

DECISION-MAKING TOOLS

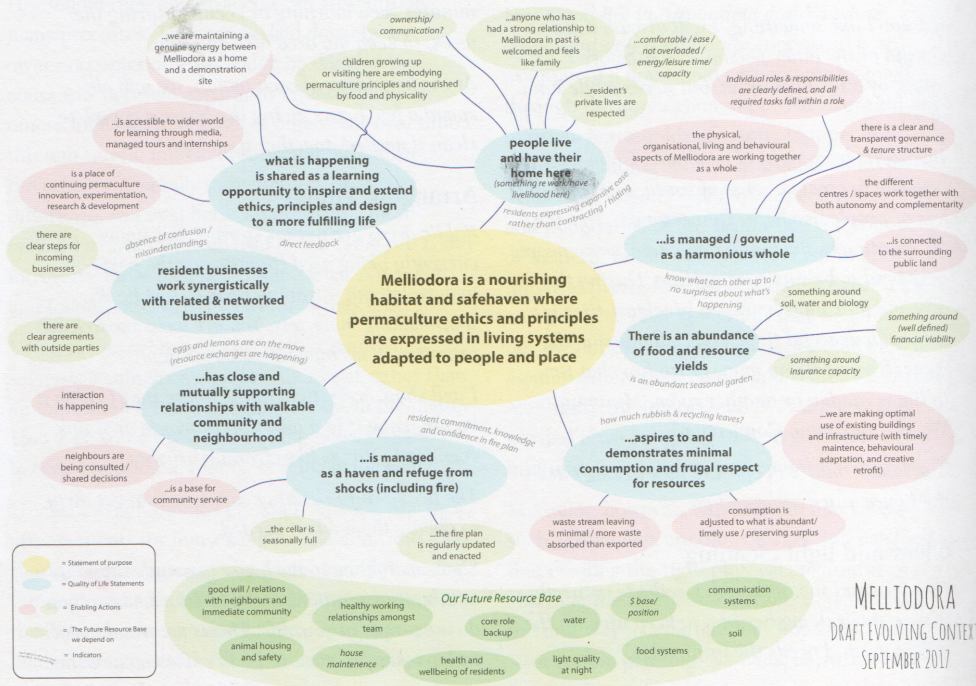
While organic processes for collective decision making drawing on a range of past experiences allow most families and households to muddle along, to address the challenges and opportunities of energy descent, more evolved decision-making processes may be necessary. Many models from the world of business decision making, and from more alternative thinkers, have the potential to be used in household decision making.

One well-known technique is SWOT analysis, which identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is a strategic planning tool commonly used in business that can also be useful for households considering or making a move for greater self-reliance (which is a bit like starting a business). 'Strengths' and 'weaknesses' focus on the positives and negatives of the household while 'opportunities' and 'threats' focus on the positive and negatives of the neighbourhood and wider society and economy.

Another well-known lineage of work is that of Edward De Bono who coined the term 'lateral thinking'. His 'Six thinking hats' decision-making process² has been widely used to acknowledge the value of different perspectives that individuals tend to adopt in groups, for instance the green hat represents innovation and creative thinking whilst the black hat represents the potential negatives (or 'devil's advocate'). It's especially useful in breaking recurring patterns by all agreeing to view the subject from the same perspective (wearing the same hat) in turn. This process creates awareness and acceptance of the value of six recurring perspectives.

Holistic Management™ (HM) is a decision-making framework developed by ecologist and grazier Allan Savory. Though HM began with ecological approaches to rangeland management it has since been extended to planning other areas of life, and is very applicable to decision making within a household.

In the text box opposite, Dan Palmer explains the HM process in his own words:



HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT DECISION MAKING IN A NUTSHELL BY DAN PALMER

The decisions we make largely define who we are as individuals and a society, and they most certainly determine our legacy. Given its pervasiveness and importance, it is odd that our culture does not emphasise decision-making as a skill most of us can improve on.

Holistic Management™ (HM) is an approach to making decisions that work better for the individual, collective, and environment. HM starts by using the following sequence to create what is referred to as a *holistic context*:

- **Define.** Clarify the thing that is being managed, whether your wedding, your business, your family or neighbourhood watch group. Who are the decision makers? What resources are available?
- **Articulate Intent.** *Why* does your entity exist - for what *purpose* has it been created?
- **Core truths.** What are the core things that need to be true if the people involved are going to feel their *quality of life* improving as you pursue your intent? Skip this bit and people will tend to eventually become dissatisfied and leave.
- **Enable.** What kinds of actions need to be happening day-to-day and week-to-week to enable your core truths to actually *be true* as you strive toward your intent?
- **Perpetuate.** Who and what needs looking after for all of this to be able to continue into the future? This can also be called the *future resource base*.

(See the 'Melliodora Draft Evolving context' diagram opposite for a documented example of this thinking, guided by Palmer)

You can now start using your holistic context to guide your decisions. By testing decisions against your context, those that don't authentically fit or serve the whole get filtered out. The context becomes like a magnetic north, and the action of testing and making decisions



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toward it like using a compass to navigate through complex terrain.

Once you have made a decision, you move forward under the assumption that your decision *could be wrong*. You seek and respond to feedback about the relative success or failure of the decisions you make. Sometimes you can adjust a course of action to stay on track, sometimes you'll pull the plug and start over.

As you go along, and as you start feeling internal propulsion toward what is important, older patterns of reacting to opportunities and problems fade away. Consistent attention to a core destination can produce remarkable results (such as getting there!).

HM is an example of getting clear on the larger scale patterns before diving into the detail. It is hard to overstate the importance of clarifying these patterns, not to mention the clarity and forward direction that ensue when you do.

Savory (2016) is the most comprehensive published introduction to this tool; holisticdecisionmaking.org has articles making the approach more accessible to a non-farming audience.

2. See 'Six thinking hats' debonothinkingsystems.com or at retrosuburbia.com/book/34-2.