

## The Future of Lapland – Trends and Active Foresighting

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People have a natural curiosity about the future. For centuries, various superstitions and natural phenomena have been used to predict the future. The ultimate goal has been to prepare for the future and to avoid unpleasant consequences. Foresighting is much more than straightforward predicting. Foresighting looks at phenomena and the operating environment from different perspectives and seeks to identify through different perspectives what kinds of megatrends, weak signals or 'wild cards' can be detected.

As technology advances and the amount of data increases, forecasting based on historical data becomes easier and faster. Gartner's (2012) four-stage maturity model for data analytics opens our understanding of what and how existing data can be used to infer or interpret.

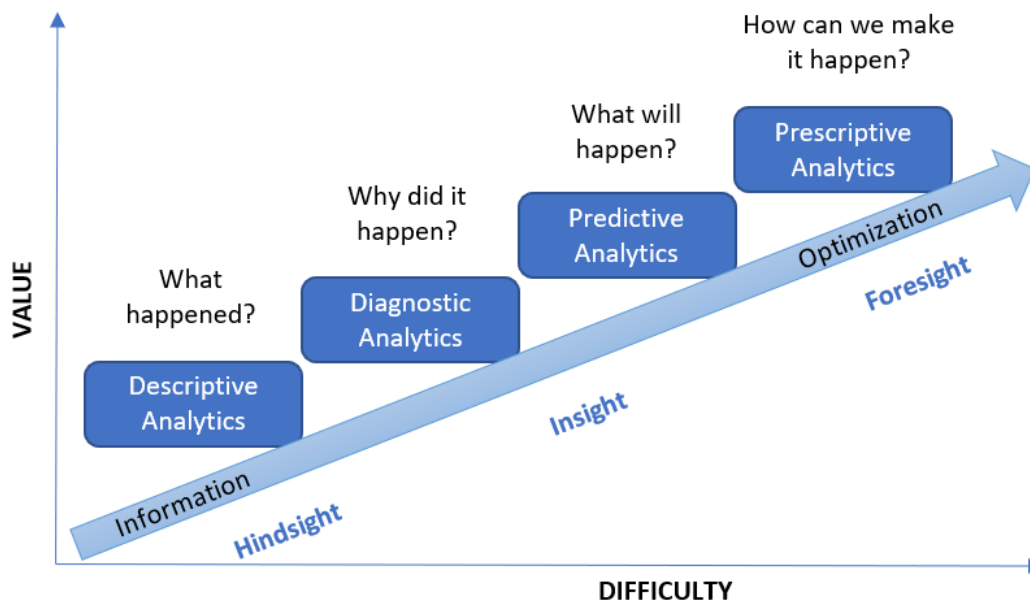


Figure 1. Stages of data analysis (adapted from Gartner 2012).

Analysing information based on past events at the lowest stage, such as statistics, provides a picture of what has happened, i.e. an answer to the question: *what happened?* The second stage

is to combine data from different data sources using analytics tools to find the answer to the question: *why did it happen?* At the next stage, increasingly sophisticated tools and methods, such as artificial intelligence and machine computing, are introduced into the analysis process, which enables the production of different prediction models, so-called probable descriptions of recent events, i.e. answers to the question; *what will happen?* Typically, even these models are not capable of a perfect forecast, and their probability decreases with time. At the highest stage of the model is the stage of prescriptive analytics, or the question: *how do we make it happen?* The question involves a strong belief that we can change the future.

The key role of foresighting is to provide and produce different perspectives on possible futures and to identify the measures that development processes require. Foresighting is often seen as an enabler of positive development, although it can also be actively utilised in preparation and risk management by identifying factors affecting unwanted development paths.

## Shaping the future together

The final report of the [Kansallinen ennakointi Suomessa 2020 \(National forecasting in Finland 2020\)](#) project states that Finnish foresighting primarily focuses on the most probable developments and information available in the organisations' inner circles. Therefore, foresighting has not been exploited in its broadest sense. At best, foresighting is understood as the systematic and conscious generation of future information. In particular, foresighting should be utilised in knowledge management and generally as a preliminary and supportive process in decision-making. Foresighting can be used to create different types of visions for the future – unwanted, likely, or desired – for different industries or functions. Examples: 1) [Lapin tulevaisuuskuvat 2040-luvulla \(The future scene of Lapland in the 2040s\)](#) published by Lapin Luotsi, 2) [Publication by the Finnish National Agency for Education \(Nyyssölä 2022\): Ennakointinäkökulmia koulunkäyntiin, kehittämiseen ja osaamiseen \(Forecasting perspectives on school attendance, development and competence\)](#), 3) [Finland's Future Growth Opportunities identified by Business Finland \(2022\)](#), and 4) [Updated Megatrends published by Sitra in January 2023](#).

However, the question is whether we will make use of all available foresighting data in decision-making. Are we able to actively utilise foresighting in developing our living environment, Lapland, in the direction of desirable future scenarios, with small steps, firmly and purposefully while actively anticipating?

Anticipation skills can be developed and studied. For example, the compilation publication [Tulevaisuustutkimus tutuksi – perusteita ja menetelmiä \(Introduction to Future Studies – the Basics and the Methodologies\)](#) is a good starting point for learning about the world view of future research as well as commonly used methods. Sitra has also produced publications and blogs in a commendable way and, e.g., has compiled the [Futuremaker's Toolbox](#) website to support both beginners and those more interested in the topic.

## Towards the desired futures

Foresighting is an essential part of innovation because the future is open and full of opportunities. Bold new perspectives, different visions of the future, and bold scenarios help us to steer the future in the direction we want. Innovative visions for the future force us to ask: *how do we make it happen?*

Reading the articles in this special issue confirmed my view on how innovative and competent the personnel of the Lapland University Consortium and their stakeholders are. Several projects make bold use of foresighting methods and expertise while working with different target groups. The topics of the articles in the special issue included the activities of the following projects: The [DigiUra](#), [Digitiimi](#), [Living Lab Prunsi](#), [LuovaDigi](#), [Tourbit](#), and [VALUE](#) projects as well as the [Poro- ja kotieläintilojen matkailupotentiaalin hyödyntäminen \(Utilising the Travel Potential of Reindeer and Livestock Farms\)](#) project and the [Vastuullisen muutoksenhallinnan osaamisen ja taitojen vahvistaminen \(Strengthening the Competencies and Skills of Responsible Change Management\)](#) project. In addition to Lapland's traditional industries, reindeer and animal husbandry, and tourism and service industries, the sectors of the articles extend to a wide range of levels of society, such as management, change management, career planning, older people, digital skills, and wellbeing technology competence, all the way to the creative industries. In addition, the special issue opens up foresighting-related perspectives on the development work and contents of the Master's degree programme, and offers the readers of the journal concrete perspectives as well as theoretical knowledge and guidance on introducing the Future Workshop method in the workplace, projects and theses.

If we look at the future only in terms of the past, we can make a self-fulfilling prophecy. The opportunities offered by the future will be missed. Foresighting involves leading the future in the desired direction. Internalising the idea offers tremendous opportunities!

I would like to express warm thanks to the columnist of the special issue, Hanna-Leena Pesonen, Sustainable Development Specialist at The Regional Council of Lapland, and Lapland UAS staff and partners for interesting and diverse articles. Let's take up Hanna-Leena's challenge and continue to train our future muscles and ways of thinking, actively shaping future views of Lapland together *to make it happen!*

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