

ATHLETICS OMNIBUS – STRATEGIC PLANNING IN ATHLETICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning is common in military manoeuvres where the purpose of strategic planning is to gain the upper hand on the opposition.

One may argue that strategic planning is not needed in sport. The fact is, in sport, we continuously need to obtain the upper hand over our own limitations or that of the opposition. The level of strategic planning will depend on what the objectives are, and what levels of excellence are to be achieved.

For an athlete to achieve success, the athlete will train according to a programme until the set objective is achieved. The training programme of the athlete is nothing else than a strategic plan custom designed for the athlete. Likewise, the Athletics Club or Athletics Federation will also need a strategic plan custom designed for the community it has to serve.

Although the strategic plan for an athlete will have the same core ingredients as the strategic plan of an Athletics Club or an Athletics Federation, the path followed to compile the strategic plans may differ.

The Following Questions Should Be Asked Before Compiling a Strategy:

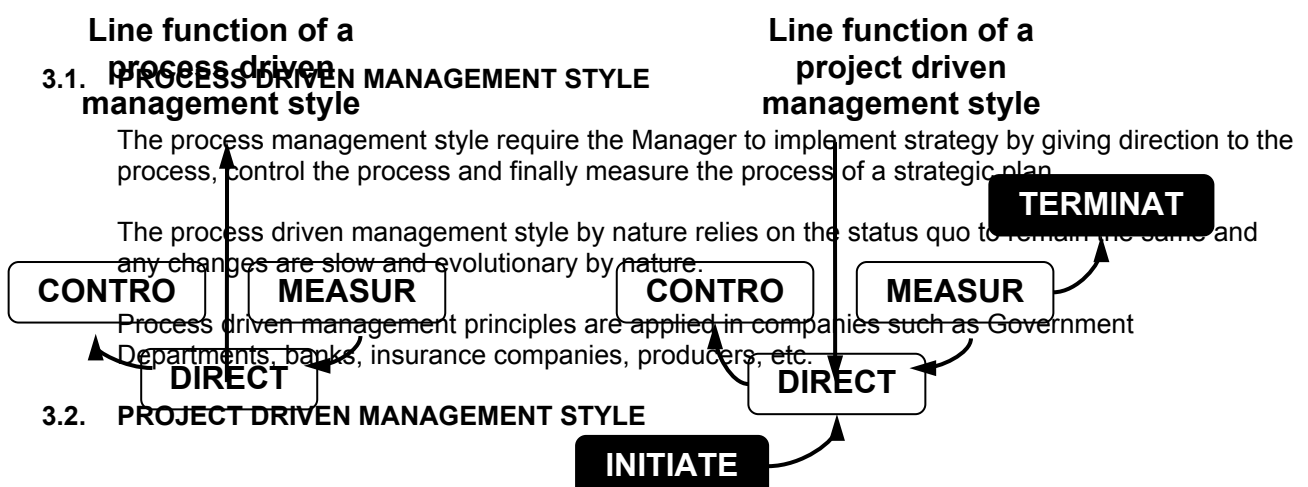
- 1.1. What strategy was in place in the past. Be brief and to the point
- 1.2. What went wrong in the previous strategy
- 1.3. Available options. State the alternative strategies. List advantages & disadvantages of each. State cost of each option
- 1.4. Recommend one or more of the strategies. Summarize the results if things go as proposed. What to do next. Identify action items
- 1.5. What unusual features might effect the implementation of the new strategy
- 1.6. Who in the Federation is good in strategising

2. WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE CAPTURED IN A STRATEGY

- 2.1. The strategy must give a clear understanding of what must be achieved. The Strategy should have a vision, mission, objectives to achieve and milestones to measure the progress made.
- 2.2. The strategy must have a financial control system in place. It should specify when and how the business plan will be funded and must have financial procedures in place to ensure financial accountability.
- 2.3. The strategy must have policies and procedures in place that give guidance on what to do, when to do it, how it should be done, where should it be done, and who should do it.

3. WHAT TYPE OF STRATEGIC PLAN

There are generally 2 management styles to manage a strategic plan namely process and project driven management styles.



In the project management style, the Manager also needs to give direction to the process, control the process and finally measure the process of a strategic plan. However, the strategic plan based on project management principles also need an initiation point and termination point.

A strategic plan based on project management principles consists of a series of projects. Each project has a clearly defined initiation point and a clearly defined termination point. The series of projects are executed in a chronological order, until the set objectives for the project is met.

Each project in the strategic plan needs to be executed effectively to provide a sound basis for the next project to build on. The project driven management style delivers results quickly and changes takes place much more frequently.

Project Management principles are normally applied by construction companies, manufacturing companies, system developers, etc.

3.3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROJECT AND PROCESS DRIVEN MANAGEMENT STYLES

PROJECT BASED STRATEGY	PROCESS DRIVEN STRATEGY
1. Manage change	Manage status quo
2. Manage new situations	Manage codified systems
3. Require high management involvement	Require low management involvement
4. Is needed when big changes must be made	Required during slow evolutionary change
5. Require management on a frequent basis	Require management by exception

4. CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT A PROJECT BASED STRATEGY

When improvements, changes, results and return on investments are needed fast and effective, as it is the case in sport, a project based strategy is advised. However, government departments generally operate on process driven management principles.

The potential is always there for sport and government to be in conflict with each other if the difference between process driven and project driven strategies are not clearly understood by both parties.

In sport, a project based strategic is better than a process based strategy because:

- 4.1. Success is achieved much faster
- 4.2. The rate of change is much faster
- 4.3. A specific area within a total strategy can be micro-managed or modified if needed
- 4.4. Quality and performance is much easier to measure
- 4.5. The budget (income/expense) is much easier to control
- 4.6. Time can be managed
- 4.7. Risks are much less and damage (errors) can be localized and contained

A project based strategic has the following challenges during implementation:

Challenge of project based strategy	Solution
1. It requires a change in management styles and is bound to be met with resistance.	The advantageous must be motivated before any change in management styles is proposed. Prospective participants must be convinced that they will benefit from the change.
2. Cross-functional activities will take place and may lead to conflict among the staff	Regular alignment meetings must take place and cross-functional activities must be pointed out. Use staff that can multi task in areas where cross functional activities takes place
3. Deadlines must be met and the staff will experience pressure in meeting them	Incentives must be implemented to encourage staff to meet deadlines
4. There are systems within systems (micro cycles and macro cycles) and can be experienced as complex	During alignment meetings, the purposes of micro cycles within macro cycles must be explained and clarified
5. The outcome can change the future and can cause uncertainty	The benefits of the changed outcomes must be explained to everybody involved before implementation starts
6. Bad decisions can be made if	Information must be provided during alignment meetings.

information is not available or staff do not want to compromise	Staff that does not want to compromise must be moved to other projects where they are more comfortable
7. If people are not managed effectively, the project can fail	Regular alignment meetings needs to take place to compare progress made, and steps must be taken promptly if someone falls behind.
8. Paperwork increase significantly and drain management time	Keep paperwork factual and record decisions taken, rather than recording the discussions. As far as possible, contain the content of documents to a 1 pager.
9. Strategies require standardization which can lead to inflexibility	Focus on the outcome of the projects rather than on the process. Standardization improves familiarity with strategy and speed up implementation with fewer mistakes.
10. Benefits are only seen when projects are completed.	Set milestones that will measure progress of the project regularly. Keep the staff up to date as the milestones are reached.

5. THE CORE FUNCTION OF A STRATEGY

It is important that all parties involved in the implementation of a strategy must have a clear understanding of what must be achieved while implementing the strategic plan.

- The overall strategic plan of the athlete should add value to the core functions of the club, school etc.
- The overall strategy of the club, school etc. in turn should add value to the core functions of the Federations operating within a country.
- Finally the overall strategy of the Federations should add value to the core functions of the International Federations e.g. IAAF, IOC, etc.

It is therefore important that a Constitution, Memorandum of Agreement, Guidelines, etc. is in place which will give direction to all the strategic plans designed at the various levels of participation, administration etc. within the sport.

It is also important that the core functions in the Constitutions, Memorandum of Agreements, Guidelines, etc. at the various levels of the sport, should be the same to ensure a smooth transition from one level of excellence to another. An overall Strategic Plan will cover the following core functions:

5.1. MARKETING STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact his/her nearest club, notifying the club of his/her desire to participate in the sport. • Specify what services he/she requires from the club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact its nearest Federation, notifying the Federation of its desire to represent the participants in its community. • Inform its community what products & services it can provide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the International Federation, notifying them of its desire to represent the participants in its country. • Inform its clubs what products & services it can provide.

5.2. OPERATIONS STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the club which services of the club will be needed e.g. competition opportunities, social gatherings, club clothing, etc. • Become a member of the club that meets his/her requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the Federation how many athletes are affiliated to the club and what services/ products are needed. • Notify its members what services/ products will be provided and when it will be provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the International Federation how many athletes are affiliated to the club and what services/ products are needed. • Notify its members what services/ products will be provided and when it will be provided.

5.3. STAFFING STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a Manager and/or a Coach to assist with his/her preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate an Executives/Managers to take care of the needs of their Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate an Executives/Managers to take care of the needs of its Clubs

5.4. FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget for all expenses that the athlete will be incur during his/her preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget for all the projects that will take place to meet the needs of its Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget for all the projects that will take place to meet the needs of its Clubs

5.5. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain membership to all information sources that can assist the athlete in his/her preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a network of contact details that can be used to keep all members informed with the latest information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a network of contact details that can be used to keep all Clubs informed with the latest information.

5.6. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously adapt the preparation programmes to maximize the performance level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously seek methods to improve the club's service to its members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously seek methods to improve the Federation's service to its clubs.

5.7. EDUCATION OUTREACH STRATEGY

The Athlete Will:	The Club Will:	The Federation Will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously improve his/her level of education, live skills, etc. to ensure a balanced personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously organize education projects to improve the skills levels of its members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously organize education projects to improve the skills levels of its Clubs.

6. COMPILE A STRATEGY

Before a strategy can be compiled, the Federation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT Analysis) must be determined.

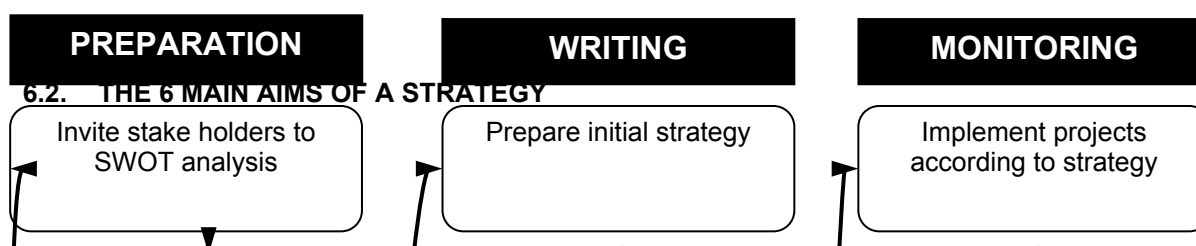
The point of reference during the initial stages of the Strategic Planning Sessions will be policy documents such as the Federation Constitution, Memorandum of Agreement, etc.

Documents that are useful when objectives and milestones in a strategy are defined, are regulatory documents such as the Fixtures List, Technical Standards, Results, Performance Ranking Lists, Selection Criteria, Affiliation procedures, etc.

A fully developed strategy should consist of a:

- Short term strategy with 1 year objectives to achieve
- Medium term strategy with 5 year objectives to achieve
- Long term strategy which may require policy/constitutional statements such as the mission or vision

6.1. THE STRATEGIC MODEL



- 6.2.1. Planning – Plan a systematic and logical series of projects that will add value to the Federation’s Constitution
- 6.2.2. Co-ordination – Co-ordinate the various project to ensure that all projects target the same outcome
- 6.2.3. Communication – Regularly communicate the objectives of strategy as well as progress made in implementing the strategy to all members of the strategic team
- 6.2.4. Motivation – Regularly motivate the strategic team to achieve the Federation and individual goals
- 6.2.5. Control – Control the activities by measuring progress against the strategy and adjust where necessary
- 6.2.6. Evaluation – Provide a framework to evaluate the performance of the strategic team according to individual and Federation targets.

6.3. THE STRATEGIC MODEL IMPLEMENTED ACCORDING TO A CALENDAR YEAR

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Last year	0	00	00									
This year	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000	000
Next year	0	00	00									

KEY: 0-Preparation; 00-Writing; 000-Monitoring

6.4. THE STRATEGIC MODEL FROM CLUB TO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Clubs					0	0	0	00	0	0	00	
National									0	0	0	00
International	0	0	0	00								

KEY: 0-Preparation Competitions; 00-Championships

7. DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROJECTS USED IN A PROJECT BASED STRATEGY

A project based strategy will consist of:

7.1. INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Individual projects are of a short duration and is normally assigned to a single individual who may be acting as a Project Manager e.g. to appoint a Committee that will monitor and update national/club records been broken.

7.2. STAFF PROJECTS

Staff projects are executed by a specific Department or Committee and works best if only 1 function is assigned to a Department, Committee. e.g. to maintain a data base of all affiliated members.

7.3. SPECIAL PROJECTS

Special projects are temporary by nature to address certain primary functions and are of short duration, e.g. a coaching course to upgrade the skills level of coaches.

7.4. MATRIX PROJECTS

Most projects will operate as a matrix project and operates on various departments, Commissions and Committees working together. It requires input from a large number of people and usually controls a large number of resources. An example is where the Competition LOC’s, Selectors, Colours Committee, etc all work together to prepare a team for the national Championships. Matrix projects are:

- 7.4.1. Complex (Micro projects within a macro project)
- 7.4.2. Interdepartmental e.g. engage both policy and operational staff

- 7.4.3. Uses technology e.g. clocks to measure time, computers to capture results, etc.
- 7.4.4. Alter the way people work
- 7.4.5. Get-it-right-first-time
- 7.4.6. Big – Engage lots of people, time and money

8. MONITORING THE STRATEGY

8.1. IMPORTANT RULES TO FOLLOW DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STRATEGY

- 8.1.1. Refer to the strategy regularly – Compiling a strategy is not a once of per year activity. It must be the point of reference during all alignment meetings
- 8.1.2. Take your time – Take time to gather relevant information to base your decisions on.
- 8.1.3. Involve everyone – The strategy is not just a high level policy document. Involve relevant people, with appropriate knowledge and skills and encourage them to commit to the process of implementation of the strategy.
- 8.1.4. Be realistic – Be aware of limiting factors such as skills levels of staff, budgetary constraints, etc. and amend the strategic where necessary to stay within the limitations of the system.
- 8.1.5. Be conscientious – Be punctual in what you do. Treat all people the same. Be the same every day.
- 8.1.6. Look ahead – Keep focused on future targets. Do not rely on historic facts to decide to decide what next year's strategy will be.
- 8.1.7. Be aware of politics – The size of project does not determine the importance of the project. Avoid game-playing around this.
- 8.1.8. Monitor events – Be prepared to amend the strategy while continuously all project reports. Try to resolve unforeseen problems and try to predict future problems.
- 8.1.9. Allow flexibility – Avoid the temptations to use all the time allocated to a project. Avoid under spending and underutilizing of resources. It will result in people been marginalized.

9. SUMMARY

A strategy will be implemented successfully if there was a good working relationship between the various levels of administration. The success of the strategy will be based on how the strategy was implemented and will depend heavily on the commitment of the members of the Club, Federation, etc to the Strategy.

The strategy must be pursued as a process rather than a destination.

A successful strategy has:

- Business Plan – that is supported by all
- Core Business – that is understood by all
- Financial Plan – that is implemented with discipline
- Marketing Plan – that create a positive image and visibility
- Human Resources – that provide a sense of belonging to its staff
- Information Technology – that communicate effectively with its members
- Development Plan – that ensure growth
- Education Outreach Plan – that make information available to all

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