

Chapter 2.5

Winning story

Danish Swimming Federation

**Pia Homen Christensen – Director
Danish Swimming Federation**

“We let our values of honesty and openness guide us”

The Danish Swimming Federation is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and member federation of FINA. We are an organisation of 200 clubs and about 12'600 individual members. We are the third-largest national sports federation in Denmark – the Danes love to swim. We organise several aquatics sports disciplines in Denmark, including: swimming, lifesaving, synchronised swimming, water polo, diving and open water swimming.

Recent structural changes have led us to strive to make each region across the country an integrated part of the Danish Swimming Federation, rather than separate, autonomous parts of the federation.

What have you done over the years to set up your federation's structure to ensure future success?

We have gained experience and know-how through organisational changes, partnerships with other organisations and national and international benchmarking. The recent structural changes have also given the board in Denmark considerable influence.

We rarely invent things ourselves; we look at best practices from other federations around the world to see what works and integrate those findings into our system. We want to improve, so we have hired international coaches and we look at what the best federations are doing to stay competitive.

We have worked hard to be a modern organisation and we follow our vision: Swimming is playing and winning. We have worked hard to be the most influential organisation in Denmark on lifesaving and swimming.

When choosing your federation's current structure, were there any internal/external factors you had to take into consideration?

Oh yes, many years of tradition made internal changes difficult. But as one of the oldest and most modern federations in Danish sport, we let our values of honesty and openness guide us. We were upfront in our discussions and we lived our values.

Doing so helped different groups cooperate and understand each other, which has helped us be successful.

Externally, we adapt. As the saying goes, "If you can't beat them join them." We looked at what other federations have done when implementing changes and we stuck to our values when integrating those best practices into our federation.

Did your federation use any particular models when developing your structure?

Dialogue and patience were key. We were very public and went out in front of Denmark to talk with club leaders, friends and foes. We knew changing things would be difficult, so we needed to have personal relationships and be public when creating a plan for change. It is important to believe that you can change things, but it is also important to know that it takes time.

What challenges have you faced in implementing your structure?

Having a long tradition and deep culture can make changing things difficult. In particular, leaders who have been involved in the federation for a long time needed to be convinced that implementing changes were the right things to do.

Building support for change requires patience and communication. Being patient (but persistent) and believing in your goals is key. And communicating your beliefs and the reasons for changing is also very important because those who may resist change initially need to know why it is happening before they can support it.

Now that your structure has been in place for some time, how has your federation been able to measure its effectiveness?

We have come so far. We haven't measured change in a quantifiable way, but since the structural changes took effect on the 1st of January 2008, we know that we have become more efficient because we have the flexibility to make important decisions day-to-day and we have better direct communication with our member clubs. Our organisation is ready for the years to come!