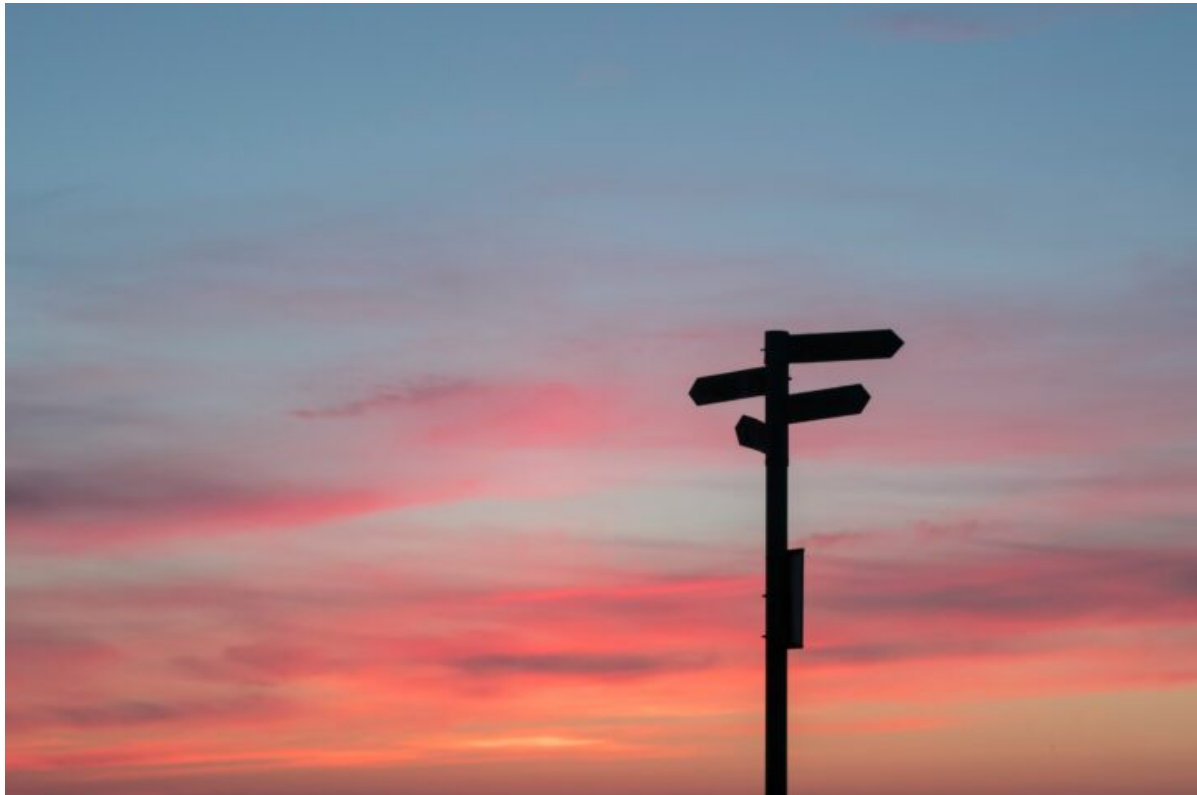




University of Turku's Delphi Survey: Insights from the University Community

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In the University of Turku, a Delphi survey was conducted in order to better understand the future of universities and higher education. The survey was part of the university's strategic foresight activities and conducted by [Finland Futures Research Centre \(FFRC\) \(https://www.utu.fi/en/university/turku-school-of-economics/finland-futures-research-centre\)](https://www.utu.fi/en/university/turku-school-of-economics/finland-futures-research-centre). The idea was to map and understand the opinions, expectations, hopes, and fears of the university community about different future scenarios for universities. This was based on the dimensions and models found in [an earlier literature review \(https://sites.utu.fi/sfi/news/leveraging-knowledge-for-strategy/\)](https://sites.utu.fi/sfi/news/leveraging-knowledge-for-strategy/).

The Delphi survey had an innovative design called a 'dialectic structure' which was used for the very first time. It showed participants opposite claims about the future of different aspects of the university. For example, international orientation was surveyed side-by-side with local orientation in order to see where people think and wish we are going in terms of global collaboration. This dialectic structure was used in order to make people distance themselves from the present conditions, consider different future situations, and show where opposite scenarios might be seen as contradictory or compatible. By looking at the responses, the survey tried to find key strategic either-or questions and those questions where some eclectic approach is possible.

The survey covered many dimensions of the university, from its overall purpose to its global orientation, organizational structure, funding models, disciplinary organization, research orientation, teaching models, technology integration, student profiles, infrastructure functions, and AI costs and benefits. Moreover, it gave a comprehensive view of the university's possible future paths. Following the Delphi logic, participants were asked to rate the probability and desirability of these contrasting future scenarios. This gave valuable insights into their expectations and preferences. As said, gaining these insights was the heart of the Delphi survey.

The survey results showed areas of agreement, for example, the perceived likelihood of a market-oriented model due to financial pressures even though it is found undesirable by many, and the preference for mission-driven research and personalized, adaptive teaching approaches. However, it also highlighted differences in respondents views, such as variety of views on the balance between global engagement and local relevance, and the role of interdisciplinary approaches versus specialized disciplinary knowledge-creation. In many cases, answers to key strategic questions seem to depend on

practical and conceptual issues – even ambiguities – in the issue and area at hand.

The survey indicated tensions between (i) the expected path of universities, often marked by centralization, market-oriented priorities, and efficiency-driven approaches, and (ii) the desired directions expressed by many participants, which favored decentralization, social mission-oriented goals, and curiosity-driven research. The tensions that are present in the survey indicate that there are different forces pulling universities in different directions. On one hand, universities are expected to follow market demands and focus on efficiency in many operations. On the other hand, many people want universities to prioritize social goals, curiosity-driven research, and decentralized decision-making. These opposing forces create a situation that universities must solve when they plan for the future.

Moreover, the open sections of the survey channeled important concerns raised by participants, such as the attractiveness of academic careers to younger generations and the crucial role of universities in fighting disinformation and ensuring the credibility of knowledge. These issues remind us that there are many hopes, fears, and ideas within university community about the future that require research to become visible and heard. Blind spots in foresight are best covered by listening to members of the community.

In the end, the Delphi survey done by the University of Turku is a valuable step in the strategic foresight activities of the university. By gathering and analyzing the different perspectives, expectations, hopes, and even pessimistic outlooks of its community, the university has gained a deeper understanding of the strategic option space it navigates. This understanding will help develop adaptive, resilient foresight and action that enable the university to not only respond to future challenges but also shape its path in line with its core values and mission. The Delphi survey results stresses the importance of using a holistic, systems-thinking approach in order to deal with these challenges and tensions. By considering the interconnected nature of various dimensions of university operations and having ongoing talks with the university community, institutions like the University of Turku can develop adaptive and sustainable lines of action.



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