The Evolving Role of the Enterprise Data Warehouse in the Era of Big Data Analytics

A Kimball Group White Paper

By Ralph Kimball

KIMBALL GROUP

Consulting | Kimball University

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

In this white paper, we describe the rapidly evolving landscape for designing an enterprise data warehouse (EDW) to support business analytics in the era of "big data." We describe the scope and challenges of building and evolving a very stable and successful EDW architecture to meet new business requirements. These include extreme integration, semi- and un-structured data sources, petabytes of behavioral and image data accessed through MapReduce/Hadoop as well as massively parallel relational databases, and then structuring the EDW to support advanced analytics. This paper provides detailed guidance for designing and administering the necessary processes for deployment. This white paper has been written in response to a lack of specific guidance in the industry as to how the EDW needs to respond to the big data analytics challenge, and what necessary design elements are needed to support these new requirements.

About the Author

Ralph Kimball founded the Kimball Group. Since the mid 1980s, he has been the data warehouse/business intelligence (DW/BI) industry's thought leader on the dimensional approach and trained more than 10,000 IT professionals. Prior to working at Metaphor and founding Red Brick Systems, Ralph co-invented the Star workstation at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). Ralph has his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University.

The Kimball Group is the source for dimensional DW/BI consulting and education, consistent with our best-selling *Toolkit* book series, Design Tips, and award-winning articles. Visit www.kimballgroup.com for more information.

Introduction

What is big data? Its bigness is actually not the most interesting characteristic. Big data is structured, semi structured, unstructured, and raw data in many different formats, in some cases looking totally different than the clean scalar numbers and text we have stored in our data warehouses for the last 30 years. Much big data cannot be analyzed with anything that looks like SQL. But most important, big data is a *paradigm shift* in how we think about data assets, where do we collect them, how do we analyze them, and how do we monetize the insights from the analysis. The big data revolution is about finding new value within and outside conventional data sources. An additional approach is needed because the software and hardware environments of the past have not been able to capture, manage, or process the new forms of data within reasonable development times or processing times. We are challenged to reorganize our information management landscape to extend a remarkably stable and successful EDW architecture to this new era of big data analytics.

In reading this white paper please bear in mind that the consistent view of this author has always been that the "data warehouse" comprises the complete ecosystem for extracting, cleaning, integrating and delivering data to decision makers, and therefore includes the extract-transform-load (ETL) and business intelligence (BI) functions considered as outside of the data warehouse by more conservative writers. This author has always taken the view that data warehousing has a very comprehensive role in capturing all forms of enterprise data, and then preparing that data for the most effective use by decision-makers all across the enterprise. This white paper takes the aggressive view that the enterprise data warehouse is on the verge of a very exciting new set of responsibilities. The scope of the EDW will increase dramatically.

Also, in this white paper, although we consistently use the term “ETL” to describe the movement of data within the enterprise data warehouse, the conventional use of this term does not do justice to the much larger responsibility of moving data across networks and between systems and between profoundly different processes in the world of big data analytics. ETL is a portion of a much larger technology called data integration (DI). Since we have used ETL consistently in our books and classes for many years, we will keep that terminology in this paper, bearing in mind that ETL is meant in the larger sense of DI.

This white paper stands back from the marketplace as it exists in early 2011 to highlight the clearly emerging new trends brought by the big data revolution. And a revolution it is. As James Markarian, Informatica's Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer, remarked: "the database market has finally gotten interesting again." Because much of the new big data tools and approaches are version 1 or even version 0 developments, the landscape will continue to change rapidly. However there is growing awareness in the marketplace that new kinds of analysis are possible and that key competitors, especially e-commerce enterprises, are already taking advantage of the new paradigm. This white paper is intended to be a guide to help business intelligence, data warehousing and information management professionals and management teams understand and prepare for big data as a complementary extension to their current EDW architecture.

Data is an asset on the balance sheet

Enterprises increasingly recognize that data itself is an asset that should appear on the balance sheet in the same way that traditional assets from the manufacturing age such as equipment and land have always appeared. There are several ways to determine the value of the data asset, including

- cost to produce the data
- cost to replace the data if it is lost
- revenue or profit opportunity provided by the data
- revenue or profit loss if data falls into competitors hands
- legal exposure from fines and lawsuits if data is exposed to the wrong parties

But more important than the data itself, enterprises have shown that insights from data can be monetized. When an e-commerce site detects an increase in favorable click throughs from an experimental ad treatment, that insight can be taken to the bottom line immediately. This direct cause-and-effect is easily understood by management, and an analytic research group that consistently demonstrates these insights is looked upon as a strategic resource for the enterprise by the highest levels of management. This growth in business awareness of the value of data-driven insights is rapidly spreading outward from the e-commerce world to virtually every business segment.

Data warehousing, of course, has been demonstrating the value of data-driven insights for at least 20 years. But until quite recently data warehousing has been focused on historical transaction data. During the past decade from 2000 to 2009, three major seismic shifts occurred in data warehousing. The first, early in the decade, was the decisive introduction of low latency operational data into the data warehouse together with the existing historical data. Of course, many of these new operational data use cases benefited from real-time data, in some cases demanding instantaneous delivery. The second seismic shift growing increasingly throughout the decade was the gathering of customer behavior data, which not only included traditional transactions such as purchases and click throughs but added huge volumes of "sub transactions" that represented measurable events leading up to the transactions themselves. For example, all the webpage events a customer engaged in prior to the final transaction event became a record of customer behavior. "Good paths" through these webpage event histories gave lots of insight into productive (i.e., monetizable) customer behavior.

The third seismic event, which is gathering enormous momentum as we transition into the current decade, is the extraction of product preferences and customers' sentiments from social media, especially the massive quantities of machine-generated unstructured data generated by the new business paradigms of dot-com companies. It is this final seismic shift that has pushed many enterprises into looking seriously at unstructured data for the first time, and asking "how on earth do we analyze this stuff?" The point here is not that unstructured data is some new thing recently discovered, but rather the analysis of unstructured data has gone mainstream just recently.

Raising the curtain on big data analytics

Use cases for big data analytics

Big data analytics use cases are spreading like wildfire. Here is a set of use cases reported recently, including a benchmark set of "Hadoop-able" use cases proposed by Jeff Hammerbacher, Chief Scientist for Cloudera. Following these brief descriptions is a table summarizing the salient structure and processing characteristics of each use case. Note that none of these use cases can be satisfied with scalar numeric data, nor can any be properly analyzed by simple SQL statements. All of them can be scaled into the petabyte range and beyond with appropriate business assumptions.

Search ranking. All search engines attempt to rank the relevance of a webpage to a search request against all other possible webpages. Google's page rank algorithm is, of course, the poster child for this use case.

Ad tracking. E-commerce sites typically record an enormous river of data including every page event in every user session. This allows for very short turnaround of experiments in ad placement, color, size, wording, and other features. When an experiment shows that such a feature change in an ad results in improved click through behavior, the change can be implemented virtually in real time.

Location and proximity tracking. Many use cases add precise GPS location tracking, together with frequent updates, in operational applications, security analysis, navigation, and social media. Precise location tracking opens the door for an enormous ocean of data about other locations nearby the GPS measurement. These other locations may represent opportunities for sales or services.

Causal factor discovery. Point-of-sale data has long been able to show us when the sales of a product goes sharply up or down. But searching for the causal factors that explain these deviations has been, at best, a guessing game or an art form. The answers may be found in competitive pricing data, competitive promotional data including print and television media, weather, holidays, national events including disasters, and virally spread opinions found in social media. See the next use case as well.

Social CRM. This use case is one of the hottest new areas for marketing analysis. The Altimeter Group has described a very useful set of key performance indicators for social CRM that include share of voice, audience engagement, conversation reach, active advocates, advocate influence, advocacy impact, resolution rate, resolution time, satisfaction score, topic trends, sentiment ratio, and idea impact. The calculation of these KPIs involves in-depth trolling of a huge array of data sources, especially unstructured social media.

Document similarity testing. Two documents can be compared to derive a metric of similarity. There is a large body of academic research and tested algorithms, for example *latent semantic analysis*, that is just now finding its way to driving monetized insights of interest to big data practitioners. For example, a single source document can be used as a kind of multifaceted template to compare against a large set of target documents. This could be used for threat discovery, sentiment analysis, and opinion polls. For example: "find all the documents that agree with my source document on global warming."

Genomics analysis: e.g., commercial seed gene sequencing. A few months ago the cotton research community was thrilled by a genome sequencing announcement that stated in part "The sequence will serve a critical role as the reference for future assembly of the larger cotton crop genome. Cotton is the most important fiber crop worldwide and this sequence information will open the way for more rapid breeding for higher yield, better fiber quality and adaptation to environmental stresses and for insect and disease resistance." Scientist Ryan Rapp stressed the importance of involving the cotton research community in analyzing the sequence, identifying genes and gene families and determining the future directions of research. (SeedQuest, Sept 22, 2010). This use case is just one example of a whole industry that is being formed to address genomics analysis broadly, beyond this example of seed gene sequencing.

Discovery of customer cohort groups. Customer cohort groups are used by many enterprises to identify common demographic trends and behavior histories. We are all familiar with Amazon's cohort groups when they say other customers who bought the same book as you have also bought the following books. Of course, if you can sell your product or service to one member of a cohort group, then all the rest may be reasonable prospects. Cohort groups are represented logically and graphically as links, and much of the analysis of cohort groups involves specialized link analysis algorithms.

In-flight aircraft status. This use case as well as the following two use cases are made possible by the introduction of sensor technology everywhere. In the case of aircraft systems, in-flight status of hundreds of variables on engines, fuel systems, hydraulics, and electrical systems are measured and transmitted every few milliseconds. The value of this use case is not just the engineering telemetry data that could be analyzed at some future point in time, but drives real-time adaptive control, fuel usage, part failure prediction, and pilot notification.

Smart utility meters. It didn't take long for utility companies to figure out that a smart meter can be used for more than just the monthly readout that produces the customer's utility bill. By drastically cranking up the frequency of the readouts to as much as one readout per second per meter across the entire customer landscape, many useful analyses can be performed including dynamic load-balancing, failure response, adaptive pricing, and longer-term strategies for incenting customers to utilize the utility more effectively (either from the customers' point of view or the utility's point of view!)

Building sensors. Modern industrial buildings and high-rises are being fitted with thousands of small sensors to detect temperature, humidity, vibration, and noise. Like the smart utility meters, collecting this data every few seconds 24 hours per day allows many forms of analysis including energy usage, unusual problems including security violations, component failure in air-conditioning and heating systems and plumbing systems, and the development of construction practices and pricing strategies.

Satellite image comparison. Images of the regions of the earth from satellites are captured by every pass of certain satellites on intervals typically separated by a small number of days. Overlaying these images and computing the differences allows the creation of hot spot maps showing what has changed. This analysis can identify construction, destruction, changes due to disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes and fires, and the spread of human encroachment.

CAT scan comparisons. CAT scans are stacks of images taken as "slices" of the human body. Large libraries of CAT scans can be analyzed to facilitate the automatic diagnosis of medical issues and their prevalence.

Financial account fraud detection and intervention. Account fraud, of course, has immediate and obvious financial impact. In many cases fraud can be detected by patterns of account behavior, in some cases crossing multiple financial systems. For example, "check kiting" requires the rapid transfer of money back and forth between two separate accounts. Certain forms of broker fraud involve two conspiring brokers selling a security back-and-forth at ever increasing prices, until an unsuspecting third party enters the action by buying the security, allowing the fraudulent brokers to quickly exit. Again, this behavior may take place across two separate exchanges in a short period of time.

Computer system hacking detection and intervention. System hacking in many cases involves an unusual entry mode or some other kind of behavior that in retrospect is a smoking gun but may be hard to detect in real-time.

Online game gesture tracking. Online game companies typically record every click and maneuver by every player at the most fine grained level. This avalanche of "telemetry data" allows fraud detection, intervention for a player who is getting consistently defeated (and therefore discouraged), offers of additional features or game goals for players who are about to finish a game and depart, ideas for new game features, and experiments for new features in the games. This can be generalized to television viewing. Your DVR box can capture remote control keystrokes, recording events, playback events, picture-in-picture viewing, and the context of the guide. All of this can be sent back to your provider.

Big science including atom smashers, weather analysis, space probe telemetry feeds. Major scientific projects have always collected a lot of data, but now the techniques of big data analytics are allowing broader access and much more timely access to the data. Big science data, of course, is a mixture of all forms of data, scalar, vector, complex structures, analog wave forms, and images.

"Data bag" exploration. There are many situations in commercial environments and in the research communities where large volumes of raw data are collected. One example might be data collected about structure fires. Beyond the predictable dimensions of time, place, primary cause of fire, and responding firefighters, there may be a wealth of unpredictable anecdotal data that at best can be modeled as a disorderly collection of name value pairs, such as "contributing weather= lightning." Another example would be the listing of all relevant financial assets for a defendant in a lawsuit. Again such a list is likely to be a disorderly collection of name value pairs, such as "shared real estate ownership =condominium." The list of examples like this is endless. What they have in common is the need to encapsulate the disorderly collection of name value pairs which is generally known as a "data bag." Complex data bags may contain both name value pairs as well as embedded sub data bags. The challenge in this use case is to find a common way to approach the analysis of data bags when the content of the data may need to be discovered after the data is loaded.

The final two use cases are old and venerable examples that even predate data warehousing itself. But new life has been breathed into these use cases because of the exciting potential of ultra-atomic customer behavior data.

Loan risk analysis and insurance policy underwriting. In order to evaluate the risk of a prospective loan or a prospective insurance policy, many data sources can be brought into play ranging from payment histories, detailed credit behavior, employment data, and financial asset disclosures. In some cases the collateral for a loan or the insured item may be accompanied by image data.

Customer churn analysis. Enterprises concerned with churn want to understand the predictive factors leading up to the loss of a customer, including that customer's detailed behavior as well as many external factors including the economy, life stage and other demographics of the customer, and finally real time competitive issues.

Making sense of big data analytic use cases

Certainly the purpose of developing this list of use cases is to convince the reader that the use cases come in all shapes and sizes and formats, and require many specialized approaches to analyze. Up until very recently all these use cases existed as separate endeavors, often involving special purpose built systems. But the industry awareness of the "big data analytics challenge" is motivating everyone to look for the architectural similarities and differences across all these use cases. Any given enterprise is increasingly likely to encounter one or more of these use cases. That realization is driving the interest in system architectures that addresses the big data analytics problem in a general way. Please study the following table.

	Vector, matrix, or complex structure	Free text	Image or binary data	Data “bags”	Iterative logic or complex branching	Advanced analytic routines	Rapidly repeated measurements	Extreme low latency	Access to all data required
Search ranking		X	X	X	X	X			X
Ad tracking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Location & proximity	X		X	X			X	X	
Causal discovery	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Social CRM	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Document similarity	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Genomic analysis	X	X	X		X	X			
Cohort groups	X	X		X	X	X			X
In-flight engine status	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Smart utility meters	X		X		X	X	X		X
Building sensors	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Satellite images	X		X		X	X			
CAT scans	X		X	X	X	X			X
Financial fraud	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hacking detection	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Game gestures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Big science	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Data bag exploration	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Risk analysis	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Churn analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	

The sheer density of this table makes it clear that systems to support big data analytics have to look very different than the classic relational database systems from the 1980s and 1990s. The original RDBMSs were not built to handle any of the requirements represented as columns in this table!

Big data analytics system requirements

Before discussing the exciting new technical and architectural developments of the 2010s, let's summarize the overall requirements for supporting big data analytics, keeping in mind that we are not requiring a single system or a single vendor's technology to provide a blanket solution for every use case. From the perspective of 2011, we have the luxury of standing back from all these use cases gathered in the last few years, and we are now in a position to surround the requirements with some confidence.

The development of big data analytics has reached a point where it needs an overall mission statement and identity independent of a list of use cases. Many of us have lived through earlier instantiations of advanced analytics that went by the names of advanced statistics, artificial intelligence and data mining. None of these earlier waves became a coherent theme that transcended the individual examples, as compelling as those examples were.

Here is an attempt to step back and define the characteristics of big data analytics at the highest levels. In the following, the term "UDF" is used in the broadest sense of any user defined function or program or algorithm that may appear anywhere in the end-to-end analysis architecture.

In the coming 2010s decade, the analysis of big data will require a technology or combination of technologies capable of:

- scaling to easily support petabytes (thousands of terabytes) of data
- being distributed across thousands of processors, potentially geographically unaware, and potentially heterogeneous
- subsecond response time for highly constrained standard SQL queries
- embedding arbitrarily complex user-defined functions (UDFs) within processing requests
- implementing UDFs in a wide variety of industry-standard procedural languages
- assembling extensive libraries of reusable UDFs crossing most or all of use cases
- executing UDFs as "relation scans" over petabyte sized data sets in a few minutes
- supporting a wide variety of data types growing to include images, waveforms, arbitrarily hierarchical data structures, and data bags
- loading data to be ready for analysis, at very high rates, at least gigabytes per second
- integrating data from multiple sources during the load process at very high rates (GB/sec)
- loading data before declaring or discovering its structure
- executing certain “streaming” analytic queries in real time on incoming load data

- updating data in place at full load speeds
- joining a billion row dimension table to a trillion row fact table without pre-clustering the dimension table with the fact table
- scheduling and execution of complex multi-hundred node workflows
- being configured without being subject to a single point of failure
- failover and process continuation when processing nodes fail
- supporting extreme mixed workloads including thousands of geographically dispersed on-line users and programs executing a variety of requests ranging from ad hoc queries to strategic analysis, and while loading data in batch and streaming fashion

Two architectures have emerged to address big data analytics: extended RDBMS, and MapReduce/Hadoop. These architectures are being implemented as completely separate systems and in various interesting hybrid combinations involving both architectures. We will start by discussing the architectures separately.

Extended relational database management systems

All of the major relational database management system vendors are adding features to address big data analytics from a solid relational perspective. The two most significant architectural developments have been the overtaking of the high end of the market with massively parallel processing (MPP), and the growing adoption of columnar storage. When MPP and columnar storage techniques are combined, a number of the system requirements in the above list can start to be addressed, including:

- scaling to support exabytes (thousands of petabytes) of data
- being distributed across tens of thousands of geographically dispersed processors
- subsecond response time for highly constrained standard SQL queries
- updating data in place at full load speeds
- being configured without being subject to a single point of failure
- failover and process continuation when processing nodes fail

Additionally, RDBMS vendors are adding some complex user-defined functions (UDF's) to their syntax, but the kind of general purpose procedural language computing required by big data analytics is not being satisfied in relational environments at this time.

In a similar vein, RDBMS vendors are allowing complex data structures to be stored in individual fields. These kind of embedded complex data structures have been known as "blobs" for many years. It's important to understand that relational databases have a hard time providing general support for interpreting blobs since blobs do not fit the relational paradigm. An RDBMS indeed provides some value by hosting the blobs in a structured framework, but much of the complex interpretation and computation on the blobs must be done with specially crafted UDFs, or BI application layer clients. Blobs are related to “data bags” discussed elsewhere in this paper. See the section entitled *Data structures should be declared at query time.*

MPP implementations have never satisfactorily addressed the "big join” issue where a billion row dimension table is attempted to be joined to a trillion row fact table without resorting to clustered storage. The big join crisis occurs when an ad hoc constraint is placed against the dimension table resulting in a potentially very large set of dimension keys that must be physically downloaded into every one of the physical segments of the trillion row fact table stored separately in the MPP system. Since the dimension keys are scattered randomly across the separate segments of the trillion row fact table, it is very hard to avoid a lengthy download step of the very large dimension table to every one of the fact table storage partitions. To be fair, the MapReduce/Hadoop architecture has not been able to address the big join problem either.

Columnar data storage fits the relational paradigm, and especially dimensionally modeled databases, very well. Besides the significant advantage of high compression of sparse data, columnar databases allow a very large number of columns compared to row-oriented databases, and place little overhead on the system when columns are added to an existing schema. The most significant Achilles' heel, at least in 2011, is the slow loading speed of data into the columnar format. Although impressive load speed improvements are being announced by columnar database vendors, they have still not achieved the gigabytes-per-second requirement listed above.

The standard RDBMS architecture for implementing an enterprise data warehouse based on dimensional modeling principles is simple and well understood, as shown in Figure 1. Recall that throughout this white paper, the EDW is defined in the comprehensive sense to include all back room and front room processes including ETL, data presentation, and BI applications.

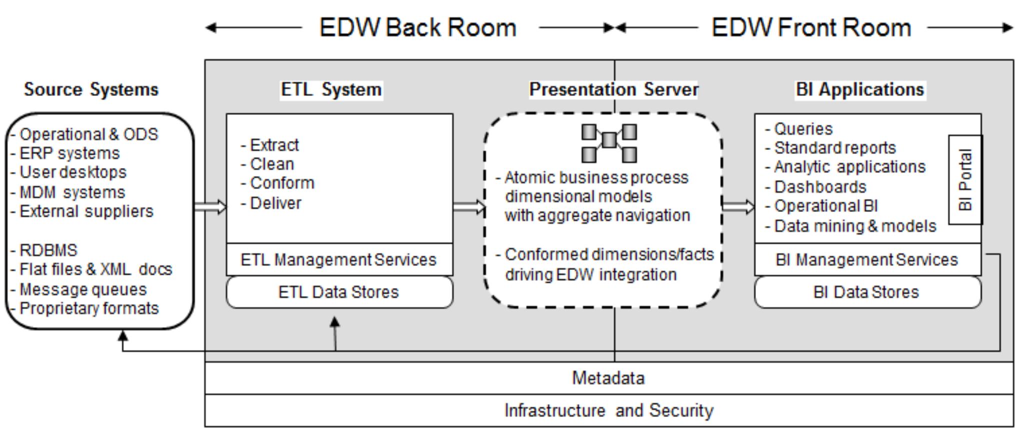

Figure 1. The standard RDBMS – based architecture for an enterprise data warehouse
Source: *The Data Warehouse Lifecycle Toolkit*, 2nd edition, Kimball et al. (2008)

In this standard EDW architecture the ETL system is a major component that sits between the source systems and the presentation servers that are responsible for exposing all data to business intelligence applications. In this view, the ETL system adds significant value by cleaning, conforming, and arranging the data into a series of dimensional schemas which are then stored physically in the presentation server. A crucial element of this architecture is the preparation of conformed dimensions in the ETL system that serves as the basis of integration for the BI applications. It is the strong conviction of this author that deferring the building of the dimensional structures and the issues of integration until query time is the wrong architecture. Such a "deferred computation" approach requires an unduly expensive query optimizer to correctly query complex non-dimensional models every time a query is presented. The calculation of integration at query processing time generally requires complex application logic in the BI tools which also might have to be executed for every query.

The extended RDBMS architecture to support big data analytics preserves the standard architecture with a number of important additions, shown below in Figure 2 with large arrows:

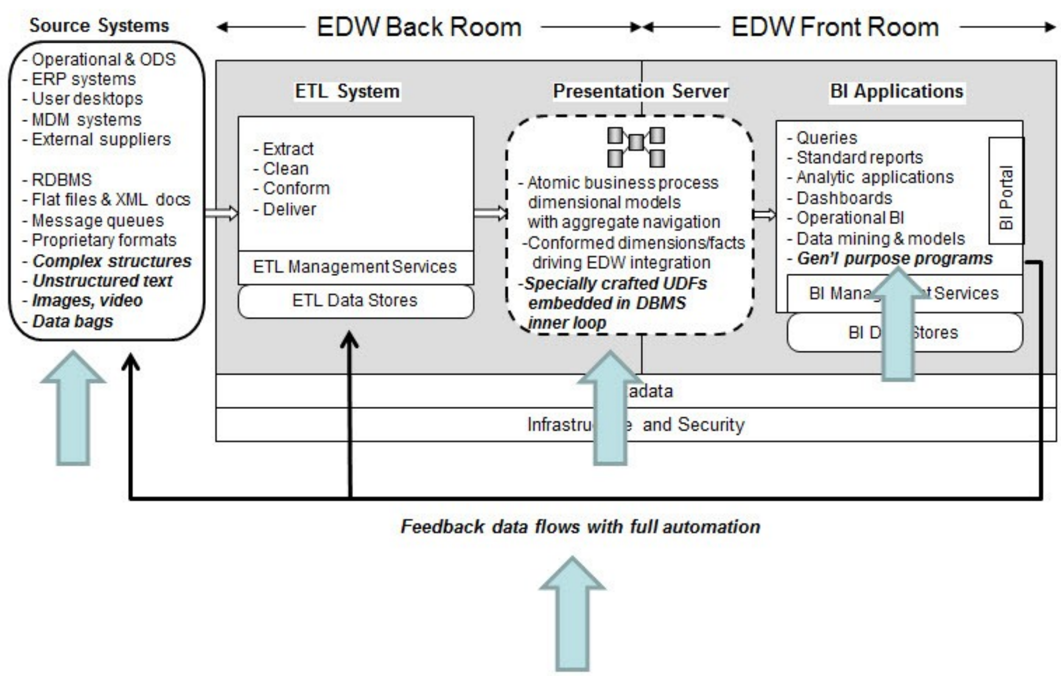

Figure 2. The extended RDBMS – based architecture for an enterprise data warehouse

The fact that the high-level enterprise data warehouse architecture is not materially changed by the introduction of new data structures, or a growing library of specially crafted user-defined functions, or powerful procedural language-based programs acting as powerful BI clients, is the charm of the extended RDBMS approach to big data analytics. The major RDBMS players are able to marshal their enormous legacy of millions of lines of code, powerful governance capabilities, and system stability built over decades of serving the marketplace.

However, it is the opinion of this author that the extended RDBMS systems cannot be the only solution for big data analytics. At some point, tacking on non-relational data structures and non-relational processing algorithms to the basic, coherent RDBMS architecture will become unwieldy and inefficient. The Swiss Army knife analogy comes to mind. Another analogy closer to the topic is the programming language PL/1. Originally designed as an overarching, multipurpose, powerful programming language for all forms of data and all applications, it ultimately became a bloated and sprawling corpus that tried to do too many things in a single language. Since the heyday of PL/1 there has been a wonderful evolution of more narrowly focused programming languages with many new concepts and features that simply couldn't be tacked on to PL/1 after a certain point. Relational database management systems do so many things so well that there is no danger of suffering the same fate as PL/1. The big data analytics space is growing so rapidly and in such exciting and unexpected new directions that a lighter weight, more flexible and more agile processing framework in addition to RDBMS systems may be a reasonable alternative.

MapReduce/Hadoop systems

MapReduce is a processing framework originally developed by Google in the early 2000s for performing web page searches across thousands of physically separated machines. The MapReduce approach is extremely general. Complete MapReduce systems can be implemented in a variety of languages although the most significant implementation is in Java. MapReduce is really a UDF (user defined function) execution framework, where the "F" can be extraordinarily complex. Originally targeted to building Google's webpage search index, a MapReduce job can be defined for virtually any data structure and any application. The target processors that actually perform the requested computation can be identical (a "cluster"), or can be a heterogeneous mix of processor types (a "grid"). The data in each processor upon which the ultimate computation is performed can be stored in a database, or more commonly in a file system, and can be in any digital format.

The most significant implementation of MapReduce is Apache Hadoop, known simply as Hadoop. Hadoop is an open source, top-level Apache project, with thousands of contributors and a whole industry of diverse applications. Hadoop runs natively on its own distributed file system (HDFS) and can also read and write to Amazon S3 and others. Conventional database vendors are also implementing interfaces to allow Hadoop jobs to be run over massively distributed instances of their databases.

As we will see when we give a brief overview of how a Hadoop job works, bandwidth between the separate processors can be a huge issue. HDFS is a so-called "rack aware" file system because the central name node knows which nodes reside on the same rack and which are connected by more than one network hop. Hadoop exploits the relationship between the central job dispatcher and HDFS to significantly optimize a massively distributed processing task by having detailed knowledge of where data actually resides. This also implies that a critical aspect of performance control is co-locating segments of data on actual physical hardware racks so that the MapReduce communication can be accomplished at backplane speeds rather than slower network speeds. Note that remote cloud-based file systems such as Amazon S3 and

CloudStore are, by their nature, unable to provide the rack aware benefit. Of course, cloud-based file systems have a number of compelling advantages which we'll discuss later.

How MapReduce works in Hadoop

A MapReduce job is submitted to a centralized JobTracker, which in turn schedules parts of the job to a number of TaskTracker nodes. Although, in general a TaskTracker may fail and its task can be reassigned by the JobTracker, the JobTracker is a single point of failure. If the JobTracker halts, the MapReduce job must be restarted or be resumed from intermediate snapshots.

A MapReduce job is always divided into two distinct phases, map and reduce. The overall input to a MapReduce job is divided into many equal sized splits, each of which is assigned a map task. The map function is then applied to each record in each split. For large jobs, the job tracker schedules these map tasks in parallel. The overall performance of a MapReduce job depends significantly on achieving a balance of enough parallel splits to keep many machines busy, but not so many parallel splits that the interprocess communication of managing all the splits bogs down the overall job. When MapReduce is run over the HDFS file system, a typical default split size is 64 MB of input data.

As the name suggests, the map task is the first half of the MapReduce job. Each map task produces a set of intermediate result records which are written to the local disk of the machine performing the map task. The second half of the MapReduce job, the reduce task, may run on any processing node. The outputs of the mappers (nodes running map tasks) are sorted and partitioned in such a way that these outputs can be transferred to the reducers (nodes running the reduce task). The final outputs of the reducers comprise the sorted and partitioned results set of the overall MapReduce job. In MapReduce running over HDFS, the results set is written to HDFS and is replicated for reliability.

In Figure 3, we show this task flow for a MapReduce job with three mapper nodes feeding two reducer nodes, by reproducing figure 2.3 from Tom White's book, Hadoop, The Definitive Guide, 2nd Edition, (O'Reilly, 2010).

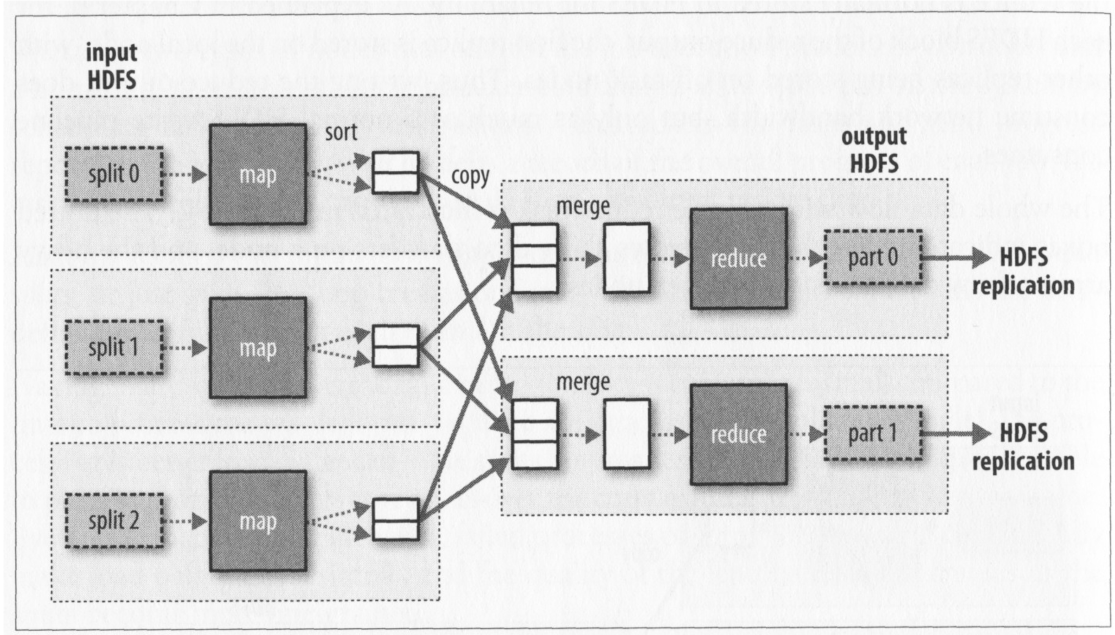

Figure 3. An example MapReduce job

In Tom White's book, a simple MapReduce job is described which we extend somewhat here. Suppose that the original data before the splits are applied consists of a very large number (perhaps billions) of unsorted temperature measurements, one per record. Such measurements could come from many thousands of automatic sensors located around the United States. The splits are assigned to the separate mapper nodes to equalize as much as possible the number of records going to each node. The actual form of the mapper inputs are key-value pairs, in this case a sequential record identifier and the full record containing the temperature measurements as well as other data. The job of each mapper is simply to parse the records presented to it and extract the year, the state, and the temperature, which becomes the second set of key-value pairs passed from the mapper to the reducer.

The job of each reducer is to find the maximum reported temperature for each state, and each distinct year in the records passed to it. Each reducer is responsible for a state, so in order to accomplish the transfer, the output of each mapper must be sorted so that the key-value pairs can be dispatched to the appropriate reducers. In this case there would be 50 reducers, one for each state. These sorted blocks are then transferred to the reducers in a step which is a critical feature of the MapReduce architecture, where it is called the "shuffle."

Notice that the shuffle involves a true physical transfer of data between processing nodes. This makes the value of the rack aware feature more obvious, since a lot of data needs to be moved from the mappers to the reducers. The clever reader may wonder if this data transfer could be reduced by having the mapper outputs combined so that many readings from a single state and year are given to the reducer as a single key-value pair rather than many. The answer is “yes,” and Hadoop provides a combiner function to accomplish exactly this end.

Each reducer receives a large number of state/year-temperature key-value pairs, and finds the maximum temperature for a given year. These maximum temperatures for each year are the final output from each reducer.

This approach can be scaled more or less indefinitely. Really serious MapReduce jobs running on HDFS may have hundreds or thousands of mappers and reducers, processing petabytes of input data.

At this point the appeal of the MapReduce/Hadoop approach should be clear. There are virtually no restrictions on the form of the inputs to the overall job. There only needs to be some rational basis for creating splits and reading records, in this case the record identifier in Tom White's example. Actual logic in the mappers and the reducers can be programmed in virtually any programming language and can be as simple as the above example, or much more complicated UDFs. The reader should be able to visualize how some of the more complex use cases (e.g., comparison of satellite images) described earlier in the paper could fit into this framework.

Tools for the Hadoop environment

What we have described thus far is the core processing component when MapReduce is run in the Hadoop environment. This is roughly equivalent to describing the inner processing loop in a relational database management system. In both cases there's a lot more to these systems to implement a complete functioning environment. The following is a brief overview of typical tools used in a MapReduce/Hadoop environment. We group these tools by overall function. Tom White's book, mentioned above, is an excellent starting point for understanding how these tools are used.

Getting data in and getting data out

- ETL platforms -- ETL platforms, with their long history of importing and exporting data to relational databases, provide specific interfaces for moving data into and out of HDFS. The platform-based approach, as contrasted with hand coding, provides extensive support for metadata, data quality, documentation, and a visual style of system building.
- Sqoop – Sqoop, developed by Cloudera, is an open source tool that allows importing data from a relational source to HDFS and exporting data from HDFS to a relational target. Data imported by Sqoop into HDFS can be used both by MapReduce applications and HBase applications. HBase is described below.
- Scribe – Scribe, developed at Facebook and released as open source, is used to aggregate log data from a large number of Web servers.
- Flume – Flume, developed by Cloudera, is a distributed reliable streaming data collection service. It uses a central configuration managed by Zookeeper and supports tunable reliability and automatic failover and recovery.

Programming

- Low-level MapReduce programming -- primary code for mappers and reducers can be written in a number of languages. Hadoop's native language is Java but Hadoop exposes APIs for writing code in other languages such as Ruby and Python. An interface to C++ is provided, which is named Hadoop Pipes. Programming MapReduce at the lowest level obviously provides the most potential power, but this level of programming is very much like assembly language programming. It can be very laborious, especially when attempting to do conceptually simple tasks like joining two data sets.
- High level MapReduce programming -- Apache Pig, or simply Pig, is a client-side open-source application providing a high level programming language for processing large data sets in MapReduce. The programming language itself is called Pig Latin. Hive is an alternative application designed to look much more like SQL, and is used for data warehousing use cases. When employed for the appropriate use cases, Pig and the Hive provide enormous programming productivity benefits over low-level MapReduce programming, often by a factor of 10 or more. Pig and Hive lift the application developer's perspective up from managing the detailed mapper and reducer processes to more of an applications focus.
- Integrated development environment – MapReduce/Hadoop development needs to move decisively away from bare hand coding to be adopted by mainstream IT shops. An integrated development environment for MapReduce/Hadoop needs to include editors for source code, compilers, tools for automating system builds, debuggers, and a version control system.
- Integrated application environment – an even higher layer above an integrated development environment could be called an integrated application environment, where complex reusable analytic routines are assembled into complete applications via a graphical user interface. This kind of environment might be able to use open source algorithms such as provided by the Apache Mahout project which distributes machine learning algorithms on Hadoop platform.
- Cascading -- Cascading is another tool that is an abstraction layer for writing complex MapReduce applications. It is best described as a thin Java library typically invoked from command line to be used as a query API and process scheduler. It is not intended to be a comprehensive alternative to Pig or Hive.
- HBase -- HBase is an open-source, nonrelational, column oriented database that runs directly on Hadoop. It is not a MapReduce implementation. A principal differentiator of HBase from Pig or Hive (MapReduce implementations) is the ability to provide real-time read and write random-access to very large data sets.

- Oozie -- Oozie is a server-based workflow engine specialized in running workflow jobs with actions that execute Hadoop jobs, such as MapReduce, Pig, Hive, Sqoop, HDFS operations, and sub-workflows.

- ZooKeeper – ZooKeeper is a centralized configuration manager for distributed applications. Zookeeper can be used independently of Hadoop as well.

Administering

- Embedded Hadoop admin features – Hadoop supports a comprehensive runtime environment including edit log, safe mode operation, audit logging, filesystem check, data node block verifier, data node block distribution balancer, performance monitor, comprehensive log files, metrics for administrators, counters for MapReduce users, metadata backup, data backup, filesystem balancer, commissioning and decommissioning nodes.
- Java management extensions – a standard Java API for monitoring and managing applications
- GangliaContext – an open source distributed monitoring system for very large clusters

Feature convergence in the coming decade

It is safe to say that relational database management systems and MapReduce/ Hadoop systems will increasingly find ways to coexist gracefully in the coming decade. But the systems have distinct characteristics, as depicted in the following table:

Relational DBMSs	MapReduce/Hadoop
Proprietary, mostly	Open source
Expensive	Less expensive
Data requires structuring	Data does not require structuring
Great for speedy indexed lookups	Great for massive full data scans
Deep support for relational semantics	Indirect support for relational semantics, e.g. Hive
Indirect support for complex data structures	Deep support for complex data structures
Indirect support for iteration, complex branching	Deep support for iteration, complex branching
Deep support for transaction processing	Little or no support for transaction processing

In the upcoming decade RDBMSs will extend their support for hosting complex data types as "blobs", and will extend APIs for arbitrary analytic routines to operate on the contents of records. MapReduce/Hadoop systems, especially Hive, will deepen their support for SQL interfaces and fuller support of the complete SQL language. But neither will take over the market for big data analytics exclusively. As remarked earlier, RDBMSs cannot provide "relational" semantics for many of the complex use cases required by big data analytics. At best, RDBMSs will provide relational structure surrounding the complex payloads.

Similarly, MapReduce/Hadoop systems will never take over ACID-compliant transaction processing, or become superior to RDBMSs for indexed queries on row and column oriented tables.

As this paper is being written, significant advances are being made in developing hybrid systems using both relational database technology and MapReduce/Hadoop technology. Figure 4 illustrates two primary alternatives. The first alternative delivers the data directly into a MapReduce/Hadoop configuration for primary non-relational analysis. As we have described, this analysis can range the full gamut from complex analytical routines to simple sorting that looks like a conventional ETL step. When the MapReduce/Hadoop step is complete, the results are loaded into an RDBMS for conventional structured querying with SQL.

The second alternative configuration loads the data directly to an RDBMS, even when the primary data payloads are not conventional scalar measurements. At that point two analysis modes are possible. The data can be analyzed with specially crafted user-defined functions, effectively from the BI layer, or passed to a downstream MapReduce/Hadoop application.

In the future even more complex combinations will tie these architectures more closely together, including MapReduce systems whose mappers and reducers are actually relational databases, and relational database systems whose underling storage consists of HDFS files.

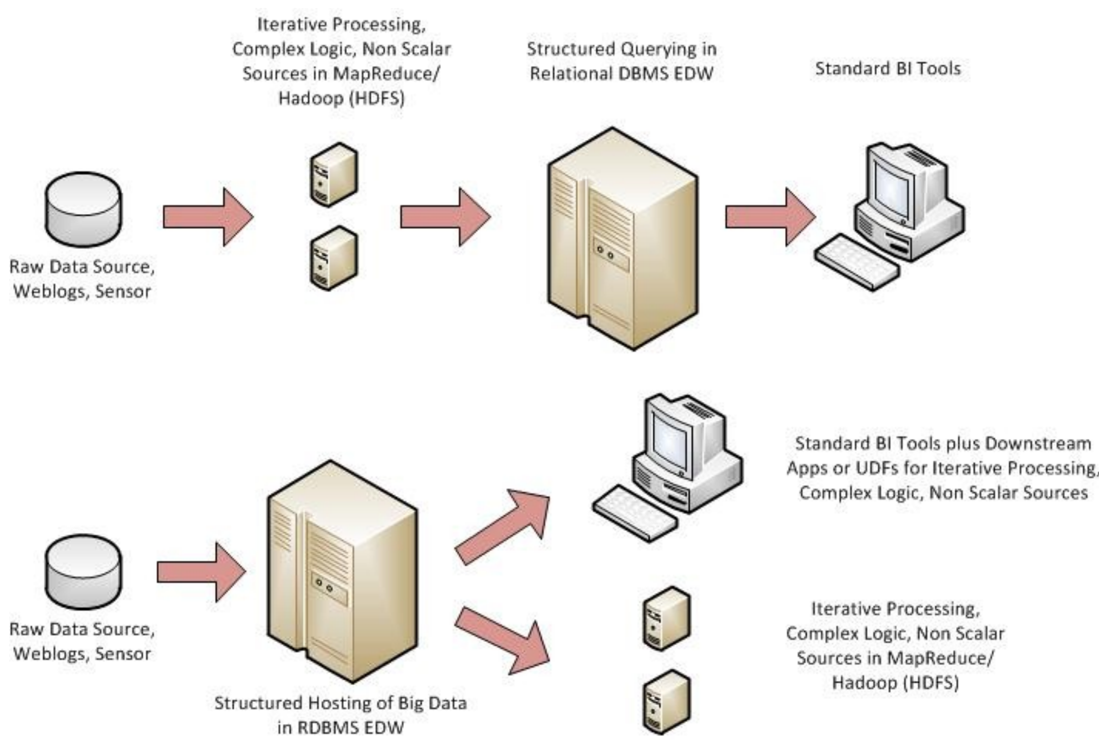

Figure 4. Alternative hybrid architectures using both RDBMS and Hadoop.

It will probably be difficult for IT organizations to sort out the vendor claims which will almost certainly claim that their systems do everything. In some cases these claims are "objection removers" which means that they are claims that have a grain of truth to them, and are made to make you feel good, but do not stand up to scrutiny in a competitive and practical environment. Buyer beware!

Reusable analytics

Up to this point we have begged the issue of where does all the special analytic software come from. Big data analytics will never prosper if every instance is a custom coded solution. Both the RDBMS and the open-source communities recognize this and two main development themes have emerged. High-end statistical analysis vendors, such as SAS, have developed extensive and proprietary reusable libraries for a wide range of analytic applications, including advanced statistics, data mining, predictive analytics, feature detection, linear models, discriminant analysis, and many others. The open source community has a number of initiatives, the most notable of which are Hadoop-ML and Apache Mahout. Quoting from Hadoop-ML's website:

> " Hadoop-ML (is) an infrastructure to facilitate the implementation of parallel machine learning/data mining (ML/DM) algorithms on Hadoop. Hadoop-ML has been designed to allow for the specification of both task-parallel and data-parallel ML/DM algorithms. Furthermore, it supports the composition of parallel ML/DM algorithms using both serial as well as parallel building blocks -- this allows one to write reusable parallel code. The proposed abstraction eases the implementation process by requiring the user to only specify computations and their dependencies, without worrying about scheduling, data management, and communication. As a consequence, the codes are portable in that the user never needs to write Hadoop-specific code. This potentially allows one to leverage future parallelization platforms without rewriting one's code."

Apache Mahout provides free implementations of machine learning algorithms on Hadoop platform.

Complex event processing (CEP)

Complex event processing (CEP) consists of processing events happening inside and outside an organization to identify meaningful patterns in order to take subsequent action in real time. For example, CEP is used in utility networks (electrical, gas and water) to identify possible issues before they become detrimental. These CEP deployments allow for real-time intervention for critical network or infrastructure situations. The combination of deep DW analytics and CEP can be applied in retail customer settings to analyze behavior and identify situations where a company may lose a customer or be able to sell them additional products or services at the time of their direct engagement. In banking, sophisticated analytics might help to identify the 10 most common patterns of fraud and CEP can then be used to watch for those patterns so they may be thwarted before a loss.

At the time of this white paper, CEP is not generally thought of as part of the EDW, but this author believes that technical advances in continuous query processing will cause CEP and EDW to share data and work more closely together in the coming decade.

Data warehouse cultural changes in the coming decade

The enterprise data warehouse must absolutely stay relevant to the business. As the value and the visibility of big data analytics grows, the data warehouse must encompass the new culture, skills, techniques, and systems required for big data analytics.

Sandboxes

For example, big data analysis encourages exploratory sandboxes for experimentation. These sandboxes are copies or segments of the massive data sets being sourced by the organization. Individual analysts or very small groups are encouraged to analyze the data with a very wide variety of tools, ranging from serious statistical tools like SAS, Matlab or R, to predictive models, and many forms of ad hoc querying and visualization through advanced BI graphical interfaces. The analyst responsible for a given sandbox is allowed to do anything with the data, using any tool they want, even if the tools they use are not corporate standards. The sandbox phenomenon has enormous energy but it carries a significant risk to the IT organization and EDW architecture because it could create isolated and incompatible stovepipes of data. This point is amplified in the section on organizational changes, below.

Exploratory sandboxes usually have a limited time duration, lasting weeks or at most a few months. Their data can be a frozen snapshot, or a window on a certain segment of incoming data. The analyst may have permission to run an experiment changing a feature on the product or service in the marketplace, and then performing A/B testing to see how the change affects customer behavior. Typically, if such an experiment produces a successful result, the sandbox experiment is terminated, and the feature goes into production. At that point, tracking applications that may have been implemented in the sandbox using a quick and dirty prototyping language, are usually reimplemented by other personnel in the EDW environment using corporate standard tools. In several of the e-commerce enterprises interviewed for this white paper, analytic sandboxes were extremely important, and in some cases hundreds of the sandbox experiments were ongoing simultaneously. As one interviewee commented, "newly discovered patterns have the most disruptive potential, and insights from them lead to the highest returns on investment."

Architecturally, sandboxes should not be brute force copies of entire data sets, or even major segments of these data sets. In dimensional modeling parlance, the analyst needs much more than just a fact table to run the experiment. At a minimum the analyst also needs one or more very large dimension tables, and possibly additional fact tables for complete "drill across" analysis. If 100 analysts are creating brute force copy versions of the data for the sandboxes there will be enormous wasting of disk space and resources for all the redundant copies. Remember that the largest dimension tables, such as customer dimensions, can have 500 million rows! The recommended architecture for a serious sandbox environment is to build each sandbox using conformed (shared) dimensions which are incorporated into each sandbox as relational views, or their equivalent under Hadoop applications.

Low latency

An elementary mistake when gathering business requirements during the design of a data warehouse is to ask the business user if they want "real time" data. Users are likely to say "of course!" Although perhaps this answer has been somewhat gratuitous in the past, a good business case can now be made in many situations that more frequent updates of data delivered to the business with lower and lower latencies are justified. Both RDBMSs and MapReduce/Hadoop systems struggle with loading gigantic amounts of data and making that data available within seconds of that data being created. But the marketplace wants this, and regardless of a technologist's doubt about the requirement, the requirement is real and over the next decade it must be addressed.

An interesting angle on low latency data is the desire to begin serious analysis on the data as it is streaming in, but possibly far before the data collection process even terminates. There is significant interest in streaming analysis systems which allow SQL-like queries to process the data as it flows into the system. In some use cases when the results of a streaming query surpass a threshold, the analysis can be halted without running the job to the bitter end. An academic effort, known as continuous query language (CQL), has made impressive progress in defining the requirements for streaming data processing including clever semantics for dynamically moving time windows on the streaming data. Look for CQL language extensions and streaming data query capabilities in the load programs for both RDBMSs and HDFS deployed data sets. An ideal implementation would allow streaming data analysis to take place while the data is being loaded at gigabytes per second.

The availability of extremely frequent and extremely detailed event measurements can drive interactive intervention. The use cases where this intervention is important spans many situations ranging from online gaming to product offer suggestions to financial account fraud responses to the stability of networks.

Continuous thirst for more exquisite detail

Analysts are forever thirsting for more detail in every marketplace observation, especially of customer behavior. For example every webpage event (a page being painted on a user's screen) spawns hundreds of records describing every object on the page. In online games, where every gesture enters the data stream, as many as 100 descriptors are attached to each of these gesture micro-events. For instance, in a hypothetical online baseball game, when the batter swings at a pitch, everything describing the position of the players, the score, runners on the bases, and even the characteristics of the pitch, are all stored with that individual record. In both of these examples, the complete context must be captured within the current record, because it is impractical to compute this detailed context after the fact from separate data sources. The lesson for the coming decade is that this thirst for exquisite detail will only grow. It is possible to imagine thousands of attributes being attached to some micro-events, and the categories and names of these attributes will grow in unpredictable ways. This makes the data bag approach discussed earlier in the paper much more important. It means that positionally dependent schemas, with the keys (names of the data) pre-declared as column names is an unworkable design.

Finally, a perfect historical reconstruction of interesting events such as webpage exposures needs to be more than just a list of attributes on the webpage when it was displayed, even if that list is enormously detailed. A perfect historical reconstruction of the webpage needs to be seen through a multimedia user interface, i.e., a browser.

Light touch data waits for its relevance to be exposed

Light touch data is an aspect of the exquisite detail data described in the previous section. For example, if a customer browses a website extensively before making a purchase, a great deal of micro-context is stored in all the webpage events prior to the purchase. When the purchase is made, some of that micro-context suddenly becomes much more important, and is elevated from "light touch data" to real data. At that point the sequence of exposures to the selected product or to competitive products in the same space becomes possible to be sessionized. These micro-events are pretty much meaningless before the purchase event, because there are so many conceivable and irrelevant threads that would be dead ends for analysis. This requires oceans of light touch data to be stored, waiting for the relevance of selected threads of these micro-events to eventually be exposed. Conventional seasonality thinking suggests that at least five quarters (15 months) of this light touch data needs to be kept online. This is one instance of a remark made consistently during interviews for this white paper that analysts want "longer tails" which means that they want more significant histories than they currently get.

Simple analysis of all the data trumps sophisticated analysis of some of the data

Although data sampling has never been a popular technique in data warehousing, surprisingly the arrival of enormous petabyte sized data sets has not increased the interest in analyzing a subset of the data. On the contrary, a number of analysts point out that monetizable insights can be derived from very small populations that could be missed by only sampling some of the data. Of course this is a somewhat controversial point, since the same analysts admit that if you have 1 trillion behavior observation records, you may be able to find any behavior pattern if you look hard enough.

Another somewhat controversial point raised by some analysts is their concern that any form of data cleaning on the incoming data could erase interesting low-frequency "edge cases." Ultimately both the cases of misleading rare behavior patterns, and misleading corrupted data need to be gently filtered out of the data.

Assuming that the behavior insights from very small populations are valid, there is widespread recognition that micro-marketing to the small populations is possible, and doing enough of this can build a sustainable strategic advantage.

A final argument in favor of analyzing complete data sets is that these "relation scans" do not require indexes or aggregations to be computed in advance of the analysis. This approach fits well with the basic MapReduce distributed analysis architecture.

Data structures should be declared at query time, not at data load time

A number of analysts interviewed for this white paper said that the enormous data sets they were trying to analyze needed to be loaded in a queryable state before the structure and content of the data sets were completely understood. Again, thinking of the data bag kind of marketplace observation where within a well-structured dimensional measurement process the actual observation is a disorderly and potentially unpredictable set of key value pairs, the structure of this data bag may need to be discovered, and alternate interpretation of the structures may need to be possible without reloading the database. One respondent remarked that "yesterday's fringe data is tomorrow's well-structured data," implying that we need exceptional flexibility as we explore new kinds of data sources.

A key differentiator between the RDBMS approach and the MapReduce/Hadoop approach is the deferral of the data structure declaration until query time in the MapReduce/Hadoop systems. An objection from the RDBMS community that forcing every MapReduce job to declare the target data structure promotes a kind of chaos because every analyst can do their own thing. But that objection seems to miss the point that a standard data structure declaration can easily be published as a library module that can be picked up by every analyst when they are implementing their application.

The EDW supporting big data analytics must be magnetic, agile, and deep

Cohen and Dolan in their seminal but somewhat controversial paper on big data analytics argue that EDWs must shed some old orthodoxies in order to be "magnetic, agile, and deep." A *magnetic* environment places the least impediments on the incorporation of new, unexpected, and potentially dirty data sources. Specifically, this supports the need to defer declaration of data structures until after the data is loaded. According to Cohen and Dolan, an *agile* environment eschews long-range careful design and planning! And a *deep* environment allows running sophisticated analytic algorithms on massive data sets without sampling, or perhaps even cleaning. We have made these points elsewhere in this white paper but Cohen and Dolan's paper is a particularly potent, if unusual, argument. Read this paper to get some provocative perspectives! A link to Cohen and Dolan's paper is provided in the references section at the end of this white paper.

The conflict between abstraction and control

In the MapReduce/Hadoop world, Pig and Hive are widely regarded as valuable abstractions that allow the programmer to focus on database semantics rather than programming directly in Java. But several analysts interviewed for this paper remarked that too much abstraction and too much distancing from where the data actually is stored can be disastrously inefficient. This seems like a reasonable concern when dealing with the very largest data sets, where a bad algorithm could result in runtimes measured in days. For the breaking wave of the biggest data sets, programming tools will need to allow considerable control over the storage strategy, and the processing approaches, but without requiring programming using the lowest level code.

Data warehouse organization changes in the coming decade

The growing importance of big data analytics amounts to something between a midcourse correction and a revolution for enterprise data warehousing. New skill sets, new organizations, new development paradigms, and new technology will need to be absorbed by many enterprises, especially those facing the use cases described in this paper. Not every enterprise needs to jump into the petabyte ocean, but it is this author's prediction that the upcoming decade will see a steady growth in the percentage of large enterprises recognizing the value of big data analytics.

Most observers would agree that big data analytics falls within "information management," but the same observers may quibble about whether this affects the "data warehouse." Rather than worrying about whether the box on the organization chart labeled EDW has responsibility for big data analytics, we take the perspective that enterprise data warehousing without the capital letters absolutely encompasses big data analytics. Having said that, there will be many different organizational structures and management perspectives as industries expand their information management. This kind of tinkering and adjusting to the new paradigm is normal and expected. We went through a very similar phase in the mid 1980s when data warehousing itself was a new paradigm for IT and the business. Many of the most successful early data warehousing initiatives started in the business organizations and were eventually incorporated into those IT organizations that then made major commitments to being business relevant. It is likely the same evolution will take place with big data analytics.

The challenge before information managers in large enterprises is how to encourage three separate data warehouse endeavors: conventional RDBMS applications, MapReduce/Hadoop applications, and advanced analytics.

Technical skill sets required

It is worth repeating here the message of the very first sentence of this white paper. Petabyte scale data sets are of course a big challenge but big data analysis is often about difficulties other than data volume. You can have fast arriving data or complex data or complex analyses which are very challenging even if all you have are terabytes of data!

The care and feeding of RDBMS-oriented data warehouses involves a comprehensive set of skills that is pretty well understood: SQL programming, ETL platform expertise, database modeling, task scheduling, system building and maintenance skills, one or more scripting languages such as Python or Perl, UNIX or Windows operating system skills, and business intelligence tools skills. SQL programming, which is at the core of an RDBMS implementation, is a declarative language, which contrasts with the mindset of the procedural language skills needed for MapReduce/Hadoop programming, at least in Java. The data warehouse team also needs to have a good partnership within other areas of IT including storage management, security, networking, and support of mobile devices. Finally, good data warehousing also requires an extensive involvement with the business community, and with the cognitive psychology of end-users!

The care and feeding of MapReduce/Hadoop data warehouses, including any of the big data analytics use cases described in this paper, involves a set of skills that only partially overlap traditional RDBMS data warehouse skills. Therein lies a significant challenge. These new skills include lower-level programming languages such as Java, C++, Ruby, Python, and MapReduce interfaces most commonly available via Java. Although the requirement to program via procedural based lower-level programming languages will be reduced significantly during the upcoming decade in favor of Pig, Hive, and HBase, it may be easier to recruit MapReduce/Hadoop application developers from the programming community rather than the data warehouse community, if the data warehouse job applicants lack programming and UNIX skills. If MapReduce/Hadoop data warehouses are managed exclusively with open source tools, then Zookeeper and Oozie skills will be needed too. Keep in mind that the open-source community innovates quickly. Hive, Pig and HBase are not the last word in high-level interfaces to Hadoop for analysis. It is likely that we will see much more innovation in this decade including entirely new interfaces.

ETL platform providers have a big opportunity to provide much of the glue that will tie together the big data sources, MapReduce/Hadoop applications, and existing relational databases. Developers with ETL platform skills will be able to leverage a great deal of their experience and instincts in system building when they incorporate MapReduce/Hadoop applications.

Finally, the analysts whom we have described as often working in sandbox environments will arrive with an eclectic and unpredictable set of skills starting with deep analytic expertise. For these people it is probably more important to be conversant in SAS, Matlab, or R than to have specific programming language or operating system skills. Such individuals typically will arrive with UNIX skills, and some reasonable programming proficiency, and most of these people are extremely tolerant of learning new complex technical environments. Perhaps the biggest challenge with traditional analysts is getting them to rely on the other resources available to them within IT, rather than building their own extract and data delivery pipelines. This is a tricky balance because you want to give the analysts unusual freedom, but you need to look over their shoulders to make sure that they are not wasting their time.

New organizations required

At this early stage of the big data analytics revolution, there is no question that the analysts must be part of the business organization, both to understand the microscopic workings of the business, but also to be able to conduct the kind of rapid turnaround experiments and investigations we have described in this paper. As we have described, these analysts must be heavily supported in a technical sense, with potentially massive compute power and data transfer bandwidth. So although the analysts may reside in the business organizations, this is a great opportunity for IT to gain credibility and presence with the business. It would be a significant mistake and a lost opportunity for the analysts and their sandboxes to exist as rogue technical outposts in the business world without recognizing and taking advantage of their deep dependence on the traditional IT world.

In some organizations we interviewed for this white paper, we saw separate analytic groups embedded within different business organizations, but without very much cross communication or common identity established among the analytic groups. In some noteworthy cases, this lack of an "analytic community" led to lost opportunities to leverage each other's work, and led to multiple groups reinventing the same approaches, and duplicating programming efforts and infrastructure demands as they made separate copies of the same data.

We recommend that a cross divisional analytics community be established mimicking some of the successful data warehouse community building efforts we have seen in the past decade. Such a community should have regular cross divisional meetings, as well as a kind of private LinkedIn application to promote awareness of all the contacts and perspectives and resources that these individuals collect in their own investigations, and a private web portal where information and news events are shared. Periodic talks can be given, hopefully inviting members of the business community as well, and above all the analytics community needs T-shirts and mugs!

New development paradigms required

Even before the arrival of big data analytics, data warehousing has been transforming itself to provide more rapid response to new opportunities and to be more in touch with the business community. Some of the practices of the agile software development movement have been successfully adopted by the data warehouse community, although realistically this has not been a highly visible transformation. But, in particular, the agile development approach supports the data warehouse by being organized around small teams driven by the business, not typically by IT. An agile development effort also produces frequent tangible deliveries, deemphasizes documentation and formal development methodologies, and tolerates midcourse correction and the incremental acceptance of new requirements. The most sensitive ingredient for success of agile development projects is the personality and skills of the business leader who ultimately is in charge. The agile business leader needs to be a thoughtful and sophisticated observer of the development process and the realities of the information world. Hopefully the agile business leader is a pretty good manager as well.

Big data analytics certainly opens the door to business involvement since the central analysis is probably done in the business environment directly. But it is probably unlikely that the professional analyst is the right person to be the overall agile data warehouse project leader. The agile project leader needs to be well skilled in facilitating short effective meetings, resolving issues and development choices, determining the truth of progress reports from individual developers, communicating with the rest of the organization, and getting funding for initiatives.

Traditional data warehouse development has discovered the attractiveness of building incrementally from a modest start, but with a good architectural foundation that provides a blueprint for where future development will go. This author has described in many papers the techniques for "graceful modification" of dimensional data warehouse schemas. In a dimensionally modeled data warehouse, new measurement facts, new dimensional attributes, and even new dimensions can be added to existing data warehouse applications without changing, invalidating, or rolling over existing information delivery pipelines to the end users. Many of the use cases we have described in this paper for big data analytics suggest that new facts, new attributes, and new dimensions will routinely become available.

Integration of new data sources into a data warehouse has always been a significant challenge, since often these new data sources arrive without any thought to integration with existing data sources. This will certainly be the case with big data analytics. Again for dimensionally modeled data warehouses, this author has described techniques for incremental integration, where "enterprise dimensional attributes" are defined and planted in the dimensions of the separate data sources. We call these conformed dimensions. The development and deployment of conformed dimensions fits the agile development approach beautifully, since this kind of integration can be implemented one data source at a time, and one dimensional attribute at a time, again in a way that is nondestructive to existing applications. Please see the references section at the end of this white paper for more information on conformed dimensions.

Finally, at least one organization interviewed for this white paper has taken agility to its logical extreme. Individual developers are given complete end-to-end responsibility for a project, all the way from original sourcing of the data, through experimental analysis, re-implementing the project for production use, and working with the end-users and their BI tools in supportive mode. Although this development approach remains an experiment, early results are very interesting because these developers feel a significant sense of responsibility and pride for their projects.

Lessons from the early data warehousing era

It took most of the 1990s for organizations to understand what a data warehouse was and how to build and manage those kinds of systems. Interestingly, at the end of the 1990s, data warehousing was effectively relabeled as business intelligence. This was a very positive development because it reflected the need for the business to own and take responsibility for the uses of data.

The earliest data warehouse pioneers had no choice but to do their own systems integration, assembling best-of-breed components, and coping with the inevitable incompatibilities in issues of dealing with multiple vendors. By the end of the 1990s, the best of breed approach gave way to vendor stacks of integrated products, a trend which continues until today. At this point, there are only a few independent vendors in the data warehouse space, and those vendors have succeeded by interfacing with nearly every conceivable format and interface, thereby providing bridges between the more limited proprietary vendor stacks.

With the benefit of hindsight gained from the traditional data warehouse experience, the big data analytics version of data warehousing is likely to consolidate quite quickly. Only the bravest organizations with very strong software development skills should consider rolling their own big data analytics applications directly on raw MapReduce/Hadoop. For information management organizations wishing to focus on the business issues rather than on the breaking wave of software development, a packaged Hadoop distribution (e.g., Cloudera) makes a lot of sense. The leading ETL platform vendors likely will also introduce packaged environments for handling many of the phases of MapReduce/Hadoop development.

Analytics in the cloud

This white paper has not discussed cloud implementations of big data analytics. Most of the enterprises interviewed for this white paper were not using public cloud implementations for their production analytics. Nevertheless, cloud implementations may be very attractive in the startup phase for an analytics effort. A cloud service can provide instant scalability during this startup phase, without committing to a massive legacy investment in hardware. Data analysis projects can be turned on and turned off on short notice. Recall that typical analytic environments may involve hundreds of separate sandboxes and parallel experiments.

Many of the organizations interviewed for this paper stated that mature analytics should be brought in-house, perhaps implemented technically as a cloud but within the confines of the organization. Of course, such an in-house cloud may reduce fears of security and privacy breaches (fairly or not).

A remote cloud implementation raises issues of network bandwidth, especially in a broadly integrated application with multiple very large data sets in different locations. Imagine solving the big join problem where your trillion row fact table is out on the cloud, and your billion row dimension table is located in-house.

Although the best performing systems try to achieve a three-way balance among CPU, disk speed, and bandwidth, most organizations interviewed for this paper predicted that bandwidth would emerge as the number one limiting factor for big data analytics system performance.

Whither EDW?

The enterprise data warehouse must expand to encompass big data analytics as part of overall information management. The mission of the data warehouse has always been to collect the data assets of the organization and structure them in a way that is most useful to decision-makers. Although some organizations may persist with a box on the org chart labeled EDW that is restricted to traditional reporting activities on transactional data, the scope of the EDW should grow to reflect these new big data developments. In some sense there are only two functions of IT: getting the data in (transaction processing), and getting the data out. The EDW is getting the data out.

The big choice facing shops with growing big data analytics investments is whether to choose an RDBMS-only solution, or a dual RDBMS and MapReduce/Hadoop solution. This author predicts that the dual solution will dominate, and in many cases the two architectures will not exist as separate islands but rather will have rich data pipelines going in both directions. It is safe to say that both architectures will evolve hugely over the next decade, but this author predicts that both architectures will share the big data analytics marketplace at the end of the decade.

Sometimes when an exciting new technology arrives, there is a tendency to close the door on older technologies as if they were going to go away. Data warehousing has built an enormous legacy of experience, best practices, supporting structures, technical expertise, and credibility with the business world. This will be the foundation for information management in the upcoming decade as data warehousing expands to include big data analytics.

Acknowledgments

This author is grateful for Informatica's sponsoring of this white paper and for providing absolutely no "vendor bias." The opinions in this white paper are solely the responsibility of the author.

A number of smart and knowledgeable big data practitioners made themselves available during the research phase of the white paper for interviews. These individuals provided many useful insights. In alphabetic order by organization, we thank

Amr Awadallah, Mike Olson, Cloudera

Brian Dolan, Discovix

Oliver Ratzesberger, eBay

Alex Ignatius, Electronic Arts

William Schmarzo, EMC

Ashish Thusoo, Facebook

Julianna DeLua, John Haddad, Sanjay Krishnamurthi, Ron Lunasin, Informatica

Nicholas Wakefield, LinkedIn

Dan Graham, Dilip Krishna, Ron Kunze, Teradata

Professor Michael Franklin, Computer Science Department, U.C. Berkeley

Raymie Stata, Yahoo!

Dan McCaffrey, Ken Rudin, Zynga

References

An Architecture for Data Quality, a Kimball Group White paper: http://vip.informatica.com/?elqPURLPage=8784

Essential Steps for the Integrated EDW, a Kimball Group White paper: http://vip.informatica.com/?elqPURLPage=8785

Hadoop, The Definitive Guide, 2nd Edition, Tom White, O'Reilly (2011)

Hadoop-ML website: http://videolectures.net/nipsworkshops09_pednault_hmli/

MAD Skills: New Analysis Practices for Big Data, Cohen, Dolan et al, http://db.cs.berkeley.edu/jmh/papers/madskills-032009.pdf

The Data Warehouse Lifecycle Toolkit, 2nd edition, Kimball et al., Wiley (2008)