

Chapter 1.3

New ideas on strategic planning

Benefits of this chapter

Bring out your best ideas with a solid strategy

In order to inspire your staff and members you must be able to communicate your ideas in a clear and effective way. This means having a clear and solid strategy.

This chapter helps to clarify the language of strategy to help you organise and clarify the message and direction of your National aquatics Federation. It further looks into a new concept which can be useful for many federations as a base for motivation.

Once you have a clear path, you can then begin to set the direction for your aquatics future and inspire those around you.

Introduction

Too often we hear various objections when there is talk about developing or adjusting a strategic plan within a federation. The lack of interest in the new plan and less than stellar results achieved from the change in strategy are most of the time due to the fact that the idea or message is not well communicated and therefore misunderstood by many.

The lack of understanding why these new concepts should be implemented drives fear and resistance. Telling your staff and members what you are doing – by implementing a new aquatics strategic plan – may not be the message they need to hear. As leaders of your federation, you must in the first place create awareness of why you need change and be able to communicate this in a positive manner.

By customising the explanation of your new plan in the right way with the right tools, you can get everyone on board to implement your new aquatics vision.

Strategic terminology – learning the language

Various buzz words and expressions are used often when talking about strategy and they can mean different things to different people. This is why it is important to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Too often confusion and misinterpretation regarding the purpose of your new concept are the top reasons why some people can't see the overall picture of your new strategic plan. It is vital that everyone – management, staff, members, etc. – is speaking the same language so that your federation can move forward cohesively.

Here are some clarifications and simplifications of strategy terminology:

1/ Strategic planning is focused on what to do to reach your objectives while operational planning is about how to do it by who and by when.

2/ Effectiveness is based on your strategic planning and can then be defined as doing the right things, while efficiency will be achieved through your operational planning and is a measure of how things are done well.

3/ The strategy of your organisation will be measured in terms of effectiveness while the structure is focused on your efficiency.

New thinking on strategy

There are many new thoughts on strategy that come from the corporate world, which can be easily transferred to the sports world. The so-called “Blue Ocean Strategy” is one strategy which could provide interesting inspiration for your federation.

The basic idea is that most federations are operating in the “red ocean” where the sports industry boundaries are defined and accepted. Here your federation is trying to outperform your “rivals” (other sporting federations) to grab a greater share of existing demand. As the market space gets more and more crowded, the opportunities for profits and growth are reduced. All federations become more or less the same in the eyes of potential consumers, and the cutthroat competition turns the red ocean bloody.

The “Blue Ocean”, by contrast, is defined by a market space which is untouched, and where the demand for your sport is created and the opportunity for development and growth is open. While blue oceans are occasionally created beyond existing industry or sporting culture limits, most are actually created by expanding existing industry boundaries.

The idea behind creating demand is turning non-customers into customers instead of continuously competing within restricted and already defined markets, this is the central idea of “Blue Ocean Strategy.” And also what should be of great interest to your federation.

Often federations end up focusing on the same issues and come up with the same suggested solutions: increase media coverage, raise spectator attendance for the events, make events more spectator and TV friendly, develop stars to attract a wider audience, etc.

The problem here is that you and all the other sporting federations are striving for the same type of spectators, the same media, the same sponsors. The result is obviously throat-cutting competition in the red ocean. This is basically why bigger federations tend to always win the competition and continue to grow. What is left of the market goes towards specialised sports peaking interest within the region.

Are there ways for your federation to gain some market space? Developing a “Blue Ocean Strategy” could be a way forward – but how to do it? For detailed guidelines the “Blue Ocean Strategy” should be studied in detail, but in essence, it is a two-step process:

The first step is to look at your market where you are currently active and competing with other sports or events. Are there any commonalities that current spectators and supporters/participants are seeking from your sport? If so, what are these commonalities? And Are there some common elements? If yes, the key will be to identify new segments that could be attracted by these common elements – someone currently not being approached by your sport or by competitors. These groups of non-customers could become the new customers, fans or participants.

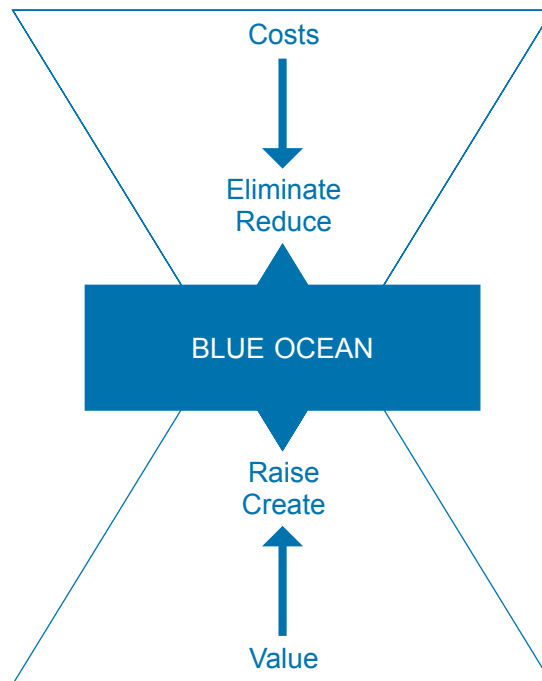
The second step in developing a “Blue Ocean Strategy” is to make your current offer attractive to these new groups. There must be a reason why they have felt attracted so far. In order to attract these new customers to the sport or event, the perceived value needs to be increased and the costs of joining should be lowered – preferably at the same time!

In order to obtain this and break the value-cost trade off, changes and improvement must happen on two fronts:

1/ Costs must be reduced by eliminating propositions that new customers don't really care about and by reducing other offers that are not important to new customers.

2/ Values (for the new customers) must be increased by creating new elements to the sport or event and by raising the level of other elements that are considered attractive to new customers.

Diagram 1.3 a



Useful tips

Helpful tips to remember when implementing new ideas:

- Some changes can cause emotional and heated discussion at first, but if explained clearly, they can turn out to be key drivers in future successes.
- Reaching out to a completely new group of customers can be scary, but if your strategy is strong this can have a bigger pay off in the end.
- Creating something new – a new product or new disciplines – can raise the overall level of your sport. But make sure to work with your continental and international federations to gain support and grow the sport together.