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Cost Management and Control in Corporate and Promotional Events: The Case of Hyundai Portugal, S.A.

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M

2026

FEP FACULDADE DE **ECONOMIA E GESTÃO**

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COST MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL IN CORPORATE AND PROMOTIONAL EVENTS: THE CASE OF HYUNDAI PORTUGAL, S.A.

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Internship Report
Master in Management

Supervised by

Adelaide Ferreira Leite Martins

2026

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Adelaide Martins, for her guidance and support throughout this work. Her demands were always high and her comments always precise. Her rigour and availability at every stage made this report considerably better than it would otherwise have been, and her comments taught me to look at my own writing with a more critical eye.

I am also grateful to Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and especially to the Events and Brand Activation team, who welcomed me into their daily work and gave me the access without which this study would not have been possible. A special thank you to my workplace supervisor, for the trust placed in me and for authorising the use of the internal data this report draws on, and to the colleagues who agreed to be interviewed, for their openness in discussing how things actually work rather than how they are supposed to work on paper.

Finally, I thank my family and friends for the constant support that never depended on how the work was going and for their patience during these months. This achievement is also theirs.

Abstract

Corporate events are costly and difficult to control financially, as they combine long-term planning with short-term decisions. This study examines cost control in this context, using the Management Control Systems (MCS) as a Package framework proposed by Malmi and Brown (2008). The research question is: **how is the MCS package configured in the context of event management at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and how do the interactions between formal and informal controls shape cost control practices across the event lifecycle?**

The study follows a qualitative, interpretative single case study design, combining direct observation during a curricular internship at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with four members of the company, across five events managed between January and May 2026.

The findings show that formal structures, including a single budget approval and a monthly cost reconciliation, are not enough on their own. Informal work fills the gaps they leave open. Supplier comparisons provide the planning detail that formal tools do not capture, and a team-level tracker offers day-to-day visibility that the slower, formal controls cannot provide, which explains why some overruns are caught in time while others only appear later. Cultural considerations can also override cost, especially when selecting suppliers, even without skipping the formal comparison of quotations that always takes place first. This complementary pattern, however, breaks down for reward controls and post-event review, which remain disconnected from individual event outcomes and therefore limit the organisation's ability to learn from one event to the next.

This study extends the MCS Package framework to a project-based event management setting, where the interaction between formal and informal controls has received limited attention, and proposes post-event review as an additional dimension. Practically, it offers Hyundai Portugal, S.A. a structured account of its own control package.

JEL Codes: D23; L14; M14; M41

Keywords: Cost Control; Management Control; Management Control Systems as a Package; Formal and Informal Controls; Event Management; Case Study

Resumo

Os eventos corporativos são dispendiosos e difíceis de controlar, pois exigem planeamento de longo prazo e envolvem decisões a curto prazo. Este estudo analisa o controlo de custos nesse contexto, com base no framework Management Control Systems (MCS) as a Package, de Malmi e Brown (2008). Procura responder a duas questões: como está configurado o package de MCS na gestão de eventos da Hyundai Portugal, S.A., e como a interação entre controlos formais e informais molda as práticas de controlo de custos ao longo do ciclo de vida do evento.

Segue-se uma metodologia de estudo de caso único, qualitativa e interpretativa, que combina observação direta durante um estágio curricular, análise documental e entrevistas semiestruturadas com quatro membros da empresa, com base em cinco eventos geridos entre janeiro e maio de 2026.

Os resultados mostram que as estruturas formais, como a aprovação única do orçamento e a reconciliação mensal dos custos, não bastam por si só. O trabalho informal preenche essas lacunas. As comparações entre fornecedores acrescentam o detalhe de planeamento que falta às ferramentas formais, e um sistema de acompanhamento da equipa dá visibilidade diária que a reconciliação, mais lenta, não dá, o que explica por que alguns desvios são detetados a tempo e outros só depois. Considerações culturais podem pesar mais do que o custo, principalmente na escolha de fornecedores, mesmo com comparação formal de cotações. Este padrão quebra-se, porém, nos controlos de recompensa e na revisão pós-evento, que ficam desligados dos resultados de cada evento e limitam a aprendizagem entre eventos.

Este estudo estende o framework MCS Package a um contexto de eventos orientado por projetos, onde a interação entre controlos formais e informais é pouco estudada, e propõe a revisão pós-evento como uma dimensão adicional. Na prática, oferece à Hyundai Portugal um retrato estruturado do seu próprio package de controlo.

Códigos JEL: D23; L14; M14; M41

Palavras-Chave: Controlo de Custos; Controlo de Gestão; Management Control Systems as a Package; Controlos Formais e Informais; Gestão de Eventos; Estudo de Caso

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List of Acronyms

AI ..... Artificial Intelligence
CBS ..... Cost Breakdown Structure
COO ..... Chief Operating Officer
ERP ..... Enterprise Resource Planning
KPI ..... Key Performance Indicator
MCS ..... Management Control Systems
RBS ..... Risk Breakdown Structure
ROI ..... Return On Investment
ROO ..... Return On Objectives
THP ..... Team Hyundai Portugal
WBS ..... Work Breakdown Structure

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1. Introduction

Corporate events are an essential instrument within a company's communication strategy. In industries like the automotive sector, these events are especially relevant mainly because purchase decision processes are longer and product experiences are carefully considered (Rodrigues et al., 2023). They mostly help build trust, allow credible product demonstrations, and consequently strengthen brand positioning (Setiawan et al., 2022). However, corporate events require significant resources, involve multiple stakeholders, and integrate long-term planning with short-term operational decisions. Therefore, the delivery of high-quality events within a planned budget is critical for the company's operational and financial sustainability (Bowdin et al., 2024).

In practice, consistent management across various events is hindered by recurring weaknesses documented in the literature, namely differences in budgeting practices, dispersed information, and limited visibility of costs. These result mostly from a lack of awareness from managers, a poor separation between decision-making and decision-control functions (Becker et al., 2023), and a lack of integrated and standardized tools (Dounavi et al., 2022). Consequently, these conditions severely limit the company's ability to anticipate overruns, delay timely decision-making, and prevent lessons learned from being translated into repeatable routines for other events (Dowson et al., 2023). This failure in transferring knowledge from previous events is particularly detrimental as it contributes to recurring financial underperformance (Becker et al., 2023).

This research is motivated by a curricular internship on the Events and Brand Activation team at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and addresses the need to improve the transparency, predictability, and control of costs across the event lifecycle. Rather than treating cost control as a matter of individual tools or best practices, this study draws on the Management Control Systems (MCS) as a Package framework from Malmi and Brown (2008) to examine how different controls are configured and how they interact in the specific context of event management. Consequently, the overall objective is to analyse how this control package operates in practice and how the interaction between formal and informal dimensions shapes cost control. The research question is therefore: **how is the MCS package configured in the context of event management at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and how do the interactions between formal and informal controls shape cost control practices across the event lifecycle?**

To achieve this overall objective, five specific objectives were defined: 1) to analyse how budgeting and financial reporting operate in the organisation of the events; 2) to explore how administrative and reward controls distribute authority and accountability for cost decisions; 3) to assess the influence of corporate culture and informal relationships on cost control practices; 4) to explore how formal and informal controls interact when addressing the real challenges of cost management; 5) to analyse whether and how post-event evaluation feeds back into the planning of future events. In this context, this study is also academically relevant as it combines two fields that are often treated separately, event management and management control, mainly the cost control aspect. According to this, this study offers an approach that applies an MCS perspective to the specific challenges of the event lifecycle, moving beyond a purely operational view of cost control.

Methodologically, the project follows a qualitative and interpretive single case study design, appropriate to understand real challenges in cost control in events and identify feasible improvements, as it allows the research to combine practical observation of data with the interpretation of relevant literature (Vieira et al., 2017). Data was collected through direct observation of day-to-day operations in the management of selected events, document analysis of budgets and post-event reports, and semi-structured interviews with members of Hyundai Portugal, S.A.'s various teams involved in the management of events. For the selected events managed during the internship period, the research collected operational and financial data from the sources mentioned to examine how the control package is configured and how formal and informal controls interact. This analysis focused on five Hyundai Portugal, S.A. corporate events organised between January and May 2026, ranging from a large dealership convention to a small presentation, which provide a varied base for comparing how the control package is configured and adapted across different types of events.

The findings suggest that at Hyundai Portugal, S.A. in the event organisation area, planning, administrative, and cybernetic controls are formally in place, but only produce reliable cost control once informal work, supplier comparisons, team judgement, and daily tracking fill the gaps the formal system leaves. Two events still went over budget despite a clear approval structure, and the team's own budget tracker often shows a different figure from the real one, shown monthly by the Management Control team. Cultural controls add a further layer, filtering decisions before cost is even weighed, sometimes reinforcing the cheapest option or sometimes the most expensive one, in favour of trust in suppliers or brand image decisions. Reward controls and post-event review, however, stay outside this pattern as cost overruns never tie

back to individual accountability and lessons learned from past events pass on through memory rather than through a documented process.

This study contributes to the management control literature in two ways, and also offers practical value to the organisation studied. Theoretically, the analysis extends Malmi and Brown's (2008) MCS package framework into a project-based, event management setting (Dounavi et al., 2022). Within this framework, formal and informal controls have typically been treated as individual components rather than as interacting elements, a gap Knowles (2025) identifies directly in relation to the package itself. Post-event review is added here as an additional dimension, informed by Getz and Page's (2024) work on how events are evaluated once delivered, extending the framework's relevance to organisations that manage recurring, time-bounded projects. Practically, these findings give the Events and Brand Activation team and Hyundai's marketing team a structured basis for addressing the gaps identified above, rather than a generic call for more formal control.

This report is structured in 6 sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 reviews the literature on MCS as a Package, the distinction between formal and informal controls and the specific cost control challenges of corporate event management. Section 3 presents the methodological approach, including the case study design, data collection methods and the criteria used to select the events and interviewees. The next section introduces the empirical context, describing Hyundai Portugal, S.A. and its position within the Salvador Caetano Group. After that, section 5 presents the analysis and discussion of the five events studied, organised around the dimensions of the MCS package. Finally, section 6 concludes the report with the main findings, the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, its limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Management Control Systems as a package

Organisations rarely rely on a single mechanism to direct employee behaviour. Instead, they have multiple controls simultaneously (Chenhall, 2003), like budgets, approval procedures, performance targets, organisational structures and shared values, each addressing different aspects of coordination (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Despite this, much of the management control literature has only examined these mechanisms in isolation, analysing budgets, performance measurement systems or cultural control as separate controls, disconnected from one another and from the organisational context in which they operate (Malmi & Brown, 2008). This fragmentation has persisted even after calls for a more integrated view, as research has continued to examine individual control mechanisms independently rather than as part of a broader configuration (Bedford & Malmi, 2015). This approach carries a significant analytical risk because if the links between these various control mechanisms are not recognised, conclusions drawn about them specifically can be misleading, since its effects are inevitably shaped by all the controls surrounding it (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

It is in response to this limitation that Malmi and Brown (2008) proposed conceptualising MCS as a package. The term package is used to reflect the reality that controls are not usually designed as a whole but instead tend to accumulate over time, introduced by different teams for different purposes. In this sense rather than asking whether a particular control mechanism is present or absent, researchers should analyse how the full set of controls is configured in an organisation, how they interact with each other and if these interactions produce tension or not (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Malmi and Brown (2008) then structured this package around five groups of controls: planning, cybernetic, reward and compensation, administrative and cultural controls.

These five groups are not simply a classification scheme as they reflect different logics of control and relate to each other in a structured way. Cultural controls are the broadest and slowest to change, providing the values and norms within which all the other controls operate. Administrative controls define who is accountable for what and how tasks should be performed. Planning, cybernetic and reward controls tend to work in sequence as goals are first set, then performance is measured and finally consequences are attached to that performance (Malmi & Brown, 2008). The package logic itself has also been confirmed empirically outside Malmi and Brown's own illustration, with evidence from a lean manufacturing setting showing a large,

interrelated control package rather than a set of independent instruments (Kennedy & Widener, 2008).

Planning controls are ex ante mechanisms that direct behaviour before action takes place (Malmi & Brown, 2008). By establishing goals, standards and expected levels of effort in advance, they align the activities of individuals and groups with organisational objectives. Planning can take a longer time period, focused on strategic direction, or an action planning form that is concerned with the immediate operational horizon of twelve months or less (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

Cybernetic controls then measure whether those goals and expectations are being met and create accountability for deviations. They operate through feedback loops that compare actual outcomes against the pre-established targets and follow a corrective action where variances are identified (Malmi & Brown, 2008), and include budgets, financial and non-financial performance measures, and hybrid systems combining both. In practice, a budget only functions as a cybernetic control when it is used to hold someone accountable for variances, because when it merely serves as a reference without generating accountability, it operates as a decision-support system rather than a management control (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Reward and compensation controls are closely linked to this logic, attaching consequences to performance outcomes, thereby influencing the direction, duration and intensity of individual effort (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

While these three control types operate primarily through explicit targets and outcomes, administrative and cultural controls shape behaviour through less visible means but equally powerful ones. Administrative controls influence behaviour through organisational structures that include the arrangements that define the lines of authority and accountability, organisational design that shapes the patterns of interactions, and policies and procedures that specify how tasks are to be performed (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Cultural controls, on the other hand, influence employee behaviour through the shared values, beliefs and social norms of the organisation. Malmi and Brown (2008) in their research distinguish three forms of cultural controls: value-based controls that communicate purpose, symbol-based controls that express culture through visible artifacts and clan controls that reflect group membership and socialisation.

Taken together, these five groups constitute the MCS package of an organisation. The value of this concept lies not in cataloguing which controls are present but in examining how they are configured and how they interact (Malmi & Brown, 2008). These mechanisms of

control can reinforce each other, creating coherent and supportive packages or they may generate tensions that shape behaviour in unintended ways (Malmi & Brown, 2008). This framework is particularly suited to the present study because corporate event management involves the simultaneous operation of formal and informal controls whose interaction is unlikely to be captured by examining any single mechanism in isolation. More recent research shows that this interaction is not a simple coexistence, and that the relationship between formal and informal controls can itself enhance or hinder management control depending on how closely they correspond to one another (Knowles, 2025).

2.2. Formal and Informal Controls

The distinction between formal and informal controls is one of the most useful analytical dimensions of the MCS package. Formal controls are explicit and deliberately designed as they include budgets, written procedures, performance targets and governance structures, while informal controls operate through unwritten norms, shared understandings and accumulated experience (Malmi & Brown, 2008). While both types are present in most organisations, their relationship is not simply one of coexistence. Informal controls can actively shape how formal controls function, either reinforcing or undermining them (Knowles, 2025). Understanding this balance, and what it means for how cost control operates in practice, is central to the approach taken in this study.

The relationship between formal and informal controls is not always straightforward and has been approached in different ways in the available literature. Some researchers emphasise their complementary nature, arguing that formal systems are unlikely to meet all organisational needs and that informal controls fill the gaps left by them (Knowles, 2025). Others highlight the risk of tension and argue that, when formal and informal controls send contradictory signals, employees face conflicting pressures that can negatively influence the organisation (Norris & O'Dwyer, 2004). A third perspective treats informal controls as a substitute for formal ones and not just as a complement, particularly in contexts where these formal mechanisms are limited or absent. In these situations, shared values and accumulated experience among team members carry much of the control work that formal systems would otherwise perform (Knowles, 2025; Malmi & Brown, 2008). This trade-off is not confined to small or under-resourced organisations. A study of seventeen large European firms found that formal and informal controls rarely develop strongly together within the same organisation, with companies typically emphasising one over the other rather than achieving both (Crutzen et al.,

2017). The practical implication of this is then significant as the absence of formal controls does not necessarily indicate a failure of control, but may instead reflect only that informal control mechanisms are doing most of the work.

Among the informal control mechanisms in the Malmi and Brown (2008) framework, cultural controls deserve particular attention in contexts where organisational identity is strong. When an organisation has a clearly defined brand or mission, the values associated with this can function as powerful behavioural constraints. This is done not through rules or targets but through a shared understanding of what is and is not acceptable. In these contexts, some decisions become non-negotiable not because of a formal policy that prohibits them, but because they would conflict with what the organisation stands for (Knowles, 2025; Norris & O'Dwyer, 2004). This type of control can be quite effective at maintaining consistency and quality standards, but it also limits the flexibility available when resources are under pressure and places a heavy burden on individual judgement.

This dynamic has a direct and significant influence on how cost control operates in organisations where cultural controls are strong and formal planning and cybernetic controls are weaker (Knowles, 2025). The package in these cases is not necessarily dysfunctional as it may produce acceptable outcomes, but it tends to rely heavily on the experience and effort of the employees involved rather than on structured controls (Knowles, 2025). Understanding how organisations navigate this tension is therefore central to any analysis of cost control within an MCS package.

2.3. Corporate and Promotional Events as Control Objects

Dowson et al. (2023) define an event as a temporary gathering aimed at generating a memorable experience apart from everyday life. In that regard, more than being projects in a strict sense, corporate events share characteristics that make control particularly demanding because they are unique, time-pressured and involve multiple stakeholders and tasks that require close coordination. This is in line with Dounavi et al. (2022) classification of the events industry as a project-based sector, where project management principles, such as scope definition, cost planning and control, risk management and performance monitoring, are essential for a successful delivery. The Malmi and Brown (2008) framework allows events to be treated as organisational settings where planning, cybernetic, administrative, cultural and reward controls all operate, and where the configuration of those controls shapes both the quality and the financial outcomes of the event.

At the same time, events operate as instruments for brand engagement (Bowdin et al., 2024), developed to create experiences that connect consumers to the value and identity of the brand (Dowson et al., 2023). Events organised under a strong brand identity face tensions between quality expectations and budget constraints within which they must be delivered. So, the ultimate goal of event planning and its financial control is not only budget precision but also the maximization of the events' quality and customer engagement. This tension is one of the defining features of event management (Dounavi et al., 2022), shaping the configuration of the MCS package in ways that distinguish this context from more routine organisational settings.

This framing provides the analytical basis for treating corporate events as cost control objects throughout this report. Since events are time-bounded, purpose-driven and dependent on the coordination of multiple stakeholders, cost management in events requires an integrated foundation that combines control mechanisms with formal project implementation frameworks (Dounavi et al., 2022; Dowson et al., 2023). In practice, however, many organisations do not formalise management control practices in a structured way, which creates significant gaps in planning, monitoring and learning (Dounavi et al., 2022).

2.4. Cost Control Challenges in Event Management

The temporary and project-like nature of corporate events creates a distinctive set of cost control challenges that cannot be adequately addressed by any single mechanism. Because events have fixed delivery dates, they often involve significant financial commitments to be made under considerable uncertainty, before all costs are fully known, so the pressure on cost management is structural (Dowson et al., 2023; Getz & Page, 2024). This creates a context in which formal controls are not only difficult to establish but also hard to maintain and update under the time pressure and uncertainty that events have. When read against the MCS package framework, these challenges emerge not as isolated operational problems, but as consequences of specific weaknesses in the configuration of planning, cybernetic, administrative and cultural controls that reinforce each other across the event lifecycle.

The most structurally significant challenges relate to governance problems that weaken administrative controls on which all other formal controls depend. In large-scale events where accountability and decision rights are weakly structured, cost overruns frequently result from a weak separation between decision-making, decision-control and risk bearing, a pattern that Becker et al. (2023) describe as "soft budget syndrome". This includes behaviours like underestimation of costs and excessive optimism about benefits (Becker et al., 2023). When

those who authorize the expenditures are not held accountable for their consequences, the administrative controls are weakened or incomplete. This weakness tends to have direct consequences for planning. Without clear accountability structures, scope definition tends to be inadequate, producing contradictory requirements, omissions in cost estimates and unrealistic contingencies (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020). In event management this problem is worsened by the absence of standardised planning approaches, leaving most organisations reliant on informally maintained documentation with limited cost visibility (Dounavi et al., 2022). The consequence for cybernetic controls follows directly as they cannot function without reliable planning baselines against which to measure performance.

These internal organisational weaknesses are further complicated by external pressures specific to the corporate event environment. Unlike many event contexts, corporate events are rarely subject to revenue uncertainty as the financial challenge centres on cost uncertainty instead, as supplier quotes change, operational requirements evolve and objectives change close to delivery (Dowson et al., 2023). This makes budget control difficult because expenditure commitments are hard to stabilise in advance. Events also require coordination across many stakeholders with different interests, approval timelines and financial rules, creating an environment where resources and objectives are frequently negotiated (Getz & Page, 2024). The coordination challenge often lies in managing agencies and external suppliers alongside internal teams under significant time pressure, raising the risk of misalignment, last-minute changes and unplanned costs (Dowson et al., 2023). An organisation with strong controls can manage these pressures more effectively, but when controls are already weak, there is little room for error.

The persistence of these challenges reflects a fundamental weakness in feedback mechanisms. Event management often relies on manually maintained spreadsheets that are prone to error (Dowson et al., 2023), rarely providing timely information on incurred costs and making it hard to detect and correct deviations early (Dounavi et al., 2022). This data fragmentation undermines the feedback loops that are central to cybernetic controls in the Malmi and Brown (2008) framework. This problem extends to the post-event phase, where a comprehensive financial analysis is rarely done in a structured way (Getz & Page, 2024). Without formal review processes, the causes of budget variances go undocumented, lessons are not carried forward, and the same governance and planning failures tend to repeat themselves in following events (Becker et al., 2023). This becomes a cycle in which weak controls produce poor outcomes and the absence of learning mechanisms ensures those weaknesses persist.

So, this shows that these challenges are not separate difficulties, but a systemic problem at the level of the MCS package. Governance failures undermine planning, which makes cybernetic feedback impossible, prevents organisational learning and allows the same governance failures to continue. External pressures amplify this pattern rather than causing it. The subsections that follow examine each one of these controls' dimensions, with the aim of identifying how the literature characterises both the conditions that produce these weaknesses and those under which more effective configurations are possible.

2.5. Dimensions of the Control Package relevant to Event Cost Control

2.5.1. Planning, Cybernetic and Reward Controls

In the Malmi and Brown (2008) framework, planning controls establish the goals, resource allocations, and the performance standards that will guide the subsequent monitoring. Rather than being confined to the pre-event phase, they define the financial logic against which all later decisions and expenditures will be assessed (Malmi & Brown, 2008). For event management teams, this means building budgets, agreeing on scope, and defining what financial and operational boundaries the team is expected to work within (Dowson et al., 2023). This planning is therefore significant because it determines how clearly the financial risks are understood before commitments are made. It also serves a coordinating purpose, giving everyone involved, from internal teams to external agencies and suppliers, a shared understanding of what is expected and at what cost (Dounavi et al., 2022).

The budget is the central tool through which planning control operates in events, and it also provides the baseline for cybernetic monitoring (Malmi & Brown, 2008). A budget that exists only to set spending limits is a planning document. It only becomes a control tool when someone is expected to track actual costs against it and answer for any deviations. Malmi and Brown (2008) make this point directly, noting that a budget used without accountability is not really a management control. Evidence from event organisations supports this, as Knardal and Bjørnenak (2020) find that budgets in festival settings are used very differently depending on the background and priorities of the managers involved, with some using them actively for monitoring and others treating them mainly as financial plans. Having a budget is then different from using it for control.

How the budget is built also affects how useful it is for tracking performance. A budget structured around specific activities and objectives makes it much easier to see where problems are coming from when costs start to deviate from the plan (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020). Tools

such as the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) and the Cost Breakdown Structure (CBS) support this by linking every expenditure to a specific planned activity or objective. This direct relationship between activities and costs makes financial control easier and more transparent (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020). Also, by adding a risk dimension to this structured planning, the Risk Breakdown Structure (RBS) links potential risks to each task and expenditure, allowing teams to anticipate where costs are most likely to deviate from the plan (Dounavi et al., 2022). When this level of planning detail is absent, as it frequently is in event management, monitoring tends to produce only aggregate information about whether total spending is on track, which offers limited guidance for intervention (Dounavi et al., 2022).

The structure of event costs also shapes how responsive cybernetic controls can be. Events typically involve significant fixed commitments made early, such as venue contracts and production arrangements, which limit how much can be adjusted once the budget is set (Dowson et al., 2023). The more rigid this cost structure is, the less room teams have to act on the deviations that monitoring identifies. Organisations can reduce this rigidity by structuring some costs as variable through flexible contracting arrangements, which preserves more room to respond when things change (Banker et al., 2024). In practice, however, event budgets tend to carry substantial fixed components, and this means that even rigorous monitoring may not translate into an effective response (Dowson et al., 2023).

A further constraint on cybernetic baselines is the pace at which event conditions change. Formal plans only serve as reliable tools when they still reflect what is actually happening, and, in events, scope adjustments and last-minute operational decisions are quite common (Dounavi et al., 2022; Getz & Page, 2024). Every time the plan changes, the baselines used for cybernetic monitoring become less accurate (Malmi & Brown, 2008). The tension between keeping plans formal enough to be useful and flexible enough to remain realistic is one that event organisations rarely manage to resolve fully (Getz & Page, 2024).

Reward and compensation controls complete this sequence by assigning formal consequences to performance outcomes, then shaping how much effort individuals direct towards meeting the goals that planning controls have defined. When cybernetic controls identify a deviation, reward controls determine whether that measurement carries any formal weight for those responsible (Malmi & Brown, 2008). However, in event management, the temporary and project-based nature of events makes it difficult to design reward structures with any continuity, and event performance is normally evaluated through qualitative dimensions, including experience quality and brand alignment, which are difficult to translate into financial

accountability (Getz & Page, 2024). The sequence from planning to cybernetic to reward is therefore better understood as an analytical framework than as a description of how these controls necessarily operate in any given organisation, since overlap and partial absence are common in practice (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

2.5.2. Administrative Controls and Governance Mechanisms

Malmi and Brown (2008) define administrative controls as the mechanisms that structure how authority and accountability are distributed within an organisation. These include how the organisation is structured, how separate roles and teams are expected to work together and the formal procedures that guide daily tasks and decisions (Malmi & Brown, 2008). For cost control in events, what matters most is that these mechanisms determine who can commit to the resources needed, who must approve financial decisions and who can answer when costs go beyond what was planned.

A particular challenge in event management is that the people who make these financial decisions are also the ones responsible for evaluating if those were the right ones to make (Becker et al., 2023). Becker et al. (2023) identified the weak separation between decision-making and decision-control as one of the main structural reasons why event costs tend to overrun as it is linked directly to the soft-budget syndrome. The findings are specific to the environment of large-scale sports events, but the concept can be transferred to other contexts: if decision rights and controls are not clearly separated, cost discipline tends to be lower (Becker et al., 2023).

Cost control concerns in events are typically a result of a lack of clear approval mechanisms (Dounavi et al., 2022). When financial decisions are divided across teams, agencies, and suppliers at the same time, it is difficult for any one individual to know the full scope of the financial obligations. Costs can accumulate in separate areas while each individual decision looks reasonable in isolation (Dowson et al., 2023). So, an event can go significantly over budget because of the absence of a structure that would have made the total visible earlier (Becker et al., 2023).

Supplier contracts are one area where administrative control becomes very concrete in event management. Suppliers account for a significant part of event budgets, and their quotes can shift between the planning stage and execution (Dowson et al., 2023). A well-structured contract specifies what will be delivered, at what cost, by when and what happens if these terms are not met by each part. This gives a clear basis for disputing charges that were not agreed in

advance (Dowson et al., 2023). Without formal contracts of this kind, last minute additions and unexpected charges are hard to challenge (Dounavi et al., 2022).

According to the literature, controls in event management are frequently less formalised than what is needed (Dounavi et al., 2022). Informal approval practices and personal relationships often substitute more formal procedures and defined authority structures. This can work well when conditions are stable, but when they are not, as people leave, time pressure increases or when an event is more complex, this absence of formal structures tends to create gaps in accountability and financial visibility (Knowles, 2025). The following section considers how cultural and informal controls operate alongside these formal mechanisms and whether they can effectively fill the gaps that administrative controls leave.

2.5.3. Cultural and Informal Controls

In practice, cultural controls tend to be particularly dominant in event management. Teams that work together repeatedly across various events develop a shared understanding of the client´s preferences, the event´s purpose and what a quality delivery looks like (Dowson et al., 2023). Much of this coordination happens through shared daily routines and shared professional judgement rather than formal procedures, which makes cultural controls hard to document but often highly effective in practice (Knowles, 2025). When events are organised under a strong brand identity or mission, these shared values function as a behavioural reference point for decisions that no policy explicitly covers (Norris & O'Dwyer, 2004). Certain choices become implicitly ruled out not because any rule prohibits them but because they would conflict with what the brand is understood to stand for (Knowles, 2025). This type of cultural control can maintain consistency and quality standards across events, but it also places a heavy burden on individual judgement and limits the flexibility available when budgets are under pressure (Knowles, 2025).

The importance of this informal dimension is clear when formal systems are underdeveloped, a common situation in event management (Dounavi et al., 2022). Knardal and Bjørnenak (2020) find evidence of this in festival organisations, where informal norms and managerial characteristics frequently play a more decisive role in financial decision making than the formal systems in place. In these contexts, cultural controls do much of the work that formal mechanisms would otherwise perform, effectively substituting for the planning, cybernetic and administrative controls that are absent or incomplete (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

The problem is that this substitution can hide the gaps rather than resolve them. Norris and O´Dwyer (2004) show that when informal and formal controls send contradictory signals, the informal ones tend to dominate in practice. In their study, managers resisted decisions promoted by the formal system even in difficult circumstances because their professional values and identity were more strongly shaped by informal socialisation (Norris & O´Dwyer, 2004). In corporate events, this dynamic may protect quality standards while financial discipline may gradually weaken, because team members have been shown that the brand standards and requirements are more important than budget management. Formal weaknesses therefore go unchallenged for as long as cultural controls produce acceptable outcomes (Knowles, 2025).

As event organisation in companies evolve in scale and complexity, they typically require a transition from the informal routines to more formalised structures (Getz & Page, 2024). When financial pressures intensify, relying primarily on informal social controls can create severe tensions (Norris & O´Dwyer, 2004). So, to prevent structural weaknesses from repeating, organisations must rely on the post-event phase to review what was done (Dounavi et al., 2022). It is this formal evaluation process that makes failures visible and captures essential lessons for future events (Getz & Page, 2024).

2.5.4. Post-Event Review and Organisational Learning

Post-event review is not one of the five groups of controls in Malmi and Brown's (2008) framework. It is proposed in this study as an additional dimension, because the feedback loops that define cybernetic control (Malmi & Brown, 2008) only carry information from one event to the next when outcomes are formally reviewed after delivery (Getz & Page, 2024). During the delivery of the event, the team identifies whether spending targets are on track, but this only becomes useful over time if they are reviewed after the event, compared against the original plan, and used to shape how the next event is planned (Getz & Page, 2024). Without this step, evaluation is confined to a single event and generates no information that changes the organisation's approach to the next one. In this respect, post-event review is what closes the control process by converting experience into knowledge that can actually be applied.

Useful evaluation tends to happen in two rounds. The first is the immediate debrief, conducted while the details of delivery are still clear, which captures what worked, what did not and which decisions proved problematic on the day (Dowson et al., 2023). The second happens later, when there is enough distance to compare planned against actual expenditures, assess whether contingency measures were well calibrated and identify the main causes of variance

(Getz & Page, 2024). However, these evaluations are subject to biases because managers face incentives to present favourable results and are constrained by the quality and completeness of the data available after the event (Getz & Page, 2024). Without both stages and some awareness of these pressures, the feedback loop closes only partially.

What an organisation chooses to measure after the event shapes what it learns from it. Events that generate revenue are naturally evaluated against the Return on Investment (ROI), comparing costs to financial outcomes (Getz & Page, 2024). Events that run for brand building or stakeholder engagement require a different approach. The Return on Objectives (ROO) measures performance against non-financial goals such as brand awareness, media impressions or shifts in audience perception captured through after event surveys (Getz & Page, 2024). Both instruments generate the kind of comparative information against which performance is judged, which situates them within what Malmi and Brown (2008) define as cybernetic control. An organisation that measures only budget compliance will know whether it stayed within budget but not whether the event achieved what it was supposed to (Dowson et al., 2023). This gap matters for planning the next event.

Post-event evaluation of this kind is the exception rather than the norm in event management. Most organisations do something in the immediate aftermath, but a thorough financial and strategic review is rarely conducted systematically (Getz & Page, 2024). Becker et al. (2023), for instance, traced repeated cost and governance failures in large-scale events back to the absence of any independent mechanism for assessing what went wrong and ensuring those findings influenced the following events. Without a documented review, variance analysis does not happen and causes go undiagnosed, so the same mistakes tend to happen again (Becker et al., 2023).

This cannot be solved just by adding a debrief at the end of an event. It reflects something structural about how the MCS package tends to be configured in event management. A package in which planning controls set the budget, cybernetic controls monitor the spending and cultural controls maintain the quality standards, but no formal process exists for reviewing outcomes and feeding them back into future planning, cannot improve over time (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Most of the cost control challenges in events described earlier recur because the control package lacks a mechanism to make them visible.

Understanding how this manifests in a specific corporate event management context and whether the interaction between formal and informal controls produces a more or less

effective configuration is precisely what the research question driving this study sets out to examine.

2.6. Analytical Synthesis and Implications for the Case Study

Taken separately, the sections above describe the challenges of cost control in events and the individual dimensions of the control package that respond to them. When put together, a pattern emerges that none of them individually shows on its own. Planning and cybernetic controls are usually present but tend to be weak in practice, with budgets that exist without generating real accountability (Malmi & Brown, 2008) and with the tools that allow monitoring to catch problems early often missing (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020; Dounavi et al., 2022). Administrative controls are frequently underdeveloped as well, relying more on informal arrangements than on formal ones, as event organisation often rely on decisions made as situations arise. Cultural controls often end up filling these gaps but in reality, they hide just how weak the formal side really is (Knowles, 2025). What is also missing consistently is also a post-event review, which would help catch and correct these problems (Getz & Page, 2024). However, none of this happens in isolation. Put together, it points to a control package that has a hard time learning from its own experience. Reward and compensation controls are also almost nowhere to be found. Malmi and Brown (2008) describe these controls as attaching consequences to performance outcomes, but the literature on event management says very little about this dimension in practice, which suggests that it is not a central feature.

This synthesis then points to the two questions this study sets out to answer. The first concerns which of these controls are present, which are underdeveloped and how they relate to one another within the package as a whole. The second concerns how the interaction between formal and informal controls, particularly whether the informal mechanisms that fill the gaps left by weak formal controls reinforce cost discipline or hide where it is missing, shapes cost control practices in events. Examining these questions within the specific context of Hyundai Portugal requires close engagement with how the Event and Brand Activation team manages the events in practice, which is the purpose of this study developed in the rest of this work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological approach and objectives

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodological approach based on a single case study - Hyundai Portugal, S.A. This type of research is particularly applicable in management control to understand how organisational actors carry out their work in specific contexts (Vieira et al., 2017). The overall objective is to analyse how this control package operates in practice and how the interactions between formal and informal dimensions shape cost control. To achieve this overall objective, five specific objectives were defined: 1) to analyse how budgeting and financial reporting operate in the organisation of the events; 2) to explore how administrative and reward controls distribute authority and accountability for cost decisions; 3) to assess the influence of corporate culture and informal relationships on cost control practices; 4) to explore how formal and informal controls interact when addressing the real challenges of cost management; 5) to analyse whether and how post-event evaluation feeds back into the planning of future events.

According to the classification suggested by Chua (1986), accounting research can be developed from three different epistemological positions: positivist, interpretative and critical. This study adopts the interpretative position, since it assumes that cost control practices in event management are socially constructed through the language, interaction and shared meanings of those involved, rather than being objectively measurable facts to be tested against hypotheses. This is an appropriate position since cost control practices should not be regarded as exclusively technical processes, but rather as integrated into organisational processes, managerial choices and relations with suppliers and internal teams. This is precisely the separation between phenomenon and context that a purely positivist or hypothesis-testing approach would assume (Yin, 2018), which is precisely the separation this study´s research question sets out to question rather than assume.

The internship context provides privileged access to the everyday organisational routines and informal practices that may not be easily accessible to external researchers. This proximity is also a limitation that must be made explicit. As an intern embedded within the team under study, the researcher's interpretation is inevitably shaped by its position within the organisation, which creates a risk of bias and over-familiarity with practices that an external observer might question. For this reason, this study specifically incorporates reflexivity regarding the role of the

researcher, recognising that the researcher, the phenomena studied and the methods used inevitably shape one another throughout the research process (Covaleski et al., 2017). In practice, this meant consistently distinguishing between what was observed directly in the course of daily work and what was reported informally by colleagues, treating the last with additional caution before incorporating it as data, and paying close attention to moments when familiarity with the team's language and assumptions risked an explanation being accepted without sufficient scrutiny. Triangulating across interviews, internal documents and the researcher's own observations is the primary mechanism used to mitigate the risk throughout the study (Vieira et al., 2017), though it does not by itself substitute for this ongoing reflexive awareness.

A case study method is an empirical research strategy exploring a specific phenomenon in its real-life context, particularly in cases where we cannot clearly separate the phenomenon from its context and several sources of evidence are needed (Yin, 2018). The case study under analysis is both exploratory and descriptive (Vieira et al., 2017). It is descriptive because it sets out to document how planning, administrative, cybernetic, cultural and reward controls actually operate across the events studied, rather than simply confirming the model already established in the literature. It is also exploratory, since it explores how formal and informal controls interact to shape cost control practices, rather than to test a hypothesis formulated in advance.

The focus of the study is the management of events at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., understood as the organisational setting in which the MCS package operates. Within this case, five completed events function as embedded units of study. These include an Annual Dealership Convention, a brand activation for the *FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola*, the Team Hyundai Portugal (THP) presentation for the media and some selected internal stakeholders, a model launch event for the new Hyundai IONIQ 9 and the participation in the *Rally de Portugal*. Each event provides a distinct occasion through which the configuration and interaction of the different controls can be observed and compared. Therefore, it provides an opportunity to describe, refine or challenge existing ideas about how cost control operates in event-based contexts, following a logic of analytical replication rather than sampling logic of surveys (Scapens, 2004; Yin, 2018).

3.2. Data collection and analysis

In order to address the research objectives, the main data sources are semi-structured interviews with staff engaged in event planning and cost control, direct observation during the internship, and the review of internal documents and reports related to the events selected.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with four individuals. Three were members of the Events and Brand Activation team, including two Event and Brand Activation Specialists (E1 and E2) and one Event, Brand Activation and Social Media Manager (E3). The fourth interview was conducted with the Marketing and Communications Director (E4), the person to whom the events team report cost decisions and who holds final approval authority over event budgets. This final interview was included to complement the operational perspective of the events team with the perspective of the approval level, since several control mechanisms described by E1, E2, and E3 depend directly on decisions made at this level. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are organised around a defined set of topics while remaining flexible enough to follow themes that emerge unexpectedly during conversation, rather than constraining the interview to a fixed sequence of questions (Mahama & Khalifa, 2017).

Table 1 - Characterisation of Interviewees

Interviewee	**Position**	**Time in Role**	**Time in the company**
E1	Event and Brand Activation Specialist	2 years	5 years
E2	Event and Brand Activation Specialist	1 year and 7 months	1 year and 7 months
E3	Event, Brand Activation and Social Media Manager	1 year	2 years and 6 months
E4	Hyundai Marketing and Communications Director	1 year	7 years

The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via online meeting between June and September 2026, audio recorded with the interviewee's consent, and transcribed using TurboScribe.ai, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based transcription tool. The resulting transcripts were then checked and corrected manually against the original recordings. The average duration of the interviews was 19 minutes, ranging from 12 to 25 minutes**.** The first three interviewees were selected from within the Events and Brand Activation team based on their direct involvement in the organisation of the five events under study. They were selected based on their direct involvement in at least one of the events analysed, prioritising those with visibility over budgeting or supplier decisions, rather than a fixed number of participants determined in

advance. The Marketing and Communications Director was selected separately, as the person holding final approval authority over the events studied. Interviews were conducted following a flexible guide based on Malmi and Brown's (2008) five dimensions of the MCS package, planning, cybernetic, administrative, cultural and reward controls, complemented by an additional dimension proposed in this study, post-event review as a distinct mechanism of organisational learning (See Appendix A). These interviews were complemented by observation of meetings, supplier negotiation and on-site executions.

The internal documents, including budgets, purchase orders and management control reports, were gathered whenever possible and used to support the information gained during interviews and observations. These documents, when available, were organised according to their analytical function within the control package: planning documents (initial briefing and budgets), approval and procurement documents (requisitions, purchase orders and supplier contracts), monitoring documents (expenditure tracking and variance records from budget), and post-event documents (debrief notes, final cost reports). Such procedures are more appropriate than standardised surveys for understanding what the challenges of cost control in events are and how management control instruments are actually used in practice (Vieira et al., 2017). The use of multiple methods enables triangulation, that is, the comparison of different sources and types of evidence. This is essential to increase credibility and contextual validity of the findings (Scapens, 2004).

The collection of data focused on five corporate events in which the Events and Brand Activation team held the greatest level of involvement and responsibility during the internship period. This set of events differs significantly in scope and objectives, as mentioned above, which allows a richer view of how cost control practices are adapted to different contexts.

Given that this study involves internal financial and operational data from a private company, disclosure of supplier names, cost figures, and internal comparisons was authorised by the researcher's workplace supervisor, for the purposes of this academic report. Where details can identify specific individuals or sensitive information, these were anonymised in the final report. No interviewee is identified by name at any point in this report, and each is referred to only by code assigned in this section (E1, E2, E3 and E4).

The interview notes, observation notes and internal documents of the chosen events were categorised chronologically and by type of event when applicable. This was followed by analysing the information based on Malmi and Brown's (2008) five dimensions of the MCS

package, including planning, cybernetic, administrative, cultural and reward controls, complemented by post-event review as the additional dimension proposed by this study.

Two levels of comparison were then conducted. Within each event, the analysis examines how the different controls interacted and then, across events, the analysis compared the findings and identified which control gaps recurred regardless of the event type, and which differences in configuration appeared to depend on the scale, visibility or strategic purpose of the event. A central concern throughout this analysis is not simply whether a given control is present or absent but how controls interact. That is, for example, whether informal mechanisms compensate for gaps in administrative or cybernetic controls, if they mask the absence of a formal structure, and whether the existence of a formal mechanism, such as a budget, translates into actual accountability or remains a reference document without consequences. Throughout this process, the evidence collected was read in light of the concepts developed in the literature review, allowing the data to be interpreted against the theoretical propositions that inform this study's understanding of the MCS package.

4. The case study - Hyundai Portugal, S.A.

Hyundai Portugal, S.A. is integrated into the Salvador Caetano Group, one of the oldest and most relevant business groups in the automotive and industrial sector in Portugal, founded in 1946 by Salvador Fernandes Caetano. Today, it operates in 46 countries across Europe, Africa and America, basing all activities on its core values of innovation, quality and proximity to the customer (Salvador Caetano, 2025a).

Hyundai Portugal, S.A. was established in 1996 in Portugal but was only integrated into Salvador Caetano Group's structure in 2015 (Hyundai Portugal, n.d.). The Group became the exclusive distributor of the Hyundai brand in Portugal (Salvador Caetano, 2025b), a role that, as observed during the internship, covers the full scope of import, distribution and after-sales services for Hyundai vehicles in the country. This positions Hyundai Portugal, S.A. as responsible for consolidating the brand in the Portuguese market, while promoting the image and values of the Group it integrates. Through an extensive network of dealerships and communication strategies, Hyundai Portugal, S.A. seeks to strengthen the brand's awareness and contribute to the positioning of Salvador Caetano Group as a benchmark in the Portuguese automotive sector.

Hyundai Portugal is particularly active in event-based brand activation, organising and attending a set of corporate and promotional events across the year, including dealership conventions, vehicle launches for dealers and press, participation in motorsport events such as Rally de Portugal, and brand activations linked to external properties such as the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola, as observed during the internship. These events differ considerably in scale, audience and strategic purpose, from internal, relationship-focused gatherings such as dealership meetings to large public activations with substantial supplier coordination and public visibility, which makes this setting particularly well suited to examining how a single MCS package is configured and adapted across events of different types.

The organisation of these events involves significant expenditure on logistics, venue hire, supplier services and human resources, coordinated across the internal Event and Brand Activation team alongside external agencies, suppliers and, in several cases, partner organisations, as observed during the internship. This combination of internal and external actors and a strong, centrally managed brand identity creates precisely the conditions in which the interaction between formal and informal controls, and the tensions between brand consistency and budget discipline, become visible.

The internship developed within this report is integrated in the Events and Brand Activation team, a shared structure within the Salvador Caetano Group that manages events across the different brands the group imports and distributes. Within this team, the internship's focus is specifically on cost management in Hyundai Portugal, S.A. events, which constitute the empirical basis of this study. As observed during the internship, both the Salvador Caetano Group and Hyundai Portugal, S.A. have an organisational structure and values that place particular emphasis on financial discipline and brand consistency, which makes the interaction between formal and informal controls in the management of its events particularly relevant for this research.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Overview of the Events under study

This study examines five events organised for Hyundai Portugal by the Events and Brand Activation team, a shared structure within Salvador Caetano Auto during the internship period. Taken together, they differ considerably in scale, purpose and strategic context, which is precisely what allows the configurations of the MCS Package to be observed across distinct organisational settings rather than a single, uniform type of event. These five events also differ in the type of audience they were designed for, ranging from media platforms to the dealership network and general public, which has direct implications for how each event was planned and financed. Table 2 summarises the financial trajectory of each event, from initial estimate to officially confirmed final cost.

Table 2 - Budget Evolution Across the five Events Studied, from Initial Estimate to Final Cost

Event	Initial Budget	SAP Requisition (Approved Budget)	Final Cost
Annual Dealership Convention	90 000€	90 000€	66 500,86€
FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola	12 000€	20 000€	28 247,20€
THP Presentation	9 000€	9 000€	8 689,80€
IONIQ 9 Model Launch	60 000€	60 000€	58 804,36€
Rally de Portugal	35 000€	35 000€	36 761,18€

Source: Author's own work, based on internal budget documents, SAP requisitions records and final cost data confirmed by the Management Control department through the Cognos system.

The requisition should not be read as an arbitrary safety margin of the initial budget, but as an intermediate budget, defined once supplier quotations and the events' materialised requirements were already known, and therefore reflecting a more informed estimate than the initial figure. Because of this, the requisition is treated throughout this analysis as the more relevant baseline against which to assess deviations. Final costs were confirmed by the Management Control department through the Cognos system, reflecting payments processed up to 30th June of 2026 linked to the project codes of each one of the 5 events.

Held on 22nd January at the Liga Portugal headquarters in Porto, as observed in the internship, the Annual Dealership Convention is the largest of the five events in terms of

audience, bringing dealership representatives from across the country together for a full-day programme. The event serves to present the objectives and strategy for the year ahead and share the results achieved across the network in the previous year, closing with an awards ceremony that recognises the top-performing dealerships across different categories. The occasion was also used to unveil the new IONIQ 9 model to the dealer network as a surprise, intended to generate motivation ahead of its commercial launch. Its final cost was notably below the requisitioned amount, the largest margin among the five events.

Taking place on 6th February at the Dragão Arena in Porto, the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola brought Hyundai to the event as a sponsor, activating the brand to the general public within the Arena and serving as the tour´s official vehicle in Portugal. Ten Hyundai Santa Fe vehicles were used to transport guests and the World Cup trophy itself. What stands out here is less the scale of the event and more its financial trajectory. As Table 2 shows, the final cost exceeded not only the initial estimate but also the requisitioned amount, the largest overrun among the five events studied.

Then came along the THP presentation on 26th of March, which was the smallest and most focused event of the group, introducing the team and its objectives to a selected group of internal stakeholders and media, rather than to the public or dealer network. Its modest scale is reflected not only in its budget, a fraction of what the other four events required, but also in the more limited set of suppliers involved in its organisation. Its final cost remained close to the requisitioned amount.

The IONIQ 9 Model launch followed on 16th of April at the Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel in Cascais, bringing dealers and media together for the official presentation of the new model. The event was built around the reveal of the vehicle with some audiovisual production, which was then reinforced by a presentation of the different aspects of the vehicle and its commercial strategy led by Hyundai's internal team. This created a controlled and high impact first impression of the car ahead of its commercial release. As shown in Table 2, the final cost remained close to the amount approved, with only a marginal deviation.

To conclude, the Rally de Portugal stretched across several stages between 7 and 10 May, from Figueira da Foz to Arganil, Felgueiras, Lousada and Fafe, combining brand activation with hospitality for invited dealers and media throughout the competition. Much like the Dealership Convention and the THP Presentation, this is a recurring event in the brand calendar, in this case tied specifically to its motorsport sponsorship activity. As with the Trophy

Tour, its official cost exceeded the requisitioned amount, although by a considerably smaller margin.

5.2. The Common Configuration of the MCS Package

5.2.1. Planning controls

Planning controls, as described in the interview with E1, follow two different starting points depending on the type of event. New or one-off initiatives are usually preceded by a briefing from the marketing team, setting out objectives, scope and available budget. This matches Malmi and Brown's (2008) characterisation of planning as an ex-ante mechanism that aligns activity with objectives before action takes place. When an event opportunity arises without advance notice, planning instead tends to begin with a conversation or a quick alignment meeting. The interviewed team member was careful not to describe this second scenario as informal, calling it instead more agile and adapted to urgency, a distinction consistent with Knowles' (2025) argument that formal and informal controls interact with one another rather than simply coexisting as separate categories. For events that repeat annually, this initial reference point is the previous edition's budget instead of a fresh briefing, which is confirmed, for example, by the planning of the Rally de Portugal, whose internal budget document, shared by the events team, shows the 2026 budget built line by line from the 2025 budget. It is not, however, a purely repetitive process. As E3 explained, when planning a recurring event "we use what the team already has from the previous editions, trying to understand what went wrong and what went well the previous year […] we try to improve on those factors and find a differentiating element so that the event is different in some way". This suggests that the inherited budgets also carry forward a deliberate process of refinement, not only a numerical reference point.

Regardless of how this initial estimate is reached, the events team then gathers and compares supplier quotations as part of deciding what best fits the event's needs, expected quality and available budget, weighing cost alongside other factors where relevant, like trust, number of events done with each supplier. This is consistent in almost every event, mostly in areas that affect more significantly the event quality and budget, like venue, catering and audiovisuals. This is illustrated, for example, by the venue selection for the Annual Dealership Convention, where seven venues were compared, with the option ultimately chosen also proving to be the least expensive (see Appendix B for the full comparison). Only once these decisions are made and validated does the events team submit a requisition in SAP, the

enterprise resource planning (ERP) system used by the Salvador Caetano Group, with an estimated budget that is more informed than the initial estimate, reflecting the actual estimated costs from the suppliers selected, although it can be the same as the initial budget. This two-step sequence, decisions first, formal requisition after, gives planning more detail than the literature generally expects in event settings, where the absence of structured tools such as the WBS or CBS is said to leave monitoring dependent on rough, uninformative totals (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020; Dounavi et al., 2022). Here, the extra detail comes informally, through the supplier comparisons carried out along the way, not through any of these formal instruments. Planning still becomes more precise, just by a different route than the literature assumes. This added precision, however, does not by itself guarantee that a well-informed requisition holds up in practice, as the deviations recorded in Table 2 already suggest.

5.2.2. Administrative controls

Administrative controls were reconstructed primarily through direct observation during the internship and confirmed independently in interviews (E1, E2, E3). Once created, the requisition is approved by the Marketing and Communications Director and also by the brand's Chief Operating Officer (COO). This is the point where the events team's assumption of what the event will cost receives formal sign-off, and it only needs to happen once. From here, any invoice or purchase order issued against the event's project code, up to the requisitioned value, is approved automatically, without the Marketing and Communications Director needing to review each one individually. This is what makes the requisition a meaningful cost control mechanism, not just an administrative formality, which matches Malmi and Brown's (2008) point that having a budget is not the same as using it for control, and the difference depends on whether someone is actually held accountable for it. It concentrates oversight into a single decision made before the event's costs are actually incurred.

Any expense beyond this requisitioned value follows a different path. Rather than a routine hierarchy applied to every decision, this is specifically what happens once the pre-approved ceiling has been exceeded. The additional expense is submitted in SAP, first reviewed by the events team, then by the Marketing and Communications Director, and finally by the brand's COO, a mechanism identified through direct observation and confirmed independently by E1. Additionally, E3 mentioned a further layer to this escalation, describing it as running through two levels of administration when needed: "the brand then communicates with its own administration and with the group's administration", which suggests that the oversight of

significant deviations is not confined to the brand itself but can extend into a wider group structure. This makes overruns slower and more visible without ever fully blocking them, and it is this repeated, escalating review that matches Malmi and Brown's (2008) definition of administrative control as a clear structure of authority and accountability. It also stands in contrast to what Becker et al. (2023, p. 1553) call the "soft budget syndrome", where a weak separation between decision-making and decision-control drives cost overruns. Here, the separation is clear and consistently applied, yet, as Table 2 showed, two of the five events still went substantially over budget, suggesting that Becker et al.'s (2023) explanation does not fully account for what happened in this case.

Supplier selection, described in the interview with E1 as a case-by-case process rather than one governed by a single rule, follows a similarly graduated logic. Cost, quality, location, responsiveness and prior experience with a supplier all weigh on the decision, alongside a factor not discussed in the literature reviewed here, how much other work that supplier already has with the team, since overloading a single partner is treated as a risk in its own right. This reflects a concern with managing relationships across suppliers, not a purely transactional view of procurement. Areas with more impact on budget and the event quality, such as venue, audiovisual production and catering, more consistently lead to collecting several quotations, though this is not an absolute rule as smaller categories are compared too whenever the team sees value in it. This comparison depends on a pool of suppliers wide enough to allow it, which is not always available for each category. E2 mentioned that the team does not always have enough suppliers to compare and that this database is built gradually by testing new suppliers on smaller events before trusting them with larger ones.

When a cost risks exceeding what was planned, the decision to proceed is made jointly with the Marketing and Communications Director, weighed against the expense's relevance to the event. Responsibility for the resulting deviation rests on the strength of the justification, not on assigning blame to an individual, and additional spending is typically absorbed by reallocating funds from other projects rather than requesting more money overall. This is a considerably softer configuration than Becker et al.'s (2023) soft budget syndrome would predict: accountability is not absent; it simply works through discussion rather than punishment. It was confirmed by E4 that overruns, when absorbed at her own level, do not require a separate formal approval step. Additional spending on one event is compensated by cutting spending elsewhere in the annual marketing budget, for example reducing the TV plan for a campaign, rather than requesting extra funds overall. This suggests that the discussion-based accountability

found at the events' team level is not specific to the team. It is how cost decisions are handled one level above it as well.

5.2.3. Rewards controls

Reward controls, documented in the team's internal Key Performance Indicators (KPI) record, operate at a level clearly detached from the individual event, consistent with the observation already made in the literature review that reward mechanisms receive comparatively little attention in the event management literature (Getz & Page, 2024; Malmi & Brown, 2008). This record scores each event out of five wherever an identifiable invited audience exists to survey: the Convention, the IONIQ 9 launch, and the Rally, whose guests answer a satisfaction survey about the whole experience. The Trophy Tour, attended overwhelmingly by the general public and by guests unrelated to Hyundai, was not surveyed at all, consistent with there being no identifiable audience to ask. The THP Presentation, however, is the exception, as it had an identifiable audience for which no score is recorded, and the reason for this omission is not documented.

Regardless of whether a score exists, the same KPI record shows all five events feeding into one annual scorecard, which also lists each event's final cost and determines the team's yearly bonus. This link between cost and reward, however, does not translate into individual accountability for a specific event's outcome. As E2 confirmed, cost is indeed one of the indicators considered in the team's KPIs, but the team is not held responsible when a single budget is exceeded, because the decision to accept the overrun is not theirs to make. Taken together, the three dimensions examined here show a package where planning has become more precise and administrative authority is clearly assigned, but where reward does not appear to link back to cost.

5.3. Cybernetic Control and the Timing Problem

Cybernetic control, in Malmi and Brown's (2008) definition, works through feedback loops that measure actual outcomes against pre-established targets, generating accountability for any deviation identified. For this to function as a genuine control, and not merely as a record of what happened, the deviation needs to be identified in time for someone to act on it. The evidence gathered here, through direct observation during the internship and confirmed by E1, shows two distinct mechanisms operating at different levels, each measuring a different kind of costs in a different way and at a different pace.

At the team level, cost tracking is active rather than merely observational. The events team keeps a shared Excel file for each event, precisely the kind of manually maintained spreadsheet that Dowson et al. (2023) identify as central to cost tracking in event management, and, as they note, prone to error. Updated throughout event preparation, recording committed and anticipated costs as they arise, this file is used to actively manage the budget: comparing prices across categories, adjusting allocations between them, and requesting new quotations where a cost looks likely to run over what was planned. As observed during the internship, this gives the team a genuine sense of control over the event while it is being organised, and decisions are made and adjusted continuously in response to what the team's internal budget shows.

At the organisational level, a separate mechanism runs independently of the team's own tracking. The management control department compiles all costs recorded against each project code, based on invoices already paid, and meets monthly with the marketing department, primarily the Marketing and Communications Director, to review this compilation. In this meeting, the two sides discuss whether spending is tracking against what was expected for each project code, how much has already been paid out, and whether any deviation requires justification or a reallocation of funds elsewhere in the annual marketing budget. Unlike the team's own tracking, this mechanism is based on confirmed payments rather than anticipated ones, and follows the organisation's fiscal calendar rather than the timeline of any single event.

These two mechanisms do not always arrive at the same number. Table 3 compares the events team's own working figure for each event with the amount later confirmed through this monthly reconciliation.

Table 3 - Comparison between the Events Team's Internal Budget Tracker and the Official Final Cost of the event

Event	Team Internal Budget Tracker	Final Cost (Cognos)	Difference
Annual Dealership Convention	75 438,33€	66 500,86€	-8 937,47 €
FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola	17 069€	28 247,20€	+11 178,20€
THP Presentation	8 715,35€	8 689,80€	-25,55€
IONIQ 9 Model Launch	57 822€	58 804,36€	+982,36€
Rally de Portugal	38 168,50€	36 761,18€	-1 407,32€

Source: Author's own work, based on the event team's internal budget trackers and the final cost data confirmed by the Management Control department through the Cognos system.

Some divergence between the two figures is to be expected and does not by itself indicate a failure of tracking. For the THP Portugal Presentation and the IONIQ 9 launch, the two figures are close, a gap consistent with routine costs charged to the same project code but outside the events team's immediate visibility, such as travel, fuel or accommodation for colleagues from other teams attending the event, as observed during the internship. The remaining three events, however, diverge for reasons that are not all the same. The Trophy Tour shows the clearest visibility failure: the team's tracker sat at 17 069€, but the Cognos reconciliation confirmed 28 247,20€, a difference of over 11 000€ that was simply not visible in the team's own file even when the costs were closed after the event in this file. The Rally shows a different pattern. Here, the team's own tracker, at 38 168,50€, was already above the 35 000€ requisition, meaning the team was aware of the budgetary pressure in advance; the official cost later confirmed was, if anything, slightly lower than the team had anticipated, at 36 761,18€. This is not a visibility failure but a case where an anticipated overrun against the requisition was not prevented by the formal approval structure described in Section 5.2. The Convention shows a third pattern again: the team's tracker, at 75 438,33€, sat well above the confirmed cost of 66 500,86€, suggesting a conservative internal estimate, anticipated costs that did not materialise, or a combination of the two.

This distinction matters for how the timing problem should be understood. It is not that deviations are uniformly hidden until the monthly reconciliation, as the Trophy Tour alone might suggest. In some cases, as with the Rally, the team already has visibility into a likely overrun, but the mechanisms available, the requisition ceiling and the escalated approval path described in Section 5.2, do not necessarily stop the overrun from happening, instead, they turn it into a justified and formally authorised deviation. This is a different failure from the one Becker et al. (2023) describe as the "soft budget syndrome," where overruns follow from a weak separation between decision-making and decision-control. Here, that separation appears to be formally present. The evidence instead points to a misalignment between the pace and the accuracy of operational tracking and the pace of financial reconciliation, rather than to an absence of accountability as such.

5.4. Cultural Controls in Practice

Events are not only cost objects but also instruments for brand engagement (Bowdin et al., 2024), which means that expectations about quality and image compete directly with cost discipline. In Malmi and Brown's (2008) framework, cultural controls operate through shared

values and norms that affect behaviour across an organisation, generally wider and slower to change than the other dimensions of the package. E1 described cost-consciousness as a deeply ingrained part of the team's culture, present even in situations without any immediate budget pressure. This suggests that cost control here does not depend solely on the formal mechanisms already discussed, the requisition ceiling and the escalated approval structure, but is also reinforced by an internalised expectation that spending should be questioned and justified as a matter of habit, not only when a deviation forces the issue.

This cultural dimension interacts with cost decisions in a consistent way. In every case examined, the events team first gathered and compared quotations from several suppliers. What varied was which criterion then decided the outcome. In one case, cost and a cultural consideration pointed to the same option. In two others, a cultural or relational consideration was more important than cost, and the team selected an option that was not the most economic available. In the remaining case, a safety concern eliminated an entire set of options before cost was even weighed.

The venue selection for the IONIQ 9 launch illustrates this clearly (full comparison in Appendix B). Two proposals in the Comporta region were considered at an early stage. Both were discarded specifically because of flooding and severe weather affecting the region earlier in the year, a concern with the safety and reliability of the event experience rather than with cost. Only after this entire region had been ruled out did the choice become clear. The option that remained was also the least expensive.

The Annual Dealership Convention shows the same filter-then-cost logic operating twice, with two different outcomes (full comparison in Appendix B). The venue selection compared seven options, and the one chosen, which reflects the brand's established presence in football sponsorship, was also the least expensive. Here, the cultural filter and the cost criterion pointed to the same option. The catering selection compared three proposals, and the most expensive of them, *Casa do Marquês*, was the one selected, based on a multi-year relationship of trust with a supplier the brand knew would reliably deliver for an event considered important both for the brand and for the dealer network in attendance. Here, the filter and the cost criterion did not coincide, and the filter prevailed. This reliance on trust as a deciding criterion is not treated within the team as free of risk. E3 noted that leaning too heavily on a supplier because of an established relationship can make it harder to know whether that supplier's prices still reflect the market: "if we become too dependent on one supplier due to trust, we risk not knowing whether their prices still match market values". This comment was not made about

Casa do Marquês specifically, but it points to an awareness that the team has when evaluating supplier options for each event.

A related but analytically distinct case is the audiovisual supplier decision for the Team Hyundai Portugal Presentation. Three proposals were compared, and the supplier selected, Smart Choice, was not the cheapest of the three (full comparison in Appendix B). As confirmed informally by the team, this decision was not about price or about trust in the quality of the cheaper alternative, Boost Sound, but about avoiding overload on a supplier the team was already using across several projects, and about preserving a working relationship with more than one audiovisual partner. This case deserves closer attention, because it sits less comfortably within Malmi and Brown's (2008) definition of cultural control as shared organisational values than the other examples do. Managing a supplier's workload and maintaining a good relationship across multiple partners is arguably closer to a relational, operational concern than to a value or norm shared across the organisation, and its inclusion here points to a limit in how far the cultural category, as defined in the framework, can stretch to capture this kind of consideration.

This same prioritisation is confirmed by E4, who stated directly that, in Hyundai's case, budget is not the most important factor in supplier decisions, and that prioritising innovation and differentiation works more in line with what the brand wants than costs alone. This indicates that the pattern found across these cases is not confined to the events team, it also describes how the Marketing and Communications Director herself weighs these decisions.

These findings can be compared with Norris and O'Dwyer's (2004) theme of tension between formal and informal controls, where contradictory signals from each create conflicting pressures for those involved, but do not quite match it. What is observed here, across the cases examined, is not a contradiction between formal and informal controls but an interaction in which the formal process, comparing multiple quotations, took place in every case, while the criterion that ultimately decided the outcome could be informal or cultural rather than the price comparison itself. This is more in line with Knowles' (2025) argument of the interaction of formal and informal controls rather than as separate categories. Cultural and relational considerations here do not appear to substitute the formal process of comparison; they operate as the decisive criterion within a formal process that continues to take place regardless of which ultimately wins.

Not every event had a comparable finding in this cultural view. For the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola, most of the relevant decisions had already been made before

the current team joined, and no equivalent episode of brand, quality or relational considerations outweighing cost could be established for this event within the scope of this study.

5.5. Post-Event Review and Organisational Learning

Post-event review, the additional dimension proposed in this study, is what allows the feedback generated by cybernetic control (Malmi & Brown, 2008) to carry forward from one event to the next. It turns a single measurement into something the organisation can actually learn from. The team's internal KPI record, confirmed independently in interview, shows that this process exists but does not consistently close that loop.

Each event with an identifiable invited audience is evaluated through a participant satisfaction survey. This covers aspects such as venue, catering, ease of access and logistics, already discussed in Section 5.2, but includes no question about cost or value for money, confirmed in interview. The same KPI record lists each event's final cost too, drawn from the team's own internal tracker rather than the officially reconciled Cognos figure discussed in Section 5.3. Whether or how this cost figure feeds into the team's overall evaluation was not established within the scope of this study. It may simply sit alongside the quality score as a record, without functioning as an input to it.

Financial closing also takes place in parallel, reconciling the team's internal tracker against invoices and purchase orders in SAP, already described in Section 5.3. A debrief tends to happen too, according to the interview with E1, but it was described as informal and inconsistent. Sometimes it takes the form of a structured conversation. Other times it amounts to little more than an exchange of impressions at the end of the event, with no fixed format and no systematic documentation. E1 raised this specifically, without being prompted, as the area of the process with the greatest room for improvement. Also, E4 independently pointed to the same gap from the approval level, noting that the Marketing team does not formally evaluate and build a record from past events.

This gap has real implications for learning across editions of the same event. For events that repeat annually, such as the Rally de Portugal and the THP Presentation, lessons from previous editions are carried forward, but through a scattered combination of sources rather than a single record. Past budgets, shared folders documenting where the team stayed or which suppliers were used, survey results, and the memory of team members who worked on the previous edition all play a part. Several of these sources depend on specific individuals still being on the team. If they leave, so does a piece of what was learned.

This pattern is similar to what Getz and Page (2024) describe as the exception rather than the norm in event management, where organisations do something in the immediate aftermath of an event but rarely conduct a thorough and systematic review. Becker et al. (2023) found something similar, that the absence of an independent mechanism for assessing what went wrong allows the same governance weaknesses to repeat across events. The case here does not point to governance weaknesses as such, given the clear approval structure already established in Section 5.2. What seems to be missing is a documented process. Without one, specific lessons, including those about cost, cannot be checked against what actually happened the next time a similar event comes around. Instead, everything depends on whoever is still around to remember it.

5.6. Formal and Informal Controls in Interaction

The five sections above point to a package that is neither purely formal nor informal. The two are combined at almost every stage. Planning starts from a briefing or a formal reference to a previous edition, but the detail that makes it useful comes from informal supplier comparisons carried out along the way, not from any of the structured tools the literature associates with event budgeting (Cerezo-Narváez et al., 2020; Dounavi et al., 2022). Administrative control concentrates real oversight into a single formal decision, the approval of the requisition, but what happens once that ceiling is exceeded depends on case-by-case decisions about relevance and justification, not on a fixed rule.

Cybernetic control shows the same pattern in a different way. A formal reconciliation exists at the organisational level, built on Cognos and confirmed monthly by the Management Control Team, but it moves at the pace of the fiscal calendar, not the pace of the events. This gap is partly filled by the team's own informal tracking, which gives a genuine sense of control during the events' preparation, but this tracking cannot verify its own accuracy. As Section 5.3 showed, this produces different outcomes depending on the event. Sometimes the informal tracker misses costs, as with the Trophy Tour. Sometimes it already identifies a likely deviation in advance, as with the Rally, but the formal mechanisms available do not stop it. What both cases share is a formal system that is present but not fast enough or accurate enough to act on its own.

Cultural considerations play a role here too, without replacing the formal process that comes before them. Every supplier decision examined in Section 5.4 still went through a comparison of quotations, the same formal step Malmi and Brown (2008) would expect. What

changed, case by case, was which criterion actually decided the outcome. Sometimes it was price. Sometimes it was trust built over years, as with the catering choice for the Convention. Sometimes it was a concern with managing relationships across several suppliers at once, as seen in the internship with the Smart Choice decision, a consideration that sits closer to relational management than to shared organisational values in the strict sense Malmi and Brown (2008) use. This is closer to Knowles' (2025) view that formal and informal controls interact with each other, rather than the picture in Norris and O'Dwyer (2004), where the two send contradictory signals that pull people in different directions. Here, the formal and the informal do not pull against each other. The informal criterion decides, but only after the formal step has already taken place.

Reward and post-event review work differently. This is where the interaction breaks down instead of continuing. The annual KPI record links each event to a quality score and to the team's yearly bonus, but not to any consequence tied to that specific event's cost performance. Post-event learning follows a similar pattern. It happens through surveys, shared folders, and conversations at the end of an event, but it depends on scattered sources and on people staying with the team long enough to remember what those sources mean. Neither reward mechanisms nor post-event learning closes the cost control loop in a structured way. This is where the productive interaction seen in the rest of this chapter stops, without carrying its lessons forward from one event to the next.

6. Conclusion

6.1. General Conclusions

This study set out to examine how the MCS package is configured in the context of event management at Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and how the interactions between formal and informal controls shape cost control practices across the event lifecycle. The evidence gathered across the five events studied points to a package where formal and informal structures are clearly in place, but where these formal structures only produce reliable cost control once informal work fills the gaps they leave open. This pattern holds across planning, administrative and cybernetic control, and only weakens once the analysis reaches reward and post-event review.

Planning starts from a formal reference point, a briefing with the initial budget from Hyundai's marketing team or the previous year's budget. This reference only becomes a workable plan once the events team informally gathers and compares supplier quotations, a step that no structured planning tool in this case captures. Administrative control follows a related pattern, as oversight is concentrated into a single formal approval, the requisition, signed off only once by the Marketing and Communications Director and the brand's COO, after which spending within that ceiling proceeds automatically. Even so, two of the five events studied still went over their approved budget. This suggests that Becker et al.'s (2023) explanation of cost overruns through a weak separation between decision-making and decision-control does not fully apply here, since that separation is clearly present and consistently followed.

Cybernetic control relies on two mechanisms that move at different speeds. The events team keeps its own tracker, updated throughout the preparation of each event. This tracker is the kind of manually maintained spreadsheet that Dowson et al. (2023) describe as typical in event management and prone to error. In parallel, the Management Control department gathers actual costs each month by project code, once invoices have been paid, allowing for a clear view of what has been spent in each event. These two mechanisms do not always agree. For example, for the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour, the team's tracker missed over 11 000€ in costs that only became visible long after the event was over. For the Rally de Portugal, the team's tracker already pointed to a likely overrun before the event took place, but the formal approval structure did not prevent it, it only turned the overrun into a justified and approved deviation. These two cases show different problems of the cybernetic controls around costs. In one, the informal

tracker failed to see the cost coming and, on the other, it saw the cost coming and the formal system still let it through.

When exploring cultural controls in Hyundai's event management, there is a recurring tension between quality expectations and cost discipline, as these events function as brand engagement (Bowdin et al., 2024). These cultural controls work as a filter that is applied before the cost is weighed. For the IONIQ 9 launch, for example, this filter ruled out an entire region of possible venues on safety issues before any cost comparison took place. For the Annual Dealership Convention, the same filter led to the cheapest venue that was also aligned with the brand's image, but to the most expensive catering supplier, as they were a supplier in which Hyundai's marketing team had trust and knowledge of the service. Also, the choice of a supplier can be made based on managing the workload and relationship across suppliers, independently of the price, which happened in the THP Presentation. In three of these four cases, a cultural, safety or relational consideration, rather than cost, determined the outcome.

Reward controls, on the other hand, are not formally linked to cost control in Hyundai's event management. Cost is one indicator among the several in the team's annual bonus, but no one is held accountable for a specific event's overrun, since the decision to accept that overrun was never the team's to make alone. Post event review shows the same distance. A debrief tends to happen, but it is informal and inconsistent, pointing to Getz and Page's (2024) observation that a thorough, systematic post-event review is the exception rather than the norm in event management. E1 raised this, without being prompted, as the area with the greatest room for improvement. For events that repeat every year, lessons are carried forward through memory and scattered documents rather than through any structured record, which means they depend on specific people staying on the team.

Taken together, these findings show a package where formal and informal controls complement each other for most of the event lifecycle and could not control cost on their own. This is consistent with Knowles's (2025) argument that these two categories interact rather than simply coexist. The pattern of judgement and discussion working alongside formal reporting was described consistently across all four interviews, pointing to a shared way of handling cost decisions throughout the organisation of these events. Formal structures set boundaries within which the events team operates, such as the single approval of the requisition with the approved budget for the event and also the monthly check in with the Management Control department that confirms what was actually spent. Informal mechanisms fill the gaps that these structures leave open. Supplier comparisons sharpen the formal budget, a tracker follows costs while the

event is being prepared, and cultural judgement decides between options that a formal comparison alone could not. Together they kept five very different events within a broadly manageable range of their approved budgets. However, this combination does not extend beyond the event itself. Reward remains tied to the team's yearly performance rather than to any individual event, and no process converts what happened into a record the next event can draw on. The package therefore controls each event effectively in isolation, without yet accumulating that control across events over time.

6.2. Contributions, limitations and suggestions for future research

This study makes two main contributions to the management control literature. Theoretically, it applies the MCS package framework of Malmi and Brown (2008) to a single case in a project-based, event management setting (Dounavi et al., 2022), where the interaction between formal and informal controls has received little direct attention (Knowles, 2025). It extends the framework by treating post-event review as a distinct dimension, relevant to any organisation that manages recurring, time-bounded projects such as events. Practically, this study gives Hyundai Portugal, S.A., and the Events and Brand Activation team, a structured account of their own control package. It shows where the package already works well, particularly in planning and in the concentration of administrative approval into a single decision. It also shows where the package does not close the loop, in reward and post-event review, where cost outcomes are never tied back to individual accountability or a documented process for learning. This gives the teams a base for targeted improvements, rather than a general recommendation to add more formal control.

This study has some limitations that should be kept in mind. It is based on a single case within one company and mainly one team. The findings cannot be assumed to hold in other organisations or sectors. The four interviews conducted were relatively short, even though they were supported by direct observation and internal documents. This limited how deeply some topics could be explored. In this report, the author's position as an intern within the team gave direct access to informal practices that an outside researcher would likely not have, which is why this study incorporated reflexivity as an ongoing practice rather than a one-off statement (Covaleski et al., 2017). This closeness, however, also carries a risk of over-familiarity that reflexive practice can reduce but not remove entirely. Finally, the five events studied all took place during a single internship period. This means the study cannot say whether the gaps found in reward and post-event review get better, worse, or stay the same over several years.

Future research could build on these limitations in a few ways. Comparing this case with other companies or sectors would help show whether this pattern is specific to this brand or common to project-based and event management. Following the same recurring events, such as Rally de Portugal or the THP Presentation across several years, would help show whether the missing post-event review has a lasting effect on cost performance over time. Finally, future work could look more closely at how reward controls could create real accountability for an event's cost outcome, without undermining the collaborative way suppliers are currently managed across events in this study.

Appendix A - Interview Guide

1. How does the Hyundai marketing team communicate and deliver the initial briefing?
    a. Is there always a formal briefing from the Hyundai marketing team, or are there instances where the budget from the previous edition is used as a starting point, or where the figure comes from a more informal briefing?

   (How is the initial budget to be allocated to each event decided? How is this communicated to the events and brand activation team?)
2. How are costs monitored and controlled throughout the preparation of an event?
    a. When an expense arises that is higher than expected, or even unforeseen, how is the decision made as to whether to proceed? Who has the authority to approve these expenses?
    b. What usually happens when it becomes apparent that an event is going to exceed the budget? If it does exceed the budget, is anyone held accountable, or are there no consequences?

   (When the team requests approval for an additional or unforeseen expense, which factors carry the most weight in the decision to approve or not? When an event exceeds the planned budget, how is this reported and discussed?)
3. How are suppliers usually selected for an event?
    a. Do the criteria vary depending on the type of supplier and the amount involved?
    b. Is there a greater need to seek different quotes for larger items, such as venue hire, audiovisuals and catering?
4. How would you describe the team's culture regarding costs?
    a. Is there a culture of cost-saving instilled, or does the priority always lie with brand impact, almost regardless of cost?
5. Has there ever been a situation where the quality of service or the event experience took precedence over cost considerations?
    a. How is this decision usually made?
    b. How is this balance managed between controlling costs and ensuring the quality and experience expected of the brand?
6. What usually happens after an event has finished?
    a. Apart from the feedback from the survey sent to guests and the comparison of the final budget with the initial one, is there a more or less formal assessment of what went well and what didn't?

7. In the case of events that take place year on year, such as the Team Hyundai Portugal Presentation and the Rally de Portugal, how do the lessons learnt from one event influence the following year's event? Are these lessons documented, or do they rely solely on the team's memory?
8. Is there any aspect relating to the management and control of costs at these events that you consider relevant and which has not been covered in this interview?

Appendix B - Summary of the MCS Package Configuration by Event and Full Supplier Comparisons

The information presented in this appendix results from the analysis of internal documents (budgets, supplier quotations, cost reports), direct observation during the internship, and semi-structured interviews.

B1. Annual Dealership Convention: Supplier Comparisons

Catering and audiovisual suppliers were selected from a list of exclusive suppliers of the Liga Portugal itself (contractual exclusivity).

Venue	Cost
Liga Portugal headquarters (selected)	**6 775€**
World Of Wine (+ catering)	17 960€
Torre Bella (+ catering)	20 680€
Mouco	23 020€
Quinta do Avesso (+ catering)	8 400€
Casa Ferreirinha	19 880€
The Baron's Hall	9 840€

Catering Supplier	Cost
Silva Carvalho	9 730€
Só Catering	10 405€
Casa do Marquês (selected)	**20 780€**

Audiovisual Production Supplier	Cost
Fun Addict (selected)	**3 749,04€**
New Audiovisuais	4 771,17€
Detalhes Sonoros	5 753,50€
AVK	7 180€

B.2. Model Launch: Venue Comparison

An initial round of regional comparison discarded the Comporta region entirely on weather-related grounds before cost was considered.

Proposal	Cost
Sublime Comporta (Comporta region)	13 840€ (accommodation, event space and catering for 70 people)
Spatia Comporta (Comporta region)	25 000€ (venue only)
Onyria Quinta da Marinha (Cascais, selected)	**8 937,50€ (venue only + parking)**

B.3.Team Hyundai Portugal Presentation: Audiovisual Comparison

Confirmed informally with the team: Smart Choice was selected over the cheaper option (Boost Sound) specifically to avoid overloading Boost Sound, already engaged in several projects with the team, and to preserve a working relationship across multiple suppliers, not a matter of price or trust in service quality.

Supplier	Cost
Boost Sound (not selected, cheapest)	1 207,80€
Smart Choice (selected)	**1 559€**
Fun Addict	2 381,71€

B.4. Summary of the MCS Package Configuration by Event

This section summarises the full six-dimension analysis for each event, consolidating the findings detailed in the tables above, in the interviews, direct observation and internal documents.

IONIQ 9 Model Launch

Requisition: 60 000€. Official final cost (Cognos): 58 804,36. Team's internal tracker: 57 822€.

Dimension	Description
Planning	Initial budget of 60 000€ communicated informally by the Marketing and Communications Director prior to the formal SAP requisition, created once main supplier quotations were gathered.
Cybernetic	Team's tracker and Cognos figure differ by 982,36€, within the range consistent with routine costs outside the team's immediate visibility. Final cost remained below the requisitioned amount.
Administrative	Standard escalated approval structure. Confirmed audiovisual supplier was Boost Sound.
Cultural	Two-stage venue decision. Comporta region discarded on weather grounds before cost was weighed, leaving the Cascais option, which was also the least expensive.
Reward	Internal KPI record shows Quality Score 4.5/5 and Final Budget 57 822€ (team's own tracker budget, not the Cognos-confirmed amount) side by side, with no indication that the budget figure affects the bonus.
Post-Event Review	Participant satisfaction survey conducted. No structured, documented debrief identified beyond this survey and standard financial closing.

Annual Dealership Convention

Requisition: 90 000€. Official final cost (Cognos): 66 500,86€. Team's internal tracker: 75 438,33€.

Dimension	Description
Planning	Budget defined through an informal briefing from the Marketing and Communications Director specific to this event.
Cybernetic	Team's tracker sat well above the Cognos figure, a difference of 8 937,47€, consistent with a conservative internal estimate.
Administrative	Formal comparison of venue, catering and audiovisual suppliers detailed above. Suppliers for venue and audiovisual drawn from a list mandated by the Liga Portugal venue.
Cultural	Venue and audiovisual choices converged with cost (cheapest option selected in both cases). Catering choice diverged from cost (most expensive option selected, based on trust).
Reward	Internal KPI record shows Quality Score 4.8/5 and Final Budget 75 438,33€ (team's own tracker budget, not the Cognos-confirmed amount) side by side, with no indication that the budget figure affects the bonus.
Post-Event Review	Participant satisfaction survey conducted. No structured, documented debrief identified.

FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola

Initial estimate: 12 000€. Requisition: 20 000€. Official final cost (Cognos): 28 247,20€. Team's internal tracker: 17 069€.

Dimension	Description
Planning	Fresh initial estimate. Requisition made once supplier quotations were known.
Cybernetic	Clearest visibility failure among the five events. Team's tracker understated the Cognos figure by 11 178,20€. Official cost also exceeds the requisition by 8 247,20€.
Administrative	Standard escalated approval structure. Excess beyond requisition absorbed via invoice-by-invoice approval.
Cultural	No notable episode identified.

Reward	Internal KPI record shows Quality Score N/A and Final Budget 17 069€ (team's own tracker budget) side by side. No survey conducted, no identifiable invited audience.
Post-Event Review	No structured debrief identified for this event.

Team Hyundai Portugal Presentation

Requisition: 9 000€. Official final cost (Cognos): 8 689,80€. Team's internal tracker: 8 715,35€.

Dimension	Description
Planning	Budget inherited directly from the previous edition.
Cybernetic	Team's tracker and Cognos figure differ by only 25,55€, a negligible gap.
Administrative	Audio supplier comparison detailed (Smart Choice, Boost Sound, Fun Addict). Catering retained by continuity, no comparison.
Cultural	Smart Choice selected over the cheaper Boost Sound, not for price or trust in quality, but to avoid overloading Boost Sound, already engaged in several concurrent projects with the team, and to preserve a working relationship across multiple suppliers. This sits closer to relational management than to shared organisational values in the strict sense of Malmi and Brown's (2008) cultural category.
Reward	Internal KPI record shows Quality Score N/A and Final Budget 8 715,35€ (team's own tracker budget) side by side. No score recorded despite an identifiable internal audience, a gap not resolved.
Post-Event Review	No structured debrief identified for this event.

Rally de Portugal

Requisition: 35 000€. Official final cost (Cognos): 36 761,18€. Team's internal tracker: 38 168,50€. 2025 final cost: 35 835,44€.

Dimension	Description
Planning	Budget built line by line from the previous year's figure.
Cybernetic	Team's tracker was already above the requisition before the event took place. Official cost was, if anything, slightly lower than anticipated

Administrative	Guest list managed separately from cost approval. Group dinner comparison. Excess beyond requisition was absorbed via invoice-by-invoice approval.
Cultural	No notable episode identified. Logic appears to be reproducing the previous year's edition as closely as possible.
Reward	Internal KPI record shows Quality Score 4.8/5 and Final Budget 38 168,50€ (team's own tracker budget, not the Cognos-confirmed amount) side by side, with no indication that the budget figure affects the bonus.
Post-Event Review	Participant satisfaction survey conducted. No structured, documented debrief identified.

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