

“Strategy in the face of rapid change”



Thanks to the spectacular growth of the sport, its greater professionalism and its attractiveness to commercial partners, the proportion of the FEI's commercial revenues has increased significantly over the last five years. This has allowed the FEI to invest in the further development of the organisation by hiring additional staff members, but also by developing new tools and methods which have streamlined the work and have made the FEI much more agile and efficient.

HRH Princess Haya, IOC member and FEI President, has implemented a number of key strategies in the FEI since her election in 2006.

TSE: How does FEI handle the challenge of planning strategically while at the same dealing with many operational aspects and a busy events schedule?

HRH: The first contested election in the FEI was held in 2006, and it required that the three candidates produced Programmes or a Manifesto. The same exercise was repeated in the 2010 elections. A programme that is strong enough to win an election needs to be based on the process of listening to the membership, assimilating the information, and crafting it into a document that is feasible to achieve and reflects the strategic direction required by the critical mass of the membership. For any Presidential Administration to be seen as successful the programme must be specific enough to include deliverables, or at least have clarity as to what would be considered the “measure of success” in any given strategic direction.

The easiest and simplest way to make an administration successful is to deliver on the promises made when the leadership is chosen by the membership, and additionally to create a tracking system for the deliverables



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so that the administration and the membership are bound to one common direction.

TSE: Is it difficult to set clear and measurable objectives in a complex organisation like an international federation?

HRH: Setting clear and measurable objectives depends on how committed the IF is to its future. Survival and pressure from the sporting landscape at large plays a big part in this. If the IF is one that is a Category A or B sport, then there is little pressure on it in the short term, but in the long term they would need to recognise that others are hungry and nothing lasts forever. It is always wise to pay attention to the mice that may come and eat your cheese.

It is better to set clear objectives and to deliver. It is always best to listen to your community and to craft their vision into the path for the IF to follow. Delivery is then relatively simple, no matter how complex the organisation is, as everyone should be headed in the same direction. The FEI is a volunteer based organisation, and the key has been to professionalise the conduct of our officials and clarify the standards of professionalism. I would consider assigning 'mid- and long-term objectives and goals' to staff as confusing consultancy terms; clear work plans, with tasks and delivery dates are the clarity that is needed. This also provides a clear tracking for the elected body to assess progress. The executive also has to be humble enough to admit mistakes and agile enough to change direction if a target is clearly not attainable or relevant.

TSE: Has the FEI used any specific tools/models for strategic planning and for measuring progress?

HRH: The key strategic tool that we created in the FEI was actually a strategic platform, the FEI Sports Forum. Our annual General Assembly was traditionally held in April of every year, and for obvious reasons such as the budget forecasts, and rules that needed to be approved, this event



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was moved to November. This made room for the Sports Forum, open to all, which is placed in the first quarter of the year. It is focused on bringing all the players in our community to Lausanne to discuss the key issues facing our sport, and the debate remains open for the following four months in the run up to the General Assembly where decisions are made by our membership.

TSE: Are sports organisations in general too focused on structure (number of commissions, etc.) and too little on strategy?

HRH: Going through the debate on restructuring does have its merits, in so far as it allows us to better understand the aspirations of our members. In the end, the Technical Committees or Commissions must be allowed to work unobstructed and not be led by the need for the IF to survive through its commercial income. In other words, there needs to be a clear line between regulatory and commercial.