

ECON 337901

FINANCIAL ECONOMICS

Peter Ireland

Boston College

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Unconstrained Optimization

Recall that if $f(x) = ax$, then $f'(x) = a$.

If $g(x) = ax + b$, then $g'(x) = a$.

And if $h(x) = x^c$, then $h'(x) = cx^{c-1}$.

Unconstrained Optimization

Recall also the “chain rule”

If

$$h(x) = f(g(x)),$$

then

$$h'(x) = f'(g(x))g'(x)$$

Unconstrained Optimization

Example:

$$f(y) = - \left(\frac{1}{2} \right) y^2$$
$$g(x) = 2 - x$$

Then

$$h(x) = f(g(x)) = - \left(\frac{1}{2} \right) (2 - x)^2$$

and

$$h'(x) = - \left(\frac{1}{2} \right) 2(2 - x)^{2-1}(-1) = 2 - x$$

Unconstrained Optimization: Example 1

Consider the problem

$$\max_x \left(-\frac{1}{2} \right) (x - \tau)^2,$$

where τ is a number ($\tau \in \mathbb{R}$) that we might call the “target.”

The first-order condition

$$-(x^* - \tau) = 0$$

leads us immediately to the solution: $x^* = \tau$.

Unconstrained Optimization: Example 2

Consider maximizing a function of three variables:

$$\max_{x_1, x_2, x_3} F(x_1, x_2, x_3)$$

Even if each variable can take on only 1,000 values, there are one billion possible combinations of (x_1, x_2, x_3) to search over!

This is an example of what Richard Bellman (US, 1920-1984) called the “curse of dimensionality.”

Unconstrained Optimization: Example 2

Consider the problem:

$$\max_{x_1, x_2, x_3} \left(-\frac{1}{2}\right) (x_1 - \tau)^2 + \left(-\frac{1}{2}\right) (x_2 - x_1)^2 + \left(-\frac{1}{2}\right) (x_3 - x_2)^2.$$

Now the three first-order conditions

$$-(x_1^* - \tau) + (x_2^* - x_1^*) = 0$$

$$-(x_2^* - x_1^*) + (x_3^* - x_2^*) = 0$$

$$-(x_3^* - x_2^*) = 0$$

lead us to the solution: $x_1^* = x_2^* = x_3^* = \tau$.

Constrained Optimization

To find the value of x that solves

$$\max_x F(x) \text{ subject to } c \geq G(x)$$

you can:

1. Try out every possible value of x .
2. Use calculus.

Since search could take forever, let's use calculus instead.

Constrained Optimization

A method for solving constrained optimization problems like

$$\max_x F(x) \text{ subject to } c \geq G(x)$$

was developed by Joseph-Louis Lagrange (France/Italy, 1736-1813) and extended by Harold Kuhn (US, 1925-2014) and Albert Tucker (US, 1905-1995).

Constrained Optimization

Associated with the problem:

$$\max_x F(x) \text{ subject to } c \geq G(x)$$

Define the **Lagrangian**

$$L(x, \lambda) = F(x) + \lambda[c - G(x)],$$

where λ is the **Lagrange multiplier**.

Constrained Optimization

Then, look for a critical point of the full Lagrangian

$$L(x, \lambda) = F(x) + \lambda[c - G(x)],$$

instead of just the objective function F by itself.

That is, use the FOC

$$F'(x^*) - \lambda^* G'(x^*) = 0.$$

Constrained Optimization

$$L(x, \lambda) = F(x) + \lambda[c - G(x)],$$

Theorem (Kuhn-Tucker) If x^* maximizes $F(x)$ subject to $c \geq G(x)$, then there exists a value $\lambda^* \geq 0$ such that, together, x^* and λ^* satisfy the **first-order condition**

$$F'(x^*) - \lambda^* G'(x^*) = 0$$

and the **complementary slackness condition**

$$\lambda^*[c - G(x^*)] = 0.$$

Constrained Optimization

In the case where $c > G(x^*)$, the constraint is **non-binding**.
The complementary slackness condition

$$\lambda^*[c - G(x^*)] = 0$$

requires that $\lambda^* = 0$.

And the first-order condition

$$F'(x^*) - \lambda^* G'(x^*) = 0$$

requires that $F'(x^*) = 0$.

Constrained Optimization

In the case where $c = G(x^*)$, the constraint is **binding**. The complementary slackness condition

$$\lambda^*[c - G(x^*)] = 0$$

puts no further restriction on $\lambda^* \geq 0$.

Now the first-order condition

$$F'(x^*) - \lambda^* G'(x^*) = 0$$

requires that $F'(x^*) = \lambda^* G'(x^*)$.