The Entity-Relationship Model

Chapter 2

Overview of Database Design

- Conceptual design: (ER Model is used at this stage.)
  - What are the entities and relationships in the enterprise?
  - What information about these entities and relationships should we store in the database?
  - What are the integrity constraints or business rules that hold?
  - A database ‘schema’ in the ER Model can be represented pictorially (ER diagrams).
  - Can map an ER diagram into a relational schema.

ER Model Basics

- **Entity**: Real-world object distinguishable from other objects. An entity is described (in DB) using a set of attributes.
- **Entity Set**: A collection of similar entities. E.g., all employees.
  - All entities in an entity set have the same set of attributes. (Until we consider ISA hierarchies, anyway!)
  - Each entity set has a key.
  - Each attribute has a domain.

ER Model Basics (Contd.)

- **Relationship**: Association among two or more entities. E.g., Attishoo works in Pharmacy department.
- **Relationship Set**: Collection of similar relationships.
  - An n-ary relationship set R relates n entity sets E1 ... En; each relationship in R involves entities e1 E1, ..., en En
  - Same entity set could participate in different relationship sets, or in different “roles” in same set.

Key Constraints

- Consider Works_In: An employee can work in many departments; a dept can have many employees.
- In contrast, each dept has at most one manager, according to the **key constraint** on Manages.

Participation Constraints

- Does every department have a manager?
  - If so, this is a participation constraint: the participation of Departments in Manages is said to be total (vs. partial).
  - Every did value in Departments table must appear in a row of the Manages table (with a non-null ssn value!)

**Diagram:**
Weak Entities

- A weak entity can be identified uniquely only by considering the primary key of another (owner) entity.
- Owner entity set and weak entity set must participate in a one-to-many relationship set (one owner, many weak entities).
- Weak entity set must have total participation in this identifying relationship set.

ISA (‘is a’) Hierarchies

- As in C++, or other PLs, attributes are inherited.
- If we declare A ISA B, every A entity is also considered to be a B entity.
  
  - Overlap constraints: Can Joe be an Hourly_Emps as well as a Contract_Emps entity? (Allowed/disallowed)
  
  - Covering constraints: Does every Employees entity also have to be an Hourly_Emps or a Contract_Emps entity? (Yes/no)
  
  - Reasons for using ISA:
    - To add descriptive attributes specific to a subclass.
    - To identify entities that participate in a relationship.

Aggregation

- Used when we have to model a relationship involving (entity sets and) a relationship set.
- Aggregation allows us to treat a relationship set as an entity set for purposes of participation in (other) relationships.

- Aggregation vs. ternary relationship:
  - Monitors is a distinct relationship, with a descriptive attribute.
  - Also, can say that each sponsorship is monitored by at most one employee.

Entity vs. Attribute

- Should address be an attribute of Employees or an entity (connected to Employees by a relationship)?
- Depends upon the use we want to make of address information, and the semantics of the data:
  - If we have several addresses per employee, address must be an entity (since attributes cannot be set-valued).
  - If the structure (city, street, etc.) is important, e.g., we want to retrieve employees in a given city, address must be modeled as an entity (since attribute values are atomic).

Entity vs. Attribute (Contd.)

- Works_In2 does not allow an employee to work in a department for two or more periods.
- Similar to the problem of wanting to record several addresses for an employee: we want to record several values of the descriptive attributes for each instance of this relationship.
**Entity vs. Relationship**

- First ER diagram OK if a manager gets a separate discretionary budget for each dept.
- What if a manager gets a discretionary budget that covers all managed depts?
  - Redundancy of budget, which is stored for each dept managed by the manager.
  - Misleading: suggests budget tied to managed dept.

**Binary vs. Ternary Relationships**

- If each policy is owned by just 1 employee:
  - Key constraint on Policies would mean policy can only cover 1 dependent.
- What are the additional constraints in the 2nd diagram?

**Summary of Conceptual Design**

- Conceptual design follows requirements analysis,
  - Yields a high-level description of data to be stored
- ER model popular for conceptual design
  - Constructs are expressive, close to the way people think about their applications.
- Basic constructs: entities, relationships, and attributes (of entities and relationships).
- Some additional constructs: weak entities, ISA hierarchies, and aggregation.
- Note: There are many variations on ER model.

**Summary of ER (Contd.)**

- Several kinds of integrity constraints can be expressed in the ER model: key constraints, participation constraints, and overlap/covering constraints for ISA hierarchies. Some foreign key constraints are also implicit in the definition of a relationship set.
  - Some constraints (notably, functional dependencies) cannot be expressed in the ER model.
  - Constraints play an important role in determining the best database design for an enterprise.

**Summary of ER (Contd.)**

- ER design is subjective. There are often many ways to model a given scenario! Analyzing alternatives can be tricky, especially for a large enterprise. Common choices include:
  - Entity vs. attribute, entity vs. relationship, binary or n-ary relationship, whether or not to use ISA hierarchies, and whether or not to use aggregation.
- Ensuring good database design: resulting relational schema should be analyzed and refined further. FD information and normalization techniques are especially useful.