FRANCESCO FACCIO

Homepage ◇ francesco.faccio.ai@gmail.com ◇ Google Scholar

RESEARCH PROFILE

Currently a Senior Research Scientist on the Discovery Team at Google DeepMind. Previously Postdoctoral researcher and a PhD at IDSIA, mentored by Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber. Successfully acquired over $3 million in AI research funding, and spearheaded initiatives expected to secure more than $25 million in funding for AI projects over the next 5 years. My research interests lie at the intersection of General AI, Reinforcement Learning, and AI for Science. I am particularly interested in developing Artificial Scientists to automate scientific research using artificial curiosity and metalearning techniques. Part of my work involves language modeling and robotics.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Senior Research Scientist   Jan 2025 – Present
Google DeepMind, London
- Working on Reinforcement Learning in the Discovery Team.

Research Consultant   Oct 2022 – Dec 2024
Center of Excellence for Generative AI, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology
- Secured funds for over $2.5M$ while conducting several research projects between industry and academia.
- Contributed to the establishment of a new Center of Excellence in Generative AI.
- Co-organized the KAUST Rising Stars in AI Symposium 2023, 2024, 2025.
- Conducted over 50 interviews to recruit and hire PhD students and Postdocs.

Intern   2018 – 2019
The Swiss AI Lab IDSIA, USI, SUPSI
- Compared LSTM and GRU Recurrent Neural Networks on language tasks.

Google Summer of Code (GSoC) Student   2016
GNU Octave
- Implemented two Matlab-compatible adaptive solvers for Differential Algebraic Equations.
- Increased sparse matrix speed by 150x over the classic Octave DASPK solver.

EDUCATION

Postdoc in Computer Science   Feb 2024 – Dec 2024
Università della Svizzera italiana (Dalle Molle Institute for Artificial Intelligence Research)
Supervisor: Jürgen Schmidhuber
Focus: Reinforcement Learning, Large Language Models, Machine Learning

Ph.D. in Computer Science   Feb 2019 – Feb 2024
Università della Svizzera italiana (Dalle Molle Institute for Artificial Intelligence Research)
Supervisor: Jürgen Schmidhuber
Ph.D. Thesis: Reinforcement learning with general evaluators and generators of policies.
Focus: Reinforcement Learning, Neural Networks, Machine Learning

M.Sc. in Mathematical Engineering   Mar 2016 – Dec 2018
Politecnico di Milano
Supervisor: Marcello Restelli
Focus: Advanced Mathematics, Advanced Programming, Machine Learning, Applied Statistics.

B.Sc. Mathematical Engineering   Sep 2012 – Feb 2016
Politecnico di Milano

PROJECTS AWARDED (> $3M FUNDS)

AI for Chemical Material Discovery
2024 –

KAUST Center of Excellence for Generative AI + Undisclosed Industrial Partner
- Contribution: Designed, wrote, and led a project on Reinforcement Learning for the discovery of Chemical Materials with an industrial partner.
- Status: Awarded an undisclosed amount over multiple years duration.

From Generative AI to General AI
2024 – 2029

KAUST Center of Excellence for Generative AI
- Contribution: Designed and wrote a proposal on General AI research for internal funds.
- Status: Awarded an undisclosed amount over 5 years duration.

Computer Vision for the KAUST Coral Restoration Initiative
2024 –

KAUST Center of Excellence for Generative AI + KCRI
- Contribution: Major contribution in initiating the project proposal, developing its first draft, and involving the sponsoring partner.
- Status: Awarded an undisclosed amount over multiple years duration.

Computational Resources for Reinforcement Learning Research
2021 – 2022

IDSIA, USI, SUPSI
- Contribution: Designed, wrote, and led a proposal for computational resources.
- Status: Awarded 220 thousand GPU hours on the Swiss National Supercomputer. Estimated value $500k.

PROJECTS PENDING APPROVAL ($4.7M FUNDS)

Curious Robot Babies Learn Through Self-Invented Experiments
2024 – 2028

KAUST Center of Excellence for Generative AI + Undisclosed Industrial Partners
- Contribution: Major contribution in writing the proposal and organizing the collaboration between industry partners.
- Status: Under review for $2.7M over 5 years duration.

Additional undisclosed projects for approximately $2M
2024 – 2027

KAUST Center of Excellence for Generative AI + Undisclosed Industrial Partner
- Contribution: Designed, and wrote the projects in collaboration with the industry.
- Status: Under review.

PUBLICATIONS

- V. Herrmann, **F. Faccio**, and J. Schmidhuber. Learning Useful Representations of Recurrent Neural Network Weight Matrices (2024). *International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML)*. Selected for an **oral** presentation. **Acceptance rate for oral presentation 144/9473 (1.5%)**. https://arxiv.org/abs/2403.11998

- M. Zhuge, W. Wang, L. Kirsch, **F. Faccio**, D. Khizbullin, and J. Schmidhuber. Language Agents as Optimizable Graphs (2024). *International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML)*. Selected for an **oral** presentation. **Acceptance rate for oral presentation 144/9473 (1.5%)**. https://arxiv.org/abs/2402.16823

- Y. Wang, W. Li, **F. Faccio**, Q. Wu, and J. Schmidhuber. Highway Value Iteration Networks (2024). *International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML)*. https://arxiv.org/abs/2406.03485v1

- **F. Faccio***, V. Herrmann*, A. Ramesh, L. Kirsch and J. Schmidhuber. Goal-Conditioned Generators of Deep Policies (2023). *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*. Selected for an **oral** presentation. Acceptance rate 1721/8777 (19.6%). https://doi.org/10.1609/aaai.v37i6.25912

- H. Liu, M. Zhuge, B. Li, Y. Wang, **F. Faccio**, B. Ghanem, and J. Schmidhuber. Learning to Identify Critical States for Reinforcement Learning from Videos (2023). *Proceedings of the International Conference on Computer Vision (ICCV)*. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCV51070.2023.00187

- M. Štrupl*, **F. Faccio***, D. R. Ashley, R. K. Srivastava, and J. Schmidhuber. Reward-Weighted Regression Converges to a Global Optimum (2022). *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*. Acceptance rate 1349/9251 (14.6%). https://doi.org/10.1609/aaai.v36i8.20811

- N. Sajid*, **F. Faccio***, L. Da Costa, T. Parr, J. Schmidhuber, and K. Friston. Bayesian brains and the Rényi divergence (2022). *Neural Computation*. https://doi.org/10.1162/neco_a_01484

- K. Irie, **F. Faccio**, and J. Schmidhuber. Neural Differential Equations for Learning to Program Neural Nets Through Continuous Learning Rules (2022). *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS)*. Acceptance rate 2672/10411 (25.6%). https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2206.01649

- **F. Faccio**, L. Kirsch, and J. Schmidhuber. Parameter-based Value Functions (2021). *International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR)*. Acceptance rate 860/2997 (28.7%). https://openreview.net/forum?id=tV6oBfuyLTQ

- A. M. Metelli, M. Papini, **F. Faccio**, and M. Restelli. Policy Optimization via Importance Sampling (2018). *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS)*. Selected for an **oral** presentation. Acceptance rate 1011/4856 (20.8%). **Acceptance rate for oral presentation 30/4856 (0.6%)**. https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.5555/3327345.3327449

* equal contribution

PREPRINTS AND WORKSHOPS

- W. Wang, H. Alyahya, D. R. Ashley, O. Serikov, D. Khizbullin, **F. Faccio**, and J. Schmidhuber. How to Correctly do Semantic Backpropagation on Language-based Agentic Systems (2024). *Under review.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2412.03624

- Y. Wang, Q. Wu, W. Li, D. R. Ashley, **F. Faccio**, C. Huang, and J. Schmidhuber. Scaling Value Iteration Networks to 5000 Layers for Extreme Long-Term Planning (2024). *Under review.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2406.08404

- Y. Wang, H. Liu, M. Strupl, **F. Faccio**, Q. Wu, X. Tan, and J. Schmidhuber. Highway Reinforcement Learning (2024). *Preprint.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2405.18289

- M. Alhakami, D. R. Ashley, J. Dunham, **F. Faccio**, E. Feron, and J. Schmidhuber. Towards a Robust Soft Baby Robot With Rich Interaction Ability for Advanced Machine Learning Algorithms (2024). *Preprint.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.08093

- W. Zhang, H. Liu, J. Xie, **F. Faccio**, M.Z. Shou, and J. Schmidhuber. Cross-Attention Makes Inference Cumbersome in Text-to-Image Diffusion Models (2024). *Under review.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.02747

- M. Zhuge*, H. Liu*, **F. Faccio***, D. R. Ashley*, et al. Mindstorms in Natural Language-Based Societies of Mind (2023). *NeurIPS Workshop on Robustness of Few-shot and Zero-shot Learning in Foundation Models.* **Best Paper Award**. https://arxiv.org/abs/2305.17066

- A. Stanić, D. R. Ashley, O. Serikov, L. Kirsch, **F. Faccio**, J. Schmidhuber, T. Hofmann, and I. Schlag. The Languini Kitchen: Enabling Language Modelling Research at Different Scales of Compute (2023). *Preprint.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2309.11197

- P. Piekos, A. Ramesh, **F. Faccio**, and J. Schmidhuber. Efficient Value Propagation with the Compositional Optimality Equation (2023). *NeurIPS Workshop on Goal-Conditioned Reinforcement Learning.* https://openreview.net/forum?id=UyNjQ3UKO2

- W. Wang, L. Kirsch, **F. Faccio**, M. Zhuge, and J. Schmidhuber. Continually Adapting Optimizers Improve Meta-Generalization (2023). *NeurIPS Workshops on Optimization and Distribution Shift.* https://openreview.net/forum?id=Aw8GuIevIa

- **F. Faccio**, A. Ramesh, V. Herrmann, J. Harb, L. Kirsch, and J. Schmidhuber. General Policy Evaluation and Improvement by Learning to Identify Few But Crucial States (2022). *ICML 2022 Decision Awareness in Reinforcement Learning.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2207.01566

<div align="right">* equal contribution</div>

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Maintainer of the Neural Networks Package   2016 – 2017
GNU Octave
  · Implemented and documented several Neural Network functionalities for Octave.

Google Summer of Code (GSoC) Mentor   2017
GNU Octave
  · Proposed and mentored a GSoC project on Convolutional Neural Networks.

President   2015 – 2017
Polimi Student Chapter of SIAM
  · Organized academic and cultural events.

Board of Directors   2014 – 2016
Associazione Ingegneri Matematici (Mathematical Engineering Association)
  · Organized 40+ events in collaboration with industrial partners, mainly focused on soft skills
    development, careers orientation, programming challenges, and interview training.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Oral presentation, ICML   2024
Oral presentation, ICML   2024
Best paper award, NeurIPS 2023 workshop on Ro-FoMo   2023
Oral presentation, AAAI   2023
Rising Star in AI, KAUST   2022
Oral presentation, NeurIPS   2018
Outstanding service to SIAM Student Chapters, Politecnico di Milano   2016

INVITED SPEAKER

SDAIA National Center for AI,   2024
Microsoft Research Asia Beijing, Learning to extract information from Neural Networks   2024
CUHKSZ, Recent Advances in LLM and CV   2023
TU Dresden, Conference on Reinforcement Learning   2022
KAUST, Rising Stars in AI Symposium   2022
CERN, OctConf 17   2017
New York University, Advanced Risk and Portfolio Management Bootcamp   2017
Google Tech Corner, GSoC 2017 Mentor Summit   2017
SISSA, A day in Applied Mathematics   2016

REVIEWING

Reviewer, Neural Information Processing Systems   2024
Reviewer, International Conference on Learning Representations   2024
Reviewer, International Conference on Machine Learning   2024
Reviewer, European Workshop on Reinforcement Learning   2024

Reviewer, ARLET Workshop ICML 2024

Emergency Reviewer, International Conference on Artificial Neural Networks 2024

Reviewer, International Conference on Learning Representations 2023

Reviewer, Neural Information Processing Systems 2022

Program Committee, Offline RL Workshop NeurIPS 2022

Reviewer, European Workshop on Reinforcement Learning 2022

Reviewer, International Conference on Machine Learning 2022

Reviewer, International Conference on Learning Representations 2022

Program Committee, Offline RL Workshop NeurIPS 2021

Reviewer, Neural Information Processing Systems 2021

TEACHING

Teaching Assistant, Machine Learning, Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber 2021

Teaching Assistant, Machine Learning, Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber 2020

Teaching Assistant, Machine Learning, Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber 2019

Teaching Assistant, Machine Learning, Prof. Jürgen Schmidhuber 2018

CITIZENSHIP AND RESIDENCE

Italy: Citizen
Switzerland: B Permit

LANGUAGES

Italian: Native Speaker
English: Fluency