**Decision Design Hub—**

*People, Environment, and Prosperity*

*By Ann Adams*

**H**elen Lewis’ passion was ignited by the Holistic Management training she began in 1998 and then completed in 2002. Since then Helen has helped with her family’s 3,500-acre farm, producing grass fed beef- Picot Farm, near Warwick, Queensland, Australia. Helen is also a national lobbyist, as the General Manager for the Outback Highway project, which seeks to create a highway across Australia bringing rural community and economic development. Through all this work, she has use holistic decision-making and the Holistic Management framework to improve the decision-making at the family, policy, and community development levels.

**The Value of a Context**

Since completing HMI’s Certified Educator training program in 2002, Helen has been educating families and organizations in decision-making and looking to find the root cause. She worked with Brian Wehlburg with Inside Outside Management training farmers throughout Australia. To focus on the decision-making process, Helen started a business and website called Decision Design Hub in 2020.

“I really enjoy training people about the whole process,” says Helen. “It’s been very interesting to meet so many people and help them with their lives and their directions. I really enjoy their excitement about going forward after learning the process. I think my background in agribusiness, community development, and policy helps me share this information in a way that is accessible.

“I took my first course with Bruce Ward in 1998. In 2000, I signed up for Certified Educator course, because what I love about Holistic Management is it solves the root cause of everything. You really look at problems in a new way and start solving the issues we are facing.

“In this day and age, we are witnessing what are diluted standards of social expectation of what is respectful and what isn’t. Because these social expectations are blurry, people don’t have a benchmark of appropriate behavior. With this blurring, it is even more important to have a life context to guide your decisions and actions. With that level of decision-making there is a whole new level of respect required, and there’s a wider societal point of reference.

“The value-based decision making and context in Holistic Management provides a point of reference. We have people losing their sense of belonging and wondering ‘where do I fit.’ We’ve got leadership that is focused on right or wrong, and there is a total lack of empathy because it is seen as a weakness. Consequently, we can’t hear each other. There isn’t room to say ’I don’t have the answers, so let’s work together on that.’ We have to acknowledge humanity and that we are not robots. It’s got to be okay to say ‘I don’t know.’”

Helen is aware that many people come to Holistic Management for the grazing planning, and she wants to lead with the decision-making because of the broader application and the power within that process. “Grazing is just a how to,” says Helen. “It’s a great how to, but the decision making is the management side and it is dynamic. A holistic context evolves with the person/people who create it. The context gets updated and evolves and is the most current version of ourselves and our business. The magic happens when we have various options/ ideas… we use the decision matrix checking each options towards our Holistic Context – so one of the options is the front runner, but it doesn’t mean all the other options aren’t any good, they just aren’t the best option for you or your business right now… In 6 months time- when you have grown and your business has evolved which is reflected in your context… one of the other options might be spot on because you are ready for it. This is evolutionary management- which is gold, Management that moves with us- amazing.

**Engaging a Wider Audience**

Helen’s work with the Decision Design Hub has been with private paying clients and grant-funded work with producers through Landcare (a community-based organization) in New South Wales. These producers are generally from smaller acreage properties, and are engaged in this program for personal reasons. This work is part of the Women on the Land Program, which has a goal of keeping people on the land.

Much of Helen’s work is helping people people understand the value of knowing their values and why they want certain outcomes so they have a clearer sense of direction. Helen also talks about ecosystem processes because she believes that environmental intelligence is critical for people to make good decisions. She has tweaked some of the testing questions to make them apply to a wider audience and has summarized them so it makes it easy to explain them to people and help them check off each filter.

Helen’s focus is on People, Environment, and Prosperity (PEP). Helping people consider the people in their life, the environmental, and prosperity consequences of their decisions has transformed the way her clients are talking and thinking. Testimonials point to how calm they feel with this decision making process and having clarity about their values. She always has them look at the tools they are considering for their decisions within the context of that triple bottom line.

Helen believes that the human brain (particularly the left brain) is predominately linear in its thought process, doing well with step by step activities like building a house. We look at parts and logical sequence and try to create order in chaos. “Our linear approach is sometimes referred to as silo thinking. There is a sense of control and static as we follow the steps to get the outcome we want, sometimes at the cost of ‘other factors’ we failed to consider,” she writes. These “other factors” can include our health, relationships, community, prosperity, and the environment. The reason that people can’t easily make decisions about themselves, other people, and the environment is because they are all very dynamic and complex. So, when we engage with people and the environment in linear thinking then we find ourselves reacting to unintended consequences because we are often reacting to symptoms rather than addressing the root cause.

Helen defines Holistic Management as “Elevated Decision-Making.” Creating a Life Context and creating an Action Plan so people can live their values aeveryday, then running a decision through the “10 Good Questions Matrix” helps people engage with that complexity, rather than trying to compartmentalize the relationships. By using the testing questions, people are engaging their head and heart while looking at the future, present, and the root cause and considering the larger whole of people, the environment, and prosperity. And, of course, there is the active feedback loop to keep the decision makers evolving their actions within the context of current reality.

Helen has found that the holistic decision-making helps people to start picking up on things they now need to work on like time management, management and personal development areas. “They begin to acknowledge they can do something about this situation they are in,” says Helen. “The Life Map Execise is really helpful as a starting point about what they want to change and where they want to move to. It also helps them understand why they want to shift, the why is added to their Life Context.

The Life Context process also really assists when couples work together because each person needs to do their individual context. I find there is a problem if they don’t find and write down their values individually first because by reclaiming themselves as an individual they are being true to themselves. We can then merge the Values statements- discussing the meaning of words with each person in the couple. By understabding what our values mean to each of the people in the couple- it enbales us to come from a place of respect which is accommodating of the other person, rather than someone needing to compromise. They see they can work together because they have an understanding of each others values. I’ve seen couples get closer through the process, but occasionally it can go the other way as people recognize that they are not on the same page. There’s certainly been some large changes, but the holistic context is definitely the glue to make these decisions possible.”

Helen also used the Holistic Management process for the development of the Queensland AgForce efforts to create an Ag Business Cycle Approach—a program that was to help producers and the industry acknowledge that drought is a contstant and needs to be included in the ag business cycle. The four components to the Ag Business Cycle are— No drought, drying, drought, and recovery— each component has government programmes etc that are appropriate for that phase of the cycle. In every phase producers have to consider what social, environmental and financial actions they are taking. The idea is that through rainfall data and soil moisture tests the producer can decide when they are drying and access the various support/ programmes available at that stage of the cycle..

“This process was about being proactivity and being prepared for drought with social, environmental and financial ducks in a row, of course planned grazing was an activity they could engage in. ” says Helen. “When you ticked off things you could be eligible for the next phase and set benchmarks so they knew what they needed for the next phase. Ideally this process of continual improvement would enable producers to go into drought later and come out sooner- because they were prepared.

While the program was not put into effect, we did create a Context for Agforce and make decisions towards it as we developed the policy. The process allowed policy makers to see the potential value of such a program. “It really is a shift of head space from reactionary to proactivity,” says Helen. “We can move past handouts and build some mutual obligation in by focusing producers to deal with the root cause. You’ve got to use the systems and mechanisms in government that already exist and show how the new ideas can be plugged in. It has to be easy and irresistible.

Helen is excited to bring Holistic Management to a wider community so that it becomes a mainstream tool. She is offering her Decision Design Hub as a master class for people who have had Holistic Management but came to that original training for the grazing. It takes 11hrs over 6 weeks to go through creating a context and learning the decision making.

Helen is excited to provide the tools to help improve people’s quality of life and prosperity. “I talk about the fluctuations that happen in people’s lives before they create a context,” says Helen. “There are big highs and big lows. But, then with a holistic context those highs and lows become ripples, and there is a sense of calm. of course, we may not get it right all the time, but with early monitoring we can tweak our actions and keep progressing and monitoring. Your Life context gives you the confidence of who you are and what you want.

“It’s the small decisions that we make that give us our confidence and our self-esteem and is paramount to our wellbeing. That is what leads to empowerment which is a fundamental human requirement. We need to own our decisions.”

*Visit* [*https://decisiondesignhub.com.au/*](https://decisiondesignhub.com.au/) *for more information about the Decision Design Hub process.*

**PHOTO**

**Ag Business Cycle.jpg**

Caption: The Ag Business Cycle Approach © AgForce

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**Teaser**

***By being able to exercise our mind to make a decision, we start our journey of empowerment, self-esteem, and ownership of our life and wellbeing*– Helen Lewis**