

1 Trapped Intermediate State of Plant Pyruvate  
2 Phosphate Dikinase Indicates Sub-steps in Catalytic  
3 Swiveling Domain Mechanism

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14 **Abstract**

15 Pyruvate phosphate dikinase (PPDK) is an essential enzyme of both the C<sub>4</sub> photo-  
16 synthetic pathway and cellular energy metabolism of some bacteria and unicellular  
17 protists. In C<sub>4</sub> plants, it catalyzes the ATP- and P<sub>i</sub>-dependent formation of phospho-  
18 enolpyruvate (PEP) while in bacteria and protozoa the ATP-forming direction is used.  
19 PPDK is composed out of three distinct domains and exhibits one of the largest single  
20 domain movements known today during its catalytic cycle. However, little information  
21 about potential intermediate steps of this movement were available. A recent study

22 resolved a discrete intermediate step of PPDK’s swiveling movement, shedding light on  
23 the details of this intriguing mechanism. Here we present an additional structural in-  
24 termediate that possibly represents another crucial step in the catalytic cycle of PPDK,  
25 providing means to get a more detailed understanding of PPDK’s mode of function.

26 **Keywords:** pyruvate phosphate dikinase, C<sub>4</sub> photosynthesis, swiveling domain mechanism, catalytic intermediate

## 27 Introduction

28 Pyruvate phosphate dikinase (PPDK) is a highly versatile enzyme catalyzing the interconversion between phosphoenolpyruvate  
29 (PEP) and pyruvate in bacteria, plants and unicellular parasitic protists such as *Giardia lamblia*, *Trichomonas vaginalis*, or  
30 *Entamoeba histolytica*. While serving as a glycolytic enzyme in protists enhancing the energy efficiency in these organisms  
31 at energy-limiting conditions [1], PPDK works in the opposite direction in chloroplasts of C<sub>4</sub> plants where it catalyzes the  
32 ATP-driven regeneration of the primary carboxylation substrate of the C<sub>4</sub> pathway PEP [2]. The active biological assembly in  
33 bacteria consists of a homodimer, while plant PPDK can form homotetramers as functional complex. Each PPDK monomer  
34 consists of three distinct structural and functional domains (Fig. 1A): An N-terminal nucleotide binding domain (NBD), a  
35 central domain (CD) housing the catalytic histidine residue that shuttles the phosphoryl group from the high-energy phosphate  
36 substrates and a C-terminal PEP/pyruvate binding domain (PBD). The substrate binding sites of the NBD and PBD are  
37 spaced 45 Å apart. Hence, a so-called swiveling-domain mechanism was proposed based on crystal structures from *Clostridium*  
38 *symbiosum* (Herzberg et al., 1996), *Zea mays* [3] and *Trypanosoma brucei* [4] to explain the transport of the phosphoryl  
39 group from the NBD to the PBD with the CD undergoing a large rotational ( $\sim 110^\circ$ ) and translational ( $\sim 40$  Å) movement.  
40 Recent findings based on structures from the C<sub>4</sub> and C<sub>3</sub> plants *Flaveria trinervia* and *Flaveria pringlei* suggest that the  
41 swiveling motion proceeds with at least one discrete sub-step and might employ an alternate-binding change mechanism [6].  
42 Here we present a novel crystal structure (PDB code 5LU4) of the C<sub>4</sub>-PPDK from *F. trinervia* that has been crystallized in  
43 the presence of the glycolytic substrate pyruvate and the nucleotide inhibitor ADP. The structure represents a yet unknown  
44 potential conformational intermediate of the CD and further elucidates the sequential path of the swiveling motion in the PPDK  
45 catalytic cycle.

## 46 Results and Discussion

47 The pyruvate/ADP complex structure of FtPPDK (PDB code 5LU4) was solved using molecular replacement (MR) and was  
48 refined to a resolution of 2.90 Å with  $R/R_{\text{free}}$  values of 24.7%/28.6% (Tab. 1) with an estimated coordinate error of 0.52 Å.  
49 Coordinates of FtPPDK structure 5JVL chain D were used as a search model for MR. Crystals of 5LU4 belong to space group  
50  $P2_12_12_1$  with the asymmetric unit (ASU) consisting of two FtPPDK monomers (Fig. 1B). The inhibitory ADP molecule is  
51 bound to the NBD in the same manner as the ATP analogue 2'-Br-AppNHp in FtPPDK structures 5JVL and 5JVN (Fig. 2C)  
52 provoking a closed state of the NBD [6]. Similar ADP-bound conformations have also been observed for other proteins containing  
53 an ATP grasp fold such as the human citrate lyase (PDB code 3PFF) or the bacterial glycinamide ribonucleotide synthetase  
54 (PDB code 2XD4). In 5LU4, hydrogen bonds are formed between residues Arg95, Gln336 and the  $\beta$ -phosphate of ADP as well  
55 as Thr108, Arg95, Lys25 and the  $\alpha$ -phosphate of ADP. The adenine ring is bound by hydrogen bonds formed by side chains of

56 residues Ser93, Ser242 and the backbone of Val244. Glu324 is forming a hydrogen bond to the 2'-OH group of the ribose moiety  
57 (Fig. 2C). Compared to the previously resolved intermediate position of the CD in 5JVN and its NBD-facing conformation  
58 in PPDK structures 2X0S (*T. brucei*) or 1KBL (*C. symbiosum*) [7], the position of the CD in the newly resolved structure  
59 suggests domain swiveling along disparate axes to properly align the catalytic His456 for phosphoryl group transfer from the  
60 ATP substrate in the NBD to the pyruvate bound in the PBD. To this end, 5LU4 seems to reflect a potential consecutive  
61 conformational state following the CD intermediate resolved in 5JVN. Rotation of the CD towards the NBD along an axis  
62 defined by the linker helices connecting CD, NBD and PBD in 5LU4 is similar to the previously resolved motion in the 5JVN  
63 intermediate. However, on top of this the CD is rotated by  $\sim 104^\circ$  around a second axis running almost perpendicular to the  
64 initial axis in the linker helices (Fig. 2B) in 5LU4 to further complete the catalytic cycle.

65 As for PPDK structures 5JVL and 5JVJ the ASU of 5LU4 contains two monomers. However, in contrast to the monomer  
66 arrangement in the ASU of previously published PPDK structures, where the functional homodimer is formed via their PBDs,  
67 monomers in the ASU of the swiveling domain intermediate 5LU4 interact directly via their NBDs or their CDs contacting  
68 the NBD in the other monomer, respectively (Fig. 1B). Naturally, the biological assembly previously described for bacterial,  
69 plant and protist PPDKs consisting of a PBD-mediated dimer can be constructed from the crystallographic symmetry for the  
70 5LU4 assembly, too (Fig. 1C). Yet, the spatial arrangement of closely interacting NBDs in the ASU of 5LU4 preventing the  
71 CD from adopting its terminal NBD-facing conformation was certainly a crucial factor to resolve the new potential swiveling  
72 intermediate. In addition to steric restrictions from the NBDs, the 5LU4 intermediate conformation is stabilized by a small  
73 number of polar interactions between the CD of monomer B and the NBD of monomer A in the ASU. The side chain of  
74 Glu290/A interacts with the backbone of residues Met453/B and Thr454/B. Furthermore, Asn250/A forms a hydrogen bond  
75 with Glu431/B. However, taking into account the overall dimensions and the high intrinsic flexibility of the protein as reflected  
76 by high B-factors and the large domain movements in the catalytic cycle in CD and NBD, it is unlikely that these few interactions  
77 on their own have driven the CD in the intermediate conformation resolved in 5LU4. Therefore, the main reason for isolating  
78 this potential conformational intermediate of the CD swiveling motion in the crystal is probably related to the steric hindrance  
79 of the terminal CD transition path towards the NBD in the 5LU4 dimeric assembly. However, such a steric isolation of the  
80 swiveling intermediate does not preclude that the observed structural snapshot in fact represents a physiologically relevant  
81 though short-lived conformational intermediate.

82 Similar restriction of the CD movement by symmetry-related molecules has been observed in the PBD-facing structure  
83 2R82 of mutant *C. symbiosum* PPDK [5]. Nonetheless, 2R82 clearly constitutes a plausible and well-approved conformational  
84 state in the PPDK's swiveling domain mechanism. The potential physiological relevance of our trapped 5LU4 intermediate  
85 is further supported by the free energy landscape profile computed for non-phosphorylated FtPPDK [6]. The transition path  
86 connecting the two extreme conformations of the CD in the swiveling motion, which are located themselves in local minima of  
87 the free energy landscape, follows a low energy valley. The previously resolved CD intermediate 5JVN is located near a shallow  
88 energy minimum along this path, while both, the extreme conformation of the CD resolved in PPDK of *T. brucei* (PDB code  
89 2X0S) [4] and the trapped 5LU4 intermediate of *F. trinervia* PPDK, are located on the edge of the proposed transition path  
90 at similar free energies ( $\sim 12 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ) making both of them energetically feasible intermediates.

91 The combination of currently known crystal structures, including the conformational intermediate described here, allows  
92 to sketch a plausible path of the conformational shifts in the CD taking place in the proposed PPDK swiveling mechanism  
93 (Fig. 2A): First, the CD is positioned with its catalytic His456 mediating phosphoryl group transfer between NBD and PBD  
94 in close proximity to the pyruvate binding site. At this initial state, the NBD is empty and in an open conformation (PDB  
95 code 5JVJ chain A). Subsequent nucleotide binding then triggers movement and closure of the NBD (PDB code 5JVL; Fig. 2A,  
96 state 1). In consequence, the CD is rotated towards the NBD by  $\sim 45^\circ$  around an axis located at the center of the CD running

97 parallel to the linker helices that connect CD to NBD and PBD. The related swiveling motion places the CD in an intermediate  
98 conformation between both substrate binding domains as observed in 5JVN (Fig. 2A, state 2). To further align the catalytic  
99 His456 with the bound nucleotide substrate in the nucleotide binding cleft of the NBD, the CD then is rotated by  $\sim 104^\circ$  along  
100 an axis that is oriented perpendicular to the previous swiveling movement (Fig. 2A, state 3). Eventually the CD is tilted towards  
101 the nucleotide binding site, resulting in the NBD-facing conformation, known from the 2X0S and 1KBL crystal structures of  
102 *T. brucei* and *C. symbiosum*.

103 Similar discrete sub-steps of rotary domain movements deduced from the ensemble of different PPDK conformational  
104 states have been described for other proteins exhibiting large rotational domain movements such as the F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase [8], the  
105 bacterial flagellar motor [9] or the *E. coli* 5'-nucleotidase [10]. In these systems, the discovery of discrete sub-steps of a rotational  
106 movement — initially thought to be of rather continuous nature — has eventually led to deeper understanding of the underlying  
107 catalytic mechanism and a strong correlation between structure and molecular function. In the past, the CD swiveling motion  
108 of PPDK was well recognized as one of the largest single domain movements observed in enzyme catalysis, but has always  
109 been described as a smooth transition between two extreme conformational states [12, 5]. Here we demonstrate, that this event  
110 involves two sub-steps at least. Noteworthy, a similar two-stepped swiveling mechanism has been proposed for Enzyme I (EI)  
111 of the bacterial phosphoenolpyruvate:sugar phosphotransferase system (PTS). The PBD and CD of EI are structurally and  
112 functionally similar to their counterparts in PPDK and likewise catalyze a phosphoryl group transfer between distant substrate  
113 binding sites. Despite these similarities, the inter-domain linker in EI adopts a different conformation as in PPDK. Remarkably,  
114 structural data on EI suggest a swiveling mechanism, where the CD is detached from the PBD by swiveling around an  $\alpha$ -helical  
115 linker as a first step, followed by the alignment of the catalytic histidine with its substrate histidine carrier protease (HPr),  
116 implemented by a motion around a second linker segment [13]. This mechanism is highly similar to the two-stepped swiveling  
117 mechanism outlined in our study for PPDK as both proceed via a second step that is likely involved in the correct alignment  
118 of the catalytic histidine residue and the phosphoryl-accepting substrate.

119 In summary, recent advances in our knowledge on discrete conformational intermediates of the CD swiveling motion found  
120 in crystal structures of PPDK from the C<sub>4</sub> plant *F. trinervia*, now enable us to get a more detailed view on the conformational  
121 transitions of the protein in the catalytic cycle breaking with the paradigm that the proposed swiveling motion of the CD takes  
122 place as smooth transition between only two extreme conformations. But, on the contrary, the newly resolved intermediate  
123 conformations and related sub-steps provide a more detailed mechanistic understanding of a key enzyme of cellular energy  
124 metabolism in bacteria, protists and plants.

## 125 Material and Methods

### 126 Expression and purification of recombinant FtPPDK

127 Codon-optimized coding regions of PPDK from *Flaveria trinervia* stripped of the chloroplast transport sequence were cloned  
128 into the multiple cloning site of a pET-16b vector (Novagen) containing a histidine<sub>10</sub> tag and coding for a Tobacco Etch Virus  
129 (TEV) protease cleavage site. *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) cells (Agilent Technologies) transformed with this plasmid were grown in 2YT  
130 medium (5 g L<sup>-1</sup> NaCl, 10 g L<sup>-1</sup> yeast extract, 16 g L<sup>-1</sup> peptone) at 30 °C to an OD<sub>600</sub> of 0.8. Protein expression was induced  
131 by the addition of 0.1 mM isopropyl- $\beta$ -D-thiogalactopyranosid (IPTG). Cells were harvested 18 h after induction by centrifuga-  
132 tion. Harvested cells were suspended in lysis buffer (50 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.5, 300 mM NaCl, 10 mM imidazole, 10 mM MgSO<sub>4</sub>,  
133 10% (w/v) glycerol, 5 mM DTT, 0,002% phenylmethanesulfonylfluoride) and disrupted using a cell disruptor (Constant Sys-

134 tems). PPDK was purified from the lysate using a nickel affinity chromatography column (GE Healthcare). Purification buffer  
135 (50 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.5, 300 mM NaCl, 10 mM MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 10% (w/v) glycerol, 5 mM DTT) and elution buffer (50 mM Tris/HCl pH  
136 7.5, 300 mM NaCl, 500 mM imidazole,  
137 10 mM MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 10% (w/v) glycerol, 5 mM DTT) were applied for purification. The loaded PPDK was washed with 50 mM,  
138 150 mM and 200 mM imidazol, before elution with 500 mM imidazole. Protein containing fractions were pooled and concentrated  
139 by ultrafiltration (30 kDa cutoff, Millipore). The buffer was exchanged to purification buffer using a PD-10 column (GE Health-  
140 care) before cleavage of the histidine tag by TEV protease was initiated at room temperature over night. Cleaved PPDK was  
141 separated from the affinity tag by reverse IMAC, the flow-through was pooled, concentrated by ultrafiltration and the buffer  
142 changed for crystallization buffer (10 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.5, 5 mM MgSO<sub>4</sub>).

## 143 Crystallization

144 Initial crystals of the FtPPDK-pyruvate-ADP complex were obtained using the sitting drop vapor diffusion method. FtPPDK  
145 in crystallization buffer at a concentration of 10 mg mL<sup>-1</sup> was incubated at room temperature for 20 min with 5 mM MgSO<sub>4</sub>,  
146 5 mM pyruvate and 5 mM ADP. The protein solution was mixed with precipitant at a 1:1 ratio resulting in a final volume of  
147 200 nL and was equilibrated against 50  $\mu$ L reservoir solution at 21 °C. For crystal optimization the drop size was increased to  
148 2  $\mu$ L. The optimized precipitant contained 0.3 M MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.1 M MES pH 6.5 and 10% (w/v) PEG 4000. Crystals grew within  
149 two days to a size of 300 $\times$ 20 $\times$ 10  $\mu$ m<sup>3</sup>. For cryoprotection ethylene glycol was added to the drop (final concentration 15%)  
150 before the crystals were flash-frozen in liquid nitrogen.

## 151 X-ray data collection and processing

152 X-ray diffraction data was obtained at EMBL/DESY (Hamburg, Germany) beamline P13 using a wavelength of 0.9686 Å. The  
153 data set spans a total range of 270° with an oscillation range of 0.1° per image. The data set was processed with XDS [14],  
154 initial phases were determined by MR with Phaser [15] using the coordinates of 5JVL chain D as starting model. The resulting  
155 structure was rebuilt using Buccaneer [16] from the CCP4 [17] suite, followed by several rounds of manual and iterative rebuilding  
156 using Coot [18] and refinement with phenix.refine [19]. Ligands were not modeled until near-final refinement stages to reduce  
157 model bias. The atomic displacement parameters were refined individually and were partly described as groups of translation,  
158 libration and screw-motion (TLS) [20]. Feature-enhanced maps (FEM) were used to enhance sensitivity for weak side chains [21].  
159 The structure was validated using tools provided by Coot and PHENIX, particularly MolProbity [22]. Figures were generated  
160 using PyMOL [23] and PoseView [24].

## 161 Protein Data Bank Accession Code

162 Structure factors and coordinates of the pyruvate/ADP complex of FtPPDK have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank in  
163 Europe (PDBe) with the accession code 5LU4.

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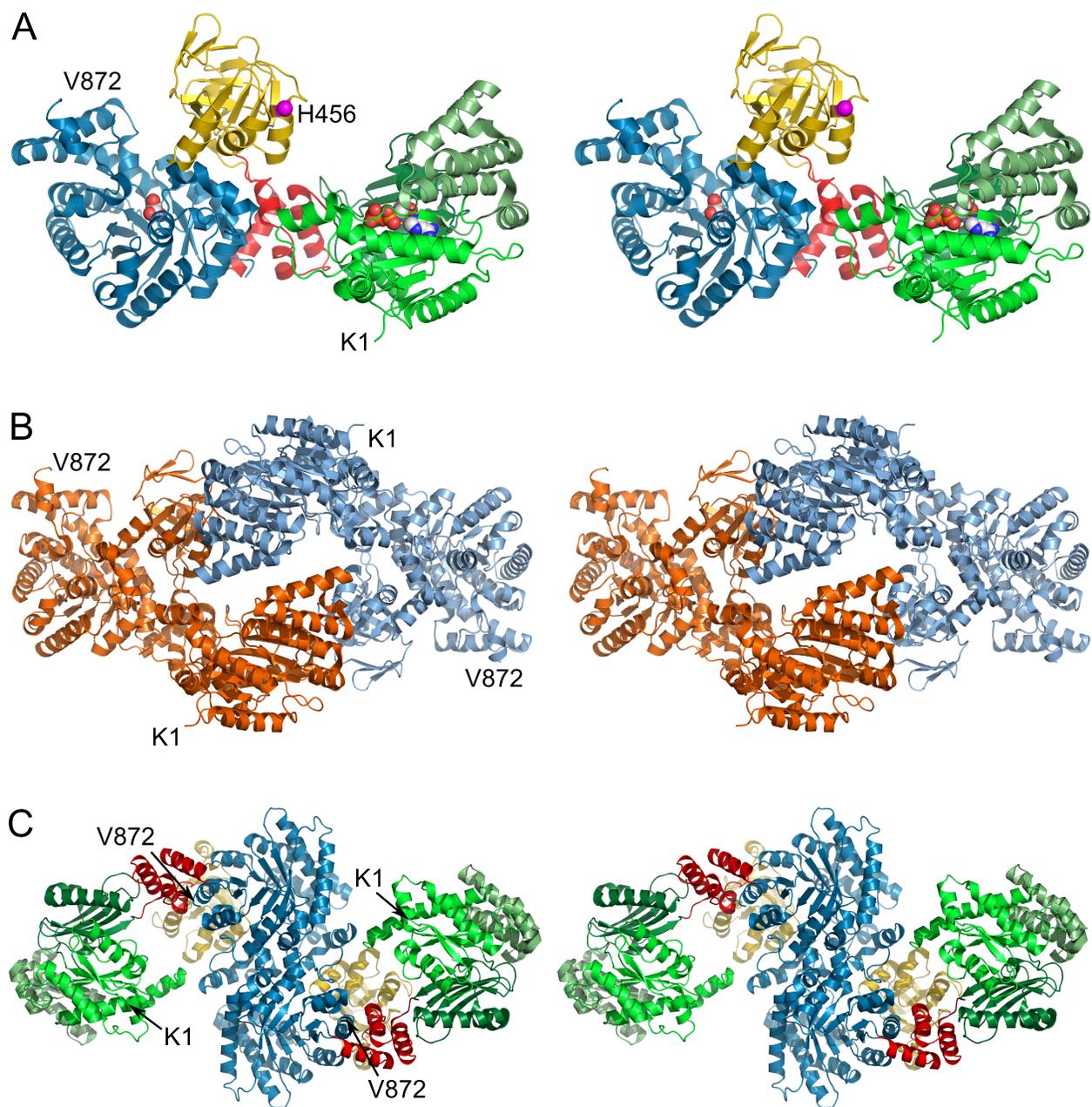


Figure 1: (A) Stereo cartoon representation of 5LU4 chain A illustrating the overall domain organization. The nucleotide binding domain (NBD, aa 1-340) and its three subdomains are colored in different greens. The PEP/pyruvate binding domain (PBD) is colored in blue (aa 534-872). The central domain (CD, yellow, aa 381-516) with the catalytic His456 (magenta,  $C_{\alpha}$  shown as sphere) is attached to both substrate binding domains via two short linker helices (red, aa 341-380 and 517-533). Pyruvate and ADP bound to the PBD and NBD respectively are depicted as spheres. (B) Dimeric assembly within the asymmetric unit (ASU). The dimer is formed by contacts between the NBDs and CDs of chains A and B, colored orange and blue respectively. (C) Biological assembly as identified by the program EPPIC [11] and reconstructed from crystal symmetry. The dimerization interface is formed by both PBDs as previously described [12]. Individual domains are colored according to (A).

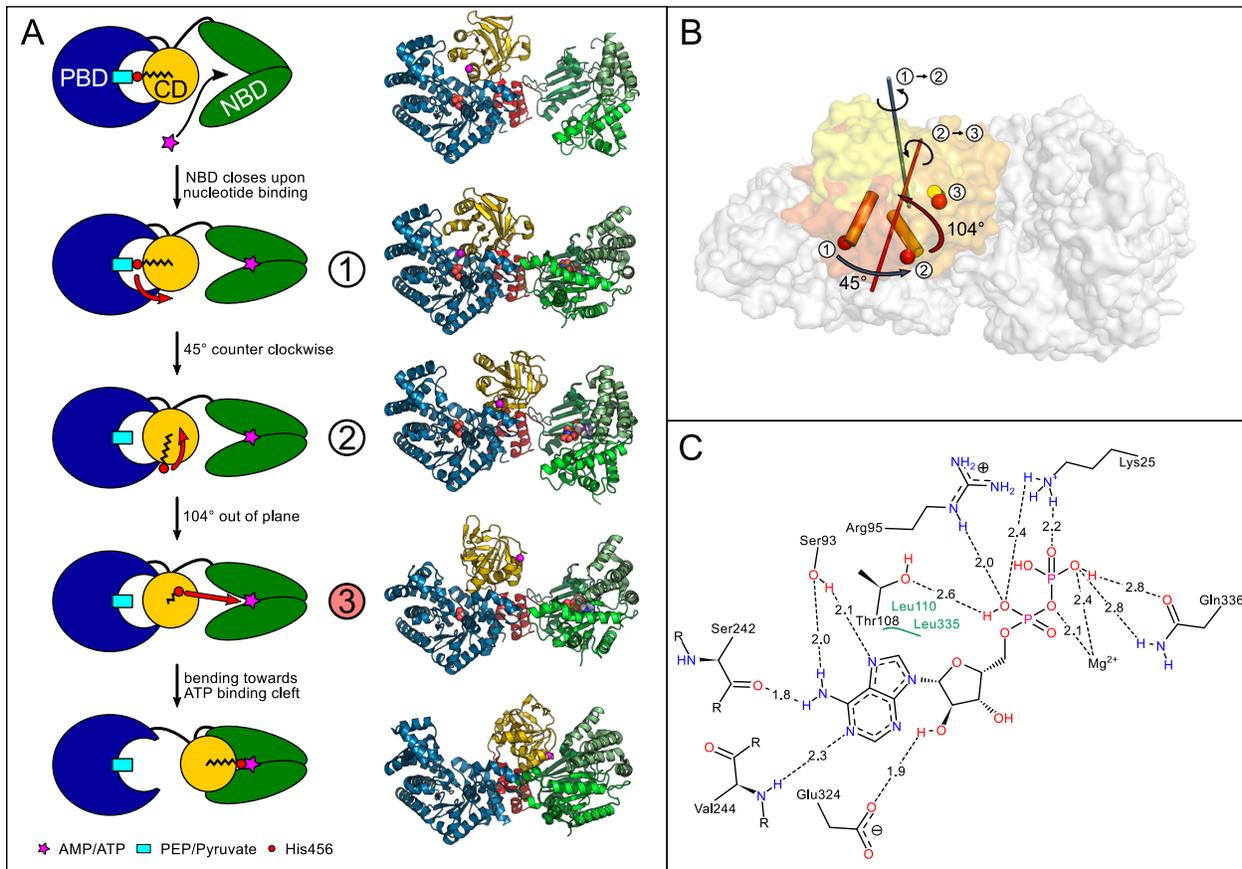


Figure 2: (A) Schematic model of the CD movement in the catalytic cycle taking into account currently known conformational intermediates. Helix 20 containing the catalytic His456 (red circle) at its N-terminal end is drawn as black zig-zag structure. The different CD conformations are numbered according to (B) with the newly solved intermediate structure highlighted in red. Corresponding crystal structures are shown on the right from top to bottom: 5JVJ chain A, 5JVL chain D, 5JVN, 5LU4 chain A [6], 1KBL [7] (B) Illustration of PPK-CD structural intermediates. CDs of published structures 5JVL chain C (1, dark-orange), 5JVN (2, orange), and of newly resolved structure 5LU4 (3, yellow) as well as the corresponding rotational axes for transformation between the different intermediate states are shown. (C) Schematic representation of the nucleotide binding site in 5LU4 chain A containing tightly bound ADP. The distances between the bound nucleotide and interacting amino acids of the binding pocket are given in Å.

Table 1: Data collection and refinement statistics

5LU4	
<b>Data collection</b>	
Wavelength (Å)	0.9686
Space group	$P2_12_12_1$
Cell dimensions	
<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i> (Å)	74.16 126.52 219.00
$\alpha$ , $\beta$ , $\gamma$ (°)	90, 90, 90
Resolution (Å)	219.00–2.90 (3.00–2.90)
$R_{\text{merge}}$	0.047 (0.499)
$R_{\text{meas}}$	0.053 (0.564)
$R_{\text{pim}}$	0.024 (0.242)
$I/\sigma_I$	20.1 (3.19)
Completeness (%)	99.8 (99.7)
Multiplicity	4.9 (5.2)
Wilson B (Å <sup>2</sup> )	83.0
<b>Model and refinement</b>	
Resolution (Å)	109.79–2.90 (2.98–2.90)
Reflections (unique/test)	46418/2229
$R_{\text{work}}/R_{\text{free}}$ (%)	24.7/28.6
No. of atoms	
Protein	11954
Ligand/ion	64
Water	2
B-factors (Å <sup>2</sup> )	
Protein	99.25
Ligands	64.61
Water	66.81
RMSD	
Bonds lengths (Å)	0.017
Bond angles (°)	1.52
Ramachandran analysis	
Favored regions (%)	97.34
Allowed regions (%)	2.43
Outliers (%)	0.24

Highest resolution shell is shown in parentheses.