

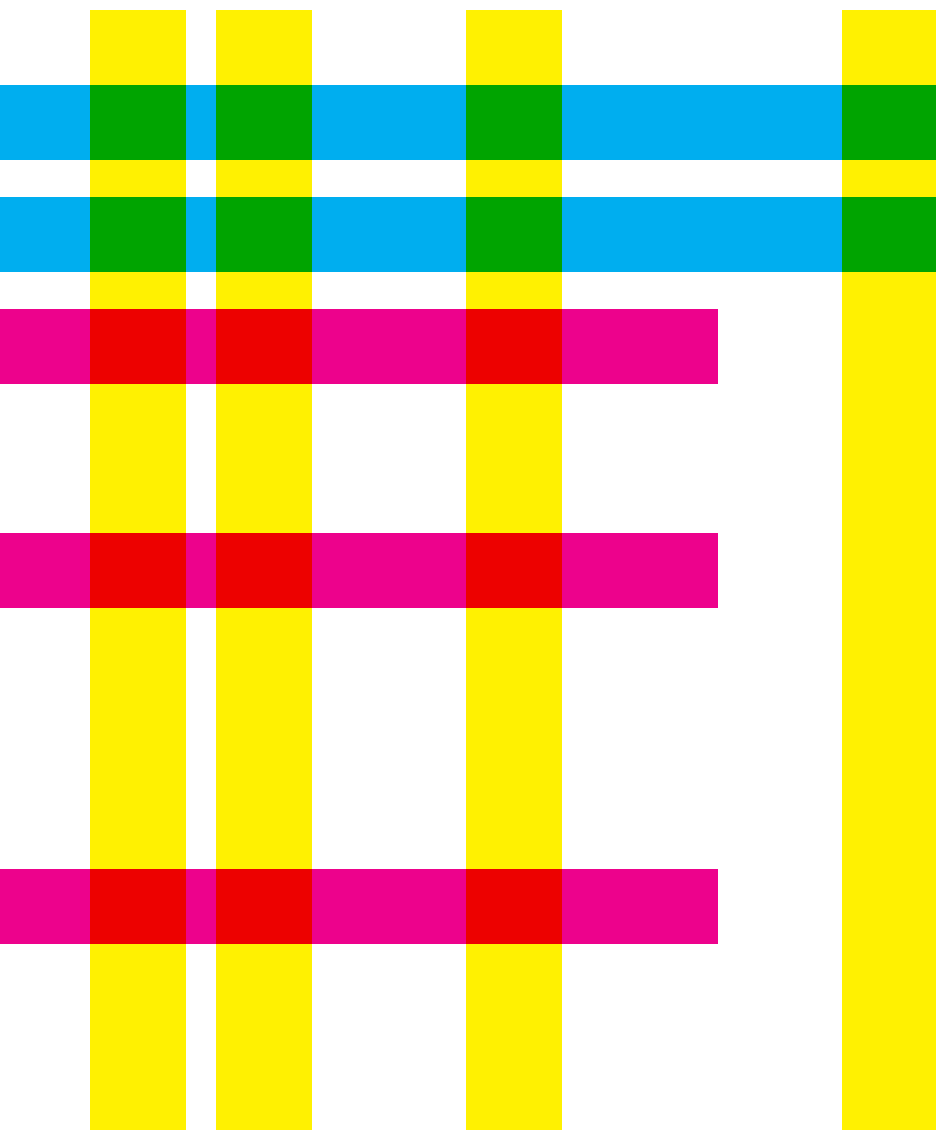
How to

**BUILD**

an Idea

Written by students of

 **LEAF**  
ACADEMY



# contents

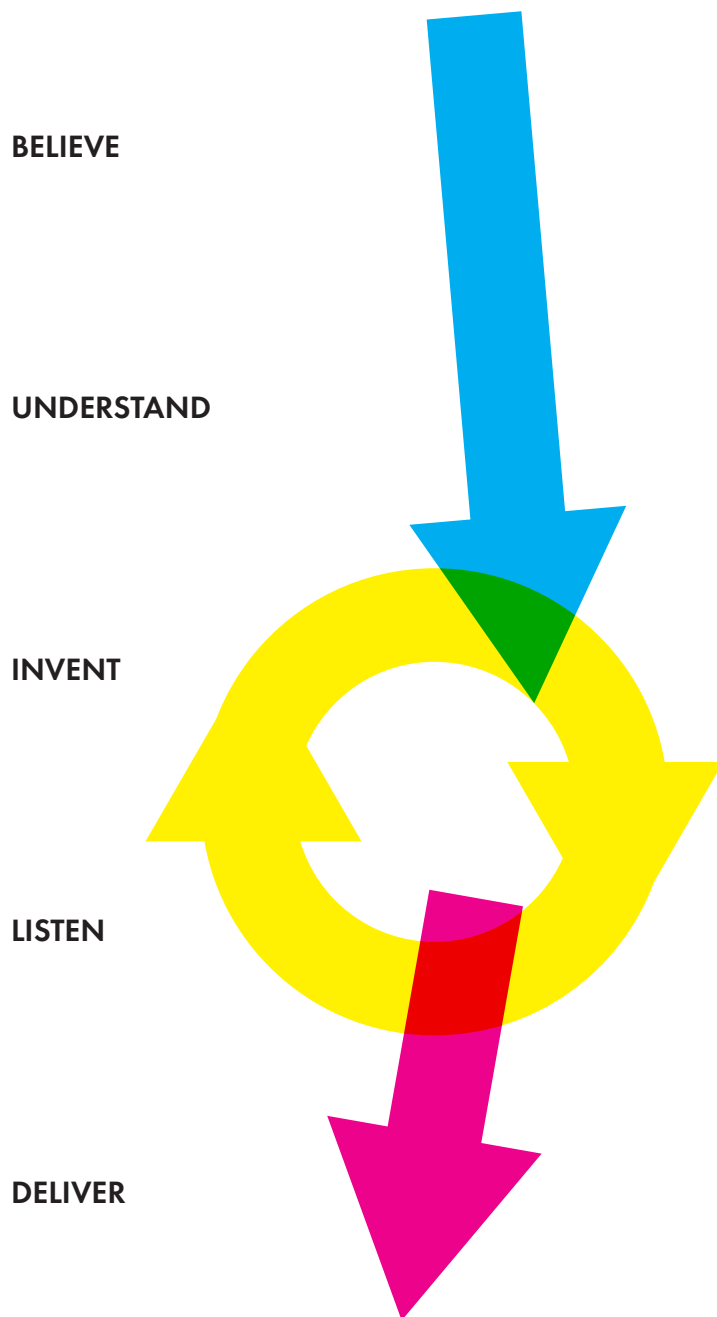
00	Introduction		5
01	BELIEVE		9
		Belasý kolibrík	11
		mindsets	15
		methods	21
		materials	27
02	UNDERSTAND		31
		mindsets	33
		methods	35
		materials	43
03	INVENT		47
		INAKO	49
		mindsets	51
		methods	53
		materials	57
04	LISTEN		61
		mindsets	63
		methods	65
		materials	67
05	DELIVER		69
		mindsets	71
		methods	73
			75
		credits	77



00

# Introduction

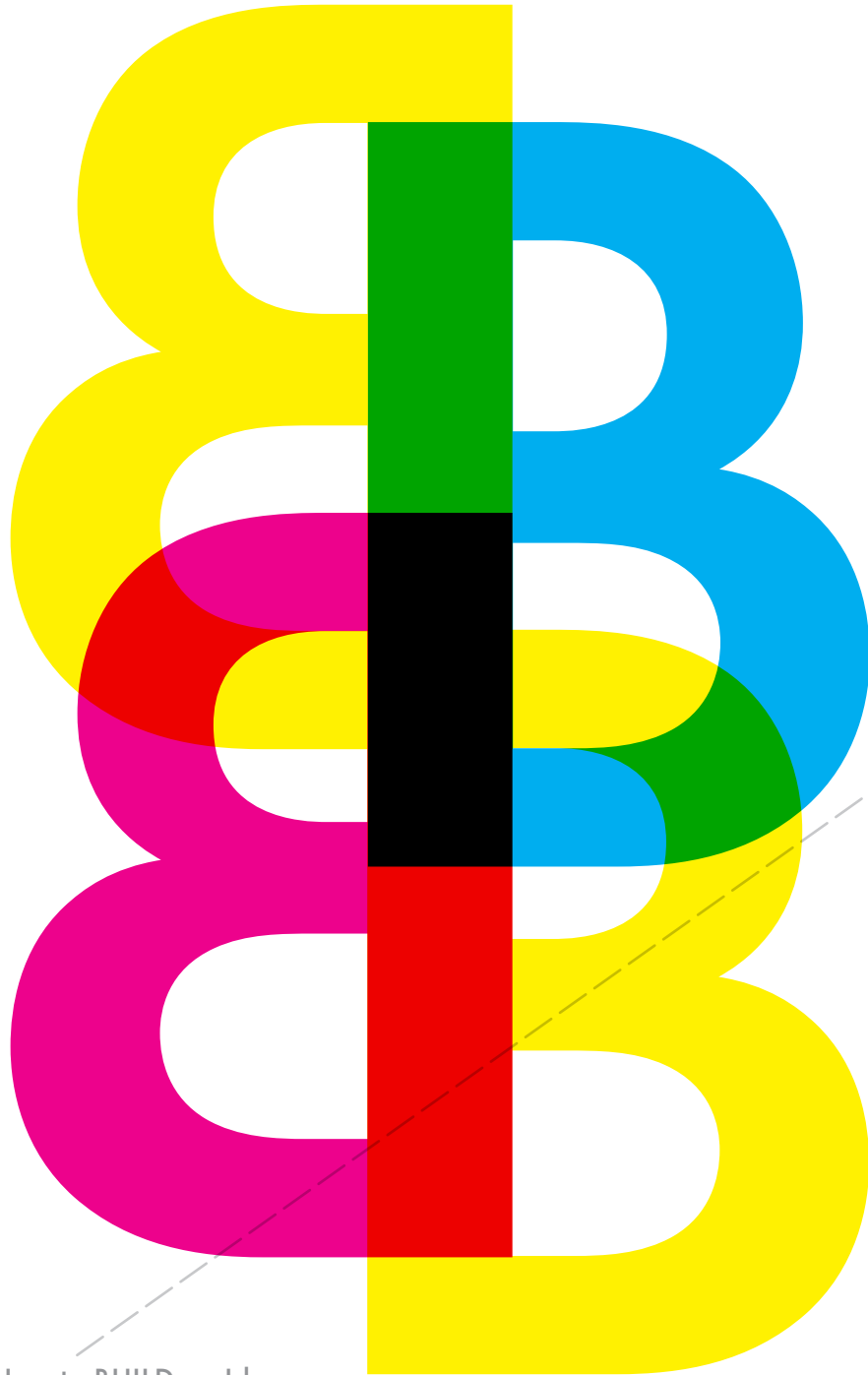
LEAF Academy is a residential high school based in Bratislava, Slovakia. Although fairly new, our school has already gained a track record of educating and housing a diverse group of highly motivated students from all over the world. That we have the pleasure of being a part of. Apart from learning traditional high school subjects in the form of APs, we are also introduced to somewhat unconventional courses building our leadership and teamwork skills. One of these is Entrepreneurial Leadership, one of the core classes at LEAF Academy. Apart from obtaining basic teamwork abilities and practicing leadership, we have been introduced to various concepts that aid us to change what we don't like or see as potential improvements about the world around us. This book is about the BUILD process, an educational concept rooted in Human Centered Design.



## so, what is human-centered design?

Human-Centered Design is a solution-based approach to issues that impact real people. While the issue or opportunity being addressed can vary from environmental to economic ones, Human-Centered Design always focuses on the impact the problem has on individual people or communities.

The main goal of using Human-Centered Design is to come up with a solution for a particular group of people fitting their needs.



01

# BELIEVE

The first phase of BUILD is about working with your own and your team's mindsets and current abilities. Regardless of where you are, you can make things happen. With others and for others. Perhaps you're a 10-year-old student who would like to change the meals in your school cafeteria, or you're 18 and want to help your neighbor, or you're a teacher and want to empower your students to organize cultural events in your hometown. There's always something that can be done. Sometimes we see the opportunities for change. Sometimes our teachers bring some to our attention, and sometimes we need to look around - walk through our village or town, observe what people are missing, seek inspiration in places where things work. Our capacity to "believe that we can make things happen" grows with every project we make, and also with every experience where we fail and learn.

Don't mistake the Believe phase for a blind overconfidence or sudden boost of motivation. The BUILD process is all about taking it one small step at a time. Do you care about certain issues? Do you believe that you can change something about them? Can you try? Do you believe you can try?



# Belasý Kolibrík

Belasý Kolibrík (a student-led project, the name translates as Blue Hummingbird) was started by two LEAF Academy students in their first year of studies. Karin and Adela, who were both fifteen years old at the time, found out that they share a passion for helping people. The girls felt they were lucky in their lives with loving families and good access to education. So, they settled on a question:

## **How can we help underprivileged children in Slovakia?**

In the Believe step, all that they did was talk to each other. What do we care about? How can we learn more about this problem? What do we like to do? Where can we start?

Then, the small young team contacted experts who have already been working with underprivileged children. They were curious. They asked questions and tried to learn as much as possible about the topic. One more classmate joined the team, as he believed that the project could make a difference. In a few weeks, the team settled on a much more specific question:

## **How can we help underprivileged Roma children from the schools we know work with their art talents?**

This was in February 2017. In June, the team organized a concert which gave a stage to the children who worked hard and learned to perform. All the proceeds from the tickets went to musical equipment, so the kids could further develop their talents. We are writing this book in 2021. Belasý Kolibrík have already empowered [...] underprivileged and also handicapped children. Karin, Adela and Andrej are all at university while continuing their passion of helping others.

Sometimes, the creative process takes us down surprising roads. If we find people who are already solving the issues we care about, we can join them. Sometimes, the issue is not big enough and we find something else to solve. Sometimes, we just learn a ton. What matters is that with the Believe phase we can take that first step towards starting or improving something we care about.

# mindsets

Nurturing your Believe capacity for every project to come is the key. IDEO, the leading design company that we learn a lot from, researched and offers four important mindsets to start with. Practicing these mindsets is important throughout the whole BUILD process, and thus we choose to learn them right at the beginning.

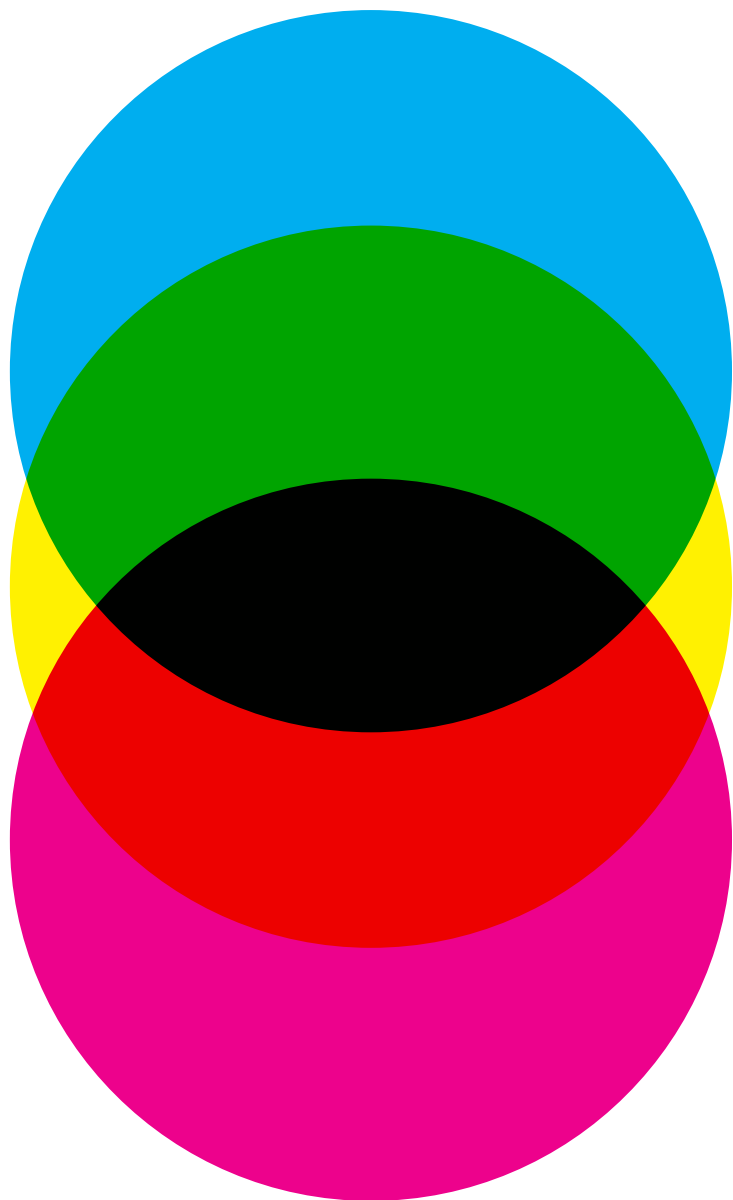
## Creative confidence

Creative Confidence is needed when one wants to become a designer of solutions. It's a belief that each of us can be creative. Not necessarily in an artistic way by creating a painting or a sculpture, however in the way of understanding the world around us. It's the conviction that you can come up with innovative solutions to major issues and problems, just need to trust the design process. The BUILD design process will show you a creative approach to almost all problems you want to solve. As you go through the tiny achievements of solving small projects, and then build to the bigger ones, you will find yourself becoming more and more confident in your creativity, and the creativity of people around you.

## Learning from Failure

Learning from Failure is a key feature of the BUILD process. During this process, you'll make many prototypes and experiments, many of which will not work for people. These experiments, however, will show what works, what doesn't, and what need to be explored further.

*\*Read more about Creative Confidence in the book by David Kelly, founder of IDEO: [www.creativeconfidence.com](http://www.creativeconfidence.com)*







In any case, you will learn. Thomas Edison put it all right when he said that

*"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."*

For us inventors, finding out what isn't working will help us discover what will.

### **Embracing Ambiguity**

Sometimes we can become too focused on getting things right on the first try. However, in the BUILD process you can, and you should make mistakes. Apart from learning from your failures, you can also open up to ambiguity. At the beginning of solving something, you have no idea what the solution might be. That is much better than going with the first solution, spending your time and energy on it and ending up not really helping people.

Be open to what you do not know. Explore: What do people go through in regards to the issue? How do they solve things at this moment, what difference would it make for them if the issue was solved?

Once you understand the topic and the people you want to help, come up with multiple and diverse ideas for solutions. Invite people to join your team for producing as many ideas as possible. With embracing ambiguity, you will end up with new ideas. Through experimenting with the prototype of the ideas (very similar to scientific method - ask your science teacher:), you can move on from those ideas that don't work and improve those that might work. In reality, accepting ambiguity frees us to find ways we cannot see initially.

## Optimism

For us to start in the right direction, we also need to be Optimistic. By being optimistic, we believe that we can make a difference, even if we do not know the solution yet. Without optimism, we lose motivation and end up not even trying. Not only does it make us more innovative, but it also boosts us towards possible solutions and pushes us as we hit dead ends. The best approach in human-centered design is the one when you are thinking about what you can do, rather than what could go wrong.

# methods

## Preliminary research

After we get ourselves into the right mindset, we can start. But where do we start with creating an idea? Start exploring: What are you passionate about? What bothers you?

You cannot solve something effectively if you do not care about the topic. If you find multiple topics you are really passionate about, try to identify problems and needs people have within the topic. Identify the people you would like to help in this topic the most or a person or more which you would like to start with. This will help you narrow your choices. In our classes, we tried to narrow the topics down to three. Some of us had two, some picked one topic.

The next steps would be to research the topic - find quality resources about it - science papers, expert articles, statistics, credible stories, documentaries, courses, even talking to people who know a lot about the topic will help you to understand the topic and where would it be worth it to perhaps create something.

## Framing a design question

We already identified the three main topics and now we're going to frame our design question. Choose one of your three topics, pick the one that you're the most passionate about. Now, let's start with framing! It is crucial for our success to frame our design question properly. When writing the design question down, bear the recommended structure in mind:



*“How can we help [someone] to [do something]?”*

This will allow you to stay focused on the issue, the people you want to help, and the desired goal. While creating the right frame, don't forget that your question needs to allow for a variety of possible solutions (many different solutions) and match the problem you are attempting to solve. If it meets these key elements, you should be on the right track! In the next steps - during interviews with people or other research of your topic, you will make the question more accurate. It is highly possible that you will change your design question based on what you have learned. Trust the process.

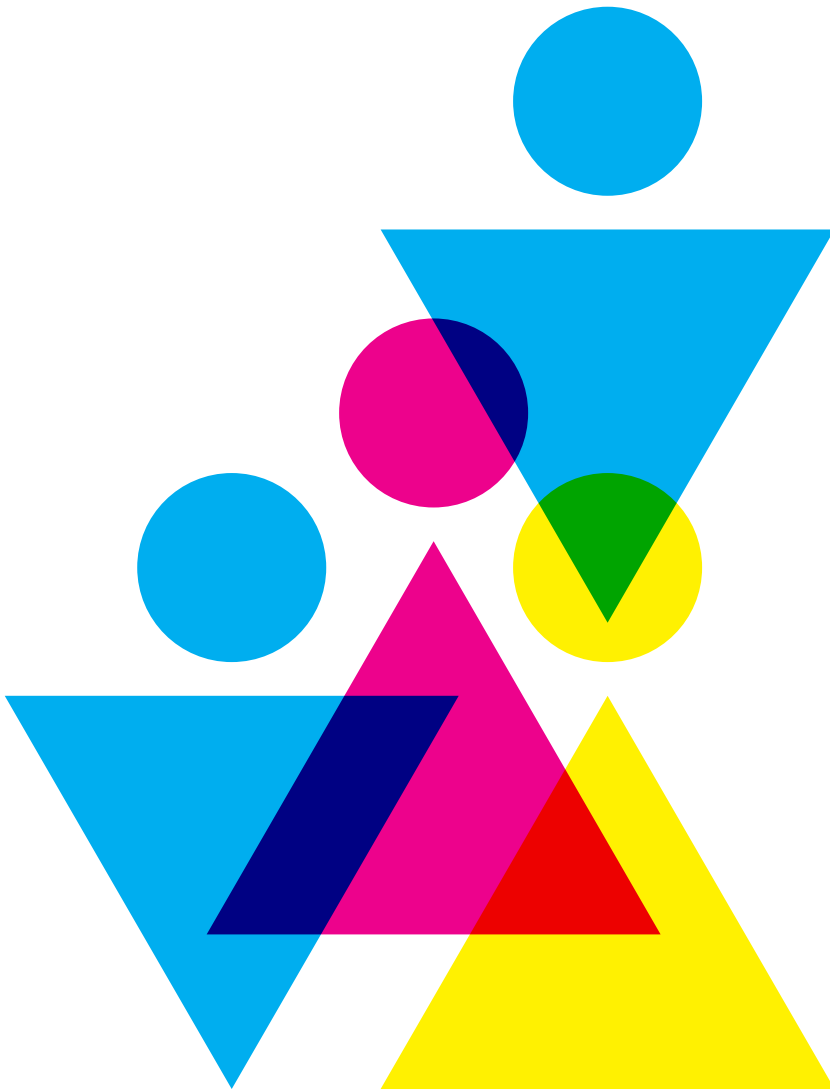
### **Building a team**

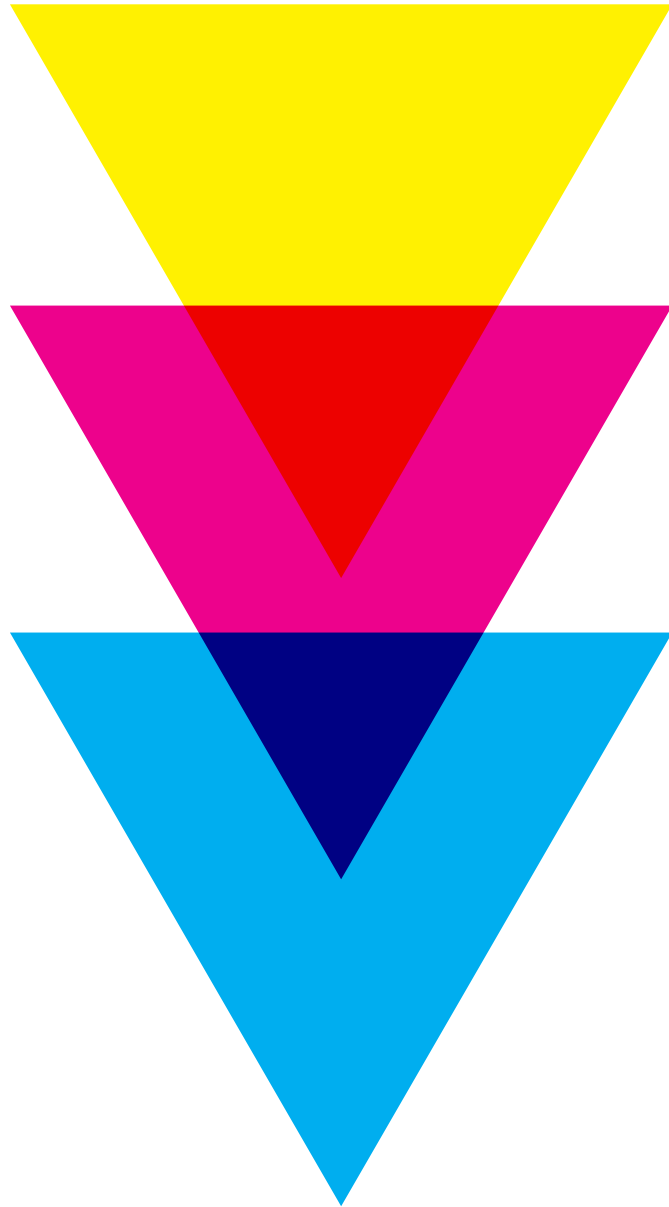
Human-centered design works the best in cross disciplinary teams. You can add new perspectives to the team by having people with diverse interests and abilities within the team. It helps to know what kind of skills the project requires and choosing the appropriate people for your team based on that.

The first and most important factor is to consider the number of people that the project would need. This is crucial because it can seriously affect your work for the entire duration of the project.

So, what is a good number of people for finding a solution for people, in a topic you all care about? It depends. How much time do you have? What are the tasks you will go through? The more people are in the group, the more time you spend on the coordination. How will you ensure that everyone feels included and important on the team? How will you communicate and support each other?

The skills of your team members influence what team/ group roles they will have. There are both functional and dysfunc-





tional roles, so you should pay close attention to the way your team functions when starting your project.

Before starting to work on the project you should get to know each other better. Team development has several steps and rushing it could hurt your effectiveness later.

By going through the stages of team development you can discover things like the strengths and weaknesses of your team members. During this process you can also see if your team members will work well together, or if there are some conflicts preventing effective teamwork.

After creating a functioning team, you should be just about ready to start working on the project. The last step before that is defining some team norms. This step makes sure that all team members are on the same page when starting the project. Team norms are a set of basic rules that the team should follow. Many of the often-implemented team norms deal with questions such as time management, deciding which team member takes care of public relations, or who will be responsible for organizing team meetings.

# materials

Forming a design question is a crucial part of the Believe phase. In this activity, we want to dig deeper and find the right question for your ideas, a question that isn't too broad or narrow.

We're going to introduce a method called 'why questioning'. This activity will work best in groups. We recommend three people. Each person will be given one of these roles:

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 1. Interviewer | asks 'why questions'                         |
| 2. Guest       | answers those questions                      |
| 3. Notetaker   | writes down the main points of the interview |

Pick a statement describing a particular issue. In other words, pick what problem you want to solve. For example:

*The majority of the Roma population in Slovakia is in a poor financial situation.*

This statement presents the main topic of interest, and the activity can begin. The interviewer just simply asks:

*Why is [given statement]?*

The guest answers and the notetaker writes down important information given by the guest. Then the interviewer continues:

*Why... [guest's statement for the first question]?*



# framing your design question

What problem are you trying to solve?

---

---

What are some possible solutions? (creative confidence!)

---

---

Exactly what impact are you aiming for?

---

---

Try framing a design question (check p. 25 for inspiration)

---

---

Go over this page again.  
Does your question need some tweaking?

---

---

This cycle continues until the 5-minute timer is up and then roles switch. Repeat this until everyone has tried each role. So in our case, we would end up with something like this:

*Why is the majority of the Roma population in Slovakia in a poor financial situation?*

*Because they lack quality education.*

*Why does the Roma population lack quality education?*

*Because they don't have the resources and opportunities to have it.*

*Why don't they have the resources and opportunities to have it?*

...

Afterwards, collect your notes and discuss which problem you want to focus on. Now it's time to form a design question that asks how to solve the chosen problem. To form a design question, we recommend using the formula on page 15.

For example in this case:

*How can we help Slovakia's Roma population get better access to quality education?*

Now that you have a solution oriented design question, you can begin your journey with the BUILD process.

# credits

## Core writing team

Ľubica Lutz  
Žofia Anna Juricová  
Matús Leng  
Rebeka Démuthová  
Michael F. McLean

## Cover Design

Michael F. McLean  
Jakub Šandor

## Other Contributors

Year 3 LEAF Academy students

## Editing

Rebeka Démuthová  
Michael F. McLean  
Ľubica Lutz

## Illustration & typesetting

Michael F. McLean  
Rebeka Démuthová



