

## What's Going on Here?

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I started this website a couple of months ago. And if we take the empirical approach to answering questions, then the answer to this question can be found by clicking on the tabs, following links where they appear, and reading what turns up.

But this is about as satisfying as one stock (and somewhat tongue-in-cheek) answer to the question “What is Philosophy?”, namely “It’s what philosophers do”.

I was led to ask myself this question by reflecting on the fact that I seem to be unable to write either books or single articles. Instead, I write multi-part articles, series that vary in length from 5 – 10,000 words, up to several times that length.

Currently, with a co-author, I am embarked on my longest series yet, a series of articles on managing time in relational databases. The inaugural installment appeared in the May issue of *DM Review*. All other installments are appearing bi-monthly, in *DM Direct*, an on-line publication associated with DM Review. Right now, it looks like this series will end up being somewhere between twenty and thirty installments in length.

In part, this pattern of writing reveals the fact that I have a lot of ideas that compete for my attention. Or, less generously, this pattern of writing reveals an inability to stick with one task and see it to its conclusion. The most egregious example is a nine-part series of articles I published in *DataWarehouse.com* several years ago. This series explains the relational normal forms that are based on functional dependencies. These are the normal forms from first through Boyce-Codd. I need to complete this series with a discussion of at least fourth and fifth normal form, and probably to include a discussion of domain-key normal form.

I still plan to complete that series. But it hasn’t happened yet.

This website, since its creation a couple of months ago, is rapidly becoming a neglected stepchild. In creating it, I supplied links to those of my articles that are still available on-line, added a few fragments that I hope will become publishable articles at some point, and also supplied links to a recent presentation I made at the 2007 Semantic Technology Conference. Since then, I’ve done almost nothing with this website.

My current bi-monthly publishing schedule, for those articles on managing time in relational databases, provide a good excuse for this neglect. But the

fundamental reason for this neglect, it now seems to me, is that I don't know what I should be doing with this website. Not having thought that through, I haven't done much with it.

So here's what I think I should be doing with this website, besides continuing to provide links to material published elsewhere. Indeed, for now at least, here's what I *will* be doing with this website.

1. **This website will be an *analytical* blog.** This means that I will publish material here that I'm not sure will ever turn into one or more articles. But it does *not* mean that I will publish opinions, i.e. points of view on current issues of interest to IT professionals. If I ever find I have an opinion that I think it would be helpful to share with fellow professionals, I will.

The adjective "analytical" is meant to point this out, to distinguish between a blog as a commentary on the passing scene, and a blog as something else. That something else is an idea about the work I do that I think might be helpful to others who do similar work.

That work, by the way, is at the nexus pointed to by such terms as "data architecture", "enterprise data models", "semantics", "taxonomies", "ontologies", and also by a penumbra of terms such as "normalization", "dimensional", "framework", "governance" and, of course, "data" itself.

2. **This website will be a construction site.** When a critical mass of analytical blog material builds up, I expect to start assembling and re-working it into material publishable in the IT trade press.
3. **This website *may* be a discussion site.** It *will* be a discussion site provided there are those who wish to participate in discussions of either the topics I introduce, or of relevant other topics they may wish to introduce. If you are interested, contact me.
4. **Until I retire, which is still several years off, this website will also be an advertisement of my availability as a consultant.** Besides thirty years in business IT, I have a doctorate in Philosophy. For most of my professional life, I have realized that in constructing both data models and also the algorithms that create and modify the data stored in those syntactical structures, we in IT have been constructing *ontologies*, our best representations of what there is that we need to keep track of.

I recently found some notes from the early nineties in which I was analyzing a series of data modeling issues in terms of ontologies, in

particular using Aristotle's distinction between essential and accidental properties of *ousia* (substances). (this distinction, although no longer central to philosophical discussions, still has great heuristic value for data modelers. This will be a topic for a later analytical blog entry, at the very least.)

But not until the last couple of years have I attempted to use terms like ontology" in discussions with others in business IT. Now, at last, I can. And so the first thing I want to say, on this site, which uses this vocabulary so new to business IT, is this: there are few, if any, consultants in business IT, other than myself, who combine a doctorate in the field to which ontology is central, with several decades of experience in the world of business IT.

Of course, it would be possible to have this "two cultures" background, and still have nothing of particular value to add to the shared knowledge that defines us as a community of interest. My publications, links to which can be found at this site, are relevant to your determining what value I do or do not bring to the art and science of managing data. The material published in this analytical blog / construction site, is also relevant.

So here's my commitment. I will publish something new here every week. I will neglect this stepchild no longer. So if you check back on a weekly basis, you won't be wasting your time.