

Effective Self Help - Rough Concept

Aim

To find the most effective ways in which people can improve their wellbeing, and share this information as simply and practically as possible.

How will this be done?

1. We will study and compile initial evidence for a wide range of (1) potentially promising self-help interventions and (2) particularly valuable areas of wellbeing to focus on.
2. From this long list, we will select the most promising interventions/ areas of wellbeing and undertake extended research into their effectiveness, based on an adapted framework of expected value and cost-effectiveness.
3. A series of articles will then be published on the EA Forum to share the findings and recommend specific practices/ interventions.
4. These articles can then be posted elsewhere and form the basis of a website that would in time provide a trusted, comprehensive, and effective guide to improving one's wellbeing - for both community members and the wider public.

How is this valuable?

1. Effective self-help advice has the potential to be highly cost-effective given the large audience published guidance could reach and the lack of costs involved in the project outside of researcher salary.
2. Assuming that most people in the EA community are doing highly-impactful work (or will likely do so in future), a small increase in the wellbeing of EA community members should produce a tangible and valuable increase in the quality of highly important work.
3. There seems to be an appetite for high-quality mental health resources within the EA community
 - a. (~55% of respondents to the 2018 EA Mental Health survey agreed or strongly agreed that 'offering mental health resources to its members is an effective use of the EA Community's resources' (vs. 35% neutral, 10% disagree/ strongly disagree)

As a (very rough and likely flawed) back of the envelope calculation of the project's value:

- A (mean) average post on the EA Forum receives 250 views (<https://forum.effectivealtruism.org/posts/ogkS8MyqtYzx6Zxev/the-ten-most-viewed-posts-of-2020> [in comments])

- During the pilot of this project, we expect to produce 6-10 articles. Taking the middle there, we can say the pilot project's total views will be 2000 (8 x 250).
- If 5% of those viewers make a sustained change based on the article, we have 100 community members who have concretely benefitted.
- Let's then say the wellbeing gains from changes made based on the articles produce a knock-on 2% productivity increase.
- Applied to a year in which two-thirds of the 100 community members worked full-time (which I believe is in line with the last EA Survey's figures), this produces ($67 \times 200 = 13,400$; $13,400 \times 0.02 = \underline{268 \text{ hours of added work}}$ [6.7 FT week's of work]).
- These figures don't account for a range of additional benefits that seem plausible results of improving wellbeing in the community:
 - (e.g.) Reduced sick days; reduced community dropout from poor mental health; higher-quality research and improved networking/ collaboration from happier workplace dynamics.
 - I also expect the total audience to end up significantly larger than just people who read the Forum. I intend to post this information on other sites (e.g. LessWrong), as well as build a dedicated site for it, and then there's also the likelihood of people spreading the ideas through word-of-mouth/ their own blogs, social media, etc.

Why self-help?

1. Other promising interventions already exist or are in development for improving access to and the quality of external mental health support (loosely classified as anything that requires a professional to administer it [e.g. therapy]).
2. This project is based on the premise that current self-help literature is often anecdotal, lacking in thoroughness when assessing existing literature/ evidence, and narrative-driven rather than aimed at best providing practical guidance.
3. Self-help advice within the EA community tends to avoid these pitfalls but is often only a partial exploration of a topic (which is entirely reasonable given most articles on the Forum are written for free).
 - a. On this basis, a funded research project following EA/ rational norms of collecting and presenting evidence could produce self-help guidance that is significantly more useful than is what is currently available. By providing the EA community with better advice, this project can produce a meaningful increase in community wellbeing.