

# Quantitative Economics Workshop Paris

## Prelude to Dynamic Programming

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# Introduction

Summary of this lecture:

- Linear equations
- Fixed point theory
- Algorithms
- Job search

Resources:

- Slides and DP textbook at  
[https://github.com/jstac/paris\\_workshop\\_2022](https://github.com/jstac/paris_workshop_2022)

# Linear Equations

For scalar equation  $x = ax + b$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} |a| < 1 \quad \implies \quad x^* &= \frac{b}{1-a} \\ &= \sum_{i \geq 0} a^i b \end{aligned}$$

How can we extend this beyond one dimension?

- When does  $x = Ax + b$  have a unique solution?
- How can we compute it?

Recall that  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$  is an **eigenvalue** of  $n \times n$  matrix  $A$  if

$$Ae = \lambda e \quad \text{for some nonzero } e \in \mathbb{C}^n$$

We define the **spectral radius** of  $A$  as

$$r(A) := \max\{|\lambda| : \lambda \text{ is an eigenvalue of } A\}$$

**Key idea:**

- $r(A) < 1$  is a generalization of  $|a| < 1$

# Neumann Series Lemma

Suppose

- $b$  is  $n \times 1$  and  $A$  is  $n \times n$
- $I$  is the  $n \times n$  identity matrix

**Theorem.** If  $r(A) < 1$ , then

1.  $I - A$  is nonsingular
2.  $\sum_{k \geq 0} A^k$  converges
3.  $(I - A)^{-1} = \sum_{k \geq 0} A^k$  and
4.  $x = Ax + b$  has the unique solution

$$x^* := (I - A)^{-1}b$$

Intuitive idea: with  $S := \sum_{k \geq 0} A^k$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} I + AS &= I + A(I + A + \cdots) \\ &= I + A + A^2 + \cdots \\ &= S \end{aligned}$$

Rearranging  $I + AS = S$  gives  $S = (I - A)^{-1}$

$$\therefore x = Ax + b \iff (I - A)x = b \iff x^* = (I - A)^{-1}b$$

# Fixed points

To solve nonlinear equations we use fixed point theory

Recall: if  $S$  is any set then

- $T$  is a **self-map** on  $S$  if  $T$  maps  $S$  into itself
- $x^* \in S$  is called a **fixed point** of  $T$  in  $S$  if  $Tx^* = x^*$

Examples.

- Every  $x$  in  $S$  is fixed for the **identity map**  $I: x \mapsto x$
- If  $S = \mathbb{N}$  and  $Tx = x + 1$ , then  $T$  has no fixed point

Example.

- If  $S \subset \mathbb{R}$ , then  $Tx = x \iff T$  meets the 45 degree line



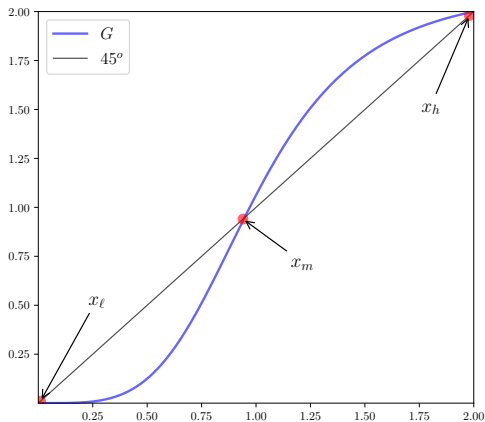


Figure: Graph and fixed points of  $G: x \mapsto 2.125/(1+x^{-4})$

**Key idea:** Fixed point theory is for solving equations

1. solve  $x = Tx \iff$  find fixed points of  $T$
2. solve  $Gx = 0 \iff$  find fixed points of  $Tx = Gx + x$

**Example.** If  $S = \mathbb{R}^n$  and  $Tx = Ax + b$ , then

$x^*$  solves equation  $x = Ax + b \iff x^*$  is a fixed point of  $T$

(But fixed point theory is mainly for nonlinear equations)

Point on notation:

- $T^2 = T \circ T$
- $T^3 = T \circ T \circ T$
- etc.

**Example.**  $Tx = Ax + b$  implies  $T^2x = A(Ax + b) + b$

Self-map  $T$  is called **globally stable** on  $S$  if

1.  $T$  has a unique fixed point  $x^*$  in  $S$  and
2.  $T^k x \rightarrow x^*$  as  $k \rightarrow \infty$  for all  $x \in S$

**Example.** Let  $S = \mathbb{R}^n$  and  $Tx = Ax + b$

**Ex.** Prove:  $r(A) < 1$  implies  $T$  is globally stable on  $S$

**Example.** Consider Solow–Swan growth dynamics

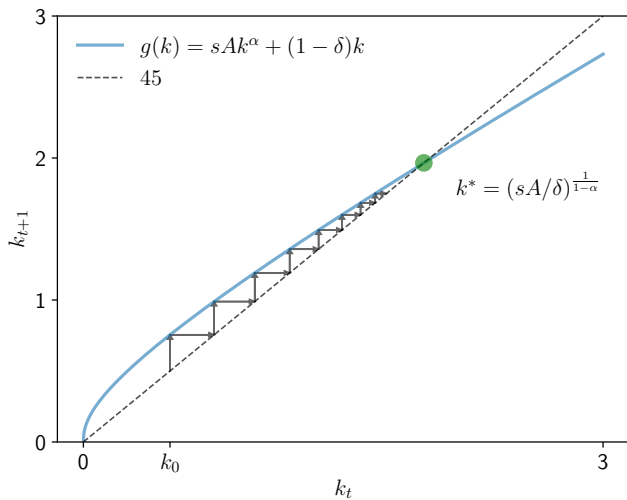
$$k_{t+1} = g(k_t) := sAk_t^\alpha + (1 - \delta)k_t, \quad t = 0, 1, \dots,$$

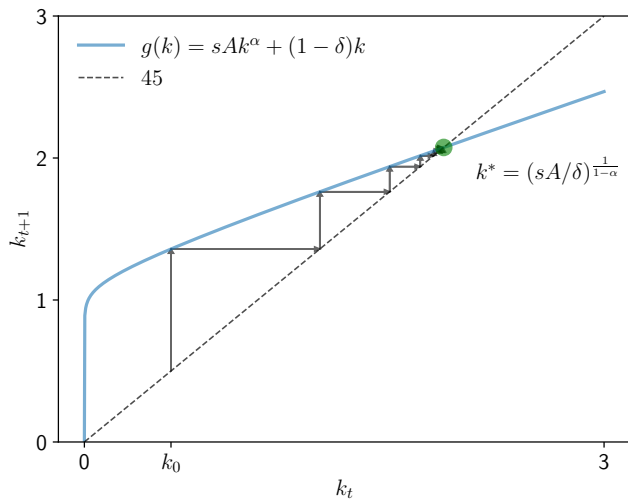
where

- $k_t$  is capital stock per worker,
- $A, \alpha > 0$  are production parameters,  $\alpha < 1$
- $s > 0$  is a savings rate, and
- $\delta \in (0, 1)$  is a rate of depreciation

Iterating with  $g$  from  $k_0$  generates a time path for capital stock

The map  $g$  is globally stable on  $(0, \infty)$





## Note from last slide

- If  $g$  is flat near  $k^*$ , then  $g(k) \approx k^*$  for  $k$  near  $k^*$
- A flat function near the fixed point  $\implies$  fast convergence

## Conversely

- If  $g$  is close to the 45 degree line near  $k^*$ , then  $g(k) \approx k$
- Close to 45 degree line means high persistence, slow convergence



Under what conditions are self-maps globally stable?

# Contractions

Let

- $U$  be a nonempty subset of  $\mathbb{R}^n$
- $\| \cdot \|$  be a norm on  $\mathbb{R}^n$
- $T$  be a self-map on  $U$

$T$  is called a **contraction** on  $U$  with respect to  $\| \cdot \|$  if

$$\exists \lambda < 1 \text{ such that } \|Tu - Tv\| \leq \lambda \|u - v\| \quad \text{for all } u, v \in U$$

# Banach's contraction mapping theorem

## Theorem If

1.  $U$  is closed in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  and
2.  $T$  is a contraction of modulus  $\lambda$  on  $U$  with respect to some norm  $\|\cdot\|$  on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ,

then  $T$  has a unique fixed point  $u^*$  in  $U$  and

$$\|T^n u - u^*\| \leq \lambda^n \|u - u^*\| \quad \text{for all } n \in \mathbb{N} \text{ and } u \in U$$

In particular,  $T$  is globally stable on  $U$

# Successive approximation

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fix a guess  $x_0$  and some error tolerance  $\tau$

$\varepsilon \leftarrow \tau + 1$

$x \leftarrow x_0$

**while**  $\varepsilon > \tau$  **do**

$y \leftarrow Tx$

$\varepsilon \leftarrow \|y - x\|$

$x \leftarrow y$

**end**

**return**  $x$

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If  $T$  is a contraction, say, then the output will be close to  $x^*$

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```
import numpy as np
def successive_approx(T,                                # Operator (callable)
                      x_0,                              # Initial condition
                      tolerance=1e-6,                  # Error tolerance
                      max_iter=10_000,                 # Max iteration bound
                      print_step=25,                   # Print at multiples
                      verbose=False):

    x = x_0
    error = tolerance + 1
    k = 1
    while error > tolerance and k <= max_iter:
        x_new = T(x)
        error = np.max(np.abs(x_new - x))
        if verbose and k % print_step == 0:
            print(f"Completed iteration {k} with error {error}.")
        x = x_new
        k += 1
    if error > tolerance:
        print(f"Warning: Iteration hit upper bound {max_iter}.")
    elif verbose:
        print(f"Terminated successfully in {k} iterations.")
    return x
```

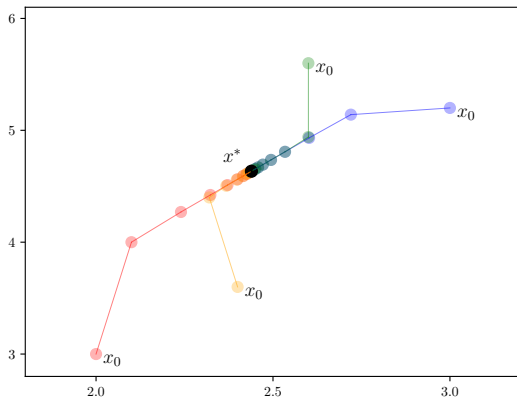


Figure: Successive approximation from different initial conditions

# Newton's Method

Let  $g$  be a smooth self-map on  $S := (a, b)$

We start with guess  $x_0$  of the fixed point and define

$$g_a(x) \approx g(x_0) + g'(x_0)(x - x_0)$$

Set  $g_a(x_1) = x_1$  and solve for  $x_1$  to get

$$x_1 = \frac{g(x_0) - g'(x_0)x_0}{1 - g'(x_0)}$$

Now repeat logic to get  $x_2, x_3, \dots$

In other words, we iterate on  $x_{k+1} = q(x_k)$  where

$$q(x) := \frac{g(x) - g'(x)x}{1 - g'(x)}$$

Note:

- we are applying successive approximation to  $q$
- Hence we can use the same code



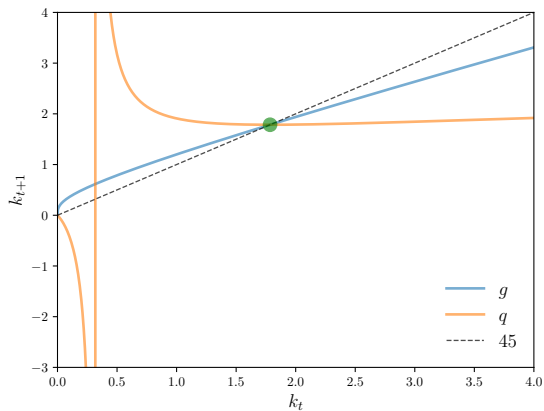


Figure: Successive approximation vs Newton's method

## Comments:

- The map  $q$  is flat close to the fixed point  $k^*$
- Hence Newton's method converges quickly near  $k^*$
- But Newton's method is not globally convergent
- Successive approximation is slower but more robust

## Key ideas

- There is almost always a trade-off between robustness and speed
- Speed requires assumptions, and assumptions can fail

**Newton's method** extends naturally to **multiple dimensions**

When  $h$  is a map from  $S \subset \mathbb{R}^n$  to itself, we use

$$x_{k+1} = x_k - [J(x_k)]^{-1}h(x_k)$$

Here  $J_h(x_k) :=$  the Jacobian of  $h$  evaluated at  $x_k$

Comments

- Typically faster but less robust
- Matrix operations can be parallelized
- Automatic differentiation can be helpful

See the notebook `solow_fixed_points.ipynb`

# Job Search

A model of job search created by **John J. McCall**

We model the decision problem of an unemployed worker

Job search depends on

- current and likely future wage offers
- impatience, and
- the availability of unemployment compensation

We use a very simple version of the McCall model

# Set Up

An agent begins working life unemployed at  $t = 0$

Receives a new job offer paying wage  $W_t$  at each date  $t$

Two choices:

1. **accept** the offer and work permanently at  $W_t$  or
2. **reject** the offer, receive unemployment compensation  $c$ , and reconsider next period

- $\{W_t\} \stackrel{\text{IID}}{\sim} \varphi$  for  $\varphi \in \mathcal{D}(W)$  where  $W \subset \mathbb{R}_+$  with  $|W| < \infty$

The agent lives forever (infinite horizon) but is **impatient**

Impatience is parameterized by a **time discount factor**  $\beta \in (0,1)$

- Present value of a next-period payoff of  $y$  dollars is  $\beta y$

Trade off:

- $\beta < 1$  indicating some impatience
- hence the agent will be tempted to accept reasonable offers, rather than always waiting for a better one
- The key question is how long to wait

The worker aims to maximize expected present value (EPV) of earnings

If we **accept**  $w \in W$ ,

$$\text{EPV} = \text{stopping value} = w + \beta w + \beta^2 w + \dots = \frac{w}{1 - \beta}$$

If we **reject**,

EPV = continuation value

$$= c + \beta \times \text{EPV of } \underline{\text{optimal}} \text{ choices in subsequent periods}$$

But what are optimal choices?!

Calculating optimal choice requires knowing optimal choice!



# The Value Function

Let  $v^*(w) := \text{max lifetime EPV given wage offer } w$

We call  $v^*$  the **value function**

**If** we know  $v^*$  then we can compute the **continuation value**

$$h^* := c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v^*(w') \varphi(w')$$

The optimal choice is then

$$\mathbb{1} \{ \text{stopping value} \geq \text{continuation value} \} = \mathbb{1} \left\{ \frac{w}{1-\beta}, h^* \right\}$$

(Here 1 means “accept” and 0 means “reject”)

But how can we calculate  $v^*$ ?

**Key idea:** Use the Bellman equation

**Theorem.** The value function  $v^*$  satisfies the **Bellman equation**

$$v^*(w) = \max \left\{ \frac{w}{1 - \beta}, c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v^*(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad (w \in W)$$

Intuition: Max value today is max over the alternatives

1. accept and get  $w/(1 - \beta)$
2. reject and get max continuation value

So how can we use the Bellman equation

$$v^*(w) = \max \left\{ \frac{w}{1 - \beta}, c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v^*(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad (w \in W)$$

to solve for  $v^*$ ?

We introduce the **Bellman operator**, defined at  $v \in \mathbb{R}^W$  by

$$(Tv)(w) = \max \left\{ \frac{w}{1-\beta}, c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad (w \in W)$$

By construction,  $Tv = v \iff v$  solves the Bellman equation

Let  $\mathcal{V} := \mathbb{R}_+^W$

**Proposition.**  $T$  is a contraction on  $\mathcal{V}$  with respect to  $\|\cdot\|_\infty$

In the proof, we use the elementary bound

$$|\alpha \vee x - \alpha \vee y| \leq |x - y| \quad (\alpha, x, y \in \mathbb{R})$$

Fixing  $f, g$  in  $\mathcal{V}$  fix any  $w \in W$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} |(Tf)(w) - (Tg)(w)| &\leq \left| \beta \sum_{w'} f(w') \varphi(w') - \beta \sum_{w'} g(w') \varphi(w') \right| \\ &= \beta \left| \sum_{w'} [f(w') - g(w')] \varphi(w') \right| \end{aligned}$$

Applying the triangle inequality,

$$|(Tf)(w) - (Tg)(w)| \leq \beta \sum_{w'} |f(w') - g(w')| \varphi(w') \leq \beta \|f - g\|_{\infty}$$

$$\therefore \|Tf - Tg\|_{\infty} \leq \beta \|f - g\|_{\infty}$$

## Choices as policies

- **states** = set of wage offers
- possible **actions** are accept (1) or reject (0)

A **policy** is a map from states to actions

Let  $\Sigma$  be all  $\sigma: W \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$

For each  $v \in \mathcal{V}$ , let us define a  **$v$ -greedy policy** to be a  $\sigma \in \Sigma$  satisfying

$$\sigma(w) = \mathbb{1} \left\{ \frac{w}{1 - \beta} \geq c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad \text{for all } w \in W$$

Accepts iff  $w / (1 - \beta) \geq$  continuation value computed using  $v$

The **optimal policy** is

$$\sigma^*(w) = \mathbb{1} \left\{ \frac{w}{1-\beta} \geq c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v^*(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad \text{for all } w \in W$$

In other words

$$\sigma \in \Sigma \text{ is optimal} \iff \sigma \text{ is } v^* \text{-greedy policy}$$

This is **Bellman's principle of optimality**

# Reservation wage

We can also express a  $v^*$ -greedy policy via

$$\sigma^*(w) = \mathbb{1}\{w \geq w^*\}$$

where

$$w^* := (1 - \beta)h^* \quad \text{with} \quad h^* := c + \beta \sum_{w' \in W} v^*(w') \varphi(w')$$

The term  $w^*$  is called the **reservation wage**

- Same ideas, different language



# Computation

Since  $T$  is globally stable on  $\mathcal{V}$ , we can compute an approximate optimal policy as follows

1. apply successive approximation on  $T$  to compute  $v \approx v^*$
2. calculate a  $v$ -greedy policy

This approach is called **value function iteration**

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input  $v_0 \in \mathcal{V}$ , an initial guess of  $v^*$

input  $\tau$ , a tolerance level for error

$\varepsilon \leftarrow \tau + 1$

$k \leftarrow 0$

**while**  $\varepsilon > \tau$  **do**

**for**  $w \in W$  **do**

$v_{k+1}(w) \leftarrow (Tv_k)(w)$

**end**

$\varepsilon \leftarrow \|v_k - v_{k+1}\|_\infty$

$k \leftarrow k + 1$

**end**

Compute a  $v_k$ -greedy policy  $\sigma$

**return**  $\sigma$

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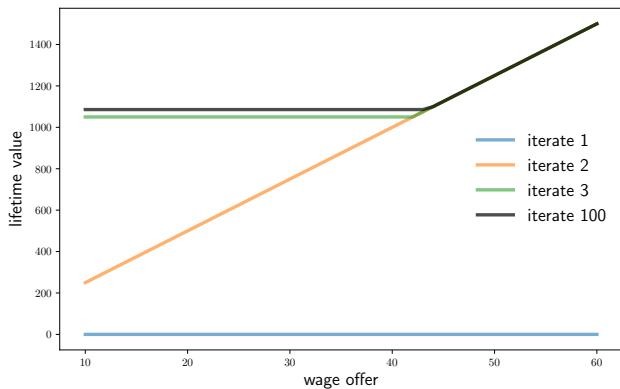


Figure: A sequence of iterates of the Bellman operator

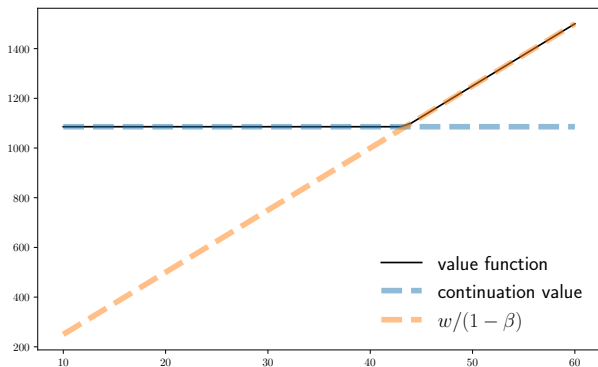


Figure: The approximate value function for job search

# Reducing Dimensionality

We used VFI because it's standard

Sometimes we can find more efficient ways to solve particular problems

In this case we can — by computing the continuation value directly

This shifts the problem from  $n$ -dimensional to one-dimensional

**Key message:** Look for ways to reduce dimensionality

Method: Recall that

$$v^*(w) = \max \left\{ \frac{w}{1 - \beta}, c + \beta \sum_{w'} v^*(w') \varphi(w') \right\} \quad (w \in W)$$

Using the definition of  $h^*$ , we can write

$$v^*(w') = \max \{ w' / (1 - \beta), h^* \} \quad (w' \in W)$$

Take expectations, multiply by  $\beta$  and add  $c$  to obtain

$$h^* = c + \beta \sum_{w'} \max \left\{ \frac{w'}{1 - \beta}, h^* \right\} \varphi(w')$$

How to find  $h^*$  from the equation

$$h^* = c + \beta \sum_{w'} \max \left\{ \frac{w'}{1 - \beta}, h^* \right\} \varphi(w') \quad (1)$$

We introduce the map  $g: \mathbb{R}_+ \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+$  defined by

$$g(h) = c + \beta \sum_{w'} \max \left\{ \frac{w'}{1 - \beta}, h \right\} \varphi(w')$$

By construction,  $h^*$  solves (1) if and only if  $h^*$  is a fixed point of  $g$

**Ex.** Show that  $g$  is a contraction map on  $\mathbb{R}_+$

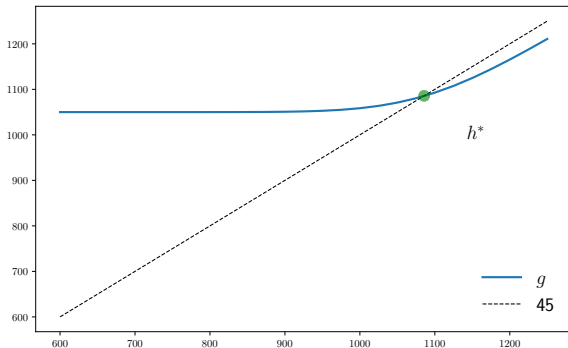


Figure: Computing the continuation value as the fixed point of  $g$



New algorithm:

1. Compute  $h \approx h^*$  via successive approximation on  $g$ 
  - Iteration in  $\mathbb{R}$ , not  $\mathbb{R}^n$
2. Optimal policy is

$$\sigma^*(w) = \mathbb{1} \left\{ \frac{w}{1 - \beta} \geq h \right\}$$

**Ex.** Implement and compare timing with VFI