

Apricot DB

The User Guide

v 0.3



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Preface

The “Apricot DB” is a desktop application, which purpose is to help users with the design, generation, analysis and maintenance of the structures of the complex relational databases.

The main presumable audience of this software are the software developers, analysts, database designers, all sort of the software architects and even some advanced participants of the company’s business processes. They all have been working with the many-tables, non trivial databases and need a tool for the graphic representation of the existing and newly created database- structures.

The database structure is a set of tables, connected with each other by relationships (that’s been making the database “relational”). Tables also can be called “entities”. The relatively simple idea of the entity-relationship diagram (ER-diagram, or ERD) lies in the background of the graphical representation of the database structure.

A list of essential functions of “Apricot DB” includes the following:

- * Creation of the database structure in form of ERD;
- * Filling in the necessary detailed information for all elements of the ERD and generate the target database scrips;
- * Perform the Reverse Engineering from of the physical (existing) structure of the target database into the ERD for further analysis, development and alterations;
- * Prepare and publish the technical documentation using clear and descriptive graphical representation of the database structure;
- * Maintain the full cycle of the design database “from scratch” process starting from the initial prototyping of the ERD’s and finishing by generations of the final database scripts to create, update or delete physical objects of the database);
- * Generation of the Excel Report with the detailed representation of the current EDR information.

No Open Source applications at the moment of writing of this documentation provide such functionality out of the box.

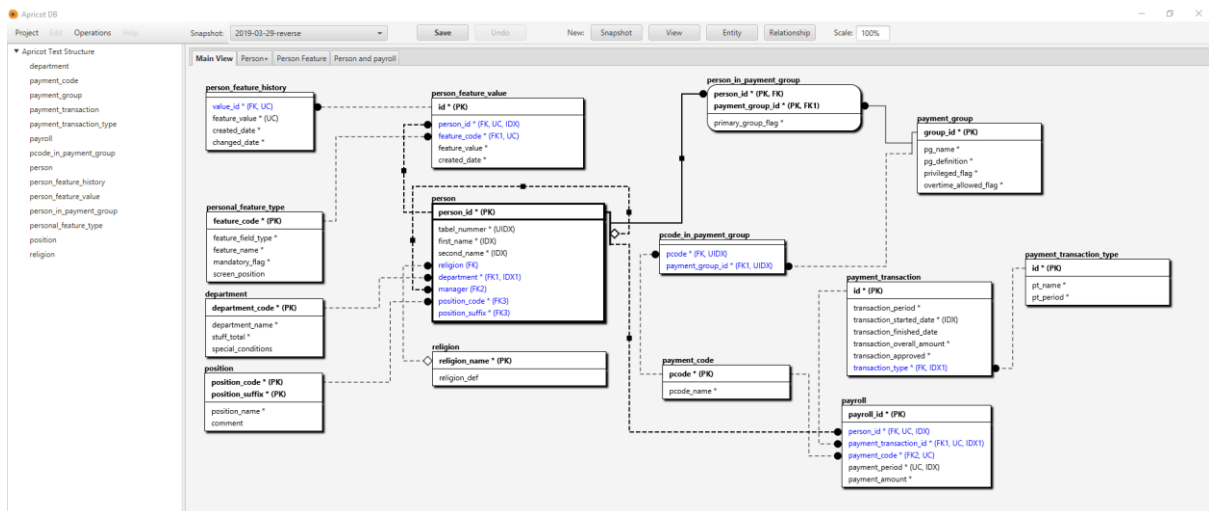
What “Apricot DB” does not do

Even though “Apricot DB” is designed to maintain all major relational databases, it has limitations on working with some physical objects specific for concrete database. “Apricot DB” does not support any programmatic structures on the database side (example: PL/SQL in Oracle, Transact SQL in SQL Server, any sort of database triggers).

The current version of “Apricot DB” does not support the database views (this support, most probable will be included into the further releases).

Introduction

The “Apricot DB” application is similar to the “classic” IDE’s like Eclipse or NetBeans. The top element of the interface is the Project. There might be any number of the Projects created, stored and maintained in “Apricot DB”, but only one Project can be opened at any particular moment of time.



Ideally, one Project is dedicated to one database (or schema, or any other stable and isolated database structure depending on the type of the database). In my example (see the screenshot) the project named “Apricot-Test-Structure” represents the SQL Server database - “APRICOT_TEST”.

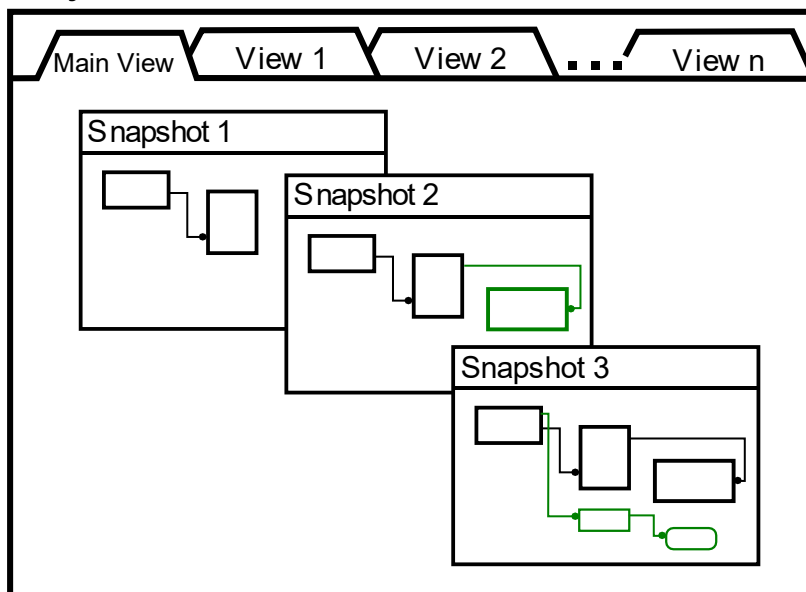
The Project contains Snapshots and Views.

Apricot DB Project/Snapshot/View concept

A Project includes Snapshots and Views. Snapshot is a container of the Entities and relationships between them. There might be many Snapshots inside one project. This permits to keep different versions of the same database.

The Views are responsible for the layout of the graphical representation of the database structure. The View can include a subset of the whole set of tables. This makes analysis and documenting of the complex databases more convenient.

Project



Important notice: The Views belong to the whole Project (not to some particular Snapshot). If a new View was created, it will be presented in all Snapshots of the Project. As soon as some change made in allocation of the Entity/Relationships presented in this particular View, these changes will be

reflected in all Snapshots. The View in “Apricot DB” can be considered as a “skin”, which changes have automatically been applied to all Snapshots. Think about the View as a CSS sheet, which is applied to all pages in the Internet Site. As soon as CSS is changed, the look and feel of all pages will change, even though the internal data represented by the pages stay the same.

The Snapshot

The Snapshot is a main container of tables and relationships between them. Project has to have at least one Snapshot. There might be any number of Snapshots in one Project. The different Snapshots in the Project might have not equal collections of tables/relationships. The concept of the Snapshot might be considered as a primitive version control system, which stores a graphical representation of the database structure at the different moments of time. Technically, the Snapshots can have completely different and not overlapping sets of tables in them. It makes sense, though, to stick with the logically the same database structure in all Snapshots of the Project. It allows to perform efficient comparison between different Snapshots in one Project as well as use an advantage of the concept of View.

The View

The view contains the graphical representation of entities/relationships (see the screenshot above). Do not confuse the “Apricot DB” View with the database views which can be created by CREATE VIEW... DDL command!

There always one mandatory View included in any Project - the Main View. It shows all tables of the chosen Snapshot. The Main View cannot be removed.

For the large database structures, which might include hundreds of tables and relationships between them, it is more convenient to “split” the whole set of the tables of the current Snapshot into the logical subsets: Views.

Physical or Logical

It is common practice to distinguish between the logical and physical ER- models. The logical model represents the higher level of abstraction comparing to the physical one. The physical representation usually contains great details of the physical parameters of the designed database, while the logical ERD abstracts many details specific for the physical representation.

In sake of simplification (and the simplicity is a vital thing!) “Apricot DB” does not distinguish between physical and logical schemas. We do not support the logical ERD- elements such as many-to-many relationships, the explicit cardinality on different sides of the relationship or the logical names of entities.

All relationships in “Apricot DB” are of “one-to-many” type. This is essential feature of the modern relational databases. The “many-to-many” relationship has be resolved using the “association table” pattern (will be touched below).

“Apricot DB” supports the only name for the Entity or the Field Name within the Entity. All the identifications have been considered as “physical” and become the final names of the tables, their fields and constraints in the generated database scripts.

Entities and Tables

According to IDEF1x standard Entities are elements of the ER- diagrams. Entities have been converted into the physical tables of the target database during the DB script generations. We will use terms Entity and Relationships as mutually interchangeable.

The Attributes within Entity of the entity relationship diagram have been converted into the fields of the table of the target database. We assume Attribute and Field terms interchangeable.

How “Apricot DB” stores the Project Data

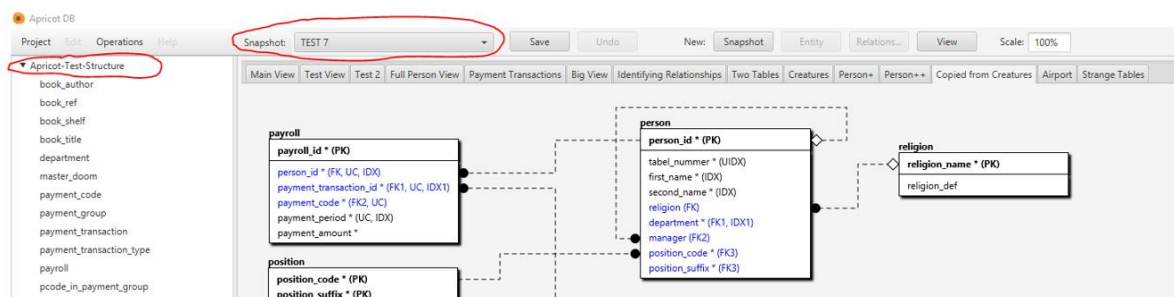
The “Apricot DB” Project is a long living thing. A designer of the database wants to be able to save the results of her work and been able to get back to the design process later. The multiple changes have been done during the design of ERD and the final database structure.

In order to store the Project data, “Apricot DB” uses the lightweight file-based database H1. This database contains the meta-data of all Projects created and saved in the current local environment.

Opening any Project, “Apricot DB” automatically restored the condition maximally close to the latest working session with this particular Project.

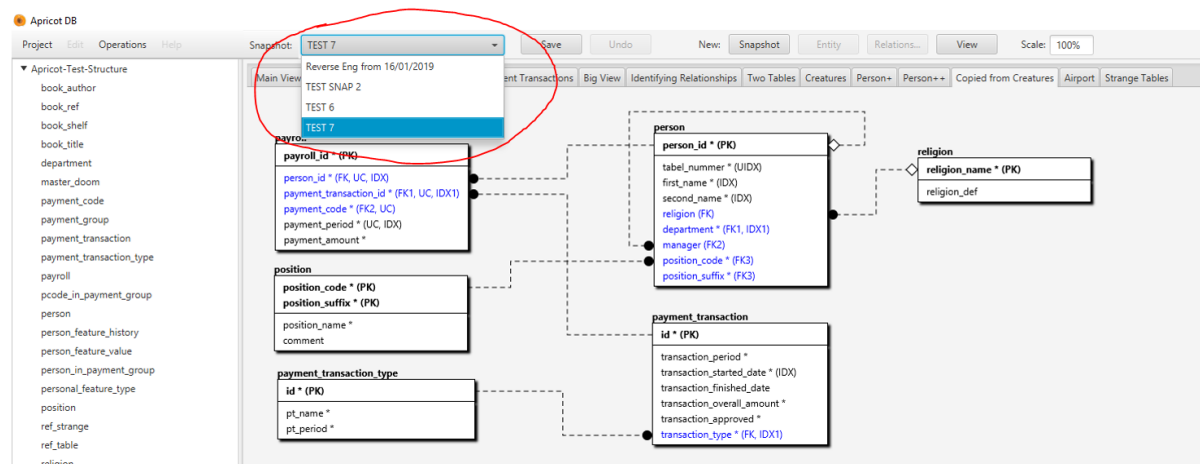
The Elements of the “Apricot DB”- main screen

The current Project and Snapshot: the current Project is shown on the left pane. The current Snapshot, selected inside the current Project is presented by the drop-down list.



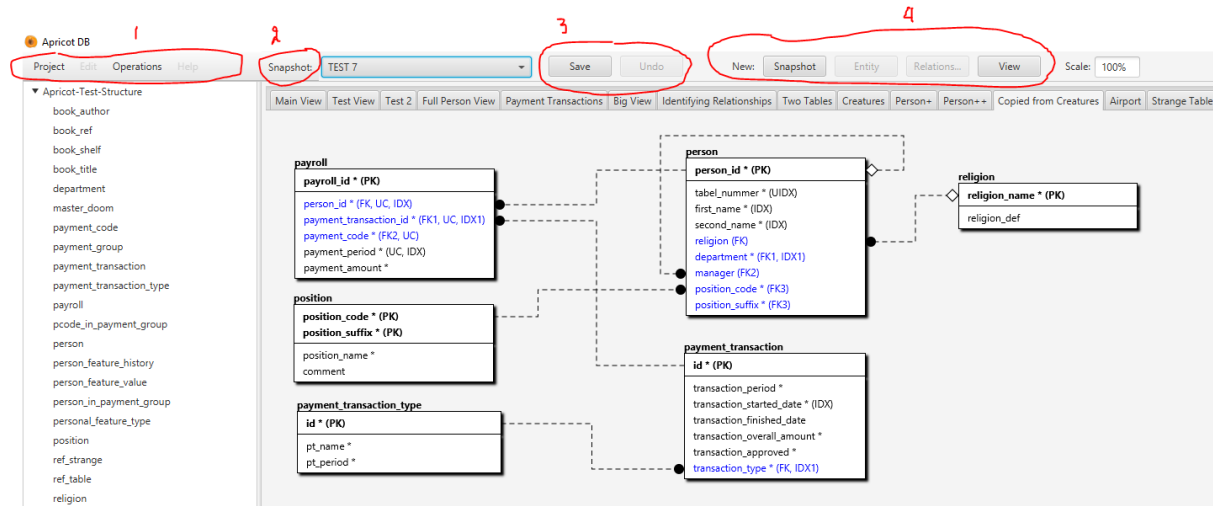
A collection of tables included into the current snapshot is shown under the current Project- name (see the left pane).

To select other snapshot use the drop down list shown below. As soon as Snapshot is selected in the drop down list, it becomes the current one.



The current Project and Snapshot have been stored between different sessions of work with “Apricot DB”. This means, that when you run “Apricot DB” application next time, it automatically selects the Project and Snapshot selected in the end of the previous working session.

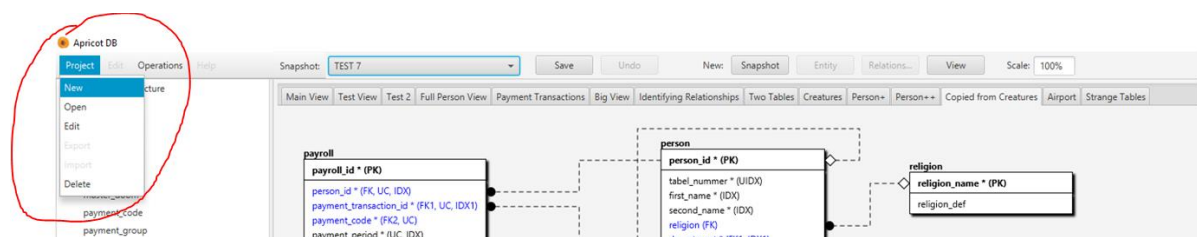
Menu and tool bar



- 1) the main menu. It permits access to the most important functions of “Apricot DB”;
- 2) menu “Snapshot” – allows edit and delete the currently selected Snapshot;
- 3) menu “Save/Undo” – saves or undoes the recent changes in the selected view;
- 4) menu “New” – allows to create new Snapshots, Views, Entities and Relationships (will be discussed later).

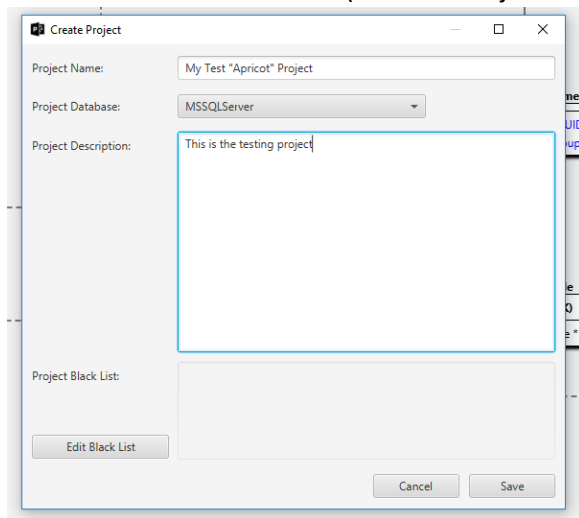
The creation a new Project

The first thing needed to start working with “Apricot DB” is creation of the new Project. To create a new Project select Project/New in main menu.



The form of creation of the new Project is shown below.

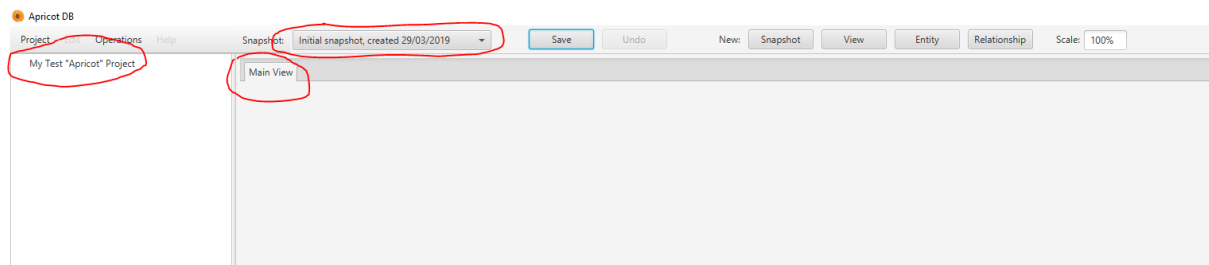
The Project Name is mandatory. On the stage of creation of the new project the type of the target database has to be selected (the field Project Database). The Project Description is optional.



After the “Save” button was pushed, the new Project was created and presented in the application.

The new project “My Test “Apricot” Project” does not have any tables yet, therefore the tables list is empty (see the screenshot below).

By default “Apricot DB” created an empty Snapshot – “Initial snapshot created 29/03/2019”. The default name of the initial Snapshot can be changed later. The only view on the screen is the “Main View”. This view is empty since there is no entities in the project yet.



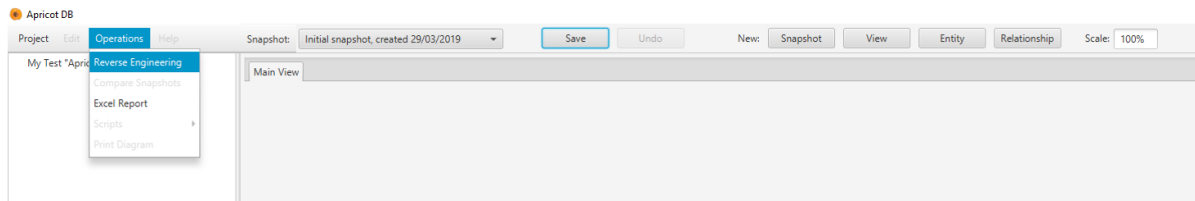
The ApricotDB Scenarios

There are two main scenarios of working with “Apricot DB”:

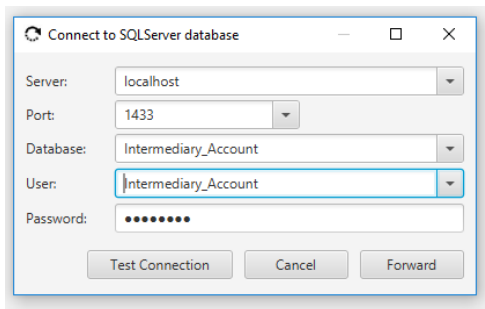
- * The Entity/Relationships in the current Project can be created from scratch;
- * The database elements can be pulled from the real database. This process called Reverse Engineering.

The Reverse Engineering Process

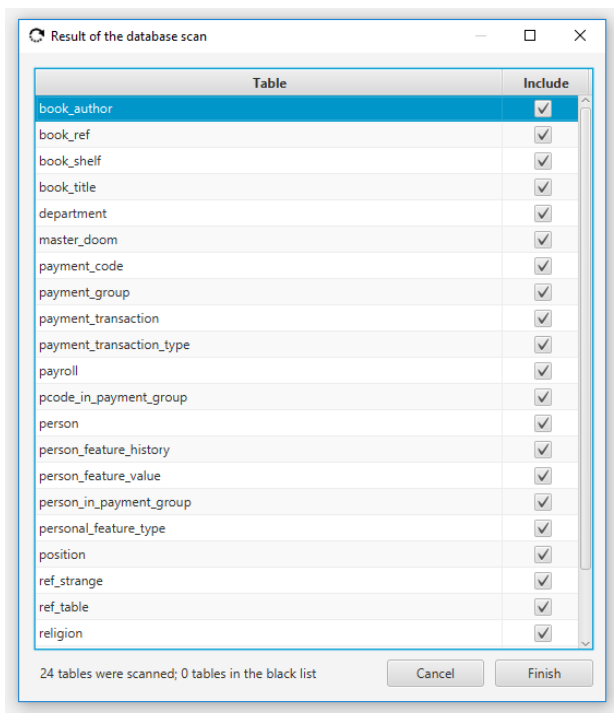
Let’s assume that we’ve got access to some real existing database, which structure we would like to start working with (analyse, alter, extend).



Using menu Operations/Reverse Engineering, the form of connection to the Database is shown below:



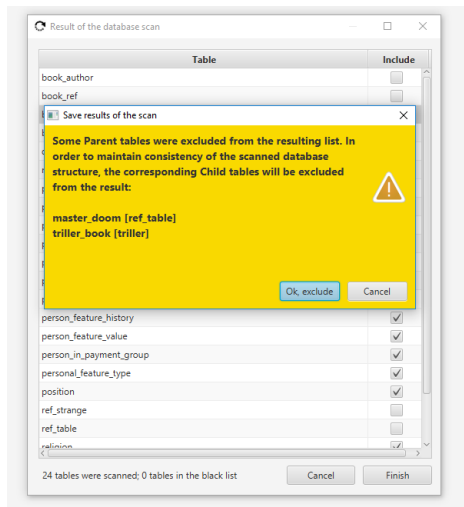
After the successful connection to the target database, Apricot DB scans the database structure and offers a list of the tables found:



The selected tables will be “pulled” into the current Project/Snapshot. Any tables in the list can be excluded from the resulting set on this stage.

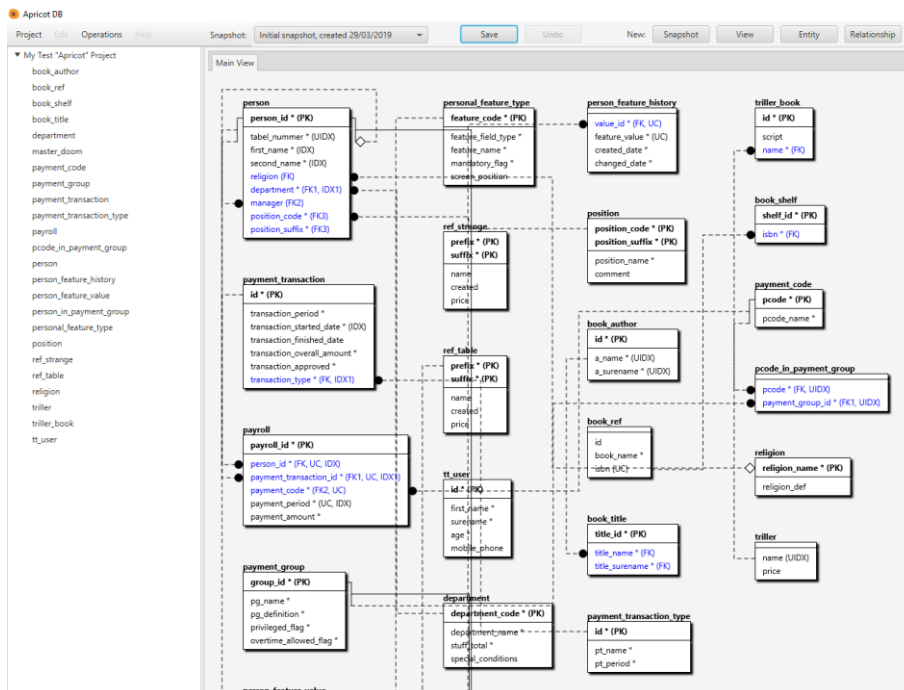
Note: Unchecking the tables in the “Include” list, excludes them from the resulting set. This operation has potential risk of violation of the referential integrity of the resulting ER Diagram. In order to prevent that, “Apricot DB” analyses the referential integrity existing in the current database schema. It warns if any integrity violations have been identified on this stage. For example, there is a table “A” and it is a parent of the tables “B” and “C”. If the parent table “A” is excluded from the result, the tables “B” and “C” have to be removed as well. Otherwise the tables “B” and “C” would have the foreign keys with no Primary Key, related to them.

If potential violation of the referential integrity was found, “Apricot DB” warns the user with the message shown below:



If the user accepts the suggestion given by the application, the related tables will be removed from the result as well. This helps to keep the database structure consistent at any moment of time.

That’s how the initial structure “read” from the database looks like after the Reverse Engineering process:



(note: the current default layout is simplified and will be improved in the forthcoming versions of the app).

The graphical notation of “Apricot DB”

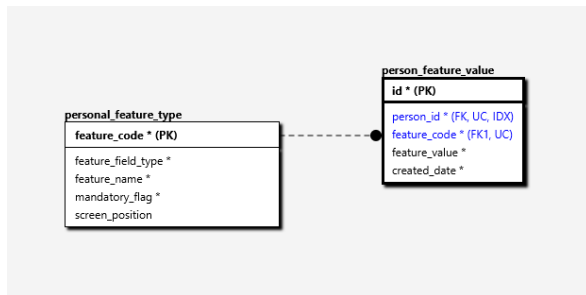
“Apricot DB” uses the standard notation IDEF1x. There are not sufficient simplifications, extensions and alterations, though.

IDEF1x is very intuitive ERD- notation. It is not contradictive to other big desktop systems like “Enterprise Architect”, “ERWin”, “Oracle Designer”, “IBM Rational Rose” and so one.

Entities and Relationships between them

The Entities on the ER- diagram are connected with Relationship (there might be the stand-alone entities, which have been by themselves and do not have any relationships with others).

In the Relationship below, the Entity on the left side called a Parent. The Entity of the right side called a Child. In other popular terminology they would be a Master and a Slave.



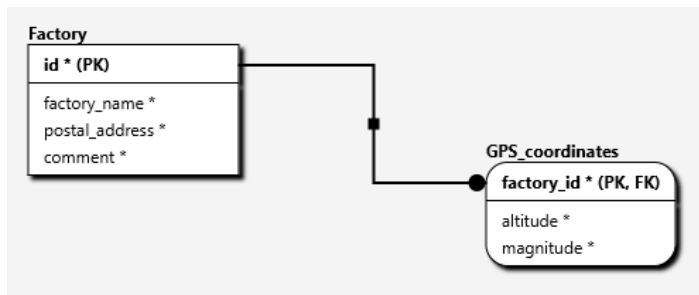
They say that the Primary Key of the Parent is exported to the Child. The corresponding field of the Child Entity called the Foreign Key.

Often the Parent entity acts as a reference or detailed entity. They say that the Child Entity refers to the Parent.

There are 3 types of the relationships between Parent and Child.

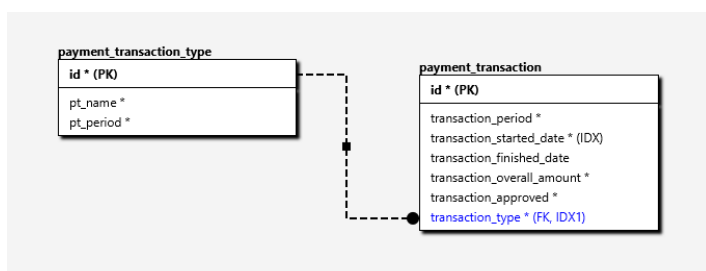
The Identifying Relationship

...takes place when the Parent’s Primary Key is included into the Child’s Primary Key. The Identifying Relationship has been drawn as a solid line:



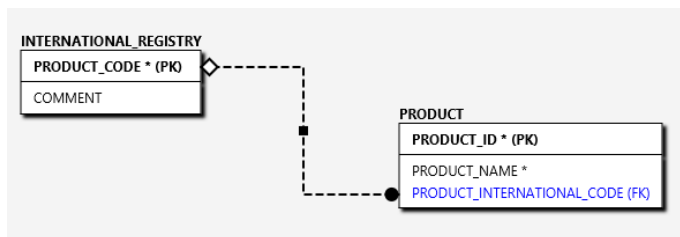
The Non-Identifying Mandatory Relationship

This type of relationship takes place when the Parent’s Primary Key is linked to the mandatory field on the Child- side. The notation for this type of Relationship is shown below:



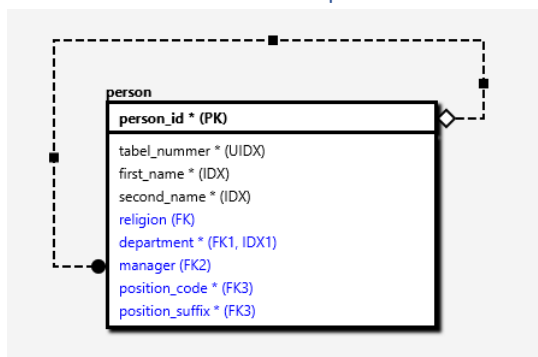
The Not-Identifying Optional Relationship

This type of relationship exists if the Foreign Key field on the Child- side is optional.



The field “PRODUCT_INTERNATIONAL_CODE” in the table “PRODUCT” on the fragment of the diagram above is optional. Therefore, the relationship is Not-Identifying Optional.

The “Auto”- relationship



The Entity can be referring to itself. For example, on the diagram above the entity “person” has the “auto”- relationship between “person” and “manager”. The “auto” relationship is always Non-Identifying. It can be mandatory or optional.

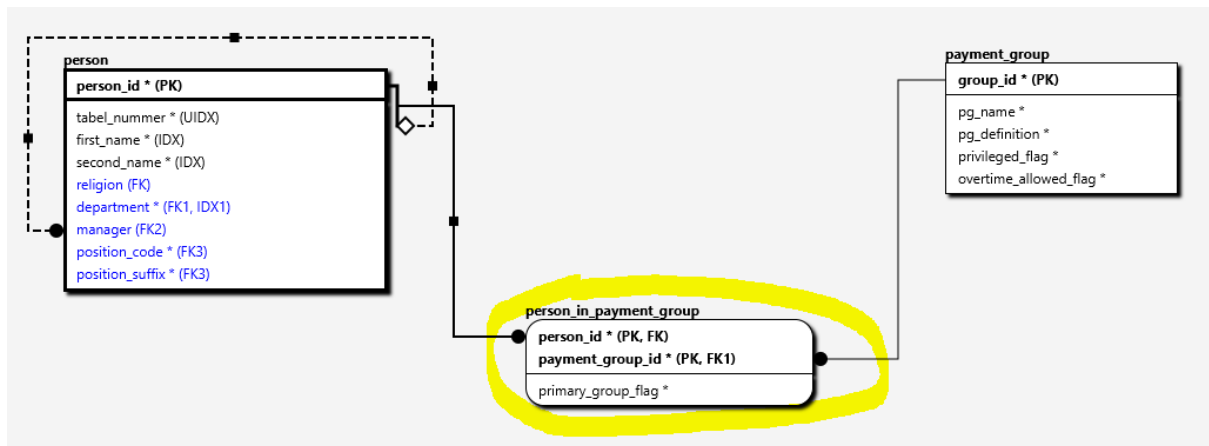
Resolving the “many-to-many” relationship

As it was mentioned earlier, “Apricot DB” does not provide the direct support of the “many-to-many” logical relationship.

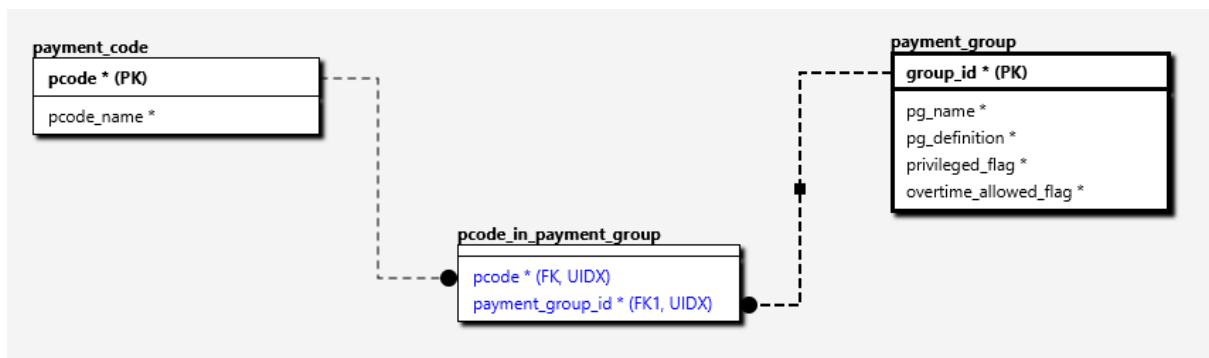
In order to implement the “many-to-many” relationship, an additional entity needs to be introduced, so called “Association Entity”.

The “Association Entity” is shown on the diagram below and marked in yellow.

This “many-to-many” resolution was implemented using the identifying relationships on both sides.



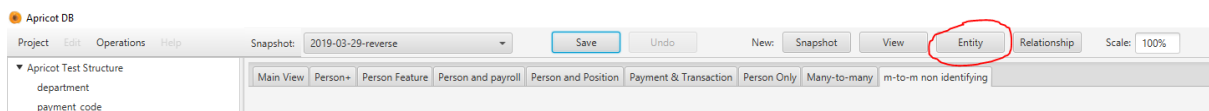
Alternatively, the “many-to-many” relationship can be resolved using the non-identifying relationships, as it is shown below:



The Entity notation

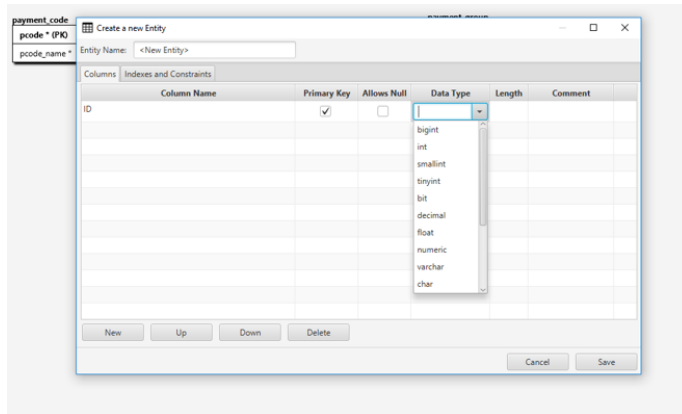
Working with Entities

The key element of any ERD is an Entity.



In order to create a new Entity, use the item “New Entity” on the toolbar, as shown above.

The form of creation/editing of Entity contains two tabs: “Columns” and “Indexes and Constraints”.



The names of fields in the table above are self-explanatory. The set of types, presented in the drop-down menu “Data Type” is a database specific. This list includes only most popular types for the database. If user needs some type not included into the provided list, it can be entered manually. Note: the type of the target database is set for the current Project during the project-create procedure. This type can be changed at any time.

The sequence of columns in the “Columns” grid will be used for generation of the database create-script. This will be the physical sequence of the columns then. The column can be moved up and down.

Note: any column can be marked as a Primary Key (PK). It does not matter if the PK- column

Working with Relationships

Working with Views

Working with Projects

Retrieving the structure of Database in form of Excel table