**Data Integration and the Extraction, Transformation, and Load (ETL) Process**

**Data integration** comprises three major processes that, when correctly implemented, permit data to be accessed and made accessible to an array of ETL and analysis tools and the data warehousing environment: data access (i.e., the ability to access and extract data from any data source), data federation (i.e., the integration of business views across multiple data stores), and change capture (based on the identification, capture, and delivery of the changes made to enterprise data sources).

A major purpose of a data warehouse is to integrate data from multiple systems. Various integration technologies enable data and metadata integration:

• Enterprise application integration (EAI)

• Service-oriented architecture (SOA)

• Enterprise information integration (EII)

• Extraction, transformation, and load (ETL)

**Enterprise application integration (EAI)** provides a vehicle for pushing data from source systems into the data warehouse. It involves integrating application functionality and is focused on sharing functionality (rather than data) across systems, thereby enabling flexibility and reuse. Traditionally, EAI solutions have focused on enabling application reuse at the application programming interface (API) level. Recently, EAI is accomplished by using SOA coarse-grained services (a collection of business processes or functions) that are well defined and ocumented. Using Web services is a specialized way of implementing an SOA. EAI can be used to facilitate data acquisition directly into a near–real-time data warehouse or to deliver decisions to the OLTP systems. There are many different approaches to and tools for EAI implementation. **Enterprise information integration (EII)** is an evolving tool space that promises real-time data integration from a variety of sources, such as relational databases, Web services, and multidimensional databases. It is a mechanism for pulling data from source systems to satisfy a request for information. EII tools use predefined metadata to populate views that make integrated data appear relational to end users. XML may be the most important aspect of EII because XML allows data to be tagged either at creation time or later. These tags can be extended and modified to accommodate almost any area of knowledge.Physical data integration has conventionally been the main mechanism for creating an integrated view with data warehouses and data marts.With the advent of EII tools new virtual data integration patterns are feasible.

**Extraction, Transformation, and Load**

At the heart of the technical side of the data warehousing process is **extraction, transformation, and load (ETL)**. ETL technologies, which have existed for some time, are instrumental in the process and use of data warehouses. The ETL process is an integral component in any data-centric project. IT managers are often faced with challenges because the ETL process typically consumes 70 percent of the time in a data-centric project. The ETL process consists of extraction (i.e., reading data from one or more databases), transformation (i.e., converting the extracted data from its previous form into the form in which it needs to be so that it can be placed into a data warehouse or simply another database), and load (i.e., putting the data into the data warehouse). Transformation occurs by using rules or lookup tables or by combining the data with other data. The three database functions are integrated into one tool to pull data out of one or more databases and place them into another, consolidated database or a data warehouse. ETL tools also transport data between sources and targets, document how data elements (e.g., metadata) change as they move between source and target, exchange metadata with other applications as needed, and administer all runtime processes and operations (e.g., scheduling, error management, audit logs, statistics). ETL is extremely important for data integration as well as for data warehousing. The purpose of the ETL process is to load the warehouse with integrated and cleansed data. The data used in ETL

processes can come from any source: a mainframe application, an ERP pplication, a CRM tool, a flat file, an Excel spreadsheet, or even a message queue. The process of migrating data to a data warehouse involves the extraction of data

from all relevant sources. Data sources may consist of files extracted from OLTP databases, spreadsheets, personal databases (e.g., Microsoft Access), or external files. Typically, all the input files are written to a set of staging tables, which are designed to facilitate the load process. A data warehouse contains numerous business rules that define such things as how the data will be used, summarization rules, standardization of encoded attributes, and calculation rules. Any data quality issues pertaining to the source files need to be corrected before the data are loaded into the data warehouse. One of the benefits of a well-designed data warehouse is that these rules can be stored in a metadata repository and applied to the data warehouse centrally. This differs from an OLTP approach, which typically has data and business rules scattered throughout the system. The process of loading data into a data warehouse can be performed either through data transformation tools that provide a GUI to aid in the development and maintenance of business rules or through more traditional methods, such as developing programs or utilities to load the data warehouse, using programming languages such as PL/SQL, C++, Java, or .NET Framework languages. This decision is not easy for organizations. Several issues affect

whether an organization will purchase data transformation tools or build the transformation process itself:

• Data transformation tools are expensive.

• Data transformation tools may have a long learning curve.

• It is difficult to measure how the IT organization is doing until it has learned to use

the data transformation tools.

In the long run, a transformation-tool approach should simplify the maintenance of an organization’s data warehouse. Transformation tools can also be effective in detecting and scrubbing (i.e., removing any anomalies in the data). OLAP and data mining tools rely on how well the data are transformed.

The following are some of the important criteria in selecting an ETL tool:

• Ability to read from and write to an unlimited number of data source architectures

• Automatic capturing and delivery of metadata

• A history of conforming to open standards

• An easy-to-use interface for the developer and the functional user

Performing extensive ETL may be a sign of poorly managed data and a

fundamental lack of a coherent data management strategy. Karacsony (2006) indicated that there is a direct correlation between the extent of redundant data and the number of ETL processes. When data are managed correctly as an enterprise asset, ETL efforts are significantly reduced, and redundant data are completely eliminated. This leads to huge savings in maintenance and greater efficiency in new development while also improving data quality. Poorly designed ETL processes are costly to maintain, change, and update. Consequently, it is crucial to make the proper choices in terms of the technology and tools to use for developing and maintaining the ETL process.

A number of packaged ETL tools are available. Database vendors currently offer ETL capabilities that both enhance and compete with independent ETL tools. SAS acknowledges the importance of data quality and offers the industry’s first fully integrated solution that merges ETL and data quality to transform data into strategic valuable assets. Other ETL software providers include Microsoft, Oracle, IBM, Informatica, Embarcadero, and Tibco.