

Data Warehouse Systems

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1 Definition

GI-Group Definition: “A Data Warehouse is a database which (from a technical point of view) integrates data from different (heterogeneous) data sources and (from an economic point of view) provides the user with this data for business analysis purposes. Frequently, but not necessarily, a historization of data takes place.”

Inman's Definition: “A data warehouse is a subject-oriented, integrated, time-variant and non-volatile collection of data in support of management's decision making process.” **Integrated** means the data is collected from multiple (separate) sources, and compiled into a single source of truth. **Time-variant** means that the data is accurate at the time it was compiled (ie. the transactions took place). This is very useful for observing changing trends. **Non-volatile** means the compiled data in the DWS is not changed (often), but only queried.

A DWS is a static copy of accumulated transaction data used for analysis.

Data Warehouses are not single products, but a system comprised of multiple interacting components, most of which are usually bought from third-parties.

1.1 Operational Data Stores vs. Data Warehouses

Operational Data Stores (ODSs) are used in the day to day transactions of a business. They are very fast, use a single data source, are used by multiple users concurrently and mostly perform small transactions (e.g. sales). Think of the database interacting with Point of Sale terminals in a supermarket.

Data Warehouse (DWs) are very large databases used to store accumulated data. They are usually only accessed by single users and even then mostly only for reads. Data is fed into DWs periodically (e.g. daily or weekly), and then usually not changed afterwards. This means that locks can be optimized differently for DWs than for ODSs. The access patterns are also very different from ODSs, with range queries being the norm.

A full comparison is given in Table 1.

ODSs are regular databases. DWs are larger, and optimized for range-queries and rare modifications.

ODSs are used for Online Transaction Processing (OLTP), and DWs for Online Analytics Processing (OLAP).

	ODS	DW
Data Sources	mostly only one	many
Data Volume	MB-GB	GB-TB-PB
Access	Single Tuple accesses	Range queries
Up-to-dateness	Up to date	(Possibly) outdated
Use	Input output by employees	Evaluation by analysts/managers
Number of users	Many	few
Response time	ms-s	s-min-h

Table 1: Comparison between ODSs and DWs

2 Reference Architecture

The goal of a reference architecture is to provide a fundamental, abstract, implementation independent visualization of the DW. It is useful for comparing DW models, systems and components and can be used for planning specifications and implementations of a DW system. A reference architecture should provide an overview of the operators (functions) and operands (databases, data), as well as the **data-flow** required for the functions and the **control-flow** required for the underlying processes.

A reference architecture is a model of a DW system.

2.1 Requirements of a DW architecture:

- **Isolation:** the DW should be independent of its data sources after the data has been imported.
- **Persistency:** after importing the data the DW should suffice as a permanent storage
- **Flexibility of use:** arbitrary evaluations should be possible
- **Scalability:** it should be easy to integrate new data sources over time
- **Efficiency:** repeating tasks should be easy to automate
- **Uniqueness** of data structures, access rights and processes
- **Orientation** of the system towards the analysis of data (ie. optimizations for range queries)

2.2 Static View of a DW Architecture

This is a view of the static components themselves, ie. the databases or the component extracting data from data sources. The system components include:

- **Interface components:** DW manager, Metadata manager
- **Databases:** DW, Base DB, Metadata DB
- **Functional components:** Monitor, Extraction, Transformation, Loading and Analysis components

The static view is (somewhat) equivalent to the white blobs in Figure 1.

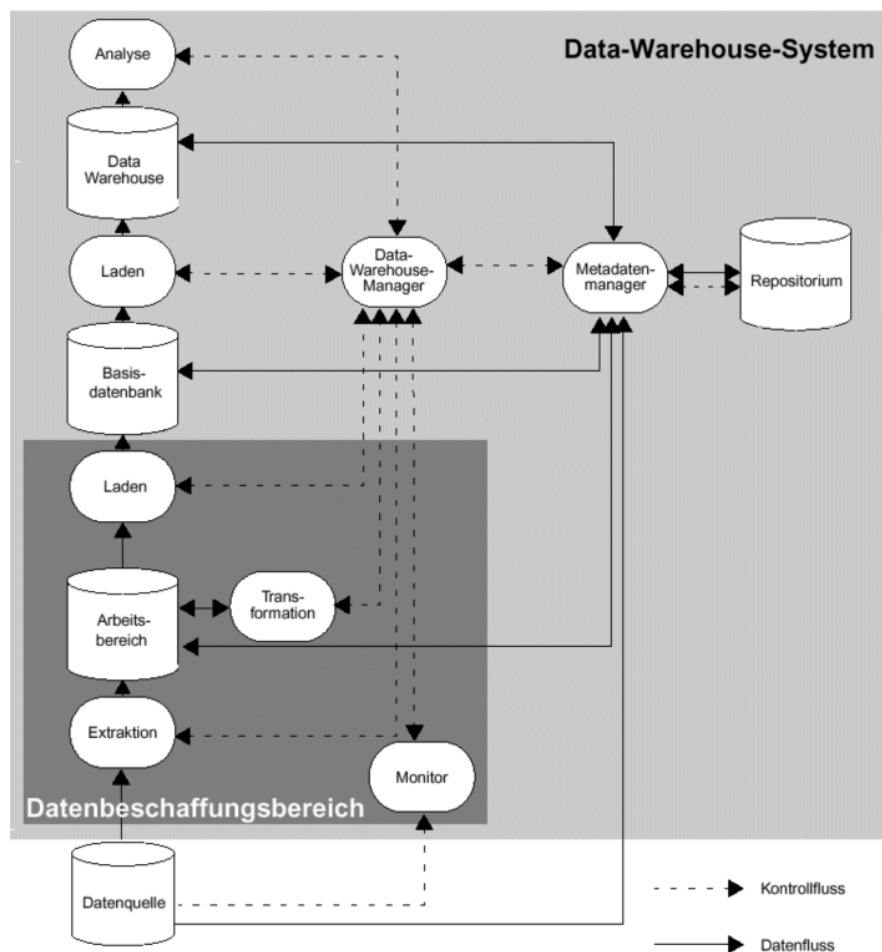


Figure 1: The data and control flow from a data source to the DW

2.3 Dynamic View of a DW Architecture

The dynamic view contains the data flow (comprised of main- and metadata flow) as well as the control flow. It is depicted by the arrows in Figure 1, with the solid arrows being data-flow and the dashed arrows being control-flow.

2.4 Components of a DW System

All the DW components do exactly what their name suggests. Figure 1 is in principle enough to fully understand Section 2.

The **monitor** handles the extraction from the data source(s), sometimes filtering out irrelevant data. Relevant data is extracted into the (temporary) **working area**, where it is *transformed* (cleaned, integrated, etc.). To reduce potential consistency issues caused by changing dimension data (e.g. product names changing), the data can then be loaded into a **base database**. This database contains

the raw transformed data, which needs to be combined with metadata to be meaningful. The base database is application independent and modelled based on the relations in the data. Finally, the data can be combined with metadata and loaded into the **data warehouse** which is modelled specifically for the application (analysis). The metadata is kept in a separate metadata **repository**.

2.5 Data Sources

The selection of data sources for the data warehouse is a defining factor for the quality of the finished data warehouse. Sources must be selected based on their **relevance** and the **quality of their data**. Factors for relevance are:

- Purpose of the data warehouse
- Availability of the source data (technical, organisational, legal)
- Cost of acquisition

Factors for quality are:

- Correctness
- Consistency
- Completeness
- Comprehensibility (Metadata, documentation)

Data sources can also be classified based on a number of characteristics; examples include origin, time, usage (metadata, base-data), ...

2.6 Control Components

Important control components are:

The **data warehouse manager** handles initialization, control and management of all functions and other components. It is the main control component and manages the entire work- and data-flow.

The **metadata manager** does exactly what the name says. It manages metadata, including start and end dates of validity (important for renames and the like) and links between the data warehouse manager and the metadata repository.

Monitors are used (one per data source) to monitor for updates and extract new data. They can either directly feed relevant data to the work area, or simply notify the manager of updates and wait for scheduled extraction. Techniques for extracting are *trigger-based* (periodically, ...), *replication-based* (store changed tuples in special relation), *timestamp-based*, *log-based*, *snapshot-based* (operate on deltas, high implementation effort but sometimes only possibility for legacy systems).

2.7 Work Area

It is a temporary storage area required for the process of data transformation, and the central storage for **ETL-components**.

2.8 ETL-Components

ETL stands for extraction, transformation and loading, and describes the components needed in order to fill the data warehouse with data originally from the data sources. As the data sources are heterogeneous (e.g. different currencies, inconsistent schemas, ...) the data needs to be cleaned and annotated with metadata in order to be useful. This cleanup is done in the ETL process.

Extraction Component

Controls the periodical transmission of source data to the working area. The extraction time determines the analysis accuracy and depends on the analysis goals. Examples for times the extraction can take place are:

- periodical
- on demand
- event-driven
- immediately on updates

The extraction strategy dictates the extraction techniques.

Transformation Component

Transformation is the process of reshaping the schema (column names, ...) as well as cleaning the data and unifying data types, currencies, unit formats (times, ...) etc.

During this process the data is also checked for integrity violation, illegal values (consistency and plausibility checks), redundancy, incomprehensible and inconsistent values, as well as missing and NULL values. All these checks are part of the code cleanup.

The schema transformation that is done by this component is necessary due to a heterogeneity of the data sources. Because different data sources have different views, legal requirements or simply different models their schemas can vary wildly. Schema transformation requires expert knowledge and is hard to automate, as a transformation script has to be created for every single data source. It also requires the setup of the metadata database.

Figure 2 shows the individual steps of the transformation process.

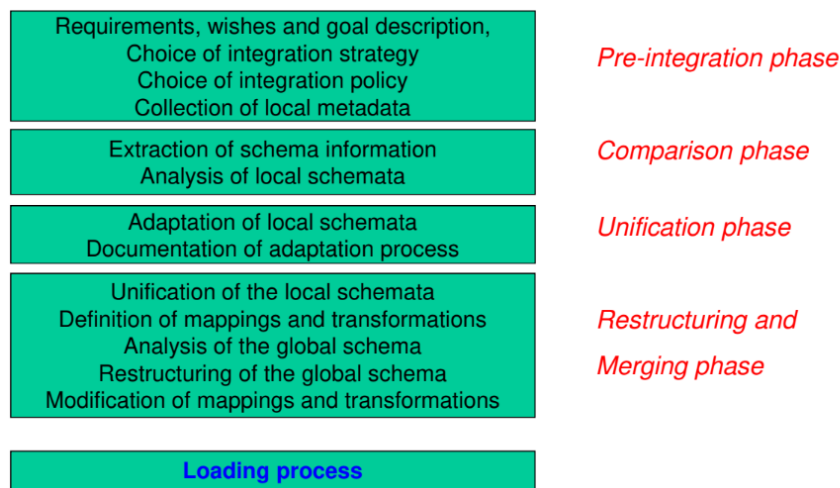


Figure 2: The steps of the transformation process

Loading Component

This component takes care of loading the transformed data into the database(s). If there is no base database the analytics specific data is transmitted to the data warehouse from the working area. If such a database does exist, the cleaned data is loaded into it, and a version of the data made specifically for analysis is sent to the data warehouse. The analysis version might include pre-aggregated results.

2.9 Base Database

The base database acts as a **central data storage**. It stores the cleaned data at the highest resolution (lowest granularity) while staying completely application neutral. It functions as a buffer between the data sources and data warehouses.

In a situation where there are multiple DWs the base database functions as the **single source of truth**, thus saving the DWs from gathering their data from each data source themselves. This reduces complexity from $\mathcal{O}(m \cdot n)$ to $\mathcal{O}(m + n)$.

The documentation of the base database must ensure traceability for the entire data flow from the sources to the base database. This includes the ETL process and points of possible human intervention in case the automated system fails. The documentation of the ETL processes must be **exact** so they can be reproduced in the next iteration.

The metadata repository as well as the base database must be **available** for the DWs to function properly if they are the single source of truth.

2.10 Data Warehouse

The DW is specifically organized for analysis. This includes ordering along multiple dimensions. In order to speed up this sorting, DWs have moved to multi-dimensional representations of their data.

Special requirements for a database management system (DBMS) of a DW include:

- bulk loading
- access interface for analysis tools
- Optimization and tuning for frequent queries (indices, materialized views, ...)

2.11 Data Marts

Data marts provide a partial view of the DW. They can either access the DW for data (requiring a permanent connection) or save their relevant part themselves. Both variants come with a tradeoff of availability versus integrity.

Splitting the DW into multiple data marts allows departments to operate independent of each other, as well as distributing the workload and required storage.

Data marts can be categorized by geography, organisation or function. While they can be kept independent from the main DW by gathering the data directly after the ETL process, this causes a lot of integrity problems and **should be avoided**.

2.12 Metadata Repository

The metadata repository contains a description of the **entire** DW system. This includes information about schemata, data-types, formats, but also the setup, maintenance and administration of the DWS itself. It is vital for understanding the data, and without it, the base database is essentially worthless.

The repository is managed by the metadata manager component.

2.13 Analysis tools

Analysis tools are also called Business Intelligence (BI) tools, and operate on the DW. They can be classified by their intended use into reporting tools, OLAP tools (used for interactive data analysis), and data mining tools (used for finding patterns in the data).

OLAP systems

These systems are used for online analytics. Cobb (inventor of database management), defines twelve rules for a good OLAP system, which are extended in the lecture slides to 18:

1. Conceptual multi-dimensional view
2. Transparency for access from multiple data sources (Transparency in this case means that the extra steps taken for the access to a different data source are invisible (transparent) to the user, not that the access is easy to understand)
3. Flexible access possibilities
4. Same response time in report creation (in regard to queries on different dimensions)
5. Client-Server architecture
6. Equality of dimensions
7. Adaptive administration of sparse data cubes
8. Multi-user operation
9. Unlimited, cross-dimensional operations
10. Intuitive data handling
11. Flexible reporting
12. Unlimited number of dimensions/aggregation levels
13. Easy data integration
14. Support of different analysis models
15. Separation of analysis and operative data
16. Separation of storage areas
17. Differentiation between NULL and non-existent values
18. Handling of missing values

relational	multidimensional
Conceptual schema	Conceptual schema
ER	mE/R, mUML
Logical schema	Logical schema
Relations	Dimensions, Cube
Physical schema	Physical schema
Index structures, B-trees	Relations(Fact table, ...), MD-Structures

Figure 3: A comparison of relational and multi-dimensional modeling methods

3 Multi-dimensional Data Modeling

As we usually want aggregations along multiple dimensions in DWSs, we want our (conceptual) model to represent this. Therefore we need to adapt existing modeling methods for multiple dimensions. While our representation of the data is multi-dimensional, internally all data is still stored in relational databases, so our adapted modeling methods are very related to traditional relational modeling methods. A comparison can be found in Figure 3.

Multi-dimensional modeling works just like regular modeling. If you understand ER diagrams, creating mER diagrams is easy, just add multiple hierarchies. An example can be found in Figure 4.

3.1 Schemas and Instances

A classification schema (of a dimension) is a set D of classification levels: $(\{D_0, \dots, D_{top}\}, \rightarrow)$. Together with their dependency operator \rightarrow they become a partially ordered set (the partial order allows for multiple parallel hierarchies). Dimension elements are occurrences of the lowest classification level D_0 and occurrences of higher classification levels are hierarchy nodes. Three examples for a classification schema can be found in Figure 4. Every path from D_0 to D_{top} defines a classification hierarchy, and an instance of a dimension is the set of all classification hierarchies.

3.2 Data cubes

As the highest number of dimensions we can easily visualize as a geometrical shape is three, data cubes are a common representation of higher-dimensional data. The cube consists of data cells which contain 1 to n measures, and the location in the cube along its three axes represents the values along three dimensions (e.g. geographical, time and product).

Cube Schemas and Instances

A cube schema $W[G, M]$ consists of the granularity G and the set of measures M . For example, if we were to store the sales of an article per store and per day, G would be the set of article, store and day. Our measures M would be the sales and maybe additionally the turnover.

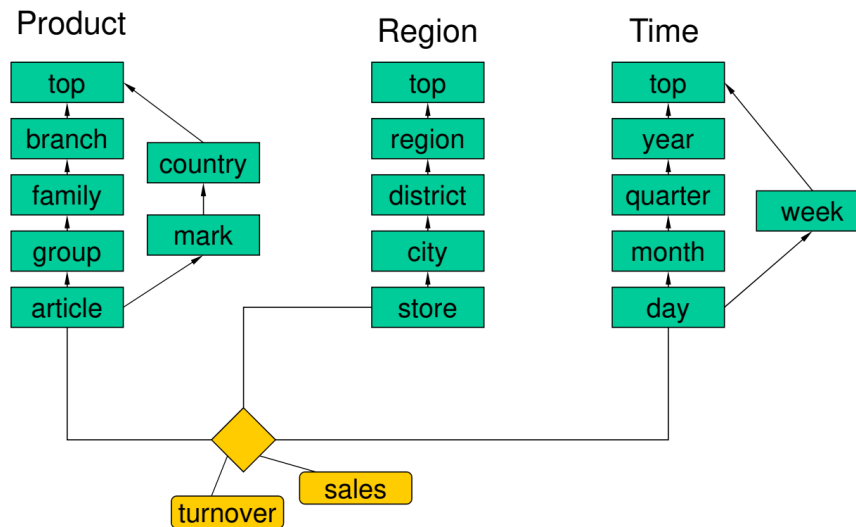


Figure 4: An example for a mER diagram with multiple classification schemes

An instance of a cube W contains all cells from the definition domain of the cube $W = \text{dom}(G) \times \text{dom}(M)$. In general, not all cells have a value. Figure 5 shows an instance of a cube including classification hierarchies.

Features of Measures

Measures have a name, domain and aggregation type. The domain is roughly equivalent to their data type, but restrictions are possible (e.g. negative cost).

Aggregation types are:

- **FLOW**: arbitrarily aggregationable (Turnover, Sales)
- **STOCK**: not temporally summable (Stock)
- **Value per unit (VPU)**: not summable (Price, taxes)

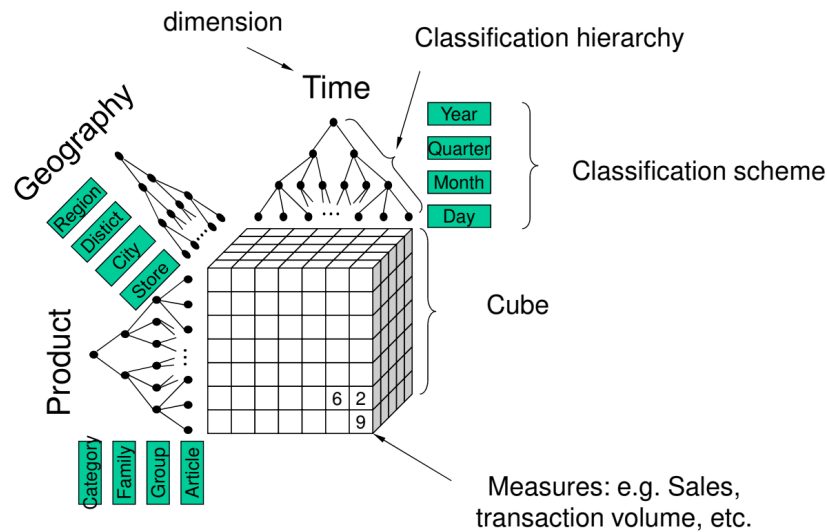
Multi-dimensional Operations

By representing our data as a cube aggregations become easy to understand operations:

- **Pivoting**: rotate the cube along one or multiple axes
- **Roll up, Drill down, Drill across**: A roll up is the aggregation of data along one or multiple axes, a drill down is the opposite. A drill across performs analysis over a spectrum of dimensional values.
- **Slice and Dice**: this is just a visual representation of filtering

Aggregation

Aggregation is a change of granularity through some function. Aggregation functions map a set of values to a single one, and can be done via cumulation (sums, averages) or ranking.



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Figure 5: An instance of a data cube

Summability of measures plays a huge role in aggregation, as it dictates which types of analysis are and aren't possible. Disjunctivity, Completeness and Type Compatibility are necessary for aggregation. Disjunctivity and Completeness are themselves necessary attributes of classification hierarchies. Completeness means that all elements must be contained in the hierarchy, and Disjunctivity means no element can be contained in two classifications in the same hierarchy. The type compatibility is dependent on the aggregation type of the variable in question.

3.3 Schema Creation and Updates

According to Kimball this should be done in four steps:

1. Selection of business process
2. Selection of the granularity
3. Selection of the dimensions (useful for functional dependencies)
4. Selection of the measures

In my opinion one should select the dimensions before the granularity, but maybe that's just me

Schema updates are very tedious, as the metadata has to be kept consistent even with the schema changes. The approach by Chameni and Stock suggests versioning the classification hierarchies and storing the timestamps in a validity matrix. The schema can also evolve, with most of it staying the same as the old version. **This is dangerous territory.**