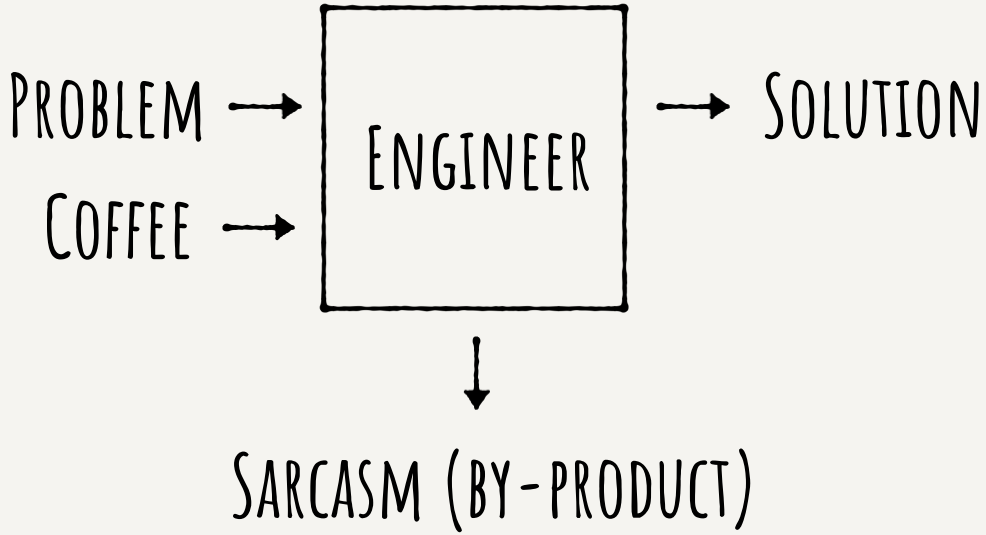
- Software is everywhere.
- Open source is mainstream.
- Widely adopted and used by corporations.
- Comparatively huge and diverse population of developers (~20+ million and growing).
- Open source is increasingly professionalized (e.g. 93% of contributions to Linux at done on the job).

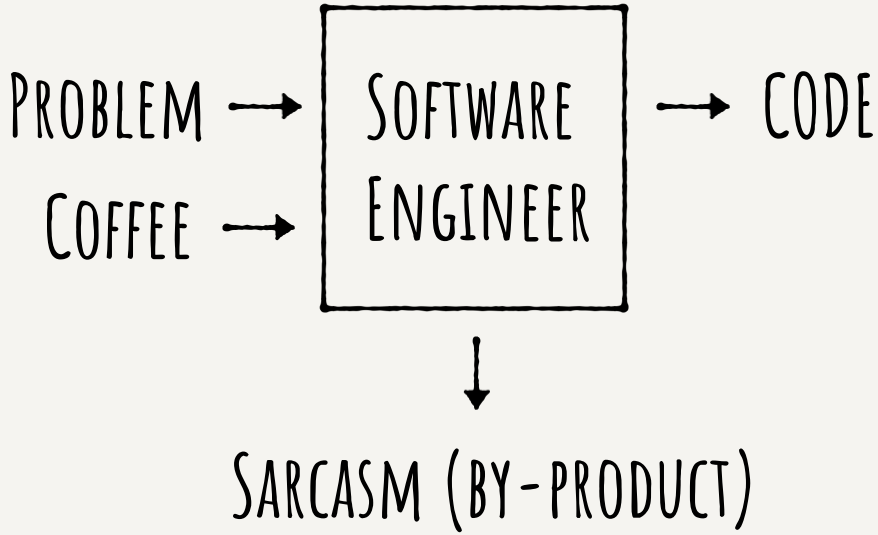
-> Motivations have changed

And that's OK!

Understand today’s motivations

For both individuals & corporations.


Problem
Coffee
Engineer
Solution
Sarcasm (by-product)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Software Engineer
Code
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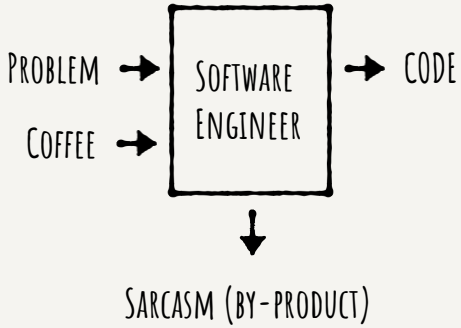
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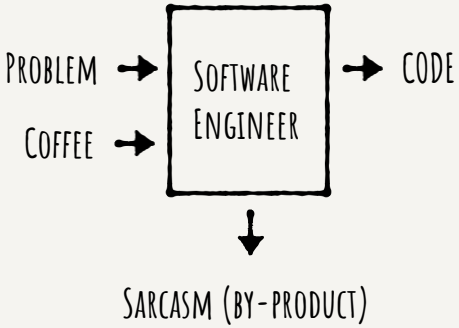
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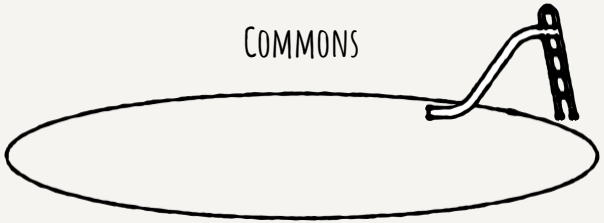
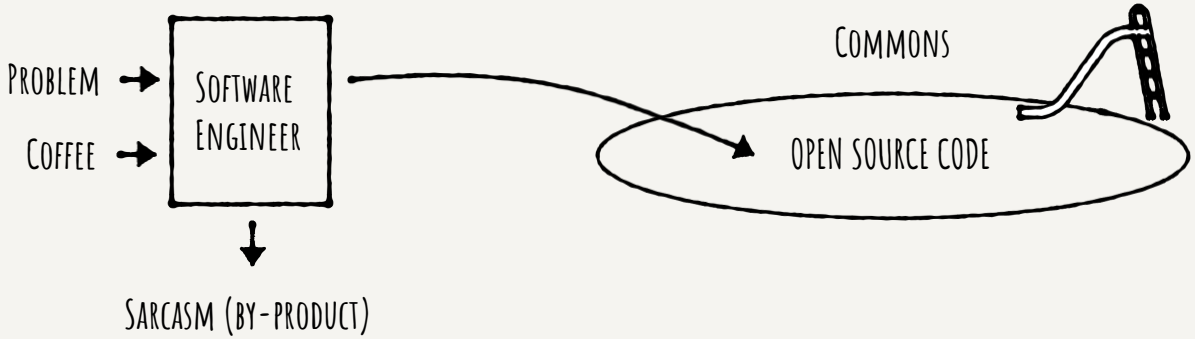

Commons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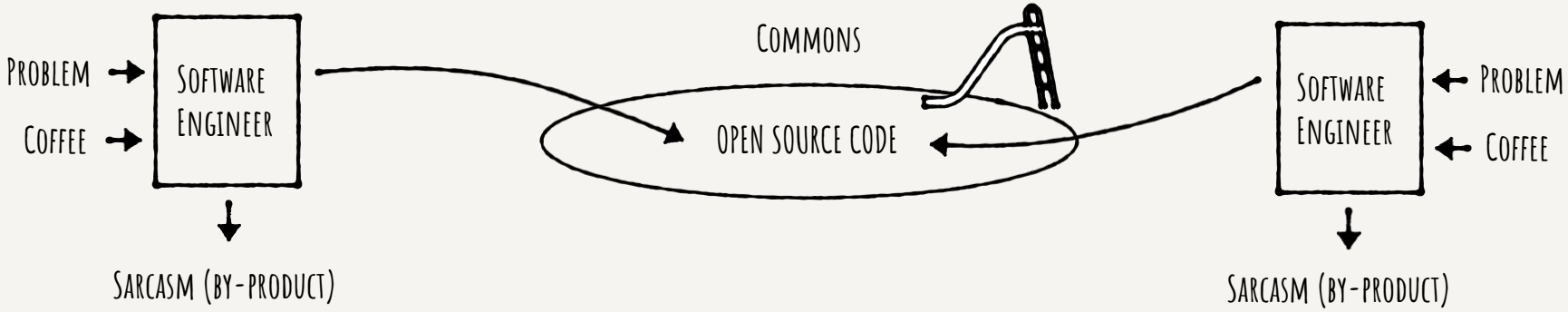
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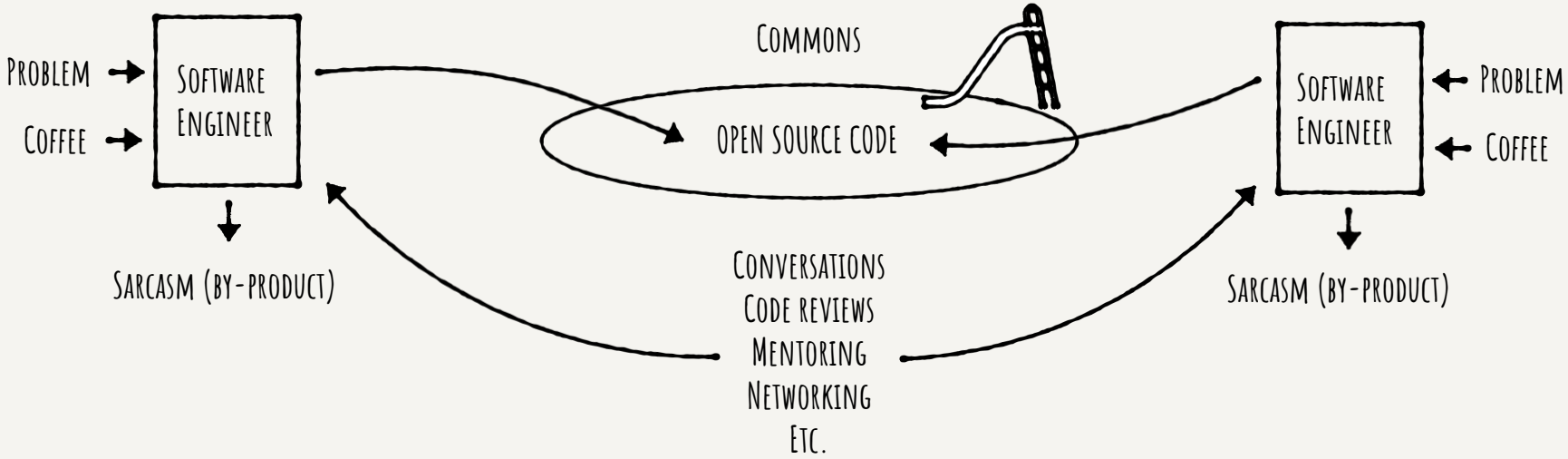
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Conversations
Code reviews
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Networking
Etc.
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Coffee
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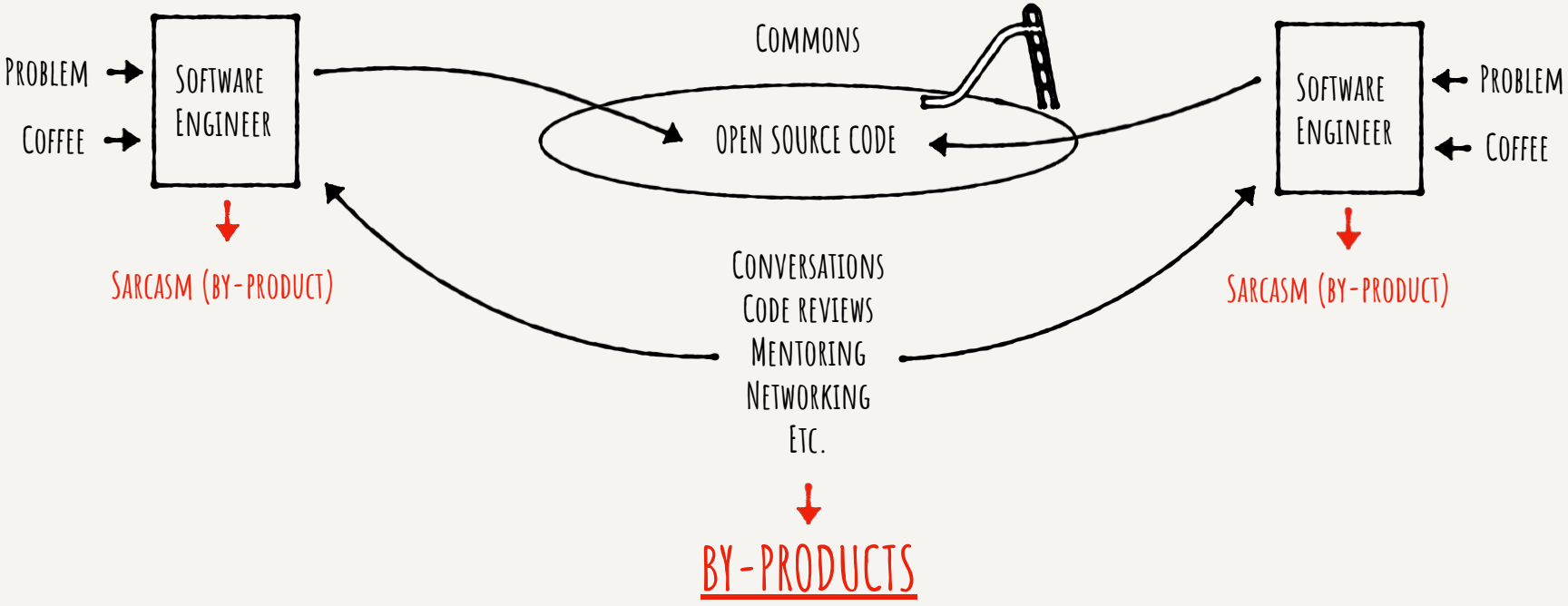
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By-products

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

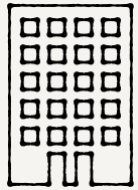
Increase efficiencies

Serendipity

Innovation

"Knowledge spillover"

Organization



Improved culture & morale

Perceived as industry leader

Access to talent pool

Remote friendly

Reduced churn

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Open source is a career booster

- Your Github profile is your resume.*
- Great way to kickstart or level up a career.
  - ➢ *Over half of the respondents to GitHub's 2017 survey claimed open source was somewhat or very important in getting their current role.*
- You have to commit (pun intended).
- Don't be opportunistic.
- **Problem:** inherently favors the privileged.

** Yes this is a problem, we'll get back to it!*

How companies can help with this

- Professionalize open source.
- Proactively help underrepresented minorities contribute.
- Have their back. Invest in proper policy to protect them when they contribute.

What companies get out of helping

- Increased diversity *at every rung* of the career ladder.
- Decrease wage gap.
- A stronger open source culture.

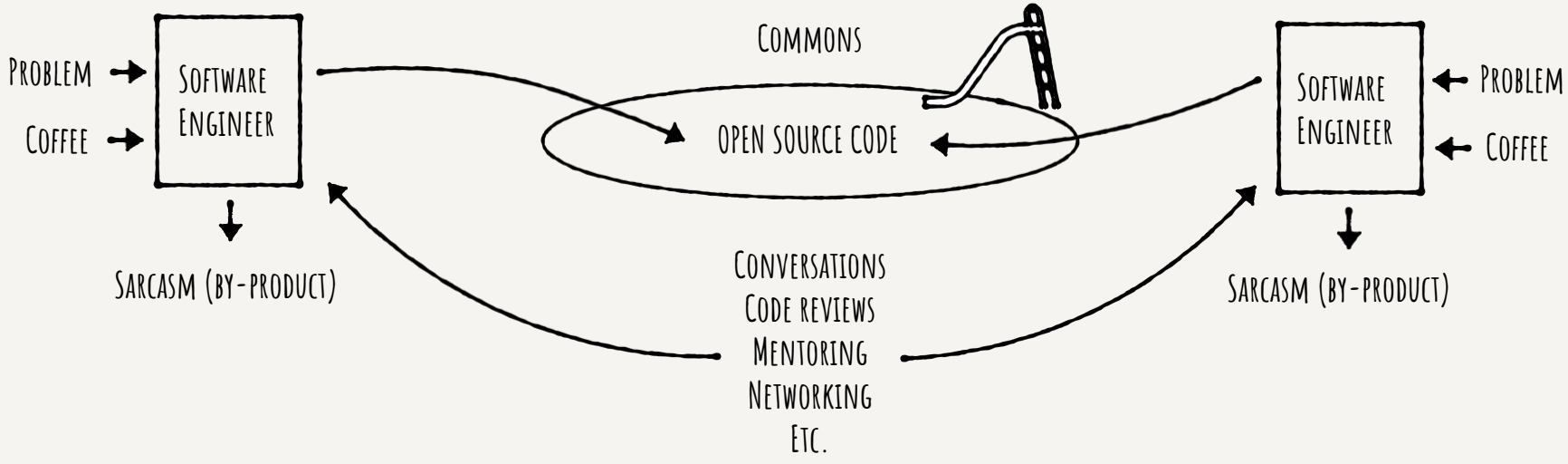
Benefits for companies

- Second-order benefits
- Operational benefits
- Strategic benefits

Second-order benefits

AKA by-products

Apache foundation's: "Community > Code"



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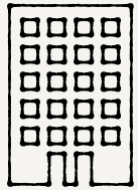

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2×

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.

By-products

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75%
75% of facebook's new engineering recruits mention facebook's open source program as a key reason they accepted their offer

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- Remote friendly
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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.

Operational benefits

Payback Technical Debt

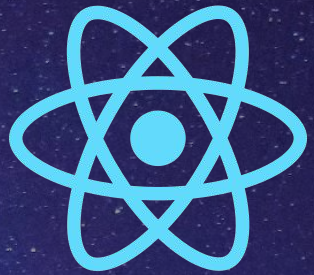
Photo: Pablo Andrés Rivero, 1997 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Economic

Web browsers

Leverage external contributions

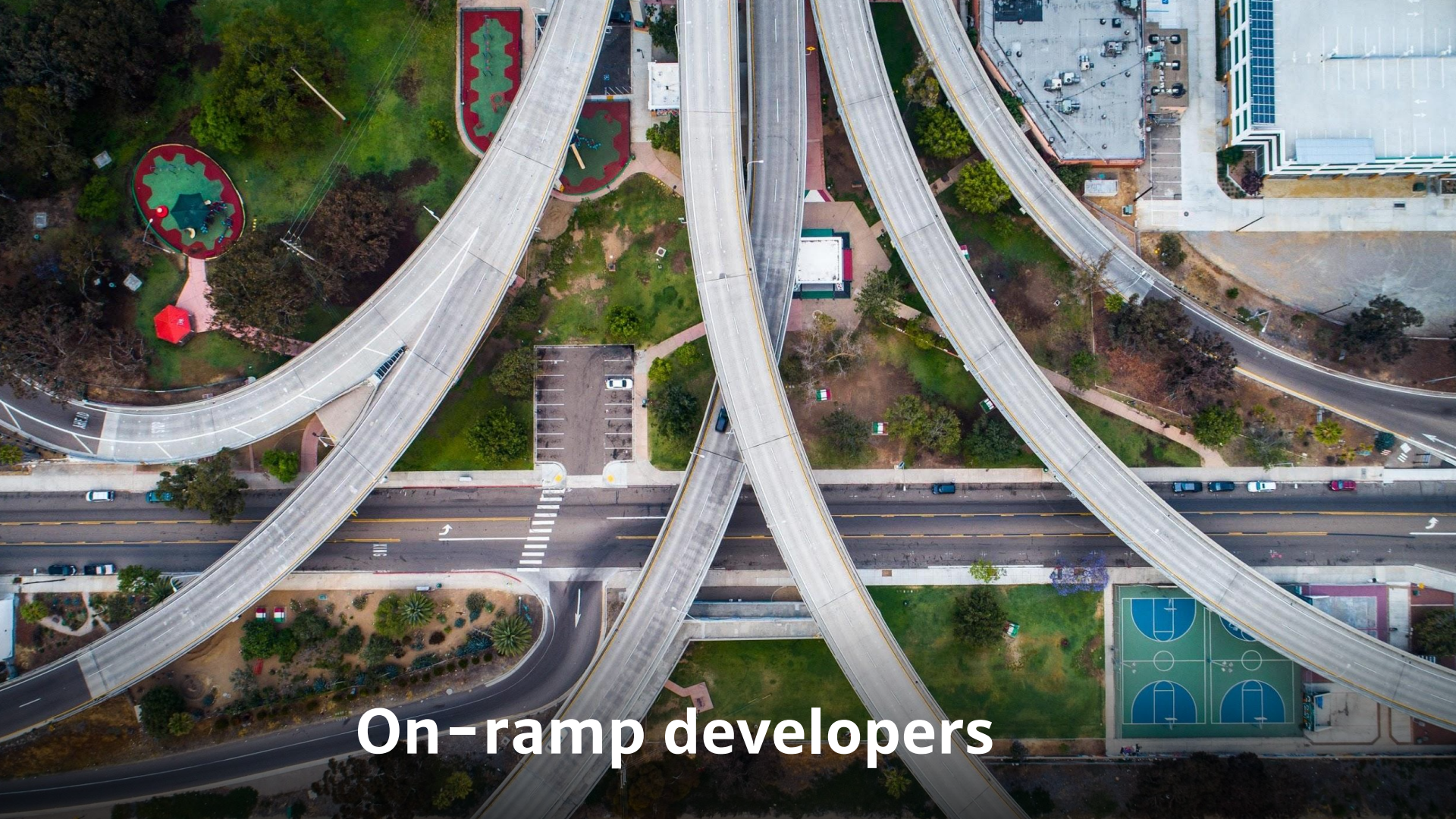
React Router



Redux

React Ecosystem

Strategic benefits



On-ramp developers

Commoditize Your Complement

Company	Focus	Complement
Google	search	Chrome, Android
intel	chip	Linux
redhat	briefcase	Linux
facebook	database	Open Compute Project

Thank you!

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Q & A

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