

Training experts to be forecasters

EA Cause Area Lighting Talks

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centre for the
mathematical
modelling of
infectious diseases

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Talk overview

Who are we?

Forecasting context

Experts -> Forecasters

Solutions?

Pandemic Preparedness?

Forum post: <https://forum.effectivealtruism.org/posts/WFbf2d4LHjgVWJCus/cause-exploration-prizes-training-experts-to-be-forecasters>

Slides: samabbott.co.uk/presentations/2022/experts-as-forecasters.pdf

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Who are we?

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Who are we? Nikos Bosse

- PhD in Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, focusing on evaluating infectious disease forecasts
- Past work includes developing an application to elicit forecasts of COVID-19 case and death numbers
- He also developed an R package, `scoringutils`, that facilitates the evaluation and comparison of forecasts from different models.
- Research coordinator for Metaculus.
- Believes that forecasting by experts as well as generalists can be very valuable.
- Founded the [Forecasting Wiki](#)



Who are we? Sam Abbott

- Researcher at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine with a background in mathematical modelling
- Since early 2020 I've worked as part of the academic response to the COVID-19 pandemic focussing on real-time analyses, nowcasting, and short-term forecasting.
- Interest in human forecasts is mainly driven by an interest in synthesising expert opinion, and the importance of evaluating forecasts from decision makers
- Sporadic forecaster and forecast question asker on Metaculus. Not very good but working to change that by developing new approaches to forecast scoring.



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Forecasting context

- Forecasting as practiced on Metaculus etc.
- Some community consensus that forecasting is helpful/impactful.
- Big if true.
- May help guide and improve decision making.
- Forecasting can be thought of as a synthesis of evidence or an unbiased news source.

Forecasting context: Forecasting and domain expertise

- Overlap appears quite small.
- Despite evidence indicating forecasting practice can lead to improved decision making.
- Evidence that generalists outperform domain experts is weaker.
- Most platforms and support is targeted at a general audience.
- We describe the current model as “forecasting as consulting”
- Generalists often spend significant time learning a domain and effectively act to synthesis evidence.

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Experts -> Forecasters

- Same forecasting aptitude + training as a generalist forecaster but with domain knowledge seems likely to outperform.
- Experts already know about things like zoonotic spillover that generalists probably don't.
- Early forecasts or time critical ones are often the most important for decision making. No time to learn.
- Experts can generate data to improve forecasts.
- Experts have the network to get forecasts listened to.
- Experts are making forecasts implicitly anyway and these are the things being used for key decision making.

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Solutions?

- We don't know
- Provide mechanisms to encourage engagement
- Make spaces for domain experts to meet others interested in forecasting
- Make it easy for experts to obtain forecast outputs
- Provide free training
- Prestige!!
- Hybrid and group forecasting
- More research is needed

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Pandemic Preparedness? My actual area of interest

- Improving forecasting, particularly in outbreak settings, may play a key role.
- My research is focussed on real-time modelling of infectious disease.
- I build tools for real-time outbreak/surveillance analysis used by CDC, ECDC, UKHSA, etc.
- Run a community organisation called epinowcast.org.
- Building the next generation of tools for outbreaks/surveillance with a [community of practice approach](#).
- Very hard as so against academic incentive mechanisms.
- Talk to me about it or just give me money?