



The Art of Presentations

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No matter what you do,
excellent public speaking
skills are essential

An academic job talk

A plenary talk at a top
conference

A sales pitch to venture
capitalists

But the fact is, good talks
are rare to find

What do you mean by “a
good talk”?

In November 2011, I read a
book that I adore

Walter Isaacson's
“Steve Jobs”

“Jobs, exuding confidence, style, and sheer magnetism, was the antithesis of the fumbling Amelio as he strode onstage. The crowd jumped to its feet and gave him a raucous ovation for more than a minute.”

– Walter Isaacson, “Steve Jobs,” Chapter 24, on the return of Jobs to the stage of MacWorld 1997

This is what we eventually
need — confidence, style,
and magnetism

But when you attend typical
talks —

The talk was not so good.

The talk went over time.

I had no idea what she's talking about.

I was checking my emails.

I fell asleep.

But why? What are the problems? And how do we fix them?

The talk is not organized well.

Problems in organizing and
preparing for a talk

No one can finish reading the slides.

Problems in designing slides

The speaker talks in a boring way.

Problems in delivering a talk

This talk is about how these
problems can be solved

It is about exuding confidence,
style, and magnetism

It is about the art of
presentations

Three General Rules of Thumb

Rule #1: keep it simple

The fact that your talk is simple to understand, doesn't mean that the work is not good

If you make your talk complex, your risks are high – it's hard to understand in a short period of time

Find a simple way to explain
something complex

You will never be able to
“dazzle the audience” with
complexity

Instead, you push them
away from your talk

Rule #2: be enthusiastic

You have been working very
hard on the work you wish
to talk about

If you want anyone else to
be excited about your work,
you should be the first

Your body language and tone of voice supply the overall message impact —

Use hand gesture

Use maximum power in voice and a microphone

Avoid a tone that feels boring

Rule #3: practice your talk

It is a performance show —
that's why it needs to be
rehearsed

Many, many times

Practicing your talk only
makes it better

First in your mind

Then in front of a friendly
audience (like a research group)

In front of your advisor

Get feedback and improve your
talk

Practicing may help you
build your confidence

so that you don't get
nervous before the talk

so that you can take a deep breadth and get started

with something truly
sensational

Three Rules of Thumb

Rule #1: keep it simple

Rule #2: be enthusiastic

Rule #3: practice your talk

Organizing and
preparing your talk

Tip #1: Have one take away
message

This is something for the
audience to remember

Your audience can't just
remember anything they like
— you control what they do
remember

That is your take away
message in the talk

Always assume that the
audience is 80 years old
with a poor memory

Be explicit about what you wish them to remember

Repeat the take away message

Keep the message simple

Tip #2: Work hard on the
flow of ideas

Spend a lot of time to work
on the flow of ideas in your
talk

Start with a pen and paper,
like working with a
“storyline” on a movie

Your storyline does not have
to be traditional, such as
background – design –
simulation

It can be anything you want

You can even make it a roller coaster ride with twists and suspense

Your audience will be happy to follow the flow and go for a ride — they may even enjoy the ride!

Just watch out on the time
needed for delivering the talk

Always leave at least 5 – 10 minutes for questions

And how about the outline?

What do you think about the
next slide?

Outline of my talk

- ▶ Problems in mobile cloud computing
- ▶ Related works on computation offloading to the cloud
- ▶ The design of our multi-layer scheme with the addition of cloudlets
- ▶ Theoretical analysis of our scheme
- ▶ Simulation results
- ▶ Conclusion

I think it's boring

Since you now have a great flow of ideas, you can remove the outline, and let the show begin to roll from the start

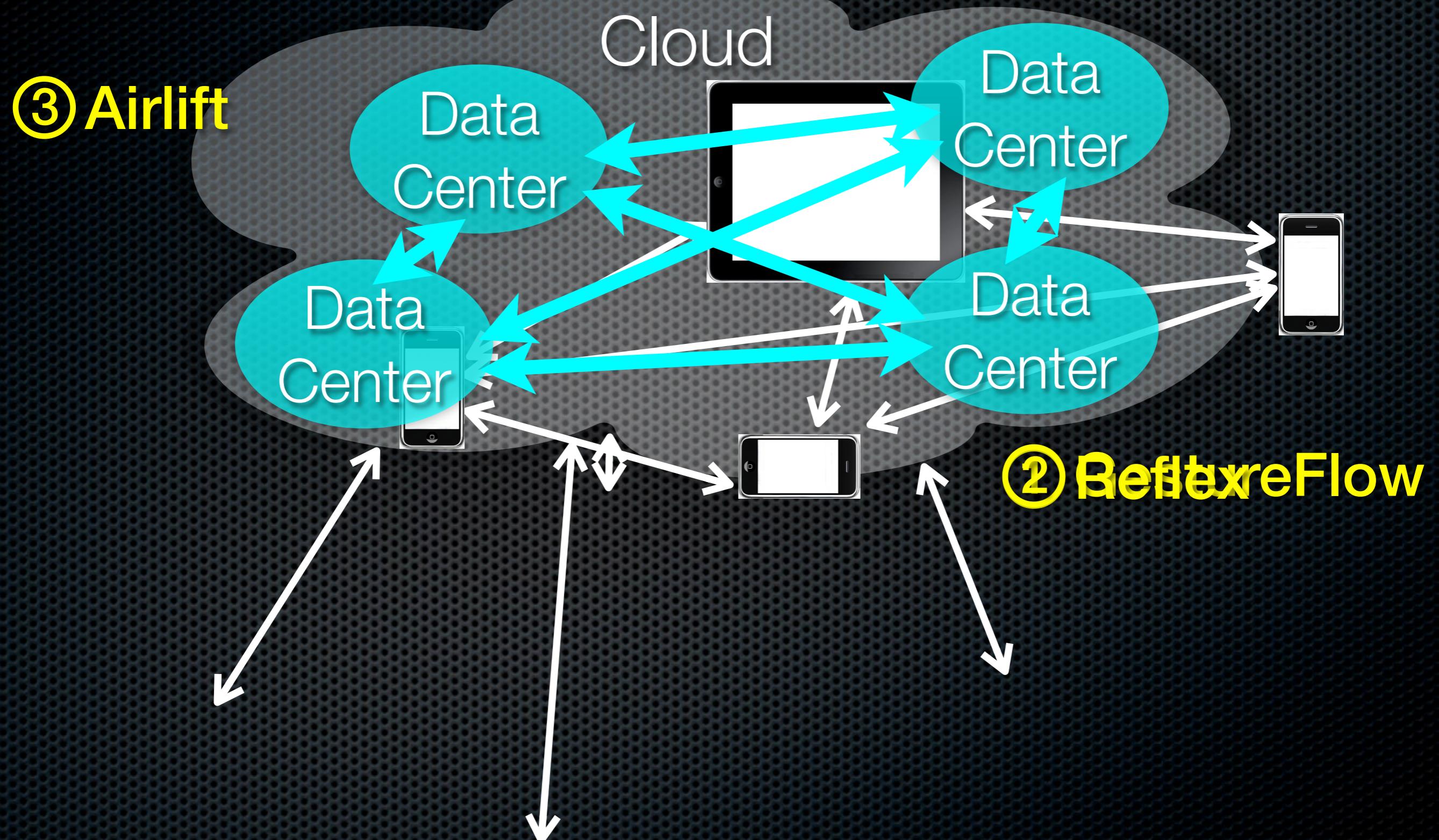
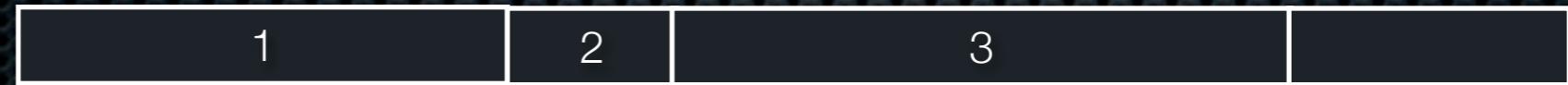
Along the way, you can add
a roadmap when there's a
need

The roadmap can even be
graphically illustrated with
subtle animations

Like this example —

courtesy of Yuan Feng's exceptional design
on her job talk

Roadmap

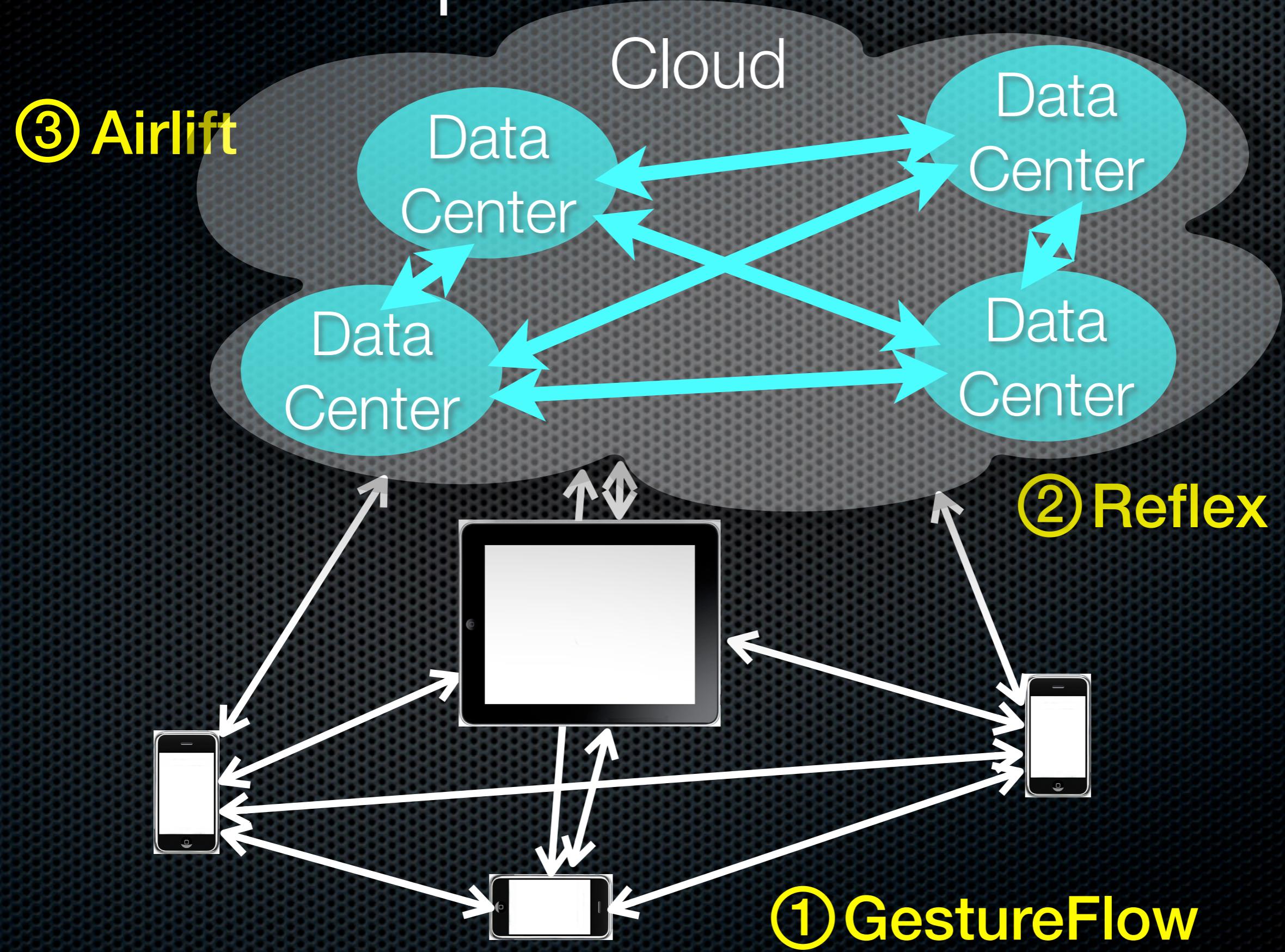


Roadmap

1

2

3



Organizing and preparing your talk

Deliver one take away message

Spend a lot of time to work on the flow of ideas

Take the audience on a ride that they enjoy and won't forget!

Designing slides



50

Tip #1: you are the boss,
not your slides

The best speakers attract all
the attention from the
audience

Your slides are a visual aid

They are your assistants

You will always be the boss

The audience should never
pay more attention to your
assistants, no matter how
good looking they are!

Some students ask me for
“PPT” after my talks

They wanted slides for good
reasons

Most speakers include all
the information they are
going to talk about in their
slides

That makes the assistants
the boss

Good speakers are not
prepared to do this

If you have their slides, you
will not reproduce what they
talked about

Because the slides contain
much less information than
the talk!

Tip #2: keep your slides
simple

Presentations should be
“zen”-like

What do you think about the
next slide?

Gender equality in Japan

- According to the latest reports from the Japanese Ministry of Labour, 72% of part-time workers in Japan are women. This is the highest ratio reported yet. The number of part-time workers has been increasing for years. For many women, full-time employment is not available, or their family obligations make it impossible for them to keep full-time hours. Below are some comments from some prominent Japanese politicians:
- “Japanese work office environment is not yet conducive for promoting gender equality.”
- “The conservatives ... wanted to keep the Japanese society traditional.”

How about this?

72% of part-time workers
in Japan are women



Or even better —

72%



When the slide is simple,
there is nothing to distract
the attention of the audience

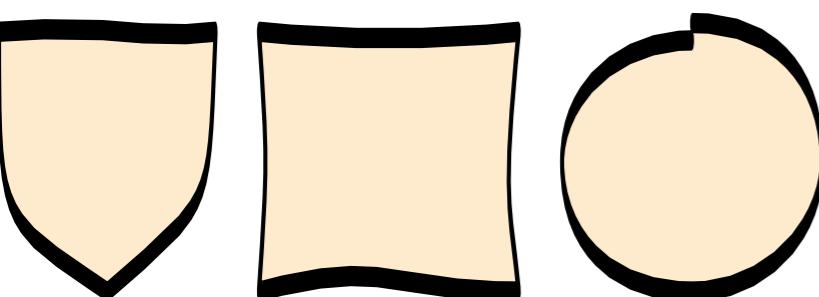
The attention of the audience is a precious resource that you wish to attract, not distract!

When there is very little to
read, they will focus on you,
the boss

Otherwise, they will read the
slides until they finish
reading

And if you advance to the next slide before they finish, they will become nervous, and read even more quickly!

So, the simpler, the better —
but how?



Click to add title

simply can't give up on
these pretty logos

include a fancy background to
distract them from your content,
yet faint enough so that they keep
thinking what the heck it is

sure, remind them who
you are all the time

Use lots of bullets, it's
the beauty of PowerPoint

Click to add text

➤ Click to add text

✓ Click to add text

○ Click to add text

■ Click to add text

▶ Click to add text

◆ Click to add text

remind them that they don't
have to endure this for too long

Don't be controlled by
“templates”

Remove superfluous decor

Have plenty of empty space

Simplicity is your best logo

Don't use too many bullets

If you must use bullets,
show them one at a time

Use huge sans serif fonts

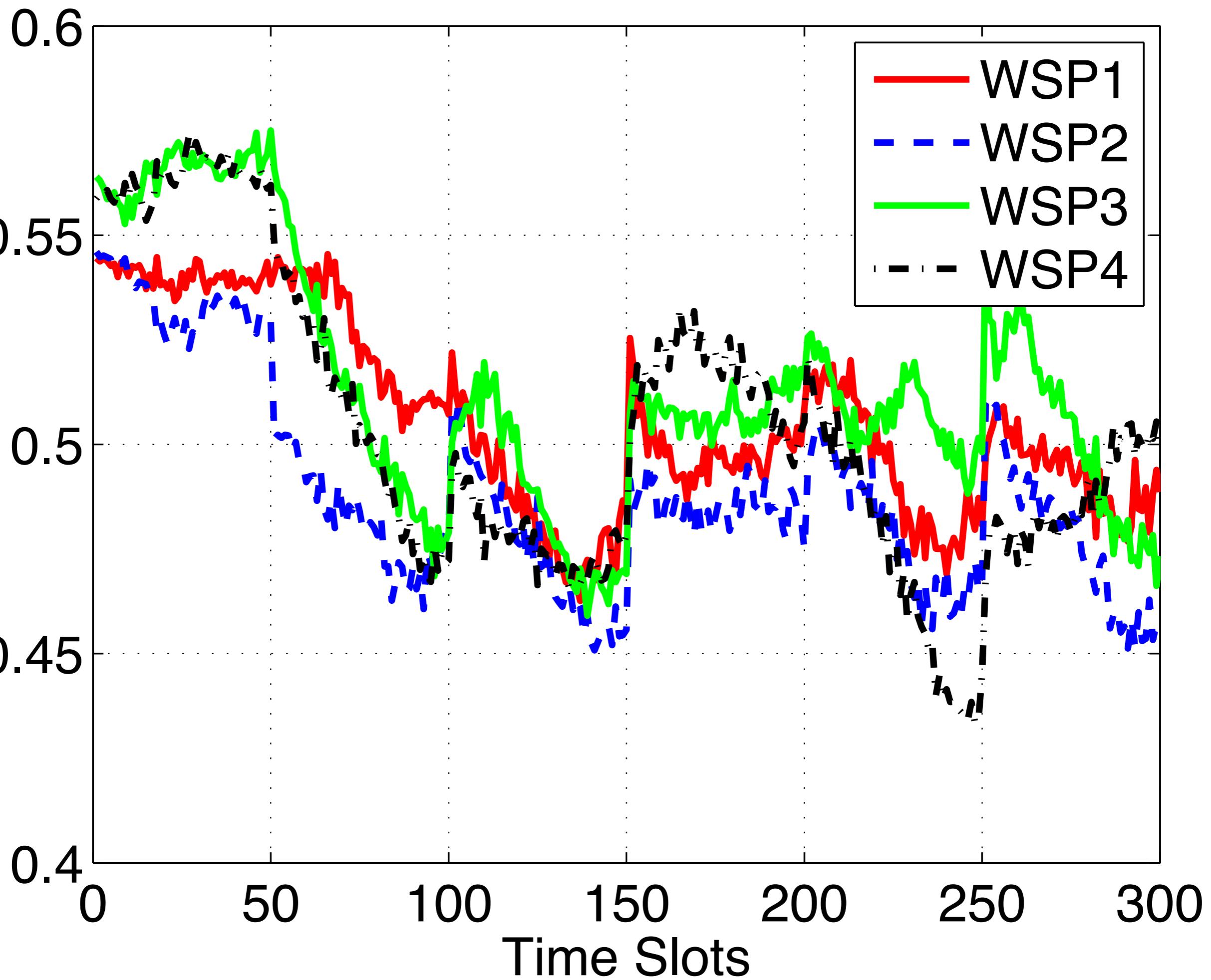
Use photos and graphics
instead of text

Keep animations and
transitions subtle

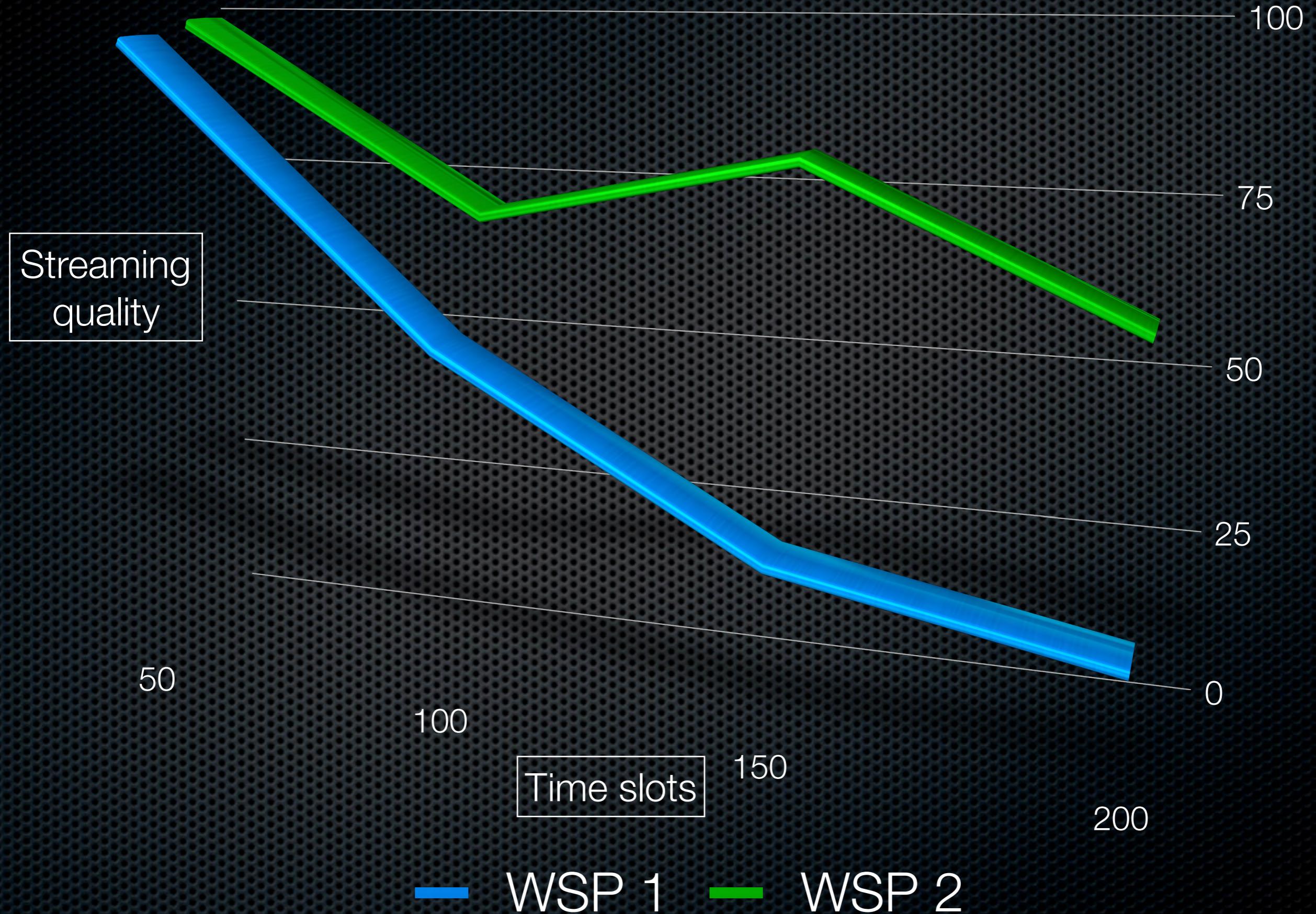
Simplify your figures and
make them easier to
understand

Would you wish to see this?

Streaming Quality



Or this?



Designing slides

You are the boss, not your slides

Keep your slides simple

Delivering your talk

Preparing for the big day

Tip #1: open and close your
talk well

Like chess, a good opening
in your talk is critical — it
grabs attention

Design your opening well

The audience is most alert during the first several minutes of the talk, use it wisely!

Don't spend the first few minutes talking about lots of background information or an outline

Get straight to your
message as soon as you
open

Here is an example opening

courtesy of Hong Xu's exceptional design in
his job talk

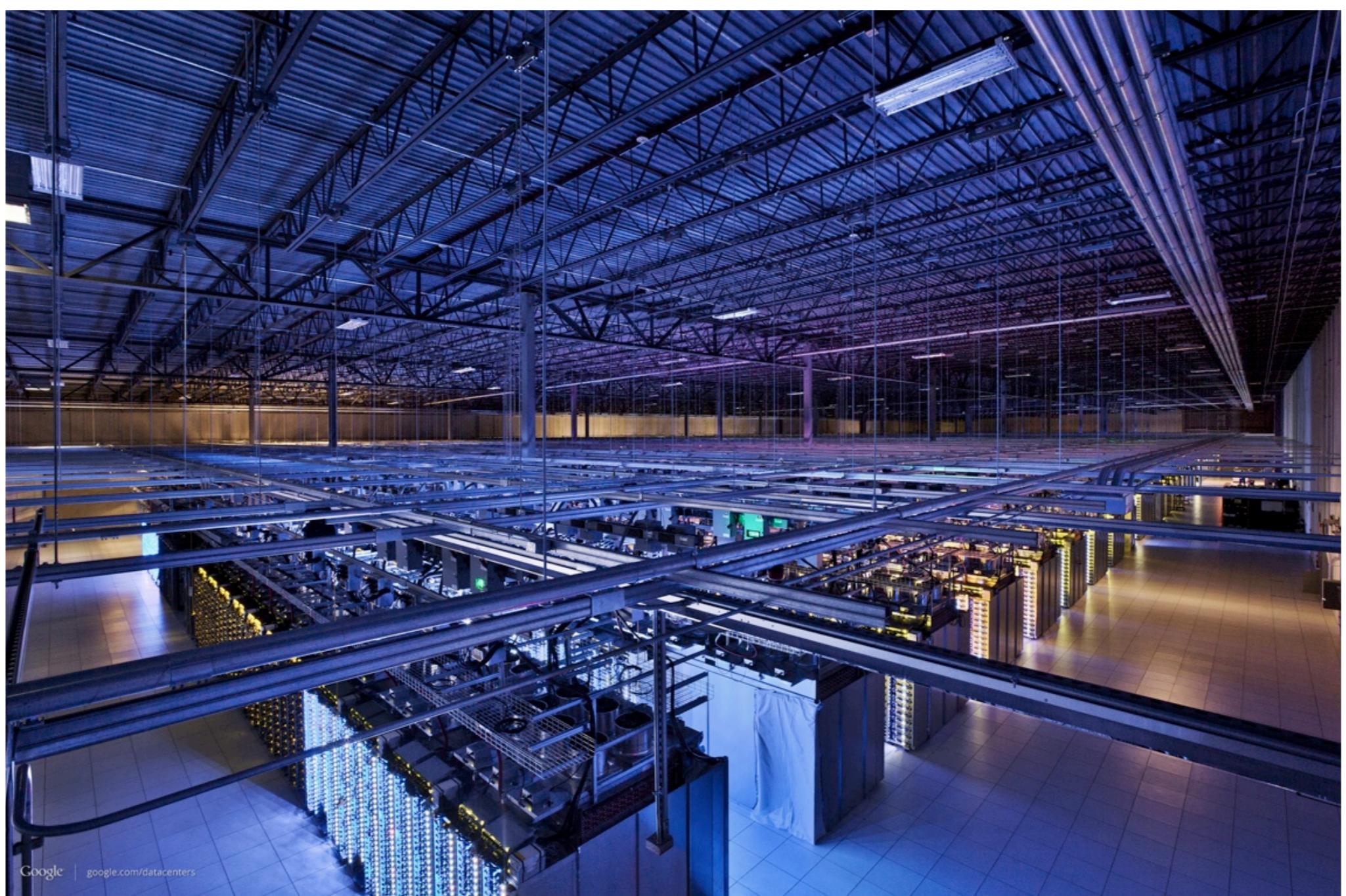
Optimizing Datacenter Operations with Practical Complexity

Objective: Very quickly, deliver
the message of the talk —

tradeoff a bit of optimality to
reduce a lot of complexity

Beyond optimality

Mega datacenters



A Google datacenter in Council Bluffs, Iowa
Source: Google

Datacenter scale

3 billion: search queries answered

4 billion: video views served

20 billion: webpages indexed

every single day

Source: New York Times

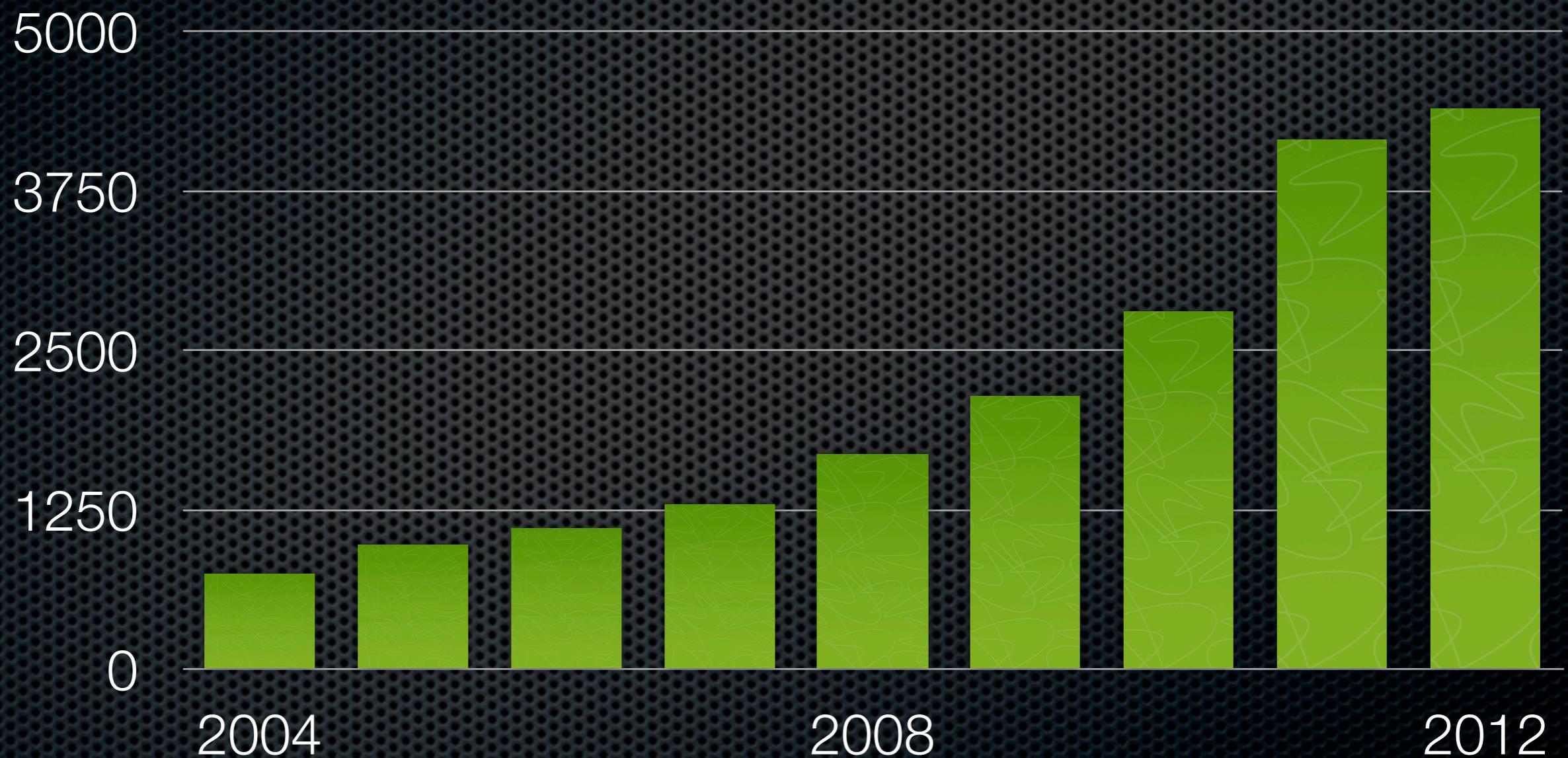
Datacenter performance

Increase server utilization

Reduce energy consumption

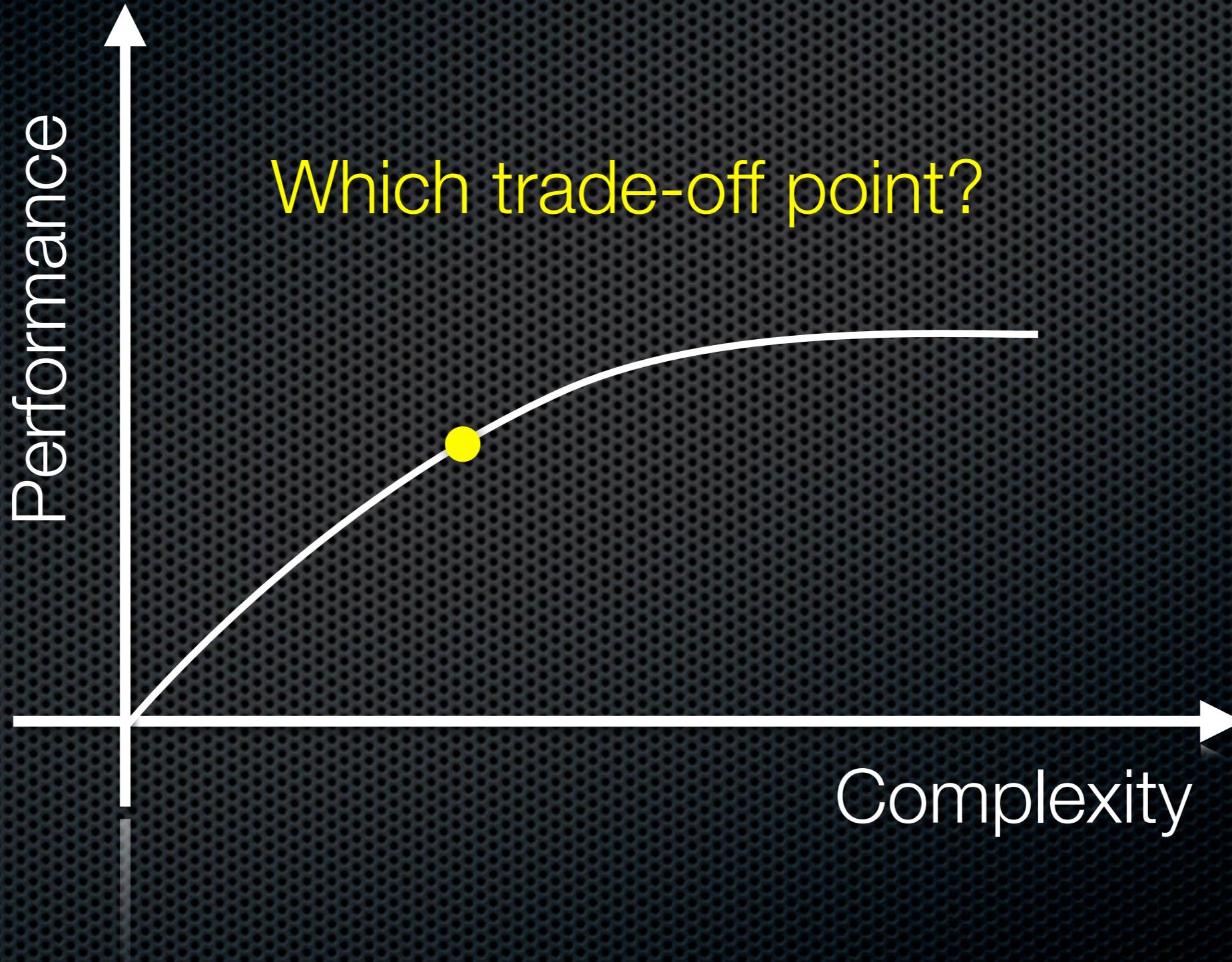
Optimality

Optimization theory is widely used



Publications related to “datacenter optimization.” Source: Google Scholar

But watch out for complexity!



Also, close your talk with a
lasting impression

As in gymnastics, a good
closing is important — do
not rush the closing!

Tip #2: control the pace of
your talk well

Slow down – the one-way communication channel from you to the audience is lossy

Be on time – use a presenter display to know how much time you have left

Use a remote control – so that you can walk around

And never revisit past slides!

Tip #3: connect with the audience

Talk to the audience — not to the projector screen

Make eye contact — do not look at your laptop display

Use body language and gestures — very powerful for connecting with people

Move away from the podium — remove physical barriers between you and the audience to make it easy to connect

Tip #4: do not try to
memorize

You will forget everything,
anyway — there is no need for
notes

Remember the logical flow of
ideas — there are a million ways
of delivering the same flow

Delivering your talk

Open and close your talk well

Control your pace well

Connect with the audience

Do not try to memorize

We are almost done —

To go the extra mile, here
are a few optional tips that
are good to know



#1: Break out from the tradition
Get out of your comfort zone and think critically –
What's the best way to communicate effectively?

#2: Ask the audience a few
questions (and answer them)

#3: A laser pointer is not the best way to emphasize

#3: A laser pointer is not the best way to emphasize

Use builds and overlays

#4: Make a few jokes to
lighten the mood

This is hard —

what's funny to you may not be so
funny to someone in a different age
group, or with different political,
religious, or cultural backgrounds

Don't make improvised jokes
without planning ahead

Steve Jobs: a few moments
in MacWorld 2007



The background of the slide is a photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest. The ground is covered with fallen leaves, and the trees have a mix of green and yellow autumn foliage.

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Google “Baochun”

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