

ISSUE MAPPING: IDENTIFYING AND RESOLVING TOUGH BUSINESS PROBLEMS

All businesses face tough challenges at one point or another – a drop in sales, an increase in costs, a change in competition. Leaders can brainstorm effective approaches to solving these kinds of difficult issues by using this issue mapping tool. It may be used in conjunction with “A Method of Solving Tough Business Problems.”

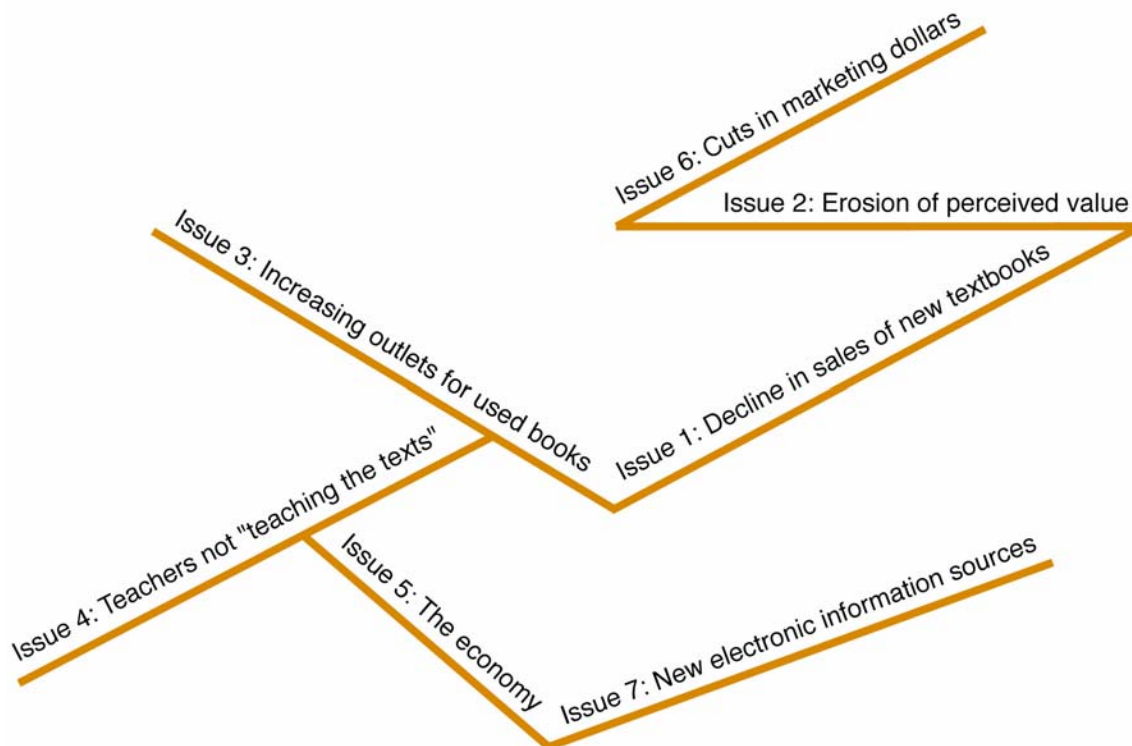
A. Identify Issues

Eighty percent of solving a tough problem is defining it correctly. This means bringing it into focus in the context of other, related issues – and then ranking the relative importance of all the issues.

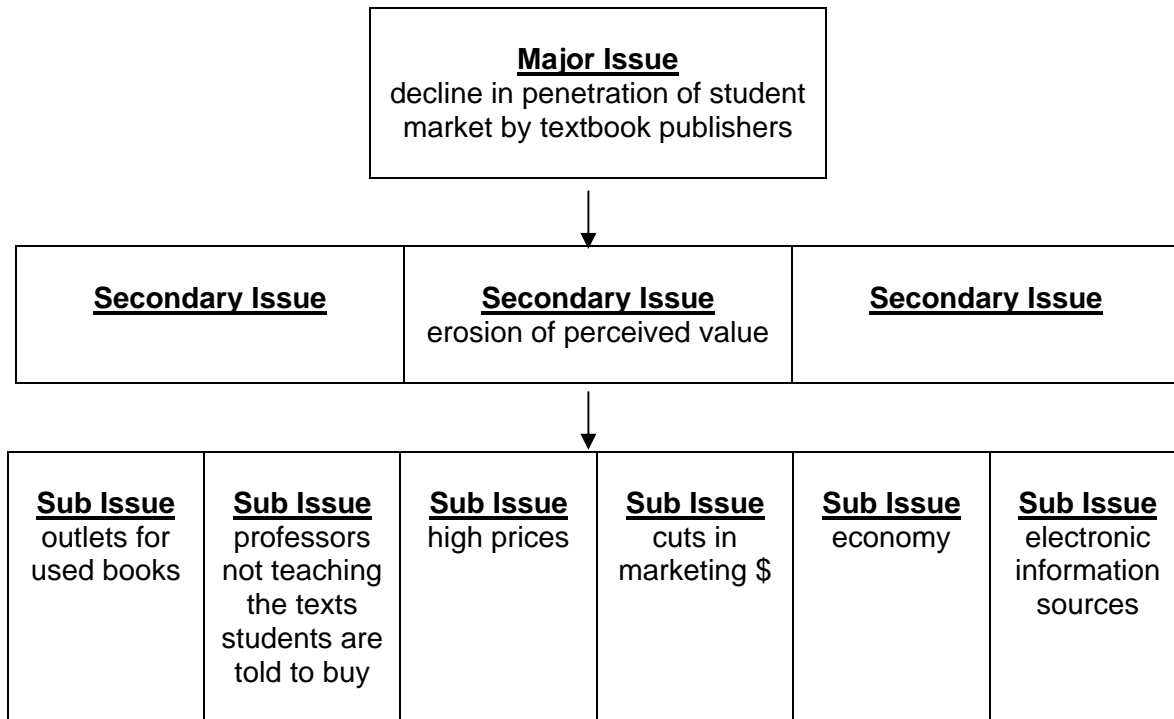
Step 1: Take a first stab at identifying the problem needing resolution.

For example, a primary issue facing textbook publishers is that the percentage of students buying new textbooks has dropped significantly, eroding profit margins and creating a downward spiral as prices are raised to compensate.

Step 2: Brainstorm all related issues.



Step 3: Map the relationship of issues in a hierarchical form. Refine until there is general agreement on the ordering of issues. Consider the following example:



Step 4: Draw a line through any issues over which you have no realistic control now or in the future.

B. Define your objectives

Step 1: Prioritize the issues in order of magnitude. (To do so, ask yourselves: If the same resources were allocated to resolving each, where would we derive the greatest impact at the least cost?) Winnow it down to 1-3 priorities.

Step 2: For each issue on your priority list, determine your objectives. Objectives are specific interim steps toward the resolution of the issue. Then determine the action steps (specific task assignments) necessary to achieve each objective.

Step 3: Provide a sheet (see example below) showing issue to be addressed, objectives, action steps, responsibility and timing.

Example

Issue: Professors are not teaching the texts students are told to buy.

Objective	Action Steps	Responsibility/Timing	
Improve communication with leading professor in field during development of texts.	a. For selected category, conduct interviews with 10 department heads at leading universities.	PD	5/30
	b. Determine where greatest opportunity lies by projecting specific increases in sell-through.	SW	6/30
	c. Create incentives designed to ensure key market influencers adopt and teach to the texts.	PD	7/30