Making the business case for *contributing* to open source

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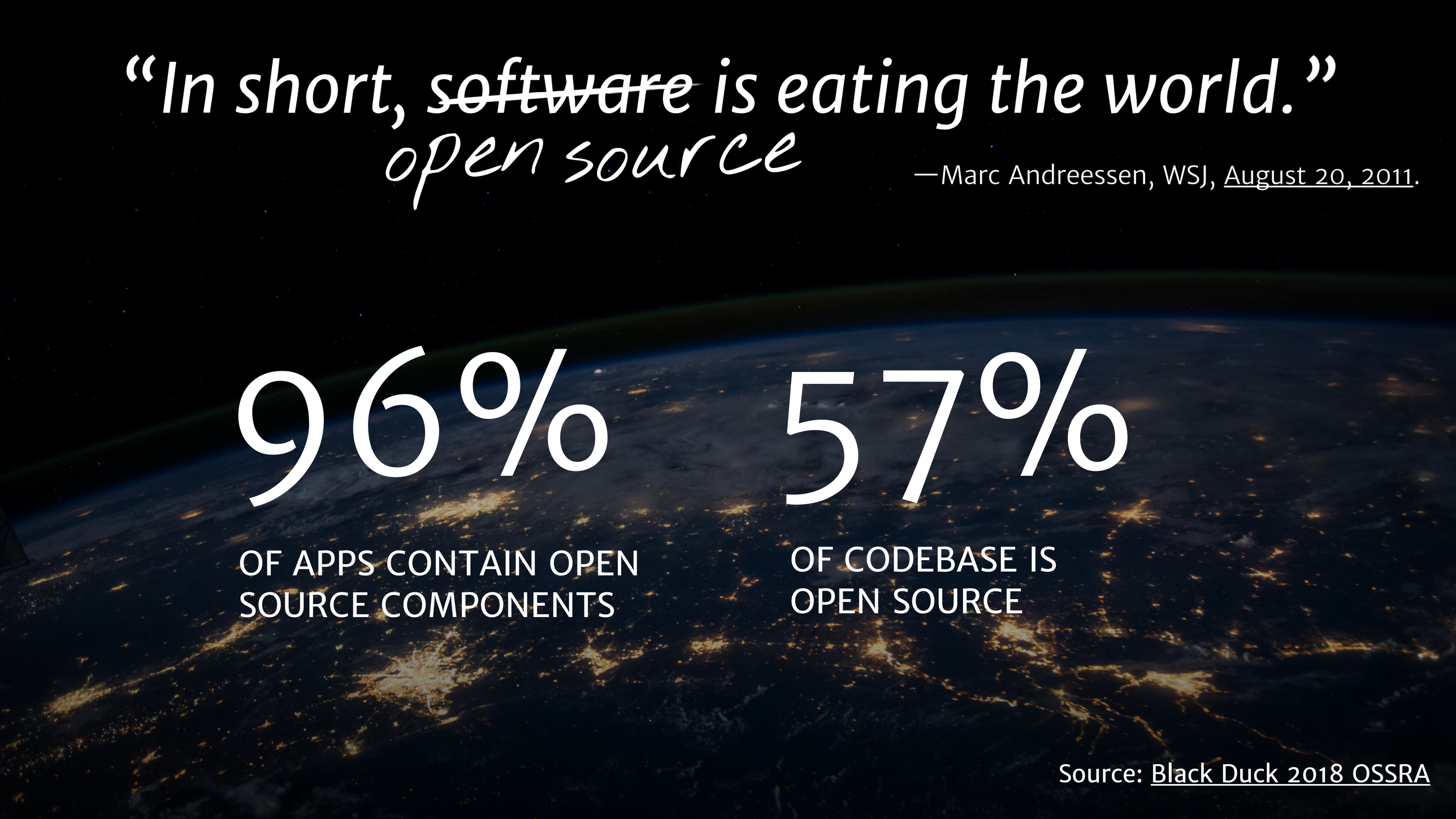
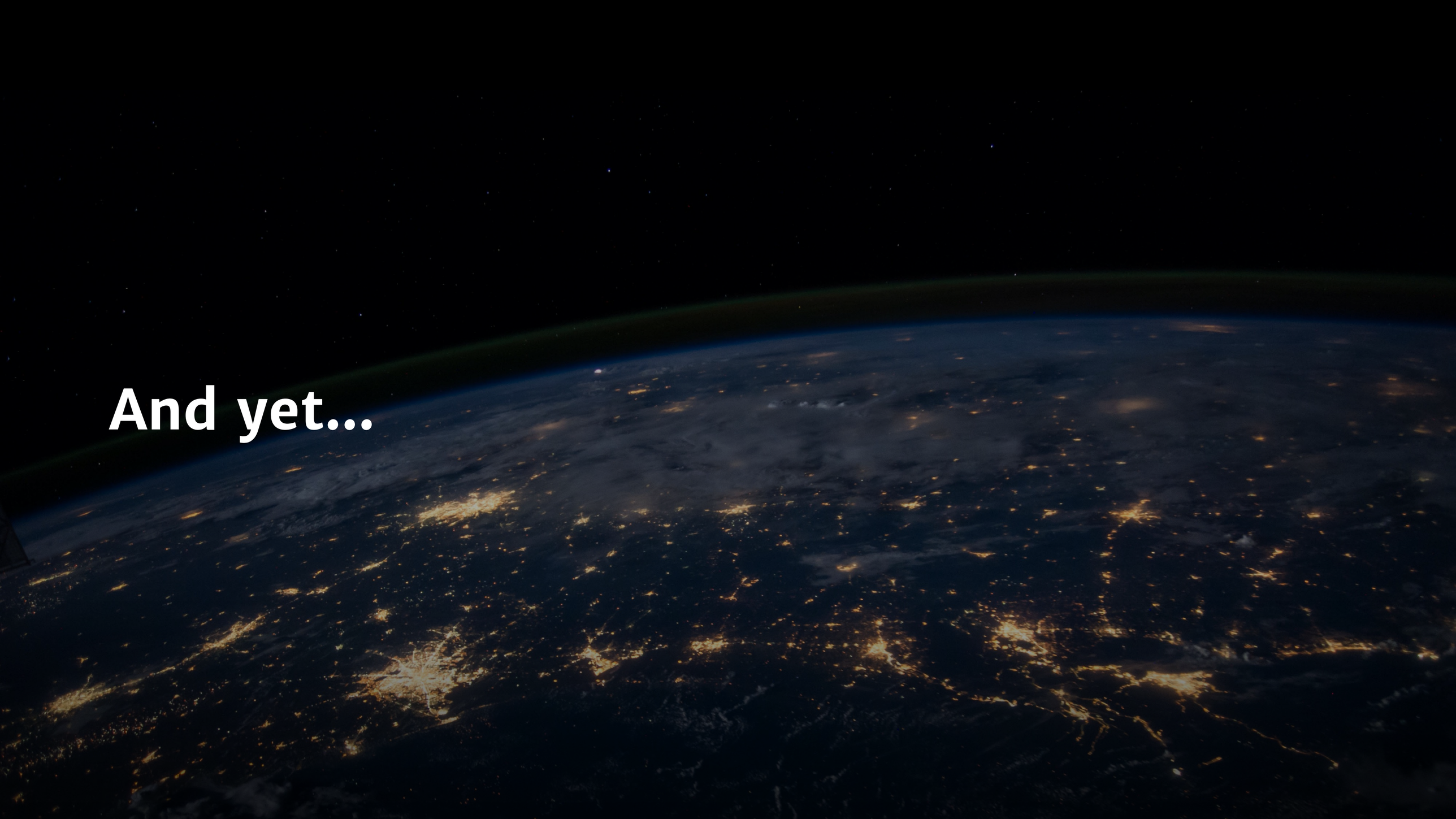
SFSCON


"In short, ~~software~~ open source is eating the world."
—Marc Andreessen, WSJ, August 20, 2011.
96%
OF APPS CONTAIN OPEN SOURCE COMPONENTS
57%
OF CODEBASE IS OPEN SOURCE
Source: Black Duck 2018 OSSRA


And yet...

Why should companies *contribute* to open source?

Common good

The Right Thing To Do™

Paying it forward

Etc.

The Right Thing To Do™
Paying it forward
Common good

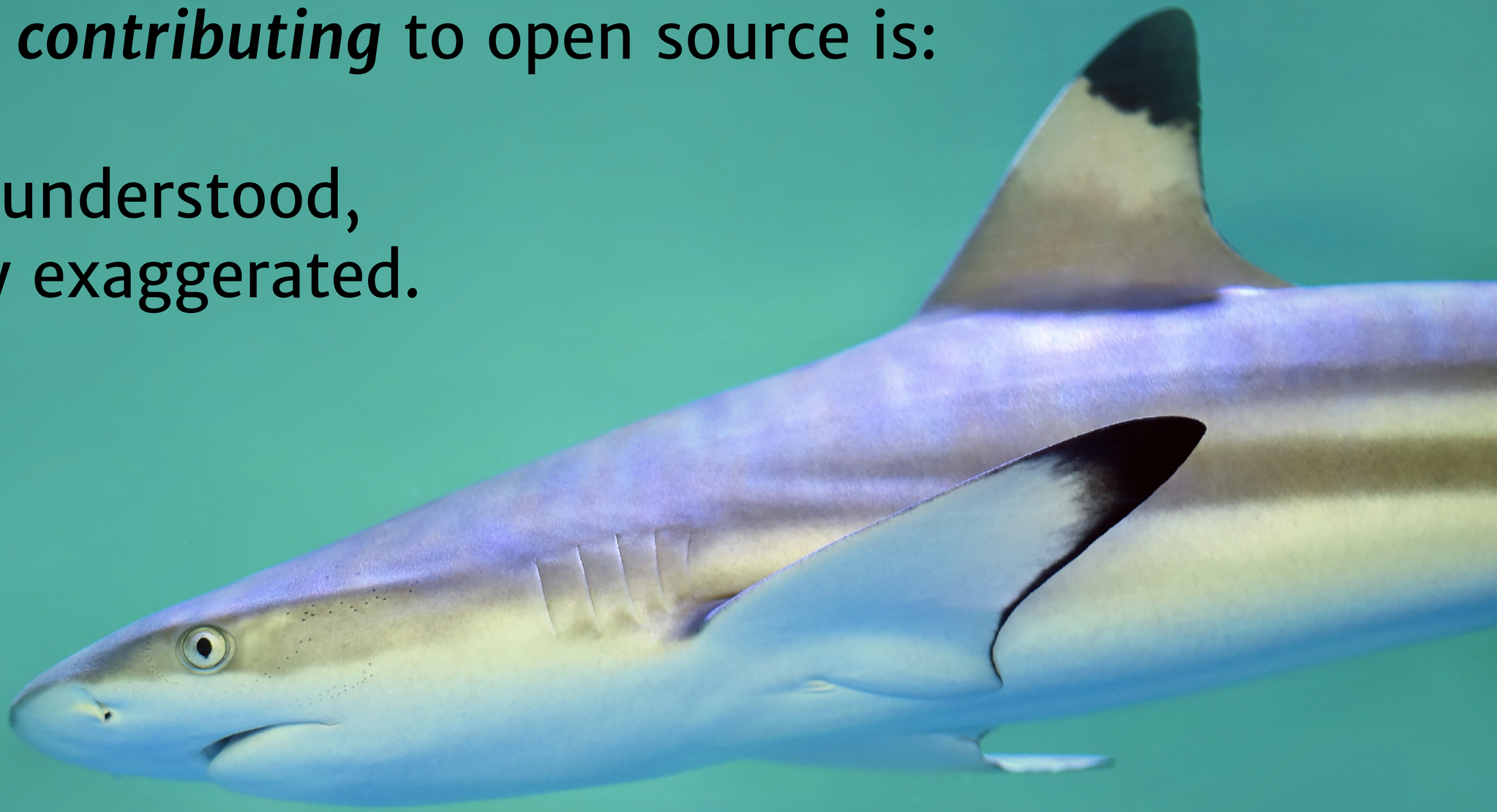
Lack
know-how
The Right
Thing To Do™
Increased
Risk
Wasted
resources
Paying it
forward
Common
good
Lost IP
Lost
competitive
advantage

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.



Understanding the value of contributing to open source

1. Strategic benefits
2. Operational benefits
3. Second-order benefits

Understanding the value of contributing to open source

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

Commoditize Your Complement

Company	Focus	Complement
Google		
intel		
redhat		
facebook		OPEN Compute Project®

On-ramp developers

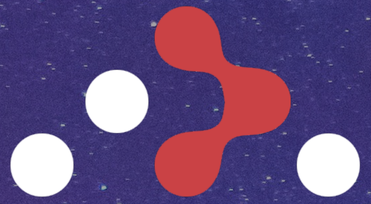
Understanding the value of contributing to open source

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

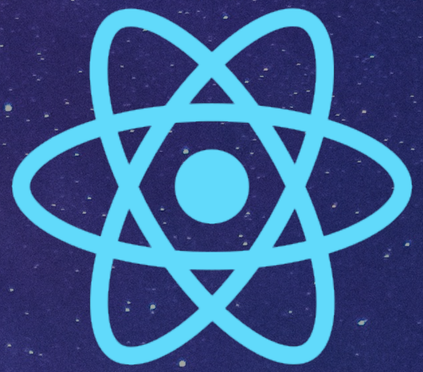
Payback Technical Debt

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

Leverage external contributions



React Router

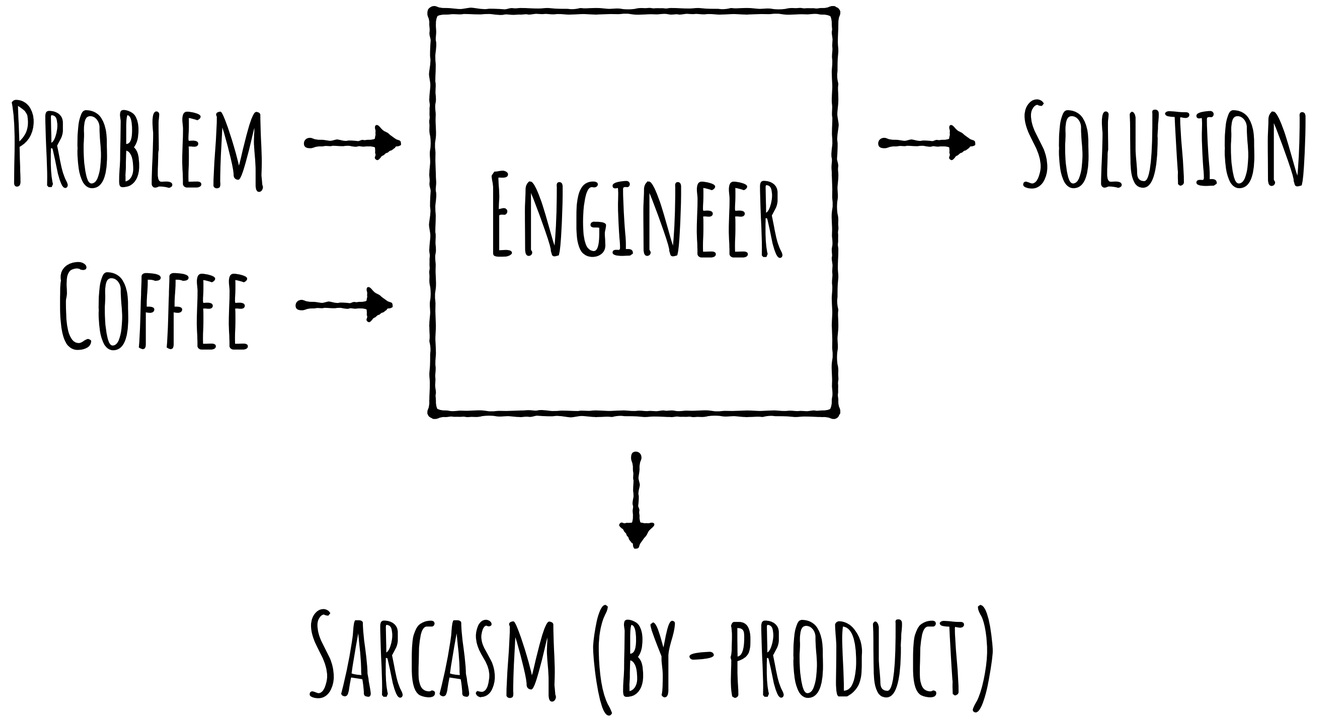


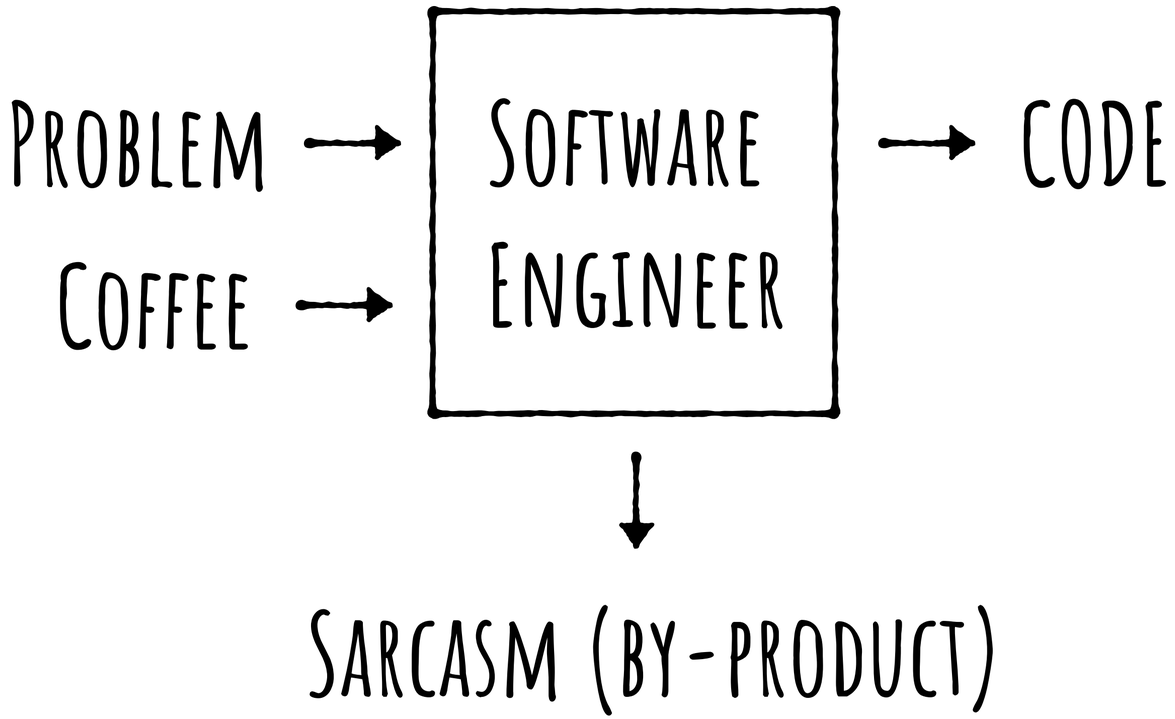
Redux

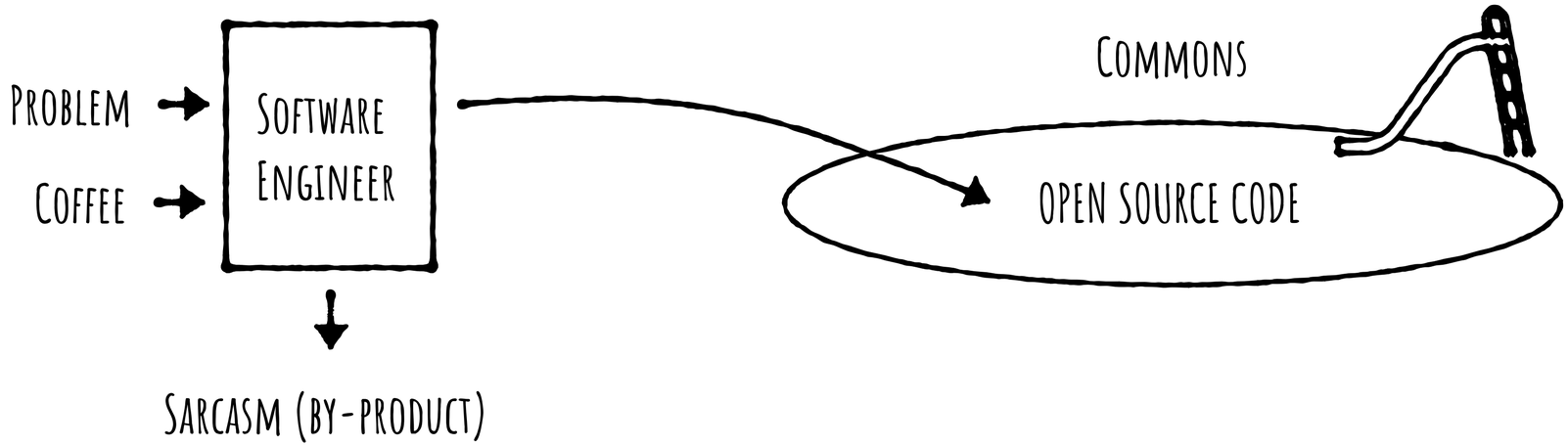
React Ecosystem

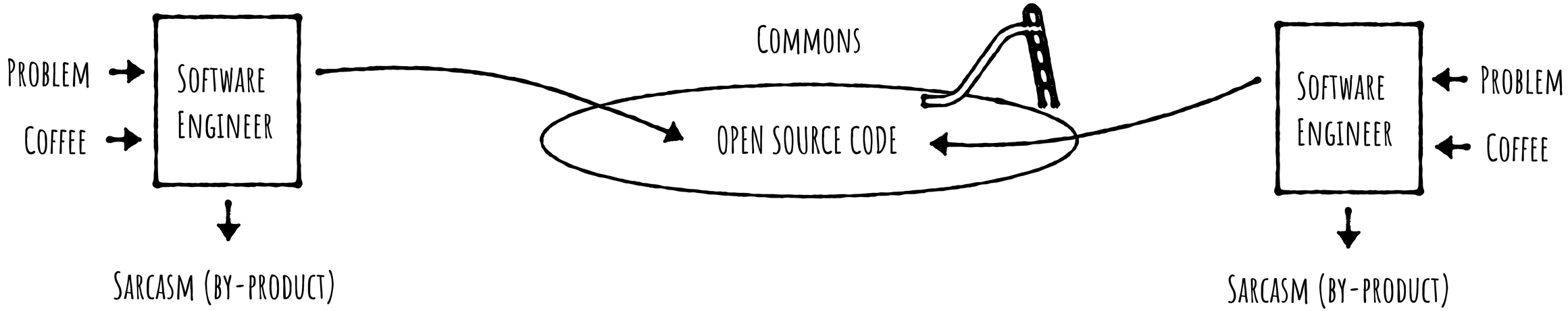
Understanding the value of contributing to open source

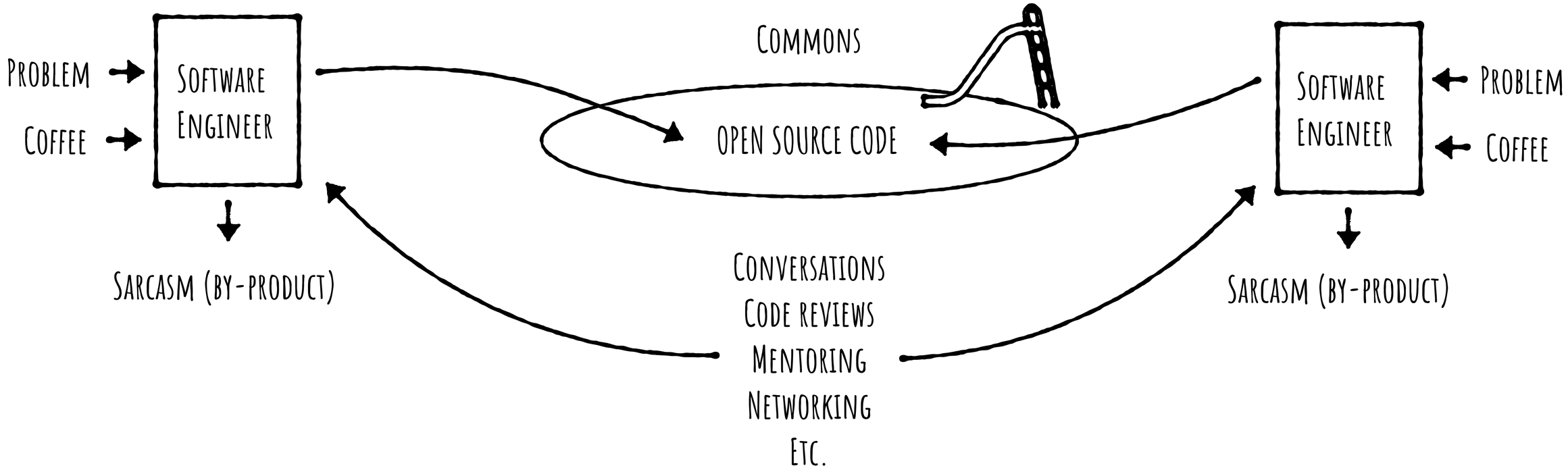
1. Strategic benefits
2. Operational benefits
3. **Second-order benefits**

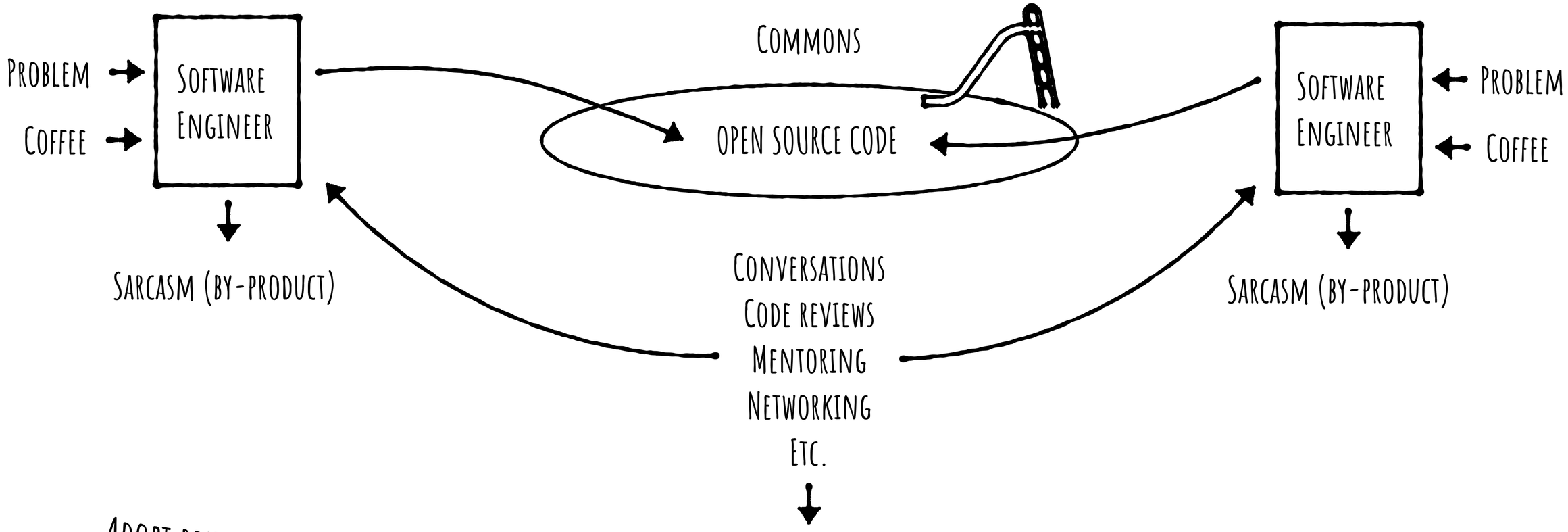

Problem
Coffee
Engineer
Solution
Sarcasm (by-product)


Problem
Coffee
Software Engineer
Code
Sarcasm (by-product)


Problem
Coffee
Software Engineer
Sarcasm (by-product)
Commons
Open source code


Problem
Coffee
Software Engineer
Sarcasm (by-product)
Commons
Open source code
Software Engineer
Problem
Coffee
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)



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"

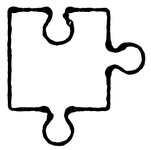
Serendipity

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

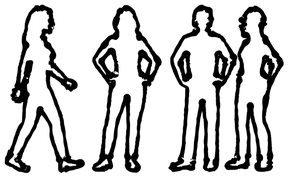
Adopt best-practices

Improve soft-skills

Access to expert network

Better career opportunities

TEAM



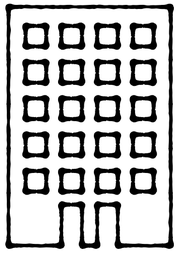
Increase efficiencies

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

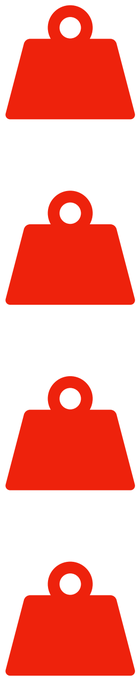
Photo: Rick Dikeman, 1997 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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.

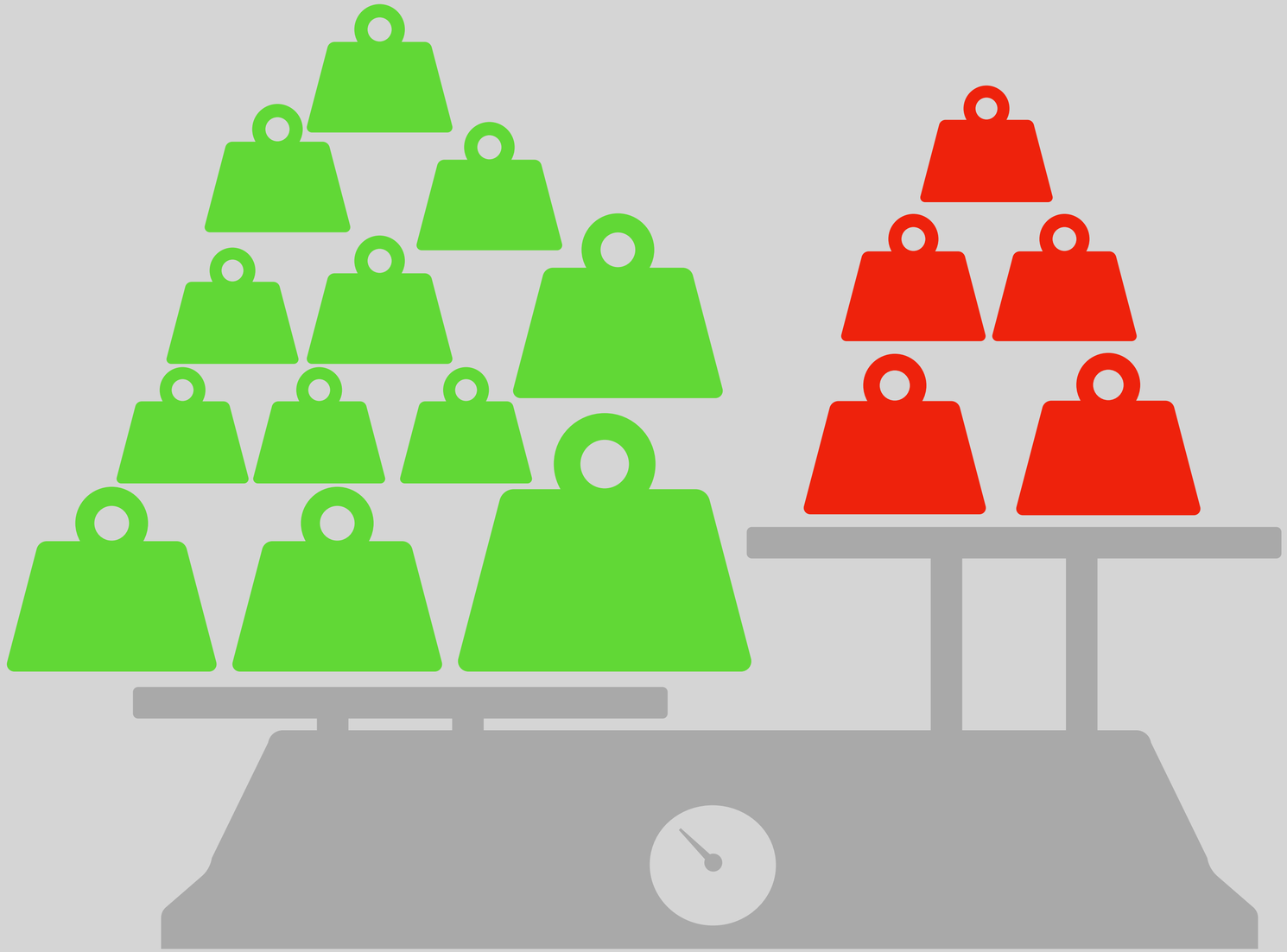


Increased Risk

Wasted resources

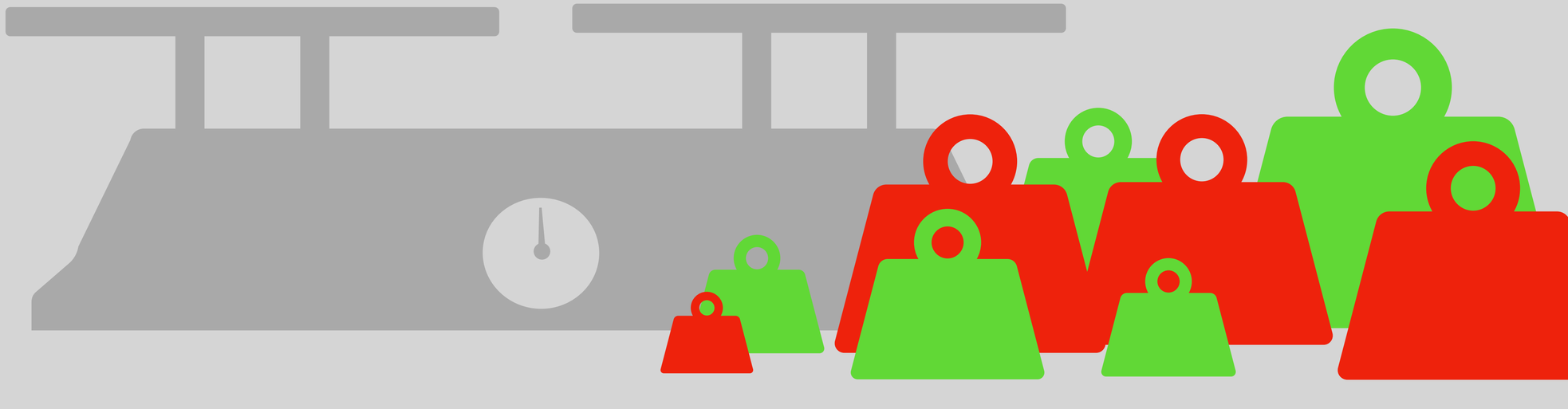
Lack *know-how*

Etc.



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.

Thank you!

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