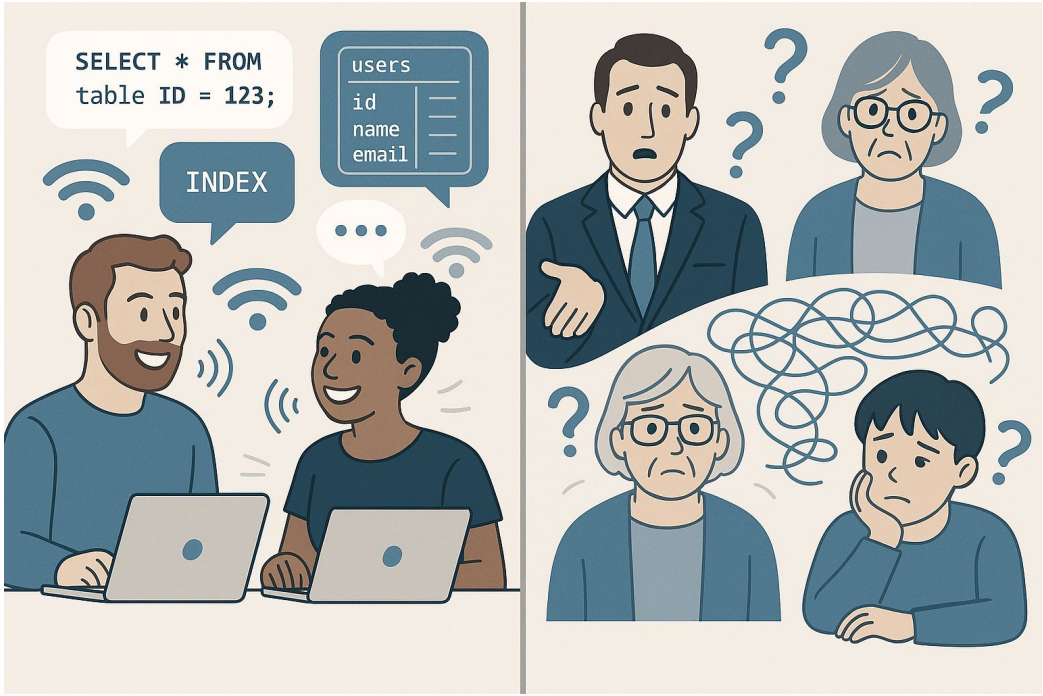
dbtune

Explaining PostgreSQL like I was five (or 85)

Ellyne Phneah

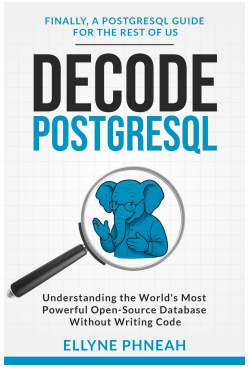
The universal struggle of technical translation



We're experts at talking to each other, but can we talk to everyone else?

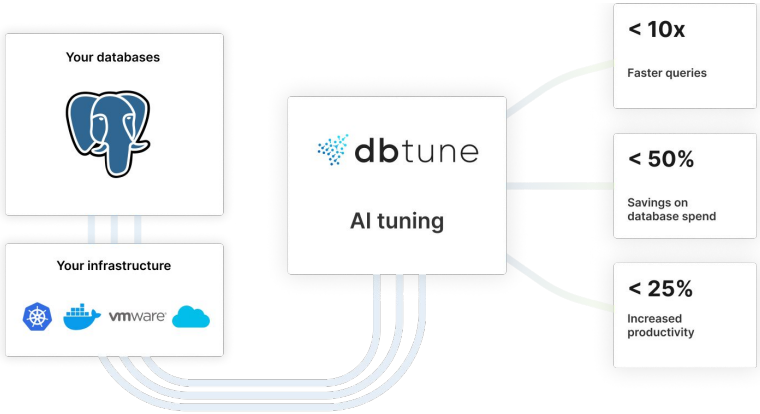
Who am I?

- Ellyne Phneah
- Marketing at DBtune
- Former Tech Journalist
- 12+ years in PR, brand and communications
- BA in English Literature
- MSc in Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Author of Decode PostgreSQL



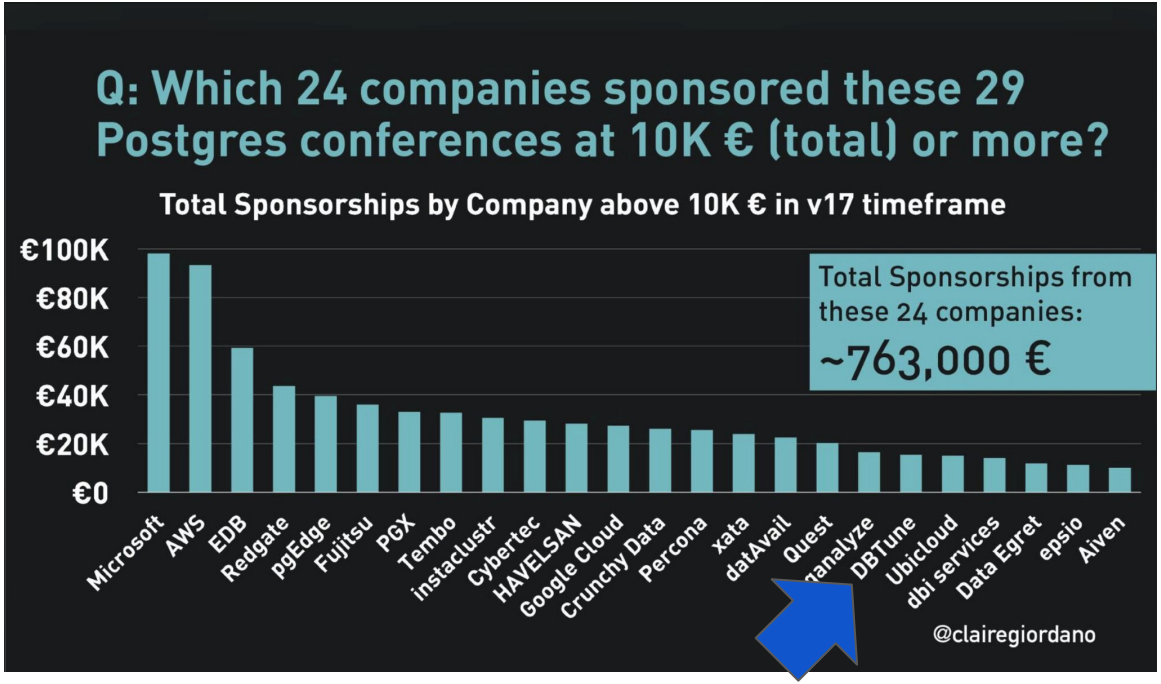
About DBtune

- AI-powered PostgreSQL server parameter tuning service
- Autonomously optimizes server parameters through machine learning
- Observes, iterates and adapts until converging and delivering optimal settings for any individual workload, use case and machine.



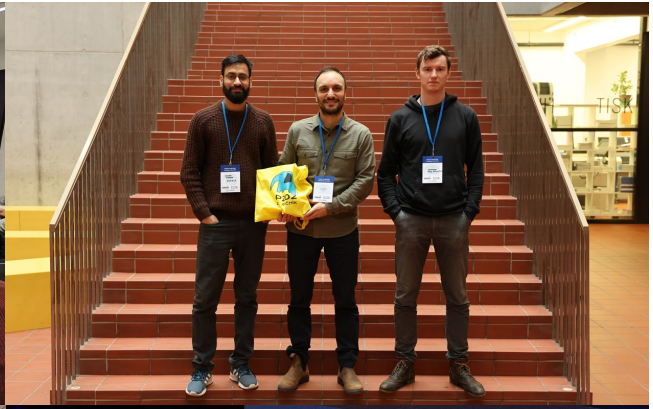
Visit our website

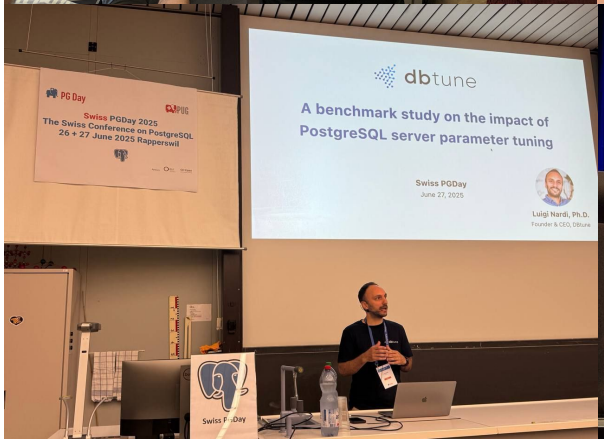
DBtune is the top 20 PostgreSQL sponsors



Source: [Claire Giordano, PostgreSQL Conference Europe 2024, Athens]

Community trainings and presentations





Malmo PostgreSQL User Group (M-PUG)

M-PUG organizers

Ellyne Phneah
DBtune

Dr. Luigi Nardi
DBtune

Daniel Gustafsson
Microsoft

Dennis Rilorin
Redpill Linpro

Join M-PUG

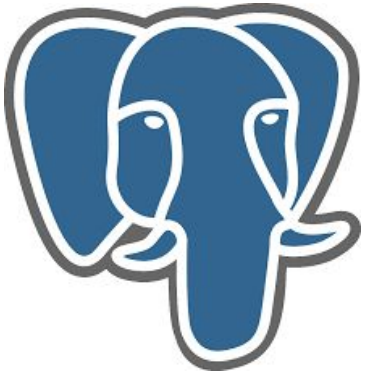
PostgreSQL's real world impact

#1

Most popular database
(Stack Overflow, 2024)

35+ years

Development
(PostgreSQL.org)



#1

Choice for developers
in 2025
(Yugabyte, 2025)

49%

Developer adoption
in 2024
(Stack Overflow, 2024)

The communications crisis

56%

Projects fail
due to **poor comms**
(PMI Pulse of the Profession)

47%

Projects fail due to
poor management of requirements
(PMI)

23%

PMs and stakeholders
agree when a project is “done”
(Geneca via PMI studies)

When technical and business teams can't communicate effectively, projects fail.

Agenda

- Why metaphors work
- 3 universal metaphors
- 3 translation frameworks
- 3 business context translation
- 3 common translation pitfalls
- Decode PostgreSQL

dbtune

Why metaphors work

The science of communications

metaphor

noun [C or U]

UK /ˈmet.ə.fɔːr/ US /ˈmeţ.ə.fɔːr/

Add to word list

C2

an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object:

- *"The mind is an ocean" and "the city is a jungle" are both metaphors.*

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

Why metaphors are your secret weapon

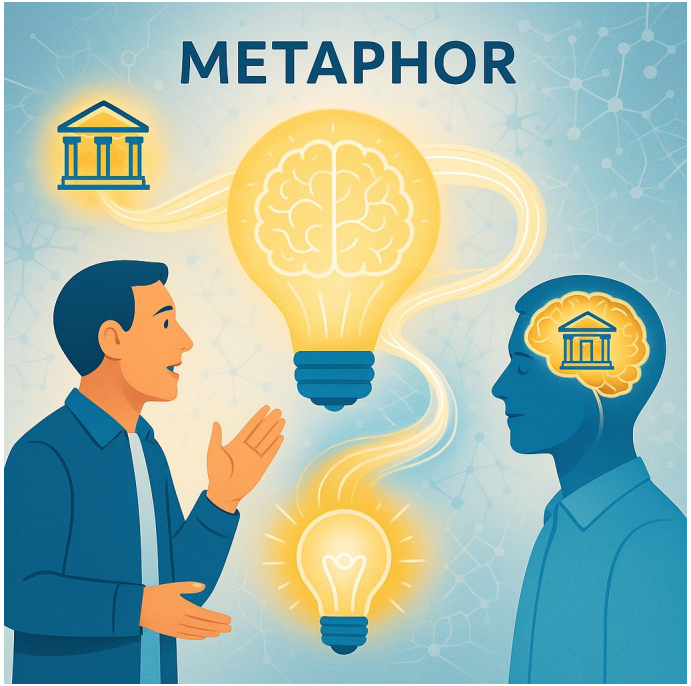
Helps our
brains connect
new concepts
to familiar ones

Why metaphors are your secret weapon

Create bridges between the unknown and the known

Why metaphors are your secret weapon

Make abstract concepts concrete and memorable



Metaphors are as close as you can come to placing a thought directly into the mind of your audience

— Thibodeau, Matlock, Flusberg (2019)

The internet = Information Superhighway

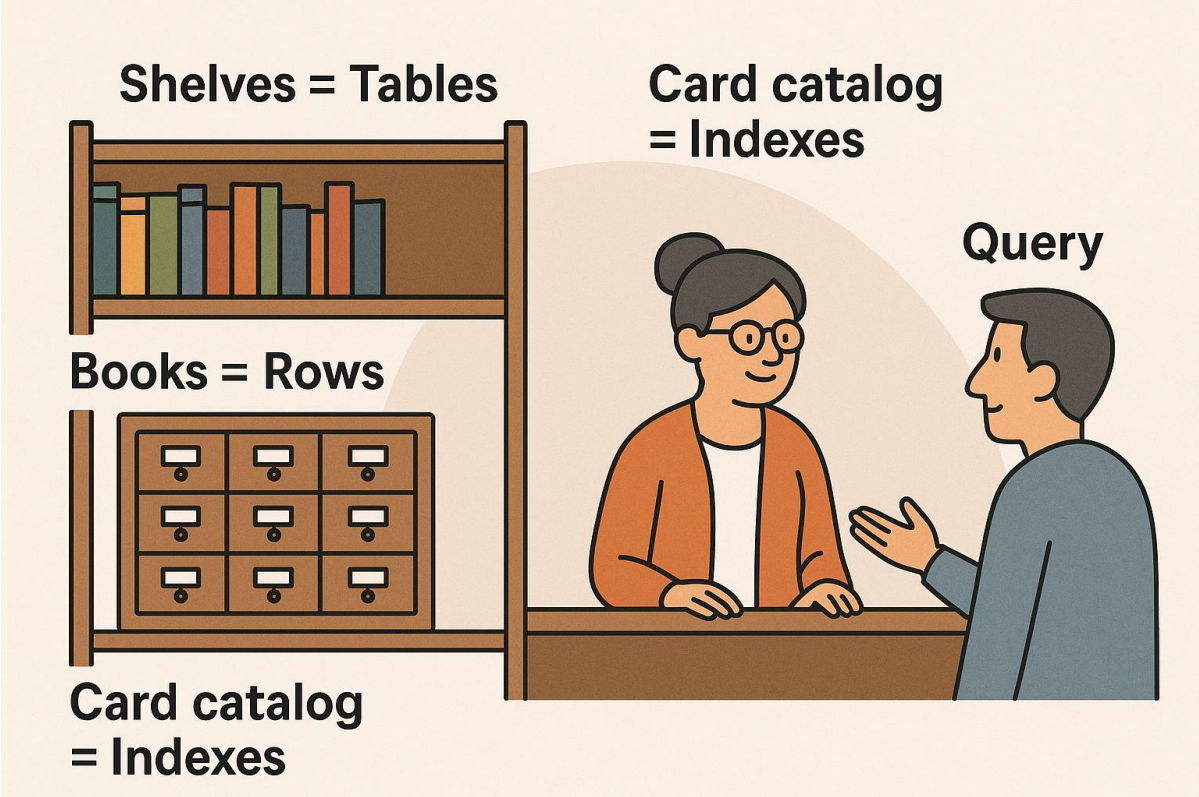
— Al Gore

dbtune

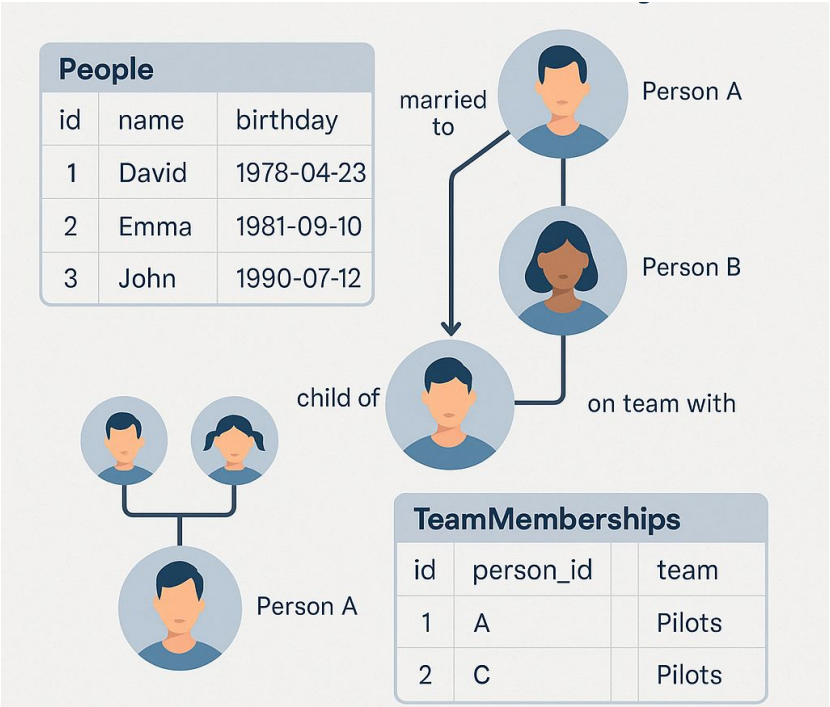
3 universal metaphors

That makes PostgreSQL easily understandable

Metaphor 1: The library



Metaphor 2: PostgreSQL as a social network



Metaphor 3: PostgreSQL as a hotel

Schemas = Hotel floors

8kB pages = Room closets

Write-ahead log = Concierge's notepad

VACUUM = Housekeeping

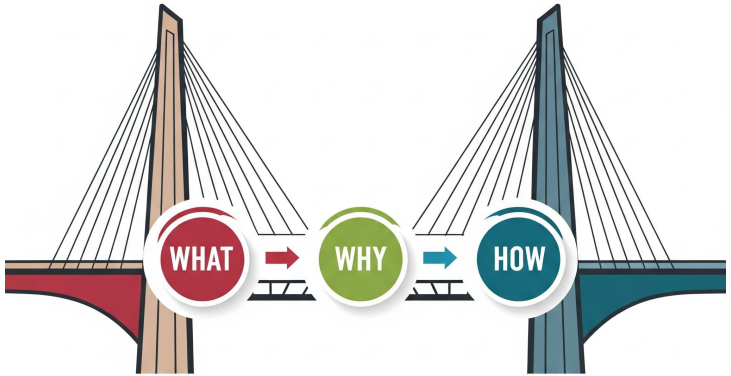
Metadata = Master plan

dbtune

3 translation frameworks

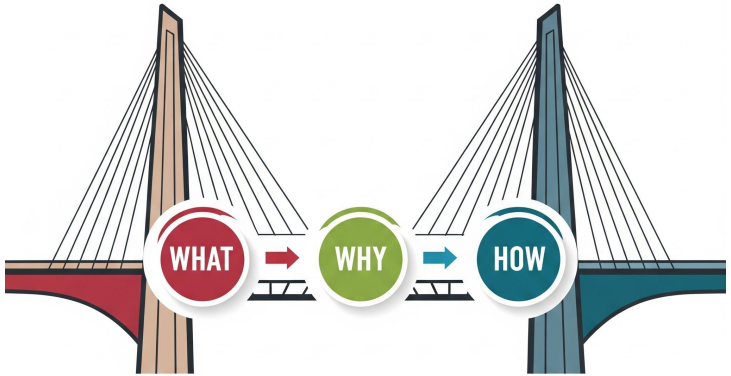
Repeatable blueprints that work with any audience

Framework 1: What-Why-How bridge



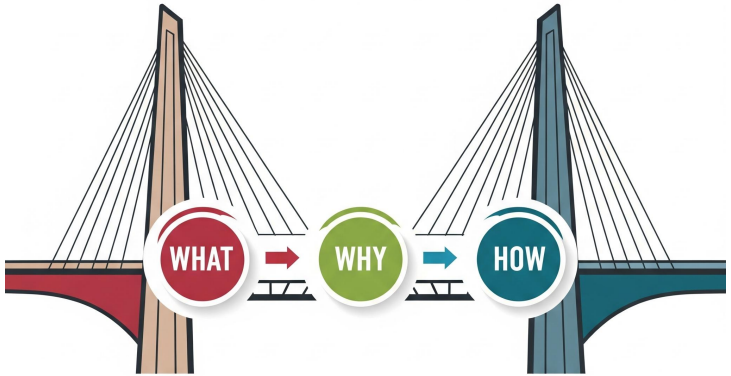
WHAT: Keeps customer data organized and searchable

Framework 1: What-Why-How bridge



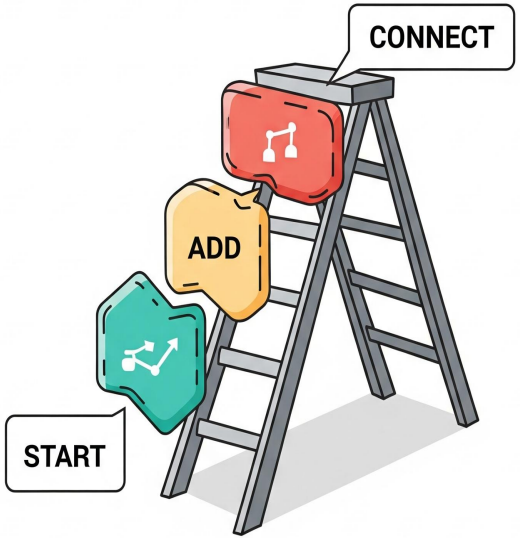
WHAT: Keeps customer data organized and searchable
WHY: So you can answer 'who are our most valuable customers?'

Framework 1: What-Why-How bridge



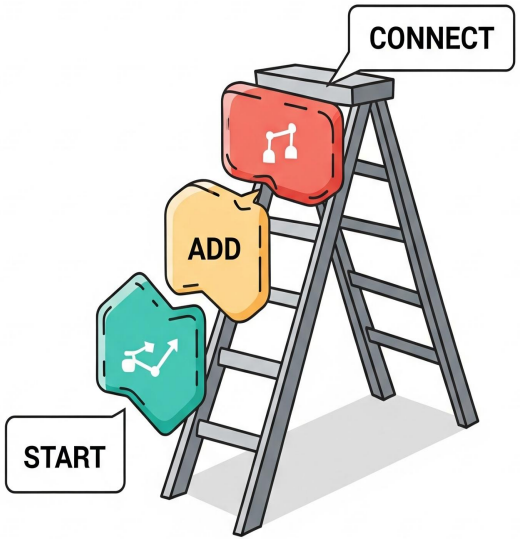
WHAT: Keeps customer data organized and searchable
WHY: So you can answer 'who are our most valuable customers?'
HOW: Leading to better targeting and higher conversion rates

Framework 2: Analogy ladder



START: You know how Excel organizes data in rows and columns?

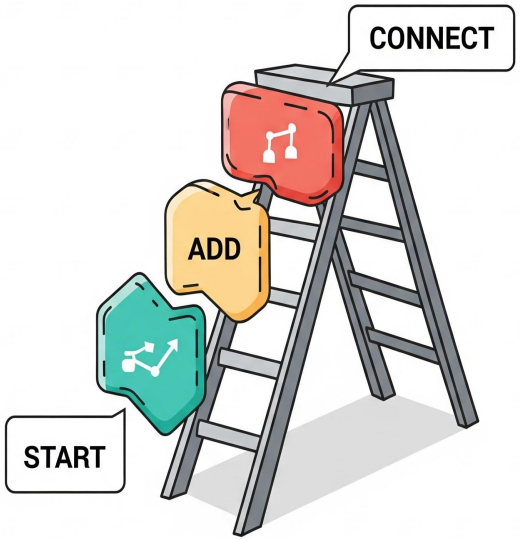
Framework 2: Analogy ladder



START: You know how Excel organizes data in rows and columns?

ADD: PostgreSQL is like Excel, but designed for millions of rows and multiple people using it simultaneously

Framework 2: Analogy ladder

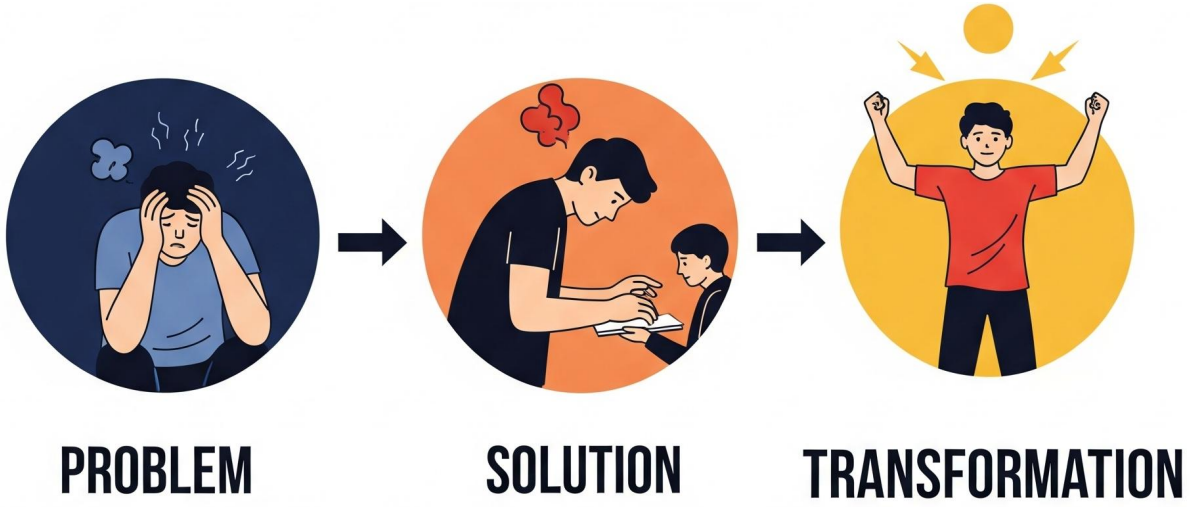


START: You know how Excel organizes data in rows and columns?

ADD: PostgreSQL is like Excel, but designed for millions of rows and multiple people using it simultaneously

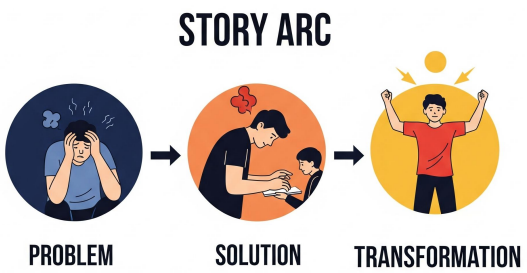
CONNECT: This means your entire team can access the same data without conflicts or version control nightmares

Framework 3: The story arc

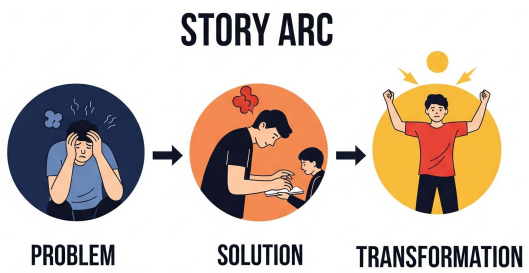


Framework 3: The story arc

PROBLEM: Your company has data scattered across multiple tools—customer info in Salesforce, analytics in Google, orders in Shopify



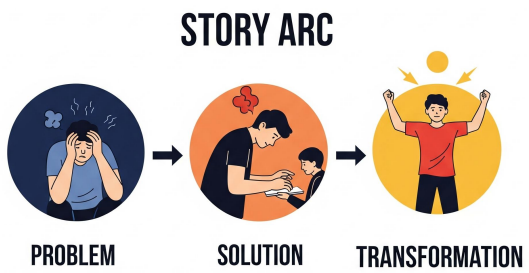
Framework 3: The story arc



PROBLEM: Your company has data scattered across multiple tools—customer info in Salesforce, analytics in Google, orders in Shopify

SOLUTION: PostgreSQL brings it all together in one organized, queryable place

Framework 3: The story arc



PROBLEM: Your company has data scattered across multiple tools—customer info in Salesforce, analytics in Google, orders in Shopify

SOLUTION: PostgreSQL brings it all together in one organized, queryable place

TRANSFORMATION: Now you can answer complex questions like 'which marketing campaigns drive the highest-value repeat customers?' in minutes, not days

dbtune

3 business context translation

Same PostgreSQL, different value propositions

Executives

"PostgreSQL reduces infrastructure costs while increasing reliability"

"It's like switching from multiple expensive tools to one Swiss Army knife"

Sales

"It powers the features that make our product competitive"

"When you promise real-time analytics, PostgreSQL delivers it"

Marketing

""It's the engine behind personalization and customer insights"

"Every targeted campaign starts with clean, accessible data"

You speak their language, not database language

dbtune

3 common pitfalls

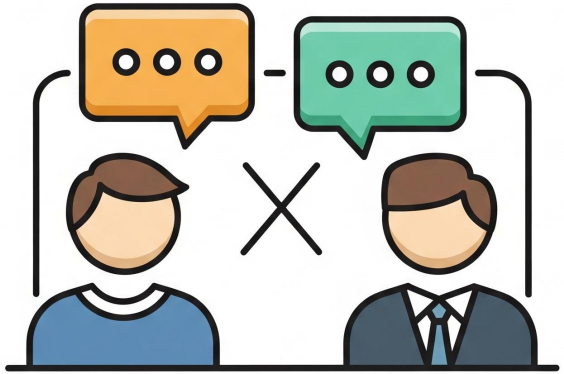
Don’t sabotage your best explanations

3 common pitfalls

01 Oversimplifying

❌ *It's just like Excel*

✅ *It's like Excel's professional older sibling*



3 common pitfalls

02 Jargon Dump

❌ *The ACID properties ensure data integrity and consistency across concurrent transactions*

✅It follows strict rules to keep your data safe and accurate

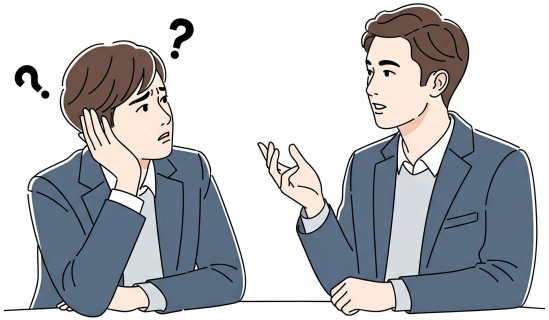
3 common pitfalls

03

Tech Problem Solving Mode

❌ *We need to optimize our query performance and indexing strategy*

✅We're making the database faster at finding answers



Tips from non-technical folks

PostgreSQL is a compact and endlessly extensible Swiss Army knife.

- Cornelia Biacsics, CMO, CYBERTEC PostgreSQL International

PostgreSQL powers the backend of your application, storing and organizing customer and order data so it's always up-to-date, searchable, and consistent, even with millions of users and constant edits

- Valeria Kaplan, DIrector of Marketing, Sales, Communications, Community, Data Egret

Closed databases sell you expensive subscriptions. PostgreSQL gives you the tree. Sure, you need to learn to pick, but the chestnuts are free.

- Philip Mark, PostgreSQL recruiter

PostgreSQL is like a Rolodex built by the community that uses it. Everyone contributes improvements, making it flexible enough for any modern application you can imagine.

- Jan Karremans, Head of Sales, CYBERTEC PostgreSQL International

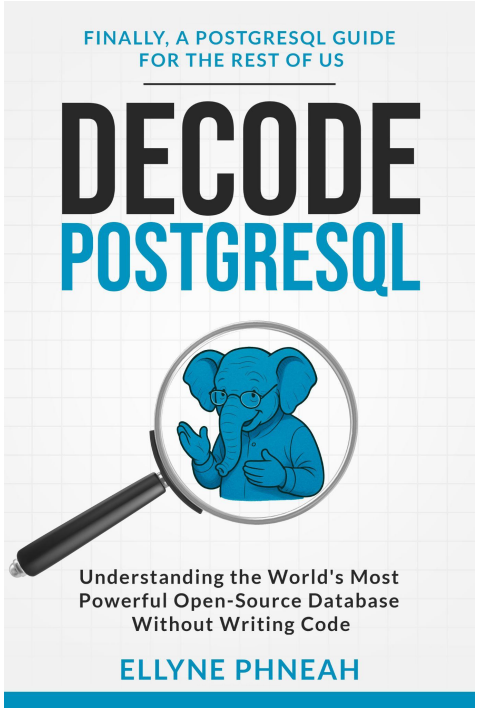
A simple exercise to try after this

Explain this to someone non-technical:
"What is a database index?"

Using ONLY everyday objects
or experiences.

Decode PostgreSQL (ebook)

- **No code, no jargon**: Just clarity
- A metaphor driven framework to explain PostgreSQL
- **14 chapters** of insights
- **Bonus section** including FAQs, common terms and resources
- **Available** across all digital devices



If your grandpa can get it, so can your CEO.

Make PostgreSQL relatable, Make it stick.

Thank you
Q&A

📩 ellyne@dbtune.com

https://www.linkedin.com/in/ellynephneah/

Let's connect on LinkedIn