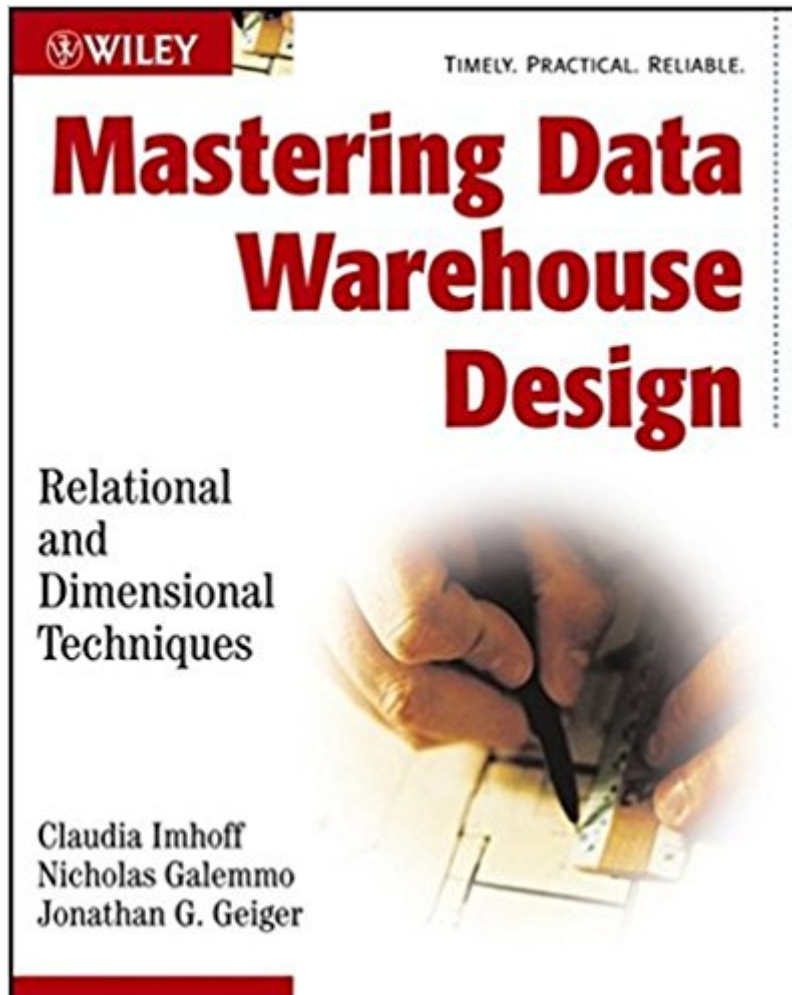# Mastering Data Warehouse Design: Relational And Dimensional Techniques

Synopsis

A cutting-edge response to Ralph Kimball's challenge to the data warehouse community that answers some tough questions about the effectiveness of the relational approach to data warehousing Written by one of the best-known exponents of the Bill Inmon approach to data warehousing Addresses head-on the tough issues raised by Kimball and explains how to choose the best modeling technique for solving common data warehouse design problems Weighs the pros and cons of relational vs. dimensional modeling techniques Focuses on tough modeling problems, including creating and maintaining keys and modeling calendars, hierarchies, transactions, and data quality

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've been to seminars by Inmon, Kimball and Imhoff, as well as read many of their books. Kimball on the one hand, is generally clear and concise on the subject and obviously understands not only DW design and implementation concepts, but how they relate to various businesses and how the business really uses the data. He's also a fairly humble man in person.Both Inmon and Imhoff on the other hand are rather self-aggrandizing (Inmon once waltzed into one of his keynote speeches dressed like a boxer to the theme from Rocky!), and both Inmon and Imhoff seem to have based their careers around bashing Kimball. In their desperation to present an alternative to Kimball's methodology and carve out their own niche, they've presented mostly incoherent, illogical and unusable ideas sometimes laced with anti-Kimball baggage. I get the feeling Inmon is kind of like

James Martin was back in the 80's, churning out countless cookie-cutter style books of dubious quality.I've designed a number of dimensional data warehouses and data marts that actually work years later using the Kimball approach, but honestly, every book I've read by Inmon and/or Imhoff has left me wondering who in the world actually uses their approach (if you can call it that) to build real-world data warehouses.If you want to have a complete library and money is no object, by all means, read everyone's ideas on data warehousing and compare and contrast for yourself (I did - I must own fifty books on the subject - but I rely on only about 5-6 books in my day to day work as a DW architect - the rest are just taking up shelf space and reminding me how nice it is to be able to read reviews at places like before you buy).

A few random comments....*The back cover says it "addresses head-on" the issues from Ralph's famous letter. I'm familiar with that letter. Either I skimmed over a couple pages too fast - and those pages had some "answer" buried in them, or, they did not really, fully, address many of the issues Ralph wrote about.*I kept getting confused - some times the book acted like it loved a synergy and partnership between the normalized and the dimensional approaches. Other it seemed to slam the dimensional approach as not working in many areas. In particular, I was shocked at the paragraph in the center of page 386. I've had no problem, using what may appear to be unrelated star schema data, in doing significant analysis and data mining.*The paragraph on page 394, under "Flexibility", says I can't do sophisticated or advanced analytics from my star schemas. I have. What am I (or, the authors) missing?*Chapter 6 - Modeling the Calendar... I feel for anyone new to this arena trying to decipher the information. I have no problems with my date or time dimensions and I can explain them to my students in a lot less time than it took me to read that chapter!*Chapter 7 - Modeling Hierarchies... Seemed a little long. I should not comment on it - when I finished reading it, I realized I had been sleeping through most of it.*I found the chart on page 100 a little scary - do they really mix the facts in a fact table? The chart shows sales and sales objectives in the same fact table. Is this just a "logical" star? Or, is their basic understanding of the dimensional model in need of an upgrade?*Not enough real world "how-to" examples.*Again, either I skimmed a few pages, or, they refer to "we'll address this in a later chapter" a few times and never did.

If you want to build a Corporate Information Factory (CIF) I suppose this book is better than many of the previous attempts at teaching how to accomplish that goal. However, like many of the previous Inmon/Imhoff books, there is too much theory (unfocused at that) and not nearly enough practical/tactical content. If you are on the CIF bandwagon however, you will find the book very

helpful as compared to most of the previous books on the topic.But that begs the question. Many a CIF or enterprise-wide project has been launched... yet most are cancelled long before reaching the finish line. This is reality. In the REAL world we have REAL deadlines and REAL budgets imposed by REAL business executives who have REAL problems to solve and it involves... oh by the way... REAL MONEY!We have to deliver NOW! Well, ok, maybe not quite that fast, but you get the idea. The hard part is getting the data! Or is it? Using simple tools and a powerfully designed, highly detailed dimensional database, we have, for example, clients pulling their own data sets ready for import into statistical and mining packages. They think they have died and gone to heaven!Foist a third normal form (3NF) design on them and their eyes roll... "Now, which of the available join paths is the right one for this business question?" and "Why is it taking so long for the query?" and "Will you pull the data for me?" Now we hear... "Instead of spending 80% or 90% of my time getting the data prepared, I spend 5% or 10% of my time doing that... so I have that much more time to actually think about the business." We have seen clients' ability to understand and drive their business expand beyond their own wildest imagination in very short order. It shows on their bottom line and they are very happy with that!

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