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Development of Knowledge Code Converter for Design Knowledge Management

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Abstract – This is a report on a new methodology to manage design knowledge by utilizing a knowledge-based CAD and a prototype system named C^3 (Cubic; CAD knowledge Code Capacitor), which is being developed using our methodology. C^3 facilitates (i) the automatic generation of a knowledge code for a knowledge-based CAD by processing design documents written in the format near the natural language, such as English or Japanese, and (ii) automatically generation of a design document written in the format near the natural language from the knowledge code. The features of the system facilitate document-based design knowledge management which reduces the designer's load to encode and maintain design knowledge, because it is easier for a designer to treat a natural language description than a coded description.

Keywords: **Knowledge management, Knowledge-based CAD, Design document, Natural language processing**

1. Introduction

Knowledge management is a crucial issue for manufacturers [1] because the power of knowledge has been recognized as a very important resource for preserving valuable heritage, learning new things, solving problems, creating core competences, and initiating new situations for both individuals and organizations [4]. Even in the field of design research, knowledge management has become a hot topic in recent years [6]. Some groups have been implementing design knowledge management systems (i.e., [9]).

Because of this concern, commercial knowledge-based CAD systems, which are equipped with knowledge bases to store design rules and design constraints, have been released in succession (i.e., CATIA [2] and Unigraphics [8]. A knowledge-based CAD allows designers to adopt semi-automated design activities by accumulated design rules and design constraints and, thus, reduces the lead-time for the design. However, in order to utilize knowledge-based CAD, it is necessary to encode knowledge before-hand and continue to maintain the encoded knowledge. This results in a heavy workload for designers.

This is a report of a new methodology to manage design knowledge by utilizing a knowledge-based CAD and a prototype system named C^3 (Cubic; CAD knowledge Code Capacitor) based on our methodology. C^3 facilitates (i) the automatic generation of a knowledge code for knowledge-based CAD by processing design documents written in the format near the natural language, such as English or Japanese, and (ii) the automatic generation of a design document written in the format near the natural language from the knowledge code. The features of the prototype system reduce the designer's load to encode and maintain the knowledge because it's easier for the designer to treat a natural language description than a coded description.

There are four other sections in this paper. In Section 2, the effects and issues of knowledge-based CAD are discussed based on the study of actual design activity in a car-component manufacturer. The analysis of the study is followed by a proposal of our methodology of document-based knowledge management in Section 3. Section 3 is an identification of the outline of C^3. In Section 4, the implementation of C^3 is explained, and a design session is carried out on C^3 to show the power of C^3. Finally, Section 5 is a summary of the key points.

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2. Effect and Issues of Knowledge-based CAD

A knowledge-based CAD is a new system that is expected to support effective design activity with equipped knowledge bases. Knowledge that can be accumulated in knowledge-based CAD is categorized into the following three types.

A design rule, which describes design operations and their condition.

A design constraint, by which design parameters should be satisfied. When a CAD model does not meet a constraint, the knowledge-based CAD warns and prompts a designer to modify the model.

A design procedure, which is a procedure of a design operation applied to a CAD model. The design procedure

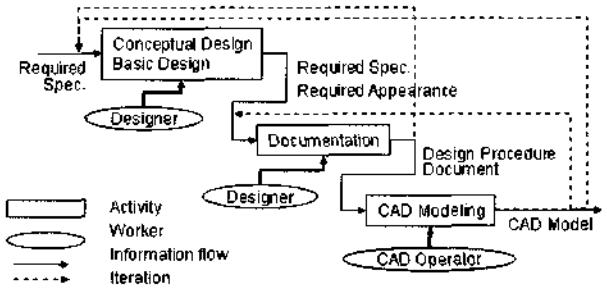

Fig. 1. Work-flows of design activities (before introducing knowledge -based CAD)

can be reused in a future design.

In this section, the effects and issues of knowledge-based CAD are described using an actual case in which a car-component manufacturer introduces knowledge-based CAD into the design division.

Fig 1 depicts the works-flows of the design division before the knowledge-based CAD was introduced. At the upstream of the flows, the designer plans the required specifications and required appearance of a product/component by referring former design cases. Through this stage, the physical and geometric attributes required for a product/component are decided as an alternative solution.

Next, the designer composes a document called a design procedure document (DPD), which describes the procedure to determine the attributes to meet the required specification and the design rules/constraints among the attributes. The principal aim of composing DPD is to instruct a CAD operator, who is not usually an expert of design, to build a geometric model of a product/component without misunderstanding the design rationale. Although it is burden for the designer to compose the DPD, it plays a crucial role for the manufacturer because design knowledge is explicitly acquired by composing the DPD. The DPD doest not only makes the communication among designers and CAD operators smooth but also promotes the reuse of design knowledge for the efficiency of future design.

At the final stage of this workflow, the CAD operator interprets the DPD based on the required appearance and then builds a geometric model on a CAD system.

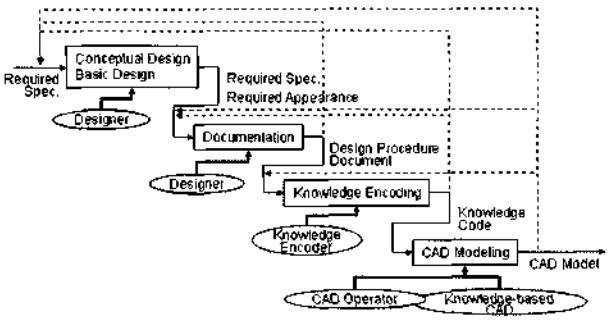

Fig. 2. Workflow of design activities (after introducing knowledge -based CAD)

The introduction of knowledge-based CAD changes the flows, as shown in Fig 2. Although the work to compose the DPD still remains, the word to encode knowledge is added anew. The encoded knowledge, which consists of the design rules, constraints, and the definition of design procedures, realizes semi-automatic design by knowledge-based CAD. As a result, it reduces the loads of CAD modeling carried out by CAD operators.

However, our study also confirmed some suspicions for introductory effect of knowledge-based CAD. The first one is concerning about the new work, encoding knowledge. A knowledge encoder carries out this work by interpreting the DPD. It is the problem that the knowledge encoder should have not only design knowledge for interpreting DPD but also knowledge of the knowledge code of the particular knowledge-based CAD. However, our investigation of the manufacturer clarified that such a double-role expertise does not exist. This is why either a designer or a CAD operator should take charge of a knowledge encoder, although it is a heavy load for both. The second one is that the format of knowledge codes is not incompatible among CADs. It is necessary to encode knowledge again when changing from one knowledge-based CAD to another. This means that it might be risk for the manufacturer from the viewpoint of knowledge reusing. The third one is that .it is difficult to maintain knowledge after knowledge has been finally encoded. In the research field of expert systems, it has been pointed out that knowledge accumulated in a computer should be maintained by capturing new concepts and removing mistakes, contradictions, and redundancy [7]. Unless knowledge has been maintained, it results in rigid design activities and a reduction in productivity. This is why a knowledge encoder should have kept on maintaining knowledge. However, it is challenging for humans to decipher knowledge codes that were designed to be read by computers. This must make the load of knowledge maintenance so heavy that the beneficial effect of a knowledge-based CAD may disappear.

To verify the above suspicions for introductory effect of knowledge-based CAD, we conducted the study on annual loads on (a) CAD modeling, (b) knowledge encoding and (c) knowledge maintenance before and after introducing a knowledge-based CAD. This study focuses on the design of a certain part of automobile, of which model-changes are conducted three times a year. Table 1 depicts the results. Note that the unit is man-day. Although the study is based on a single use case, it is confirmed by the designers, who have been using the knowledge based CAD, that the study shows a general tendency of the cases. This CAD system has been experimentally introduced into a part of business, and has achieved a similar result to the study. However,

Table 1. Variation of loads by the introduction of knowledge based CAD

	Loads (Man-Day)			
	CAD Modeling	Knowledge encoding	Knowledge maintenance	Sum.
Before introducing knowledge- based CAD	24	-	-	24
1st year after introducing knowledge-based CAD	2	50	10	62
Afterward	2	9	8	17

the business cases cannot be described here because of confidentiality. According to this study, it is sure that introducing knowledge-based CAD decreased the load of CAD modeling (24 to 2); however, knowledge encoding process takes so many lords (50) that the total load has gone up by three times the load before the introduction. After the second year of the introduction, the load of knowledge encoding decreases because the knowledge encoded in the first year can be reused. However, knowledge maintenance still requires considerable load (8). This is why the load reduction by introducing knowledge-based CAD remains a little (24 to 17), although the load of CAD modeling falls in less than one tenth of the load before the introduction.

It is clarified that the key to utilize knowledge-based CAD is to encode knowledge and to maintain knowledge. Besides, the knowledge code should be managed in a generic format which is independent from a specific knowledge code format. The approach in this research is document-based knowledge management, whereby the knowledge code is managed by the design procedure document written in the format near the natural language such as Japanese or English, and mutual exchange between the knowledge code and the design procedure document is conducted. This approach required the following three tasks:

1. Converting DPD to a knowledge code;
2. Mutual exchange of knowledge codes among various knowledge-based CAD systems; and
3. Converting a knowledge code to DPD.

Note that this research does not focus on developing the new algorithm of natural language processing but on developing knowledge management methodology for CAD systems based on natural language processing technologies which have been developed in AI research field. The prototype system of C^3 uses ChaSen [5] to process Japanese description in DPD. The existence of description noises and errors is a critical issue for the natural language processing. In order to evade this issue, this research introduces the template of natural language description in DPD as mentioned in Subsection 3.3. The function to convert a knowledge code to DPD also evades the noises and errors in DPD description.

3. Framework of knowledge code converter

The knowledge code converter C^3 (Cubic: CAD knowledge Code Capacitor) facilitates the above three tasks in order to realize knowledge management by utilizing knowledge-based CAD. This section explains the framework of C^3.

3.1. Intermediate Knowledge Code

At first, this research introduces a concept of Intermediate Knowledge Code (IKC). IKC is the knowledge code which is able to express the design rules, design constraints and design procedures without depending on specific knowledge code formats or specific operations of each knowledge-based CAD. To introduce such a knowledge code, generic concepts of design description should be clearly divided from concepts specific for knowledge-based CAD. Once such classification could be established, it becomes easier to mutually exchange knowledge codes between plural knowledge-based CAD systems by mapping concepts of IKC and CAD-specific knowledge codes.

We can find some related works to IKC. STEP (Standard for Exchange of Product Model Data: ISO 10303) is the famous standard format of CAD data, which is independent from specific CADs to express geometry and product information. In the research field of knowledge sharing, KIF (Knowledge Interchange Format) is suggested as the generic format for knowledge description [3]. As compared to these proceeded successes, IKC is the new trial to describe design knowledge of CAD systems, which includes design procedures, design rules, design constraints, and geometric operations

In this research, we defined more than 100 generic CAD operations, such as "offsetting (parallel displacement) a plane" and "making a line passing two points" as IKCs. In order to define generic IKCs which are independent from a specific CAD system, the definition is based on the consultation with designers who

Making a line passing two points:

```
(#create_line
      ((#point1 <Point>)
      (#point2 <Point>)))
```

Offsetting a plane:

```
(#create_offsetplane
      ((#object <Plane>)
       (#direction <Direction>)
       (#distance <Value>)))
```

Fig. 3. Examples of a generic operation for IKC

mastered the operations of plural CADs. Fig 3 depicts the example of IKC. The part expressed between "<" and ">" in the 3 is a variable name. Note that the IKC we defined here may be updated by adding knowledge-based CADs.

3.2. Functions and C^3

By introducing IKC, the three tasks stated in Section 2 is developed to the following four functions:

I. To convert the description of DPD to IKC;
II. To convert IKC to CAD-specific knowledge code, which we call CKC (CAD Knowledge Code);
III. To convert CKC to IKC;
IV. To convert IKC to the description of DPD;

Table 2 shows the correspondences between the three tasks and the four functions. An "X" in an intersection indicates the correspondence.

3.3. Components of C^3

In order to realize the four functions, this research develops the four components, which correspond to the function, respectively, *DPD to IKC converter*, *IKC to CKC converter*, *CKC to IKC converter* and *IKC to DPD converter*. Fig 4 depicts the architecture of C^3 which consists of the above four components. In Fig 4, an arrow with a Roman number represents function;

Table 2. Correspondence of processes and tasks of C^3

Task \ Function.	I	II	III	IV
1. Converting DPD to a knowledge code	X	X		
2. Mutual exchange of knowledge codes		X	X	
3. Converting a knowledge code to DPD			X	X

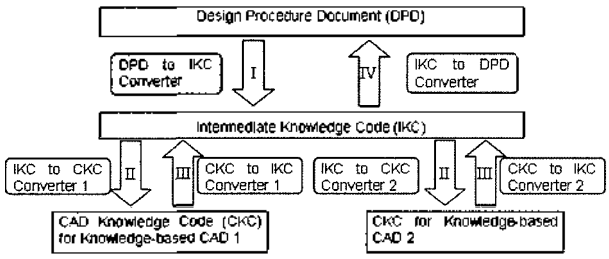

Fig. 4. The architecture of C^3

	Name	Description
B1	Bottom-surface	Create a plane at the position of <media-bottom-surface>
B2	Top-surface	Create an offset plane from <media-top-surface> outside by 5 mm
B3	Left-surface	Create an offset plane from <media-left-surface> outside by 3 mm
B4	Right-surface	Create an offset plane from <media-right-surface> outside by 3 mm
B5	Front-surface	Create an offset plane from <media-front-surface> outside by 5 mm

Fig. 5. Design Procedure Document.

and a grey rectangular node represents a component. The detail of each component is as follows.

3.4. DPD to IKC Converter

The DPD to IKC converter is the component that converts the DPD description in the format near the natural language into the IKCs. The description in the DPD should be written in the format depicted in Fig 5. Each line in this format corresponds to one description of DPD, which consists of the following three slots:

Line number: a serial number issued for each description;
Reference name: a name used to designate the geometric object created by the description of the line.
Description: text information which describes a design procedure, a design rule or constraint.

In order to convert DPD to IKC, the converter uses the DPD to IKC conversion rule, which has a syntactic pattern of a document description of DPD in the condition part and a syntactic pattern of IKC in the conclusion part. For example, the DPD to IKC conversion rule depicted in Fig 6 matches to a DPD description "Create an offset plane from face-A upward by 5 mm;" and the converter generates IKC "(#create _offsetplane ((#object face-A) (#direction upward) (#distance 5)))." When no rule matches to DPD description, the DPD to IKC converter decides that the description includes errors, and alerts the user to correct the description of DPD. The algorithm of the DPD to IKC converter is depicted in Fig 7.

DPD: Create an offset plane
from <Plane> <Direction> by <Value>mm
IKC: (#create_offsetplane
((#object <Plane>)
(#direction <Direction>)
(#distance <Value>)))

Fig. 6. Example of DPD to IKC conversion rule.

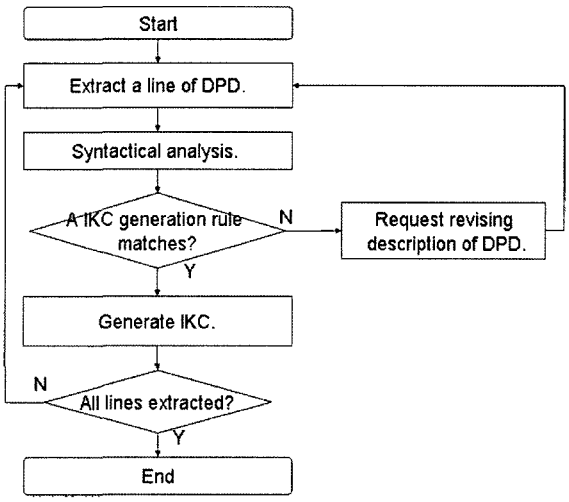

Fig. 7. Algorithm of DPD to IKC converter.

3.5. IKC to CKC Converter

The IKC to CKC converter is the component to convert the IKC to the CKC by the IKC to CKC conversion rule. Because we use CATIA V5 for a prototyping, as stated in Section 4, we developed the IKC to CKC converter according to the knowledge code format of CATIA V5. Fig 8 depicts an example of an IKC to CKC conversion rule for CATIA V5. The IKC to CKC conversion rule is specific for a knowledge -based CAD, although the converting mechanism of the IKC to CKC converter is generic.

The IKC to CKC conversion rule has the syntactic pattern of the IKC in the condition part and the syntactic pattern of the CKC in the conclusion part. The IKC to CKC converter picks up each IKC, and search the rule which matches to it. For example, IKC "(#create_offsetplane ((#object face-A) (#direction upward) (#distance 5)))" matches to the conversion rule depicted in Fig 8, and it is finally converted to CKC depicted in Fig 9. Because the converter manages the relationships between variable names and reference names in IKC ("face-A" and "upward") and their internal description in CKC ("A1" and "False"), the former are converted to the later.

```
IKC:
  (#create_offsetplane
      ((#object <Plane>)
      (#direction <Direction>)
      (#distance <Value>)))
CKC:
  Dim ?parameter As Parameters
  Set ?parameter = &part.Item("#object")
  Dim ?offsetplane As HybridShapePlaneOffset
  Set ?offsetplane = &factory.AddNewPlaneOffset(?p
  arameter, #distance, #direction)
```

Fig. 8. IKC to CKC conversion rule.

```
Dim hybridShapeSurfaceExplicit1 As Parameters
Set hybridShapeSurfaceExplicit1 = part1.Item("A1")
Dim hybridShapePlaneOffset1 As HybridShapePlaneOffset
Set hybridShapePlaneOffset1 = factory1.AddNewPlaneOffs
et(hybridShapeSurfaceExplicit1, 5, False)
```

Fig. 9. Example of CKC.

```
CKC:
  Parallel.Name = <name>, Mode = <mode>,
  Type = <type>, Curve = <curve>,
  Support = <support>, Offset.Mode = <offsetmode>,
  Length = <length>, Bothside = <bothside>,
  Direction = <direction>
IKC:
  ((crate_trim_line)
     (((name)(<name>)) ((object1)(<curve>))
     ((object2)(<support>))
     ((direction)(<direction>)) ((distance)(<length>))))
```

Fig. 10. Example of the CKC to IKC conversion rule

```
Condition:
  ((create_trim_line)
      (((name)(<name>))
      ((object1)(<curve>))
      ((object2)(<support>))
      ((direction)(<direction>))
      ((distance)(<length>))))
Conclusion:
  <name>  Create a line by offsetting <curve>
  with the support of <support> to the direction of <dir
  ection> by <length> mm
```

Fig. 11. Example of IKC to DPD conversion rule

3.6. CKC to IKC Converter

The CKC to IKC converter is the component that converts the CKC into the IKC by the CKC to IKC conversion rule. This conversion rule has the syntactic pattern of CKC in its condition part and the syntactic pattern of the IKC in its conclusion part (see Fig 10). The CKC to IKC conversion rule is specific for a knowledge-based CAD although the converting mechanism of the CKC to IKC converter is generic.

By using the IKC to CKC converter and the CKC to IKC converter, C^3 realizes the mutual exchange of CKC among plural knowledge-based CADs.

3.7. IKC to DPD Converter

The IKC to DPD converter is the component that converts the IKC into the description of the DPD by the IKC to DPD conversion rule. This conversion rule has the syntactic pattern of the IKC in its condition part and the syntactic pattern of the DPD description in its conclusion part (see Fig 11).

The IKC to DPD converter contributes to DPD generation with the CKC to IKC converter.

4. Prototyping

4.1. Implementation

We have been developing a prototype system of C^3 that can generate a knowledge code from a document description as well as a document description of DPD from a knowledge code. C^3 is implemented by C++ programming language on Windows2000. We used CATIA V5 of Dassault Inc. as a sample knowledge-based CAD for this prototype system. The prototype system is composed of the DPD to IKC converter, the IKC to CKC converter for CATIA V5, the CKC to IKC converter for CAIA V5, and the IKC to DPD converter. The current version of the prototype system support conversion of DPD written in Japanese and English to CKC, although conversion of CKC to DPD only supports Japanese.

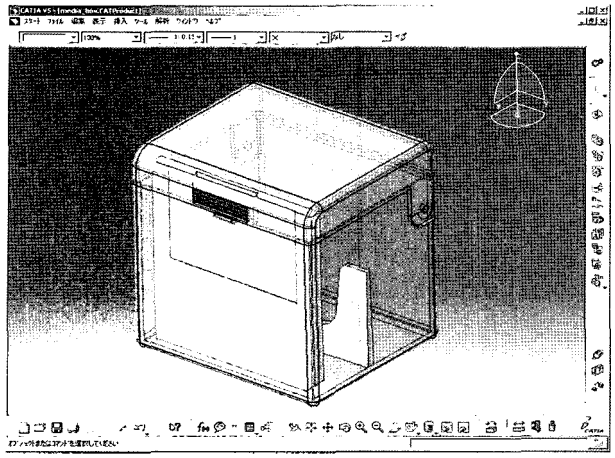

Fig. 12. Media case.

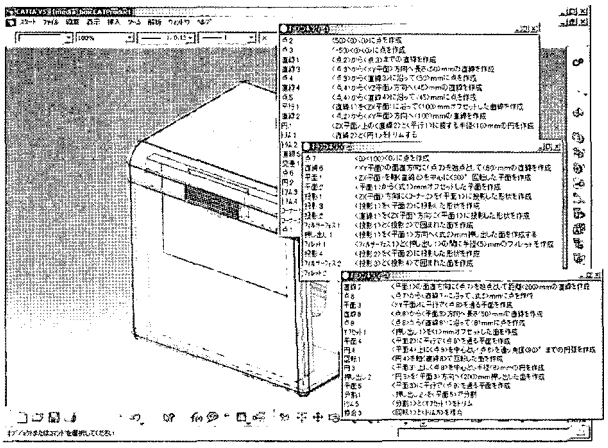

Fig. 14. Regeneration of DPD (written in Japanese) from the CAD model.

4.2. Design Session

To test and validate our methodology, we prepared a DPD of a media case as an example, and conducted the generation of the CKC for the CATIA V5 by the prototype system. Fig 12 depicts a CAD model of a media case, which was automatically constructed by knowledge codes generated by C^3. Fig 5 depicts a part of the DPD of the media case. The prototype system could generate a CKC for CATIA V5, by which the CAD model depicted in Fig 12 could be automatically generated. Fig 13 depicts the DPD to ICK / IKC to CKC conversion rule browser, by which the user can define and edit conversion rules. The prototype system could also regenerate the DPD of the media case from the CAD model (see Fig 14. Note that generated DPD is written in Japanese).

4.3. Validation

According to the above experiment, we determined that C^3 can generate a knowledge code and regenerate DPD, by which C^3 facilitates the encoding and maintaining knowledge for knowledge-based CAD on the basis of documents written in the format near the natural language. From the viewpoint of knowledge management, it is easier for humans to manage a natural language description than to directly manage a digital description of knowledge codes. The ability of C^3 might serve the utilization of knowledge-based CAD.

To support the above discussion about the effect of C^3, we conducted the study on annual loads on (a) CAD modeling, (b) knowledge encoding and (c) knowledge maintenance before and after introducing a knowledge-based CAD with C^3 as the comparison experiment to the study stated in Section 2. Table 3 depicts the results. The loads of knowledge encoding and knowledge maintenance in Table 3 include the additional cost of writing DPD and IKC. However, the cost of writing all conversion rules is omitted because it is not the cost of design but the cost of the implementation of C^3. Therefore, they would not be essential in the load of design, so far as the CAD system is not changed.

At the first year of introducing knowledge-based

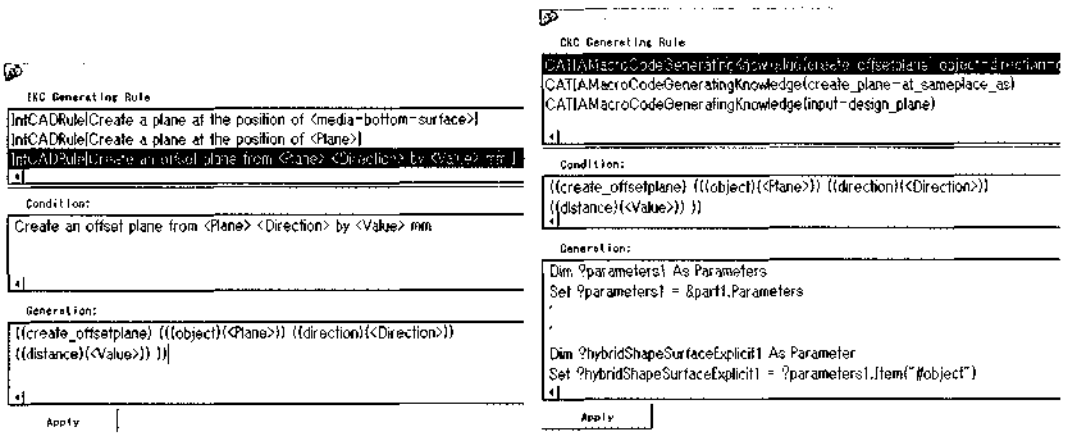

Fig. 13. DPD to IKC conversio rule browser (left) and IKC to CKC conversion rule browser (right).

Table 3. Variation of loads by the introduction of knowledge based CAD with C^3.

	Loads (Man-Day)			
	CAD Modeling	Knowledge encoding	Knowledge maintenance	Sum.
Before introducing knowledge- based CAD with C^3	24	-	-	24
1st year after introducing knowledge-based CAD with C^3	2	50	10	62
Afterward	2	9	8	17

CAD with C^3, loads of CAD modeling drastically decreases as we have seen in Section 2; but the total load increases by 8 man-days because the loads of knowledge encoding and knowledge maintenance arise. However, the amount increased is smaller than that of the case in which knowledge-based CAD is solely introduced depicted in Table 1. This is because C^3 facilitates to encode/maintain knowledge at the format near natural language description in DPD so that the designers' workload decreases.

Although we have not yet enough data for long-term analysis, the numbers of "Afterward" row in Table 3 is estimated based on the achievements of the first year. The total load will decline to a half of that before introducing knowledge-based CAD with C^3, because the load of knowledge encoding decreases to one fifth of that of the first year. The decreased amount of loads balances introductory cost of knowledge-based CAD.

According to the above study, C^3 takes a crucial role to utilize knowledge-based CAD and to raise its power to manage design knowledge.

5. Conclusion

This paper reports the framework of the knowledge code converter C^3 to utilize knowledge-based CAD towards design knowledge management, and validates its introductory effect by conducting the case study. The core ideas of this research are under patent application in Japan (Serial No. 2002- 338832, 2003-305667) and the United States of America (Serial No. 10/716,557).

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