



Disruption Brainstorming Tool

- Identify Disruption Issues
- Challenge Mainstream Assumptions
- Focus on Disruptive Alternatives to Create Growth

Brainstorming for Disruptive Innovation (1)

Objective

To disrupt, you must surface and challenge the mainstream market assumptions. This team exercise helps identify disruption issues and the mainstream assumptions that may limit your management team's ability to capitalize on disruptive opportunities.

**Table 1
Disruption Issues**

- 1. New or underserved market
- 2. Product traits vs. mainstream
- 3. Traits for early adopters
- 4. Technology trend
- 5. Business model
- 6. Channel
- 7. Corporate structure
- 8. Other

Mainstream, *n.*: Prevailing current of thought, influence, or activity in the market.

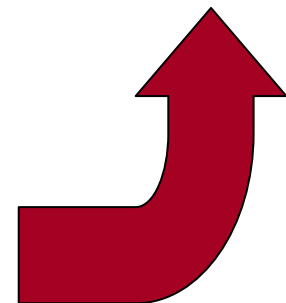
**Column 1
Mainstream Market Views**

Selected Disruption Issue:

- 4-5 Mainstream views on the issue per person
- Group similar views together
- Identify 5 common beliefs held by most

**Column 2
Common Beliefs**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



Brainstorming for Disruptive Innovation: Worksheet 1 (40 min.)

1. Work in groups of 4-8. Produce a large, 2 ft x 3 ft, copy of Worksheets 1 and 2 for each team.
2. Place **Worksheet 1** in the middle of a large table or on a wall. (Worksheet 2 will be used later).
3. Group each team around a table.
4. Make sure you have a supply of at least 10 sticky notes per team member.
5. Pick one **Disruption Issue** from those identified in **Table 1** on **Worksheet 1**. Write the name of the topic at the top of **Column 1**. (Pick an issue that is most relevant to your firm or workgroups.)
6. As an individual, reflect on the **Mainstream Market Views** surrounding the issue. How do most market participants see the issue? For example, for Issue 1:New or underserved market, the mainstream view may be “Market X is small,” or “Market X can’t be profitable because of high service costs,” or “Company Y failed at market X.” For Issue 4:Technology trend, the mainstream market view might be “There has to be a capacity breakthrough for the market to develop.” On Issue 6:Channel, the mainstream view could be, “Products like this are sold by X partners,” or “You have to sell direct.” For Issue 7:Corporate structure, the mainstream view may be “Company X dominates the market, so we need to emulate their structure but with fewer resources.”
7. Make a list of 4–5 **Mainstream Market Views** relative to the disruption issue under consideration. Record each view, with no more than 10 words on a sticky note. When finished, place your 4-5 sticky notes in **Column 1**.
8. Have one team member read all the stickies in turn. If the meaning of any note is unclear to a team member, ask the author for clarification.
9. Now, work as a team to identify clusters of similar beliefs. Rearrange the stickies in **Column 1** so that similar beliefs are grouped together. You can draw a circle encompassing clusters of similar beliefs. The goal is to identify five mainstream beliefs that a majority of the group hold in common concerning the particular disruption issue under consideration.
10. Record the five **Common Beliefs** in the appropriate spaces in **Column 2** on **Worksheet 1**.

Brainstorming for Disruptive Innovation (2)

Column 1 Common Beliefs	Column 2 Mainstream Assumptions	Column 3 Counter Examples	Column 4 Disruptive Alternatives
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2-3 Mainstream assumptions per belief per person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •1-2 counters •Why ? •Lessons? 	<p>Assumption:</p> <p>Disruptive Alternative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Group asks what can the company do to challenge assumption? •Group selects best alternative and discusses a business practice to follow
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Why do I believe this? •Based on what? 		<p>Assumption:</p> <p>Disruptive Alternative :</p>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Group selects one assumption per belief to challenge 		<p>Assumption:</p> <p>Disruptive Alternative:</p>
4.			<p>Assumption:</p> <p>Disruptive Alternative:</p>
5.			<p>Assumption:</p> <p>Disruptive Alternative:</p>

Brainstorming for Disruptive Innovation: Worksheet 2 (60+ min)

1. Continue with the same team or teams as grouped for **Worksheet 1**. Have available at least 30 sticky notes per person.
2. Place **Worksheet 2** on your table. Take the five **Common Beliefs** that you listed in **Column 2** on **Worksheet 1** and write each belief in one of the five squares in **Column 1** on **Worksheet 2**.
3. As an individual, think about the underlying mainstream assumptions to each of these Common Beliefs. For example, some of the mainstream assumptions to the belief that “New market X is small,” might be: “Customers are already well served by mainstream products,” or “We have to educate customers,” or “We need a mainstream partner or channel to legitimize the market,” or “Customers are resistant to change.” As an individual, write down 2–3 **Mainstream Assumptions**, one per sticky, for each **Common Belief** listed in **Column 1** on **Worksheet 2**. Limit each sticky to no more than 10 words. Have each members post 2–3 assumption stickies in the appropriate space in **Column 2**.
4. As a team, group similar **Mainstream Assumptions** together within **Column 2**. As a team, choose the one assumption for each common belief that most deserves to be challenged. For example, in New or underserved market, you might identify the assumption “We have to educate customers” as deserving to be challenged. Or in Technology trend, “We need a breakthrough in price or capacity,” may be worth challenging. In choosing an assumption to challenge, team members may want to ask themselves what assumption, if challenged, would represent the greatest break with the mainstream market and/or current management thinking. Having chosen an underlying assumption to challenge, circle the relevant sticky or stickies. Within each of the five boxes in **Column 2**, draw a circle around the sticky or stickies that refer to the one assumption you think most deserves to be challenged.
5. As a team, think about each of the assumptions you circled in turn. For each mainstream assumption ask, can we think of any case or cases where this assumption has been proven invalid or hasn't held true? For example, if the assumption is “We have to educate customers,” you might ask, “Can we think of examples where a group of customers have not needed to be educated about the new product?” The examples can be drawn from within your organization or outside. Ask yourselves, what was it about this example that made it an exception to the general assumption? For example, maybe a group of people had a unique circumstance, unique need or an unusual crisis, lower resistance to adoption and, therefore, were more willing to embrace the product. Are there other groups who share that circumstance or crisis? For each **Counter-example**, try to find a key lesson or two and note each of these in **Column 3**.
6. As an individual, based on the insights listed in **Column 3**, and on your own imagination, think about what your company could do, practically, to challenge each of the **Mainstream Assumptions** listed in **Column 2**. For each assumption, try to come up with one unconventional idea that might represent an alternative to mainstream market wisdom and the current management view. For example, if one of the assumptions to be challenged is “The market for product X won't develop until the price falls to Y,” you might suggest that “Early adopters are buying product X because they value convenience,” or the alternative, “Even if the price falls below Y, mainstream users won't be compelled because the real problem is ease of use.” Write each of your assumption-defying **Disruptive Alternatives**, one per assumption, on a sticky using no more than 10 words. Have team members put their stickies into the appropriate boxes in **Column 4**.
7. Have each team member read their **Disruptive Alternatives** from the stickies posted in **Column 4**. Having heard each of the disruptive alternatives, the team should choose the one alternative they think might have the best chance of being translated into practice (e.g., operationalized). Within **Column 4**, draw a circle around what the team regards as the best alternative to each of assumption.
8. Finally, discuss ways in which you might turn each of your **Disruptive Alternatives** into management practice. For example, if the disruptive alternative view is “The real problem is ease of use,” can the company develop a product focused on ease of use? Or if the alternative view is “Customers need a solution to crisis Z,” can the company reorient its business to serve that need?
9. Repeat **Worksheets 1 and 2** for other **Disruption Issues** as appropriate.

About the Author



Michael Urlocker

Michael Urlocker is management consultant, Chartered Financial Analyst, and graduate of electrical engineering. He has nearly 20 years experience focusing on telecom industry management issues and change. Prior to founding the consulting firm Northern Technology & Telecom Research, Michael was a senior technology and telecom investment analyst at several global firms, including UBS Investment Bank and CSFB. Michael has also worked as a financial journalist covering the telecom and technology sector and as a marketing consultant to the software industry.

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