

EA Forum Tagging System Suggestions

Tagging systems are great, they help us navigate large bodies of work by giving us neat sub-categories we can explore that better fit the bill of what we want to read in a given moment¹. To know if a tagging system is working, I think we should chiefly focus on measuring how good it is doing on that metric, that is, how well does this tag sort things into a coherent category that people would be interested in engaging with?

I think the current EA Forum tagging system does not fare the best on this system. Some people only use one tag, others use 20. Posts advertising jobs clutter up the “career choice tag. Some mention exploring the forum via tags from time to time, but I think few seriously engage that way.

Let me try to explain why this matters. I at one point was interested in really soaking in the diversity of career advice that the community had put out over time, and decided one that I wanted to read the best the forum had to offer on career advice. There was no post highlighting the best, so I decided I would tackle it by digging into the tag, trying to scan for posts that were worthwhile.

It was arduous. I’d estimate that over 50% of the posts (having gone through them all) weren’t relevant to me (be it because they were stale job postings, specific in a way that wasn’t helpful to me, or just tagged entirely wrong). Great posts were buried amongst the useless, and karma didn’t always mark out the good ones.

Community builders will often just refer members interested in making progress on choosing a career to 80k, and I think that generally works well, but also runs into the issue of 80k becoming a monolith. Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to have somewhere to send those wanting to learn so that they can gain a broader sense of career advice/experiences from the community?

I think the tagging system can do that, when done well. Here’s a rough proposal for how that might go.

Fixing it

The individual user can play a role in fixing this. Generally, I think using less tags (more precision) is better, and if you can spend just two minutes thinking about what the best tag might be I think you’re already ahead of the curve².

¹ They also additionally help us to understand what the focus of the article we’re reading will be at a glance, amongst other things.

² One piece of concrete advice: Please, please, please tag your job posting with “[Job listing \(open\)](#)” and nothing else (well, maybe the cause area of concern too).

But I think this is mostly a forum management thing. For one, guidance on how to tag is buried deep in the forum user manual³. I think there could at least be a basic blurb that shows up under the set of possible tags which tries to summarize the advice into two sentences.

For two, the “Core topic” tags should be used sparingly, with posts tagged by them representing something so general that anyone interested in that topic would want to read. Holden’s [Current Impressions post](#) on aptitudes belongs under Career Choice, “[Predictors of success in hiring CEA’s Full-Stack Engineer](#)” does not. In that case, we should instead have a subheading under Career Choice titled “Specific Career Advice” and a tag within that for Software Engineering. People should then be prompted not to pick a “Core Topic” as a tag, but rather be prompted to search for the best fit.

³ The current advice is basically: “Which tags to apply? Our main heuristic is that, after a quick read or skim of the post, a reader should not be surprised to see any of the tags on the post. If a post has a section on moral circle expansion (MCE) but the main topic isn’t MCE, it’s fine to add MCE as a tag. But if moral circle expansion is just discussed in a couple of paragraphs buried somewhere in the post, it should probably not be applied to the post as a tag.”