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PRODUCT LIFECYCLE OPTIMISATION OF CAR CLIMATE CONTROLS USING ANALYTICAL HIERARCHICAL PROCESS (AHP) ANALYSIS AND A MULTI-OBJECTIVE GROUPING GENETIC ALGORITHM (MOGGA)

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Abstract

A product's lifecycle performance (e.g. assembly, outsourcing, maintenance and recycling) can often be improved through modularity. However, modularisation under different and often conflicting lifecycle objectives is a complex problem that will ultimately require trade-offs. This paper presents a novel multi-objective modularity optimisation framework; the application of which is illustrated through the modularisation of a car climate control system. Central to the framework is a specially designed multi-objective grouping genetic algorithm (MOGGA) that is able to generate a whole range of alternative product modularisations. Scenario analysis, using the principles of the analytical hierarchical process (AHP), is then carried out to explore the solution set and choose a suitable modular architecture that optimises the product lifecycle according to the company's strategic vision.

Keywords: Genetic algorithms, Life cycle design, Multi-criteria decision making, Optimization, Modularity.

1. Introduction

To design and manufacture successful and profitable products in an increasingly competitive consumer-based economy presents many manufacturing companies with significant challenges. In most industries product development times are becoming shorter as companies are forced to offer an increasing number of new products to the market in order to remain competitive. In the automotive industry

Nomenclatures

M	Module number
CI_n	Number of couplings within module n
CI_{maxn}	Maximum strength of all component couplings
SI_n	Total lifecycle similarity interactions within module n
SI_{maxn}	Total possible lifecycle similarity interactions within module

Abbreviations

AHP	Analytical Hierarchical Process
MCDM	Multi Criteria Decision Making
MFD	Modular Function Deployment
MOGGA	Multi-Objective Genetic Grouping Algorithm
MCDM	Multi Criteria Decision Making

for example product development times for new products have shrunk dramatically in the last two decades, and this trend is set to continue well into the foreseeable future [1]. In addition, many companies now have complex global supply chains, where product design and manufacture is outsourced to various suppliers around the world. Tighter environmental legislation is also having effects on the way products are developed - in some industries the producer now has to ensure their products are able to meet strict recycling and reuse targets. In order for companies to remain profitable under these demanding conditions a number of strategic design and manufacture strategies are sought. One such important strategy is the use of well-defined modular product architectures.

Modular product architecture is a means by which a product can be decomposed into smaller, more manageable chunks, to improve various lifecycle performance characteristics. However, creating a suitable modular product architecture that optimises many lifecycle considerations is a complex task: it is often impossible to simultaneously optimise the modular architecture across the whole product lifecycle as some of these goals may be conflicting. The overall aim of the research presented in this paper has therefore been to develop a multi-objective optimisation framework for product modularisation. In the framework numerous product modularity principles have been reconciled and a state-of-the-art multi-objective optimisation algorithm has been developed to perform module grouping. A software prototype of the framework has been implemented using Visual Basic within an excel environment. The main focus of this paper is to describe the framework steps using a case study example – a car climate control system.

Modularity has been given many definitions over the years and a large range of measures, methods and techniques have been created in the attempt to guide the development of modular product architectures. Generally speaking one can see a kind of general convergence towards the seminal works of Ulrich and Tung [2], who define modularity in terms of two characteristics of product design: similarity between the physical and functional architecture of the design and the minimisation of incidental interactions between physical components.

The first part of Ulrich and Tung's [1] definition, relates product modularity to product functions. Similar perspectives on modularity can be seen in other works [5-11]. Following these works, product architecture is defined by the way in

which functional elements correspond to physical components (Fig. 1). The product architecture is said to be modular when it exhibits a one-to-one mapping between functional and physical elements. In a modular product functions are less integrated (spread among components), so different customer needs can be addressed by different modules, allowing a mix and match of modules to enable product variety at low costs [2, 10, 12]. The second part of Ulrich and Tung's seminal definition of modularity views modularity in terms of the interaction and interface complexity (coupling) between components. Other works also support this idea [13-21]. Interactions can be seen as the physical and functional relationships between the product's elements (components). Obviously, there is a need to reduce the number and complexity of these interactions between modules. This will reduce design dependencies, reduce assembly complexity and can be used in the pursuit of 'plug-in - plug-out' or inter-changeable modules to create a large number of product variants at low cost. Other researchers have chosen to include other product lifecycle based aspects into their definitions of modular products. Some authors [16] view modularity from a whole lifecycle viewpoint, and the methods have been used in pursuit of service [22, 23], manufacturing [24, 25], retirement [26] and assembly [27, 28] based modularity and green engineering [29, 30]. Similarly, other bodies of work [14, 15, 31, 32] also see modularity as a means of improving various product lifecycle goals.

In regards to actually creating a modular product, there have been numerous frameworks and methods developed to create optimal modular product architectures. The majority of these methods pursue a 'bottom-up' approach in which low-level product elements (components) are grouped to form larger product element (modules). The rationale for grouping has been seen to vary considerably, from a more technical perspective such as functional and physical interactions to a more strategic focus such as the similarity between various lifecycle attributes such as service and reliability, reuse and recycling, product variety, outsourcing, etc. A clustering approach based on functional interactions between components has been used [33]. Single objective mathematical optimisation models have also been developed; such as [15] who have developed a heuristic and non-linear optimisation model to optimise a weighted sum of numerous lifecycle objectives.

Similarly [2, 34] use a non-linear optimisation genetic algorithm (GA) based weighted sum approach to modularise to a number of strategic modular drivers and functional/ physical interactions, and [35] have also developed a GA-based clustering method. They apply a Module Strength Indicator (MSI) which results in an alternative representation of the design structure matrix (DSM) useful for identification of a modular hierarchy within the product structure.

Manual heuristic based methods have also been developed. Modular Function Deployment (MFD) [36] uses a comprehensive list of modular drivers which can be used to evaluate candidate modules. Functional models have been created from time ordered function chains and use a set of heuristics to form modules [5]. A matrix based approach has been used [37] that provides fuzzy logic based interaction evaluation to integrate four sets of sub-objectives into four modularity performance goals (cost, maintenance and reliability, quality and manufacturability) that are then handled by a goal programming based optimisation model.

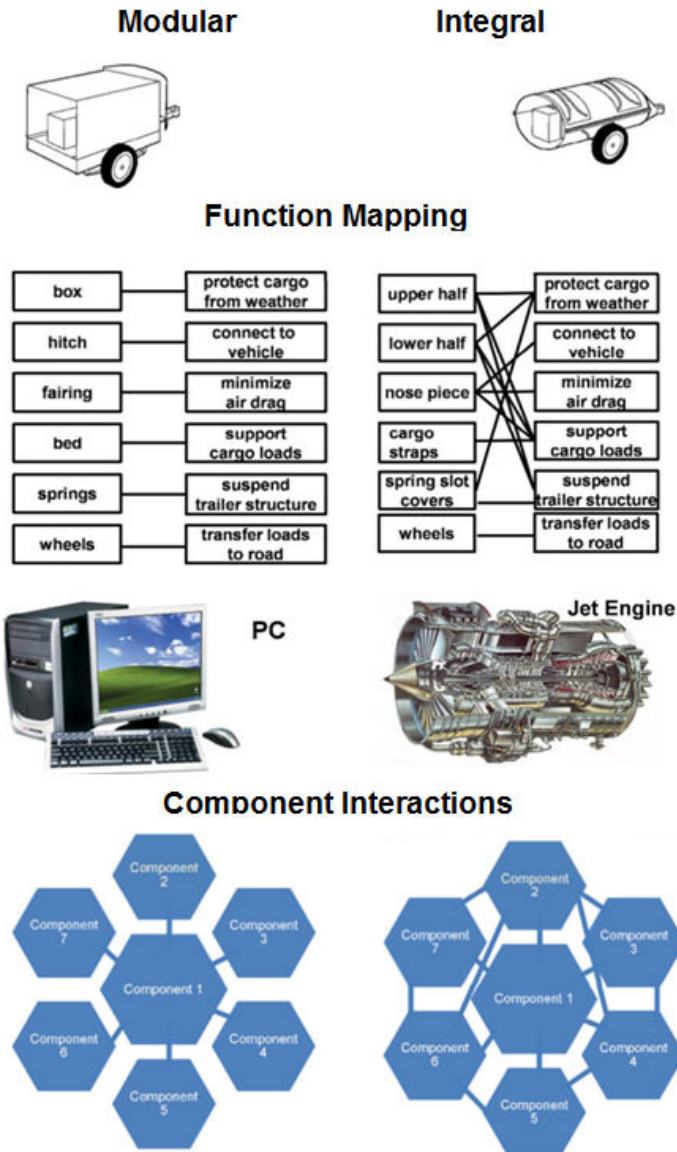


Fig. 1. Modular vs. integral architecture (Adapted from [3]).

From the above literature review it is clear that numerous modularisation methods and frameworks have been created, often pursuing similar lifecycle goals. The majority of these methods are matrix based, using a DSM approach to represent the complex functional, physical, and strategic-based interactions that occur between components. Matrix representations are a highly visual way of representing product modularity and, more importantly, can be readily manipulated with optimisation algorithms to identify modules. However, it is argued that existing

product modularisation frameworks take a simplistic approach to the multi-objective nature of the modularity configuration problem and that finding an optimal solution (where trade-offs may be needed between conflicting objectives) with these approaches can be problematic and time-consuming.

2. Overview of the Modularisation Framework

The developed modularity optimisation framework has four main steps: 1) product decomposition; 2) interaction analysis; 3) formation of modular architectures; and 4) scenario analysis (Fig. 2). The developed framework has been implemented within a software prototype using Microsoft Excel and Visual Basic, and the main user interface screen can be seen in Fig. 3. In summary of the framework steps; the product is first decomposed into a number a basic components by analysis of product functionally and existing physical structure. The various interfaces and lifecycle similarities that occur between the product’s components are then analysed and entered into a DSM-style interaction matrix. In the developed software implementation of the framework, a specially developed multi-objective grouping genetic algorithm (MOGGA) then searches the matrix and provides a whole set of alternative (Pareto-optimal) modular product configurations. The solution set is then evaluated and explored (scenario analysis) using multi-criteria decision making (MCDM). In the developed software prototype the Analytic Hierarchy Process [38] approach has been implemented for this final step.

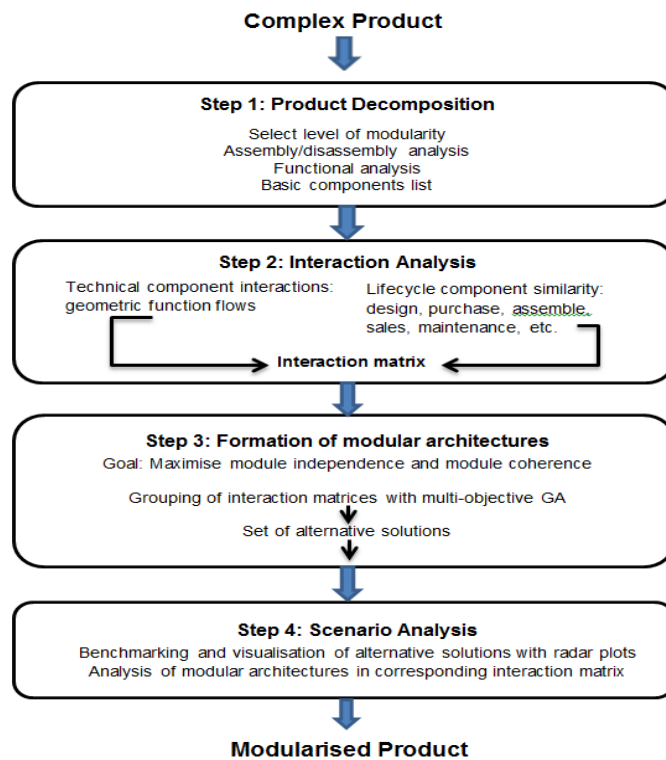


Fig. 2. Overview of modularity framework.

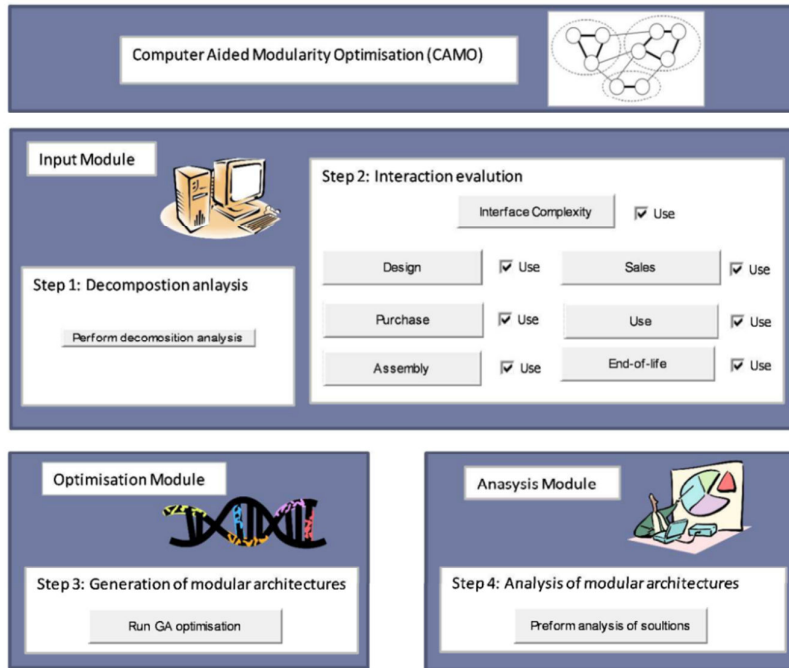


Fig. 3. Main user interface of software prototype implementation of modularity framework.

It must be noted that even for a relatively simple product there could be many different modular configurations; each optimised for different lifecycle goals. With each different configuration there will of course be compromises that will have to be made between the different modularisation objectives e.g. the modular structure may be easy to assembly, yet have poor maintainability and recyclability. Ideally these compromises should be explored before arriving at a final decision. The important aspect of the framework is the novel multi-objective approach to product modularisation, in which a whole set of alternative modular product architectures are generated in one single run, for further analysis with MCDM. This provides two main advantages. Firstly, the user does not have to provide objective preference weights. Secondly, time-consuming preference adjustment and algorithm re-runs are not needed in order to preform scenario analysis.

3. Product Modularisation with the Framework

In this section the various steps of the framework are described using an example product: the car climate control system. The car climate control system is well referred in other studies [33, 37, 39]; it is a fairly complex product, comprised of various technologies that must be split across numerous geometric locations within the car, making it an ideal case example to assess the potential of the developed modularity framework.

3.1. Step 1: Product decomposition

Essentially with the framework we are decomposing a product into its main functional components which are then grouped into modules based upon their interface complexity and lifecycle similarity. However, just like existing hierarchical product assemblies, it is argued that modularity may also exist at many levels within the product. Furthermore, complex products may contain hundreds/thousands of components and it would be infeasible to attempt modularisation of such large components sets. The decomposition step should therefore aim to identify the main functional components at a suitable level in the product hierarchy. This may mean that a functional ‘component’ is in fact a complete subassembly/ assembly. To aid the decomposition process established methodologies are recommended (e.g., function-means trees [40] or reverse fish bone diagrams [31]). The physical decomposition of the automotive climate control system, as shown in Figs. 4(a) and (b) follows Pimmler and Eppinger’s work [33], who decompose the system into 16 main functional components, Fig. 4(c).

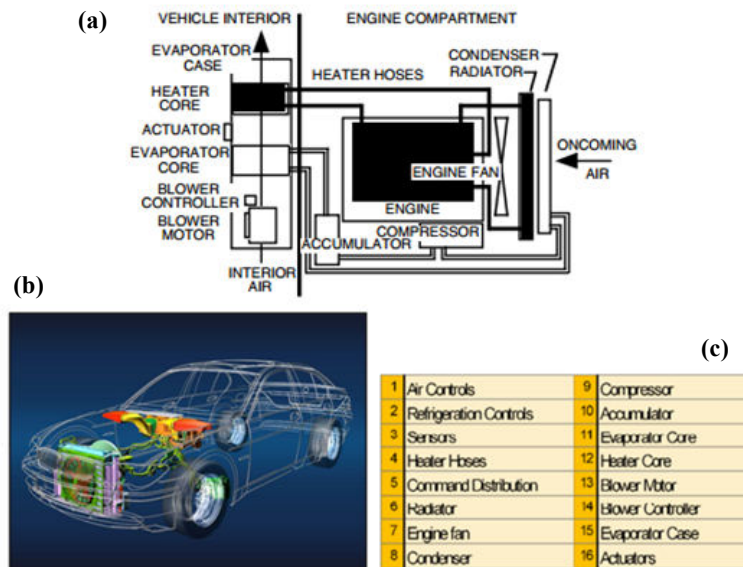


Fig. 4. (a) Diagram of car climate control system [33], (b) Illustration of car climate control system within car (Adapted from [41]), (c) Main components of the automotive climate control system.

3.2. Step 2: Interaction analysis

Once the basic physical components have been identified, the physical and functional interactions between components and the lifecycle similarities of components are analysed and entered into a master interaction matrix. In the developed software prototype, to assist the interaction analysis, evaluation forms, such as for example of coupling interactions (Fig. 5), have been developed using VBA for excel. There are two types of information that must be entered into the matrices: the physical and functional interactions between components and the lifecycle similarity of components.

3.2.1. Component coupling analysis

Following the principles of Ulrich and Tung [2] components that have strong physical and functional relationships should be grouped together to ensure that modules are as independent (loosely coupled) as possible. This will simplify interface complexity between modules and help reduce assembly and disassembly costs. The approach advocated in this research is to use one of two component interface evaluations. If the product is in the conceptual stages where the joining methods have not yet been chosen or the mating complexity between components is unknown it is suggested that a simpler measure (basic component coupling analysis) is used for component interface analysis (Fig. 5). For this evaluation the user must enter the level of component coupling due to three types of functional flows as well as the estimated degree of physical coupling. If sufficient knowledge is known about the possible joining methods and the level of mating complexity then the advanced coupling evaluation can be used. This is based upon three sub factors: the joining method, the mating face complexity and the interface reversibility between components. The combined interface value is then entered into the corresponding position of the matrix. For the purpose of this case study example basic coupling interactions are used, which follow the physical and functional interactions of Pimmler and Eppinger's work.

Coupling

Interaction analysis between: **chassis** and **bag**

There is a constraint between these components.

Basic coupling interactions

Use this coupling type

Functional flow is...

- 0.25 - Transfer of force or energy.
- 0.15 - Transfer of material.
- 0.10 - Transfer of information.
- 0.00 - None.

Physical relationship is....

- 0.75 - Strong.
- 0.50 - Medium.
- 0.25 - Weak.
- 0.00 - None.

Advanced coupling interactions

Use this coupling type

Functional flow is...

- 0.25 - Transfer of force or energy.
- 0.15 - Transfer of material.
- 0.10 - Transfer of information .
- 0.00 - None.

Mating face is...

- 0.25 - Complex irregular shape.
- 0.15 - Semi-regular shape.
- 0.10 - Regular shape.
- 0.10 - Bearing face.
- 0.10 - Geared face.
- 0.00 - None.

Joining method is...

- 0.25 - Multi screw/bolt.
- 0.15 - Single screw/bolt.
- 0.12 - Weld.
- 0.06 - Snapfit.
- 0.06 - Adhesive bond.
- 0.00 - No join.

Joint reversability is..

- 0.25 - Very difficult (weld/ strong adhesive).
- 0.20 - Difficult (multiple screw/ weak adhesive).
- 0.15 - Medium (single screw).
- 0.06 - Simple (snap fit).
- 0.00 - Very simple (no join).

Next Interaction Finish

Fig. 5. Interaction evaluation form for loose coupling objective.

3.2.2. Component lifecycle similarity

In this framework, to optimise product lifecycle characteristics, components that have the same lifecycle requirements should be grouped into discrete modules. There have been many lifecycle modularity drivers identified in the literature, such as the comprehensive list provided by Erixon [26]. In order to provide the basis for a multi-objective optimisation these drivers have been classified into six different product lifecycle stages (Fig. 6). In the developed software prototype, evaluation of the component lifecycle similarity between components is done by splitting the associated modular drivers into a number of different nodes which are mapped to components. This module driver mapping is done in a binary manner; a '1' is entered into the appropriate column if the component corresponds to that driver (Fig. 7). For example, for the climate system, the modularity driver of product variety is split into 4 different nodes based upon different product variance and commonality needs. Each node thus represents a possible module boundary for that particular lifecycle phase. If purely optimised for variance it is clear that there would be 4 modules.

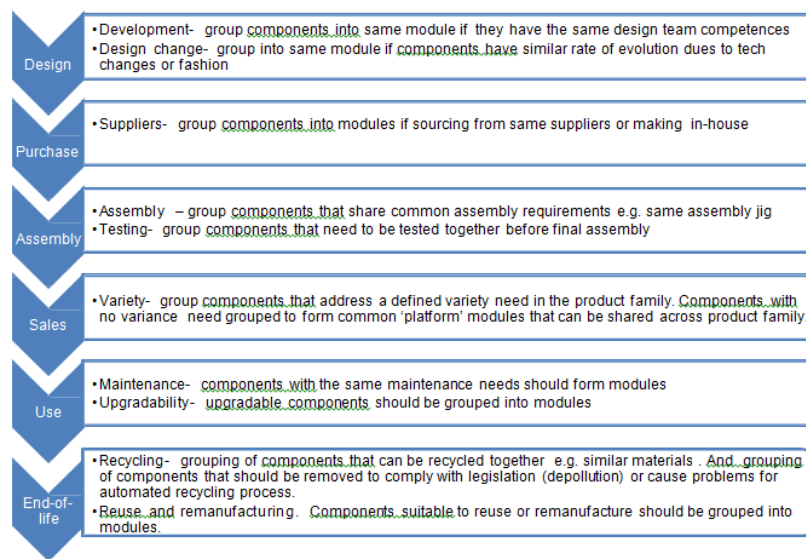


Fig. 6. Modularity drivers linked to product Lifecycle phases.

3.3. Step 3: Formation of modular product architectures

In this step of the framework, a multi-objective optimisation algorithm is applied to generate a set of different modular product architectures. As there is no existing algorithm suitable for this task a custom multi-objective grouping genetic algorithm (MOGGA) has been developed [42]. In the software prototype, the MOGGA is applied to find a whole set of optimal modular architectures through manipulation of the component interface and lifecycle similarity data in the various matrices. Each solution is found by varying the membership of components to modules, in the interaction matrix, such that the developed modularity metrics (Eqs. (1) and (2)) are maximised for seven different objectives (coupling, design, purchase, assembly,

sales, use and end-of-life). Of course it will often be impossible to simultaneously maximise every objective, so different trade-off solutions are produced. Thus in a single optimisation run the MOGGA is able to produce a whole set of solutions that represent a good coverage of the trade-off surface.

		Components:	Coupling Interaction Matrix																
			Air Controls	Refrigeration Controls	Sensors	Command Distribution	Blower Controller	Heater Hoses	Radiator Engine fan	Condenser	Compressor	Accumulator	Evaporator Core	Heater Core	Blower Motor	Evaporator Case	Actuators		
Coupling Interaction Matrix		Air Controls	1	0.4	0.4	0.1											0.1		
		Refrigeration Controls	0.4	1	0.3							0.1	0.2						
		Sensors	0.4	0.3	0.3	1	0.3										0.3	0.3	
		Command Distribution	0.1																
		Blower Controller									0.3	1	0.7	0.2					
		Heater Hoses																0.3	
		Radiator																	
		Engine fan																	
		Condenser																	
		Compressor																	
		Accumulator																	
		Evaporator Core																	
		Heater Core																	
		Blower Motor																	
		Evaporator Case																	
	Actuators																		
Lifecycle driver Mapping	Design	Control team	1	1	1	1	1												
	Design	Air flow team															1	1	1
	Design	Heating system																	1
	Design	air con system team																	1
	Purchase	supplier 1	1	1	1	1	1												
	Purchase	supplier 2																	
	Purchase	Make in-house																	
	Assembly	Passenger side	1	1	1	1	1	1											
	Assembly	Engine side (radiator)																	
	Assembly	Engine side (other)																	
	Sales	Hose length																	
	Sales	Command distribution Length																	
	Sales	Air flow pattern																	
	Sales	manual/ auto models	1	1	1	1	1	1											
	Sales	Radiator/ condenser size																	
End-of-life	Reuse																		
End-of-life	recycle (Shredder)																		
End-of-life	Recycle (Remove for separate)	1	1	1	1	1	1												

Fig. 7. Interaction matrix for car climate example.

Modularity metrics

Two modularity metrics have been developed for the framework; these are the module independence ratio and the module coherence ratio. These metrics are based upon two key modularity principles discussed in the literature: module independence and module coherence. The objective of modularisation from the module independence perspective is to achieve loosely coupled, independent modules. This can be achieved by ensuring that component interactions between modules are minimised. Module coherence is concerned with ensuring that components within modules are addressing the same modularisation objective. In

the software implementation of the framework, the module independence metric is used for analysis of component coupling whereas the module coherence metric is associated with the component lifecycle similarity. Ideally, an optimal modular architecture will have loosely coupled independent modules that are highly coherent in terms of component lifecycle similarity. However, in reality, the two modularity concepts are contradictory. Improving the independence of modules will often mean that the coherence of modules deteriorates and vice versa. Furthermore, there will also be trade-offs needed between the different lifecycle phases. For example, a higher coherence in terms of the design stage may mean a lower coherence at the end-of-life stage. Hence an important part of the framework is to generate and evaluate a number of alternative modular architectures based upon the trade-offs between module independence and module coherence of different lifecycle objectives.

Module Independence (MI) ratio is the measure of component coupling within modules divided by the total coupling between all components and is given by Eq. (1). A higher ratio means more interactions are kept within modules rather than across modules, and the modules are more independent.

$$MI = \sum_{m=1}^M \frac{CI_n}{CI_{maxn}} \quad (1)$$

Module Coherence (MC) ratio measures the total number of components with the same modular driver needs divided by the maximum potential number of component similarity interactions within the modules and is given by Eq. (2).

$$MC = \sum_{m=1}^M \frac{SI_n}{SI_{maxn}} \quad (2)$$

3.4. Step 4: Exploration of different modularisations scenarios

In this step of the framework multi-criteria decision making is used to support the solution ranking and scenario analysis stage. This enables the user to explore compromises and ultimately choose the most suitable modular structure from the different alternatives available. Because in the previous step a solution set has already been generated scenario analysis out can be carried out in 'real time'.

In the software implementation, a product modularisation objective hierarchy has been developed based upon the analytical hierarchical process (AHP) used in multi-criteria decision making (Fig. 8). In AHP pair-wise comparisons of the each criterion are made at each level of the hierarchy, ultimately generating a weight vector for each objective. The weight vectors are then used to provide ranking of the solutions generated by the multi-objective algorithm. For example, starting at the top of the hierarchy the user may decide that component coupling is more important than lifecycle similarity and will set a greater weight by adjustment of the corresponding slider bar. The generated solutions will thus be ranked according to these preference weights and the highest ranking solutions presented to the user for further analysis. In the software prototype the modular solutions are represented by radar plots (Fig. 9). These plots give the user a suitable means for making comparisons between different solutions and exploring different modularisation scenarios.

The chosen modular product architecture has been compared with an existing modular structure in a currently manufactured climate control system, (Fig. 10). This information comes from [37], who performed the case study with a tier one automotive supplier. Nepal discusses that the current climate control system was not systematically modularised in the past, and hence very few modules existed. The existing architecture may well be optimal for assembly time, however, when evaluated using the developed framework and metrics it is poorly configured for the other lifecycle considerations. It is argued however that the grouping of components with similar lifecycle characteristics using the developed framework will significantly reduce associated lifecycle costs. This will include module replacement costs, the costs of implementing variety, cost saving from module sharing (common product platforms) and improvement of recycling and reuse revenues. However, for verification, it is recommended that a detailed cost analysis should be done after a suitable modular structure has been found. Detailed cost modelling of product modularity was considered out of the scope of current research presented in this paper, but does offer an interesting area of future work.

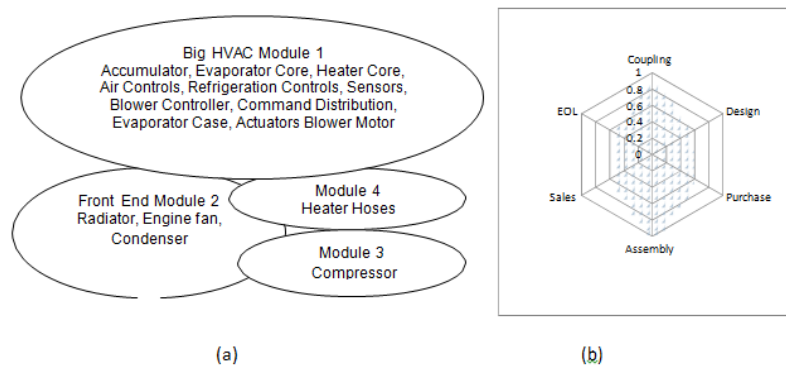


Fig. 10. Existing modularisation of car climate control system a) according to Nepal, (2005) b) modularity analysis with framework.

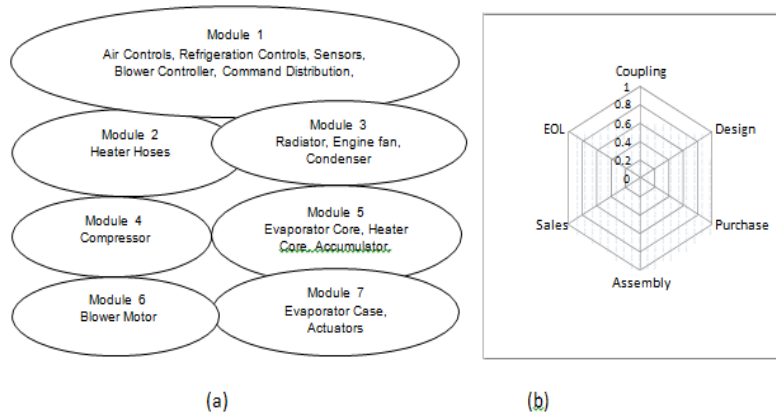


Fig. 11. Recommended modularisation of car climate control system; (a) Modules and components, (b) Modularity analysis with framework.

4. Conclusions

In this paper product modularity has been defined as a complex configuration problem in which the product system is decomposed into smaller more manageable chunks (modules) to improve product lifecycle performance. However, the majority of previous modularity methods have used simplistic optimisation models to handle an inherently complex multi-objective problem. The framework presented in this paper provides an alternative method of product modularisation for lifecycle optimisation using a novel multi-objective approach. This is primarily based upon application of a multi-objective algorithm to generate a whole set of alternative modular architectures, followed by multi-criteria decision making to help identify the best compromise solution according to the company's strategic goals. The focus of this paper has been to describe the framework's four main steps using an example product: the car climate control system. From this study, it is clear that this product is not optimised for the whole product lifecycle and that alternative modular architectures should be explored to improve the product's overall lifecycle performance.

In the research presented in this paper an assumption has been made that one overall modular structure will be chosen for the product. That is a modular architecture that attempts to optimise the whole product lifecycle. However, for some products it may be more sensible to create multiple modular structures within the product; each optimised for different lifecycle phases. This may of course add further complexity to a modular product strategy; and would require the definition of additional optimisation goals. Future work will thus expand the scope of the developed framework to explore the possibility of lifecycle optimisation with multiple modular structures within the same product.

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