

Felice Antonio Merra, Ph.D.

Data & AI Leader | Senior Data Science and Analytics Manager

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Data and AI leader with a Ph.D. in Computer Science and 5+ years scaling technical organizations at Amazon and Cognism. Grew a two-function organization (Data Science + Data Analytics) from 3 people to 12 — including a manager-of-managers layer — through 3 hires and 4 promotions, and led the reorg that consolidated Data Analytics under the function. Leads data strategy end-to-end: data quality and metrics-layer design, production ML/AI systems serving tens of millions of requests per day, and the company's AI-adoption agenda as its internal AI champion. Operates at executive level — core team member on the 3-year investment plan, data strategy, and buy-vs-build decisions — while remaining technically hands-on across LLMs, multi-agent systems, and large-scale ranking and retrieval. 40+ publications in top-tier venues (ICML, SIGIR, RecSys, WWW); RecSys 2026 Industry Chair.

LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

- **Built and scaled the organization:** grew from an inherited team of 3 (1 senior + 2 junior scientists) to a 12-person, two-function org, via 3 hires and 4 promotions.
- **Manager of managers:** 1 Data Analytics Manager reports directly, leading 4 ICs (2 senior, 2 mid); 6 scientists including 1 Principal and 3 Senior, with senior scientists delegated day-to-day management of junior/intermediate staff.
- **Drove organizational design:** proposed and executed the reorg bringing Data Analytics under the Science function; holds de facto ownership of the MLOps team's project planning despite a separate formal reporting line.
- **Executive influence:** core team member on the company's 3-year investment plan, data strategy, and buy-vs-build decisions; DRI for 3 company “big rocks” strategic initiatives, including AI enablement.
- **Company AI champion:** drives daily, hands-on use of agentic AI tooling (Claude Code and Open AI ADK) across teams, onboards other managers on AI-first practices, and contributes to the internal skills marketplace.
- **Delivered and presented at company level:** proposed, built, and shipped the company's first agentic workflow automating a key company benefit; presented outcomes at the company town hall.
- **Strategic leadership development:** deliberately prioritizes the refinement of executive competencies, focusing on the cultivation of AI and data-centric organizational cultures and high-impact professional communication.

EXPERIENCE

Senior Data Science and Analytics Manager — Cognism *Remote (IT)*

December 2024 – Present (Promoted to Senior, February 2026)

- Lead a 12-person, two-function organization (Data Science + Data Analytics) spanning science, analytics, and de facto MLOps planning, with projects reporting directly to the VP of Data.
- Own the company's data quality improvements and metrics-layer strategy end-to-end — proposal, implementation, and optimization — on Amazon Athena, Iceberg, and DynamoDB.
- Delivered in production a multi-agent LLM system serving millions of requests per month.
- Delivered transformer-based quantized ranking and retrieval models serving tens of millions of requests per day on AWS (Triton), achieving tens-of-bps improvement over baseline.
- Proposed, built, and shipped the company's first agentic workflow for a key company benefit; presented results at the company town hall.
- Coached scientists into agent-driven ways of working; hired 3 and promoted 4, including the team's first Principal Scientist.

Applied Scientist — Amazon *Berlin, DE*

November 2021 – November 2024

- Scientific leader for large, worldwide-scope projects spanning EU, Japan, India, and US teams; single point of contact across 3+ international initiatives.
- Tech lead end-to-end on GenAI solutions for Amazon Search (Rufus) and AWS (Amazon Q) — from proposal through implementation to production launch.
- Shipped a ranker to production with statistically significant relevancy (>10 bps) and business impact in Amazon Search.
- Interviewed candidates for science positions and mentored junior scientists.

Junior Applied Scientist — Amazon *Berlin, DE*

July 2020 – October 2020

- Developed a state-of-the-art filter-recommendation solution used in production on Amazon.com; published at WWW.

Ph.D. Student — Politecnico di Bari *Bari, IT*

November 2018 – October 2021

- Scientific consulting on public–private partnership projects, delivering scientific prototypes and deliverables.

Visiting Researcher — Knowledge Media Institute *Milton Keynes, UK*

April 2018 – August 2018

- Built an AI prototype for anonymizing user data for a British healthcare company.

.NET Junior Developer — Fincons Group *Bari, IT*

September 2016 – October 2018

- Managed and developed an inventory-management web app for an international client.

EDUCATION

- **Ph.D. in Computer Science Engineering** (cum laude) — Politecnico di Bari, Italy. Dissertation: “Adversarial Machine Learning in Recommender Systems.” 2018–2021
- **M.Sc. in Computer Engineering** (110 cum laude) — Politecnico di Bari, Italy. 2016–2018
- **B.Sc. in Computer Engineering** (110 cum laude) — Politecnico di Bari, Italy. 2014–2016

RECOGNITION & SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Industry Chair, RecSys 2026.
- 40+ publications across top-tier venues — ICML (1), SIGIR (5), RecSys (3), WWW (2), CIKM, WSDM, ECIR, ESWC, KDD — and journals including ACM Computing Surveys and ACM TORS.
- Best Short Paper, SIGIR 2025 — “Do LLMs Memorize Recommendation Datasets? A Preliminary Study on MovieLens-1M” (corresponding author).
- Best Paper Award, MIT-IBM Watson AI Lab (AdvML @ KDD 2021); Best Short Paper Runner-Up, CIKM 2021.
- Senior Researcher, ICML 2025 — “Hyperband-based Bayesian Optimization for Black-Box Prompt Selection.”

TECHNICAL FOUNDATION

- **Data & AI:** LLMs & multi-agent systems, RAG & vector retrieval, ranking/classification, adversarial ML, self-hosted model deployment, agentic engineering tooling (Claude Code).
- **Data platform:** Amazon Athena, Iceberg, DynamoDB, data quality & metrics-layer design.
- **Production/infra:** AWS, Triton inference serving, systems built under strict latency and scalability constraints (tens of millions of requests/day).