



Making PostgreSQL Hacking More Inclusive

Amit Langote, Masahiko Sawada,
Melanie Plageman, Robert Haas

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Agenda

- Introduction (Robert Haas)
- Amit Langote
- Masahiko Sawada
- Melanie Plageman
- Robert Haas
- Questions and Comments (you!)



The PostgreSQL Community is Awesome

- I have been working in the PostgreSQL community since 2008.
- Coolest thing that I've ever done (professionally speaking).
- Smart people, nice people, great technical discussions, lots of interesting problems to solve.



But We're Not Perfect

- Sometimes, we judge people on things other than the quality of their work.
- Sometimes, we extend opportunities to people who are more like us.
- Sometimes, we behave in ways that are more problematic for some groups of people than others.



Being Unfair Can...

- Look bad for the project.
- Drive away potential new contributors.
- Drive away or demoralize existing contributors.
- Make hacking on PostgreSQL less enjoyable.



Possible Reasons for Inequality of Opportunity

- Race
- Skin Color
- National Origin
- Native Language
- Religion
- Sex
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Family Situation
- Disability
- Age
- Neurodiversity
- Time Zone
- Preferred Social Activity
- Friend Group
- Fluency in English
- Writing Skills
- Social Skills



Amit Langote



Personal Insights on Inclusivity

- I share bits from *my* journey in the Postgres community to try to show the impact that inclusive behaviors can have on the psyche of someone like myself (Indian who's spent most of his adult working life in Japan).
 - Even though these insights may not fully represent the diversity of experiences within the community including of those from my background, I still think that they might be helpful.



Two Personas

- Transitioning between indirect, nuanced communication in personal interactions, and the direct, assertive style prevalent in PostgreSQL discussions.
 - Maintaining two personas can be draining at times.
- In my experience, the inability to be direct and assertive may result in being overlooked or dismissed.



Challenges of Non-Native English Speakers

- Email Communication Struggles
 - Difficulty expressing complex thoughts in email as a non-native English speaker.
 - Time-consuming drafting process to sound coherent, potentially leading to perceived disengagement.
 - Non-native speakers leading discussions may face reduced engagement
- Help
 - Patience: Allow non-native speakers time to express themselves.
 - Clear Language: Avoid jargon and idiomatic expressions for clarity.
 - Clarifications: Request explanations or provide summaries when needed.



On Giving a Chance

- **Entrusting Newcomers with Important Tasks**
 - Example: In 2014, Robert, Alvaro, others encouraged me, a relative newcomer, to work on a crucial project (table partitioning) in the community.
 - Their support, along with backing from in-house managers and colleagues, fueled my enthusiasm for contributing to Postgres hacking.
- **Diversifying Community Energy**
 - Encouraging newcomers to tackle significant tasks not only broadens the pool of energy and ideas in our community but also boosts their morale
 - Also lays the groundwork for the development of specialists. Having a diverse group of specialists, each with deep expertise in specific areas, can enhance project outcomes.



Flipside

- When newcomers aim for leadership roles in specific tasks, experienced members may hesitate, fearing it could impede project success, which may hinder recruitment of other experienced contributors.
- Confidence in newcomers' abilities has to be balanced with support and mentorship from experienced members.



Off-List Dynamics

- Off-list collaboration can be very effective:
 - Strategic planning and sensitive discussions may require confidentiality.
 - Building personal relationships and trust through one-on-one interactions.
 - Addressing urgent matters promptly without the delay of group discussions.
- However, it may lead to some folks feeling excluded:
 - Business-level discussions may delay patch acceptance, affecting contributor morale
 - Be transparent about that to the extent possible
 - Engineers investing in patches feel undervalued when decisions rely on off-list interactions that don't involve them.
 - Cite off-list discussion whenever possible for transparency



Masahiko Sawada



Disclaimer

- I'll share both the personal experiences and other Japanese hackers' experiences that I've heard of.
 - For some experiences, no clear solutions exist.
- Not intended as complaints or accusations.
- Aiming to increase awareness of challenges.



Difficulties with English

- Being able to communicate in English is a prerequisite.
- Most Japanese are not good at communicating in English.
 - Educational reason, linguistic reason, and environment.
- Require time to read and write emails in English.
 - Especially when trying to explain/understand the technically complex things in the thread.
 - Vice versa: probably native English speaker require time to read English written by non-native English speaker.
- Communicate patiently
 - Communicating in non native language takes time.
 - Example: I had a experience at a conference where the other person patiently tried to understand what I was explaining.



Discussion in postgres-hackers

- Misinterpret the “high-context” discussion in postgres-hackers.
 - Non-native English speakers may not be able to understand it correctly.
 - Could end up giving an inappropriate response.
- Experience of emails not being replied to or failing to get attention.
 - Try to understand why emails are not being replied to.
 - My explanation in English was not clear? Just not interested in? Or all good? No idea.
- Delivering negative feedback
 - Direct and indirect communication.
 - A small change might change the impression your email give to others.



Time Zone Differences

- Discussion on postgresql-hackers is very active.
 - About 140 emails per day.
- Most active hours are around 10am UTC and 4pm UTC.
 - Evening or night in Asian countries.
- Less opportunity to engage in the discussion.
- Shifting working hours to European or American time zone
 - Occasionally required, e.g., when discussing important topic, near feature freeze etc.
 - Example: I could participate in the discussion live, but it didn't work well.



Melanie Plageman



Listen to Women Who Want to Stay Technical

- People become good at the things they do
- All technical leaders on resilient teams have social responsibilities
- ICs should strive to be great mentors too
- Technical work should be the primary ask



Invest in Developers At Every Level

- Explain from basic principles on the “hallway track”
- Teaching a workshop or educational meetup is a statement of our priorities



Communication Efficiency Goals

- Avoid ambiguity
- Spend time on the right discussions



Responding on the Mailing List

- Be specific
- Speak from your perspective
 - *This sounds like a completely terrible idea => I don't think this is going to work*
- Reply to the person (not just the content)
- Don't talk around people
- Highlight the positive



Robert Haas



Conferences

- You can bring family members to a PostgreSQL conference if you want, but everything that happens after that is your problem.
- Conference social events tend to revolve around alcohol consumption.
- When someone attends a conference for the first time, how much attention do they receive from the other attendees?
 - Maybe too little. Maybe too much.



Working Hours

- If a committer breaks the buildfarm, or CI, they are expected to be available to fix it 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365.2425 days a year.
- If you're working with a committer to get a patch committed, you had better be willing to do whatever it takes to produce new patch versions in a timely fashion.
- Your social life, family life, and mental health will have to take a back seat to your community obligations.



Respect

- *Check your bias.* It's easy to judge an email on the list based on the person's name, or their accent, or how well they write, rather than on the quality of their ideas. Resist snap judgements.
- *Stay positive.* Even when an idea or a patch is bad, the fact that someone cared enough to bother is good. We want to foster growth, not drive people away.
- *Be mindful of your own emotions.* We all get tired and worn out, and sometimes that makes us less nice. When you're tapped out, take a break, instead of trying to write emails while tilted.



Thank you!

Any questions or comments?