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## Frog Creates An Open-Source Guide To Design Thinking

HOW DO YOU TEACH YOUNGSTERS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD HOW TO WORK TOGETHER TO TACKLE TOUGH PROBLEMS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES? FROG'S COLLECTIVE ACTION TOOLKIT AIMS TO HELP.

1.5k 945

Brainstorming, whether you believe in it or shun it, is a fantastic neologism. But as Frog Principal Designer David Sherwin has found, it's also a very American word—one that doesn't exist in every language. "We were in Bangladesh, trying to translate the idea into Bengali," says



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business + innovation + design

EDITOR : Cliff Kuang

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Sherwin's experience touches on a crucial problem for many NGOs and foundations attempting to transpose Western methods of social innovation to other cultures. "These [NGOs] are organizations focused on how to crowdsource design," says [Robert Fabricant](#), vice president of creative at Frog. "Yet most of the people they're trying to reach don't have any pattern for how to collectively approach a problem."



Today, Frog will release the Collective Action Toolkit, a free, 72-page booklet that seeks to develop a universal framework for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds to tackle big problems in their communities. Developed over the past year, the CAT contains nary a mention of design (or brainstorming). Instead, it relies on a simple vocabulary to describe skills like building a team, carrying out research, and developing solutions. Want to figure out a way to help people in your community eat healthier? Have an idea for a small business? The CAT offers templates for activities to help get the idea off the ground.

"FROG  
HOPES  
THAT THE  
CAT WILL  
GIVE  
PEOPLE A  
FRAMEWORK  
TO  
SELF-ORGANIZE"

Sherwin and Fabricant didn't set out to build the Toolkit--in fact, it grew out of a separate project that clearly demonstrated its necessity. A team from Frog traveled to Nairobi last year to participate in a Nike Foundation-led initiative called [the Girl Effect](#), aimed at understanding the value of connection amongst girls in impoverished communities. Frog prototyped a phone-based network that sat on top of Twitter, allowing isolated girls create social groups amongst themselves, building communities and friendships, aided by digital technology. "But when we left, the prototype didn't have an ongoing life," Fabricant says. The need for such a platform was clear, but only a fraction of the girls had access to phones. "What was relevant to these kids was skill development. What

they were seeing and learning was from each other. What they admired were the girls who could get up in front of a room and talk, or feel confident interviewing someone at a church or store in their

11 / 15  
TWO THOUSAND  
AND TWELVE

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Infographic of the Day: The Best Infographics Of 2012

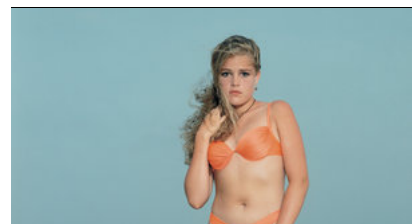
## EDITOR'S PICKS



16 Of The Year's Best Ideas In UI Design



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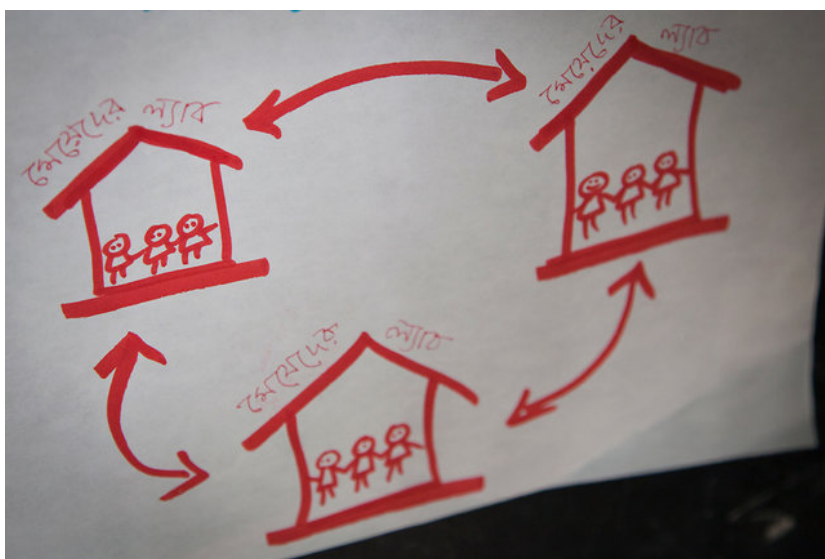
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technology or an outside design team. Sparked by their experiences with the Girl Effect, Sherwin and Fabricant began working on a stand-alone resource that could lead anyone, anywhere, through the problem-solving process: the Community Action Toolkit. They found inspiration in their own office, looking at how Frog had tackled problem solving with its clients. "What we've seen when we work with startups is that actually, when you start designing, you learn things along the way that change your view of the problem you're trying to solve," they explain. So rather than designing a step-by-step list, they created a non-linear toolkit of activities, ranging from *Find Issues*, *Uncover Needs* (a guide to doing research in your community) to *Lights, Camera, Action!* (tips for putting on skits to pitch solutions to a large group of people). Each activity ends with a return to a core focus: clarify your goal, again and again, as your project progresses.

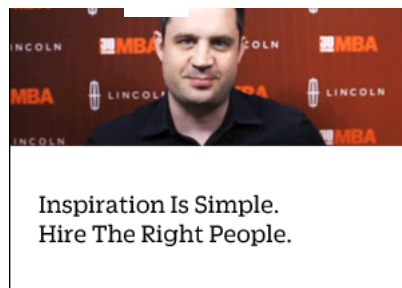
**"EACH  
ACTIVITY  
ENDS WITH  
A RETURN  
TO A CORE  
FOCUS."**

One of the most important insights the team gleaned from their field tests with groups of girls in Africa and Southeast Asia was that girls wanted to get involved in their communities, but felt they needed a pretense to do so. "They wanted something tangible," says Fabricant. "They wanted badges, certificates where they could sign their names, things like that; symbols that indicate they're participating in something, not just on their own." In communities where girls might not have the chance to go to school, talking to a

shopkeeper or interviewing a community leader can be a completely overwhelming prospect. "This is where something tangible can make a big difference," adds Sherwin. "A big part of it is giving girls who might not have a voice in their community some pretext that doesn't exist to ask a different set of questions." In the same way that "brainstorming" is an excuse for designers to sit down and argue about ideas, the team hopes that the CAT will give people a framework to self-organize. "I feel more confident than the time I (first) came--I was too shy," says one 14-year-old participant. "Now I'm meeting other girls--I am happy."



After introducing the CAT to a small group of NGO and foundation

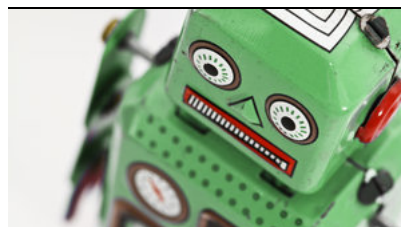


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## INNOVATION BY DESIGN



20 Tech Trends That Will Define 2013, Selected By Frog



Smart Design On What We'll Really Want From Robot Cars

## FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks for stopping by Fast Company's Co.Design. If you've been a reader for some time, you'll notice that we've just unveiled a brand-new redesign. **YOU CAN READ ABOUT THE THOUGHT PROCESS BEHIND IT HERE.** Our content, of course, will be the same: Our focus is on highlighting the world's best examples of design and innovation, working in concert. We started this site with a few simple premises in mind. First, design is a window onto the world at large, and the culture we live in.

CONTINUED

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provide to communities, and say, 'when we're done here, take this and run with it.'"

Check out the Collective Action Toolkit for yourself [here](#).



## KELSEY CAMPBELL-DOLLAGHAN

Kelsey is a designer, illustrator, and cyclist based in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Previously, she was the editor of Architizer. [CONTINUED](#)

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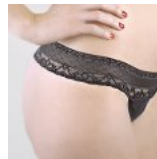
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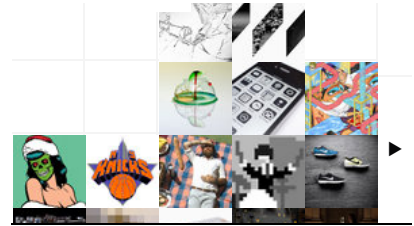
### NOTES

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## ROBERT FABRICANT

11/29/2012 06:19 PM

Andy: Thank you for your comment as well. We agree on the importance of knowledge transfer, and it was a major impetus for the Collective Action Toolkit. It is not intended to be prescriptive but additive, in that it provides a creative framework to help institutions and communities put their own



### CONTRIBUTORS



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solving.

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## STEPHEN LEE

11/20/2012 11:03 AM


I appreciate the article. I think the world can use this. Small or Large it doesn't matter. You will always have the "What If" crowd but I think it's needed. I'm happy it's open to everyone.

FLAG | RESPOND

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## CAPTURE YOUR FLAG

11/20/2012 08:20 AM

We have the pleasure of interviewing multiple frogs each year in our aspirational career documentary interview series, Capture Your Flag. In this video, frog Lauren Serota -  [@serota](#) - shares how frog is working in the NGO space, specifically in mHealth in Africa. I think this is a valuable complement to this article and of course the frog guide to design thinking:

Here is the Capture Your Flag YouTube video link to Serota answering "How are you applying design techniques to solve problems working with UNICEF on mobile health solutions in Africa?":

<http://youtu.be/69LU9A-tpFQ>

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## MARGO DUNLAP

11/16/2012 12:48 PM

Apologies to Mr.

Fabricant, but "Yet most of the people they're trying to reach don't have any pattern for how to collectively approach a problem." is a huge red flag for me.

The idea that most communities in developing countries have no framework for how

to solve problems as a group can't be credible. Designer's work in the development field exists within a long history of development initiatives, which as often as they have been helpful, have been meddlesome, condescending, exploitative, and destructive. They also have a bad habit of privileging the voice of the outsider over traditional knowledge. I often worry that as a new

industry on the international development scene, design is overlooking much of

the hard-earned knowledge about how to be respectful and helpful in less developed communities. That said, it seems like a lot of the work and insights could be very valuable.

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11/29/2012 06:10 PM

Thank you for commenting, Margo. I just want to clarify that as designers we're very conscious of the long history of international development, and we approach this kind of work with humility and respect for all concerned. The Collective Action Toolkit was directly inspired by the innate problem-solving and social skills we observed among young women in these communities, skills that are not always encouraged. Hopefully this toolkit strengthens those capacities by giving girls (as well as other community members) additional patterns for collective action that complement traditional community organizing. I think you are right that I overstated this point in the interview with fast company and appreciate your honest feedback. The toolkit is not intended to replace existing systems, processes, or customs, but to provide a creative framework anyone can use to activate their own problem-solving and community organizing skills.

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GUEST

11/21/2012 08:04 PM

Thumbs up. Collective action and brainstorming have existed as a part of the traditional way in India at least, where community problems would be addressed together in 'panchayats' (which was the inspiration for Gandhi's idea of self governing village units).

FLAG

JHENEY1

11/19/2012 10:27 PM

What really worried about is that what will happen when everybody will get educated and rich/wealthy ? who is going to serve who. US/EU/Arab /Canada ....are already facing worker/labor crises !! developing country who came in and do all the odd Job !? Do we have any solution to this ! ? Every Human has right to get education and live well !

FLAG

ANDY

11/16/2012 01:10 PM

I would vehemently agree. What percentage of villagers have ever solved a problem effectively. 100% What percentage of designers have ever lived for more than a couple days in a hut with no shoes and no electricity? Maybe a handful? Even experienced organizations like World Bank are still learning what works and what doesn't with regards to assisting the developing world - and plenty of them have these collaborative design skills. Overgeneralizing here, but the best approaches often find the solutions that are already in use somewhere, and help to transfer that knowledge to others. Maybe there's a design

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## THEMOUSEKEEPER

11/16/2012 10:50 AM

I'm not sure the author understands what open-source means...  
Otherwise, great idea!

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## BLAKE LOUGH

11/15/2012 07:11 PM

Love the idea and just like the IDEO initiative it is great to see the design community giving back to the wider community. I would be really interested to know if there have been any issues with materials, namely post-its as I notice most photos have a local group gathered round clusters of post-its. How accessible are these really in these communities and what alternatives are they using.

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## KEN W

11/15/2012 06:14 PM

Looks an awful like IDEO's HCD connect toolkit... See it for yourself, you guys.

FLAG | [RESPOND](#)

## ANDY

11/15/2012 11:30 AM

Seems like a nice piece of work, and great that you are making it available free.

Desperately needs a proof-reading, however. There are many inconsistencies in the labels ("Build your team" vs "Build your group", "Imagine new ideas" vs "Imagine more ideas"), as if the overview graphic were designed separately from the content.

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## MAX

11/15/2012 11:29 AM

Compare to:  
<http://www.ideo.com/work/human...>

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## KELSEY

11/15/2012 09:21 AM

Hey guys,  
Thanks for the catch. The URL's been updated. Enjoy.

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11/15/2012 09:07 AM

<http://www.frogdesign.com/coll...>

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## MATTUK1972

11/15/2012 09:04 AM

try here! <http://www.frogdesign.com/coll...>

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## ZEB

11/15/2012 08:48 AM

, founder @RemHackr, bringing transparency + foresight to apt rentals • strategist @intown...

change the last part of the url to collective-action-toolkit and it should work

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## ZEB

11/15/2012 08:46 AM

, founder @RemHackr, bringing transparency + foresight to apt rentals • strategist @intown...

Here's a link that works <http://www.frogdesign.com/coll...> ;)

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## ALEXANDRE

11/15/2012 08:13 AM

Looks like the Collective Action Toolkit link in the article is broken

FLAG | RESPOND

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## DR. STRANGELOVE

11/15/2012 08:40 AM

Yup. Link's broken.

FLAG

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