In late 2018, I reassessed my career and made a significant pivot. I expect the main value of sharing my experience to simply be showing that re-evaluating from scratch, while challenging, is approachable.

Deciding which problem to work on

I think that which problem you work on is the most important determinant of the impact you will have. A few years ago, before there were many good resources on this question, it was well worth me spending a decent amount of my spare time over the course of about a year exploring what problems to focus on. Happily, I think that the much better resources available now, such as these, make this part a reasonable amount easier than it used to be. (It is still the most important part!)

Broadening your options

Over the course of 2 weeks, I gathered around 50 roles existing orgs were hiring for, roles orgs perhaps should hire for, and independent project ideas. Here are some ways to broaden your options:

- Write down any opportunity you already know about which might be very good (e.g. using your capacity for earning to give as a benchmark to try to beat).
- 80,000 Hours job board
    - You can filter jobs by problem area, role type and location.
    - Also use the job board to discover promising orgs even if they are not currently listing a job you can do right away. See the listed jobs and the ‘Organisations we recommend’ section.
- Ask people who share or understand your values what the most valuable opportunities they are aware of are.
- Look through Open Phil's grantees, which can be filtered by focus area.
- Don’t forget career capital. You want to be doing high-impact work within the next few years. To do that you might focus on building skills or other resources in the near term. Everything here applies to this as much as for jumping into a directly valuable role, and the 80,000 Hours talent gaps surveys provide additional relevant information (e.g. 2018).

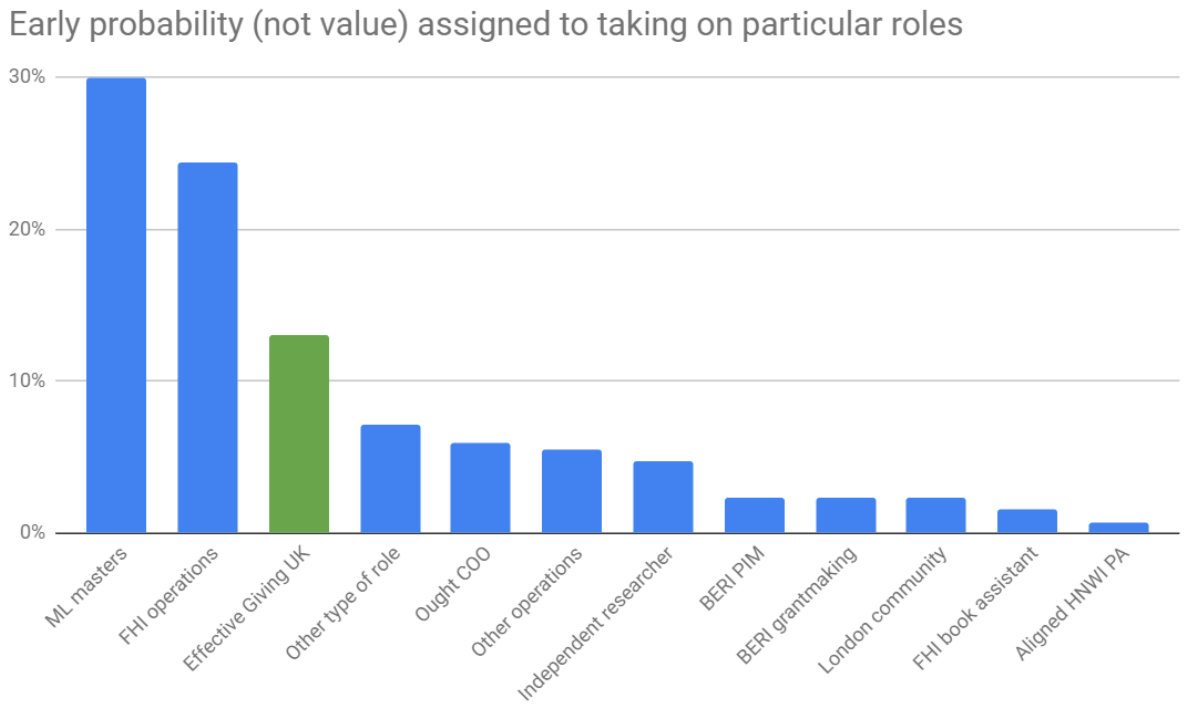
Ranking your options

At first, the idea of choosing 1 next step from 50 ideas was quite overwhelming. Explicitly arranging the ideas into a very rough order of promisingness made exploration much more approachable. Remarkably, I would not have sorted options early on if not for the 80,000 Hours decision tool. I especially recommend trying the tool if you are feeling overwhelmed or at a blank with how to move forward with your decisions.

For those interested, my 50 particular ideas are here. They span operations, generalist research, technical and strategic AI work, grantmaking, community building, earning to give and cause prioritisation research. Unlike the rest of this post, they are already out of date, but they might inspire some ideas you have not thought of.

Investigating

Through further conversations, with people at relevant orgs and other informed contacts, I chose 10 ideas to explore in more depth. There is nothing special about the number 10. It just happened to be the number of ideas I was taking seriously as a next step. For each option, I assigned a probability that I would ultimately choose that option:



I continue to think that all the opportunities I shortlisted above are among the highest-impact approaches to improving the world, and think that people with similar values and slightly different skills should seriously consider them. However, focus is valuable, so one must typically choose a mere 1 job from the many valuable things to be doing.

I started by exploring the ideas with the best combinations of likelihood of working out and value in the case of it working out. For example, I considered an ML masters to be a good backup that was likely to be available to me, while some operations roles seemed more valuable but harder to be an excellent fit for. I explored about 4 ideas briefly and about 4 in more depth.

What my brief explorations looked like:

- Talking to someone working in a similar role

- Talking briefly with potential collaborators
- Beginning but not finishing an application, learning from the process what might make me a good fit

What my deeper explorations looked like:

- Selecting small projects which seemed representative of the work and trying them
- Applying for a position which had work tests in the application process
- Contracting for a relevant organization
- Interviewing relevant people and presenting an organization with a project plan

Each deeper exploration is something like simulating a few days on the job. In cases where I was consuming material amounts of someone's time, I gave explicit odds of me ultimately taking the job so that they could decide whether the investment was a good use of their time.

Committing

Two months after I made the above graph, I was quite confident that Effective Giving UK (now Longview Philanthropy), highlighted in green, was where I could add the most value. I will continue contracting for the group through Q1 2019. If this continues to seem like an excellent fit, I expect to commit to the project for the coming years.