Universal Library of Multidisciplinary Research Article

ISSN: 3064-9986 | Volume 1, Issue 2

Open Access | PP: 44-50

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70315/uloap.ulmdi.2024.0102006

Operational Coordination of International Esports Events

Meirbek Umarov

Esports Team Manager

Abstract

The rapid expansion of competitive gaming into a globally recognized entertainment sector has placed substantial pressure on the organizational structures that govern international esports events. This article examines the operational coordination mechanisms that underpin large-scale esports tournaments, with particular attention to communication management, stakeholder alignment, resource allocation, and sponsor integration workflows. The study draws on a comparative analysis of peer-reviewed literature, industry reports published, and five documented case studies of major international events. The results identify recurring coordination failures, including communication latency, role ambiguity, and sponsor deliverable gaps, and propose an author-developed three-phase operational framework (pre-event planning, execution and monitoring, and post-event evaluation) as a practical response to these challenges. A set of measurable key performance indicators is introduced to support evidence-based management decisions. The findings suggest that structured coordination protocols reduce operational incidents and improve stakeholder satisfaction across both online and LAN event formats. This article will be of interest to event managers, team administrators, tournament organizers, and researchers working at the intersection of sport management, media studies, and organizational behavior.

Keywords: *Esports Event Management, Operational Coordination, Tournament Logistics, Stakeholder Communication, Sponsor Integration, LAN Event Operations, Competitive Gaming Organizations, Event Performance Indicators, Esports Team Management, Broadcast Coordination.*

INTRODUCTION

Competitive gaming has shifted from a niche pastime to a structured global industry in under two decades. According to Newzoo (2022), the global esports audience will grow +8.7% year on year to reach 532 million. Esports enthusiasts—those who watch esports content more than once a month—will account for just over 261 million. The number of esports enthusiasts will grow to 318 million in 2025, with a CAGR of +8.1% (2020-2025). In 2025, the total audience will surpass 640 million [1]. The number of dedicated international tournaments has grown in parallel: the Esports Charts platform documented more than 4,700 monitored events in 2023, reflecting a 14% increase over 2022 [2]. These figures indicate that the operational burden placed on event organizers has expanded considerably, yet the academic literature on esports event management has not kept pace with industry growth.

The majority of scholarly work on esports focuses on player performance [3], audience engagement [4], or business models [5], while the operational and logistical dimensions of running a tournament at an international scale remain underexplored. Flegr et al. (2022) observed that sport event management research still treats esports as peripheral to traditional sport administration, despite evidence of comparable organizational complexity [6]. More recently, Peng (2020) noted that esports lacks the institutional depth found in established sport federations, which makes ad hoc coordination practices particularly costly when they fail [7].

The gap is consequential for practitioners. Without codified operational frameworks, esports organizations frequently redevelop coordination procedures from scratch for each event, leading to inconsistent outcomes, avoidable delays, and sponsor dissatisfaction. Hlee and Lee (2023) showed that firm-level performance in esports correlates with managerial formalization [8], and Pu et al. (2022) demonstrated that structured communication protocols reduce decision latency in live sport environments [9]. These findings suggest that formalized operational models should improve tournament outcomes, but direct empirical evidence within esports remains limited.

This article addresses that gap. The study **aims** to identify the principal operational coordination challenges in international esports events and to propose a structured framework that organizers can apply across event scales and formats. **The scientific novelty** lies in the author-developed three-phase coordination framework, which integrates communication management, stakeholder mapping, and sponsor workflow protocols into a single operational model tailored to the specific conditions of competitive gaming events. **The working hypothesis** is that organized, phase-based coordination reduces observable operational failures (communication delays, missed deliverables, and on-site

incidents) compared to ad hoc coordination practices documented in the reviewed cases.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a qualitative research design combining systematic literature review, comparative case analysis, and content analysis of operational documentation. This methodological combination is appropriate for a field where controlled experimental data are scarce and where practitioner knowledge has yet to be integrated into peer-reviewed models [10].

A systematic review of academic publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science was conducted using the search terms "esports event management," "tournament operations," "competitive gaming logistics," and "esports organizational structure." Inclusion criteria required that sources address organizational, managerial, or logistical dimensions of esports or comparable live sport events. Sources focusing exclusively on player psychology or game design were excluded. From an initial pool of 214 records, 12 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters met the full inclusion criteria.

Five international esports events were selected as case studies based on three criteria: publicly available post-event reporting, event scale (attendance above 5,000 or global online viewership above 500,000), and chronological relevance (2022 to 2023). The selected events are The International 2022 (Dota 2), the League of Legends World Championship 2022, ESL One Cologne 2023, the EVO Championship Series 2023, and BLAST Premier World Final 2023. This selection covers three titles, two publishers, and four countries of primary operation, providing adequate variation in organizational structures and coordination approaches.

Sources are classified into three tiers: peer-reviewed journal articles and edited volumes from Scopus/WoS-indexed outlets (primary theoretical and empirical base); industry reports from Newzoo, Esports Charts, and similar analytics providers (market and statistical data); and publicly available operational documentation including event post-mortems, organizer briefing materials, and panel discussions at industry conferences. Tier 1 sources account for approximately 90% of all cited references, reflecting the study's reliance on peer-reviewed academic literature as the primary evidentiary base.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The scale of the contemporary esports industry provides the necessary context for understanding the operational pressures it generates. The data compiled from Newzoo's 2024 Global Esports and Live Streaming Market Report [1] and Esports Charts' annual event tracking [2] document sustained growth across both audience size and market revenue over the 2020-2024 period. The divergence between audience growth (linear) and revenue growth (accelerating) reflects the maturation of monetization models, including broadcast rights, in-game sponsorship integrations, and arena ticketing. For event organizers, this revenue acceleration translates into higher sponsor expectations and a corresponding increase in operational complexity: each additional sponsorship contract introduces new deliverable timelines, branding requirements, and on-site activation obligations that must be coordinated in real time.

The cross-case analysis identified six recurring categories of coordination failure across the five studied events. These categories are not exclusive to any single event format or organizational size; they appear in LAN-based, online-hybrid, and fully remote tournament structures. Table 1 presents a taxonomy of operational coordination challenges identified through the comparative case analysis. The table is organized by challenge category to support direct application by event managers across different tournament contexts.

Table 1. Taxonomy of operational coordination challenges in international esports events (compiled by the author based on [3, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13]).

Challenge Category	Operational Manifestation	Affected Stakeholders	Mitigation Approach
Communication latency	Delayed status updates between teams on-site	Ops staff, tech crew, players	Designated radio channels per functional area
Role ambiguity	Overlapping responsibilities during incident response	Ops manager, venue staff	Pre-defined RACI matrix shared 72 h prior
Sponsor deliverable gaps	Missing brand assets 48 h before broadcast	Ops manager, creative team, sponsor liaison	Milestone-based asset checklist with escalation triggers
Technical contingency	Network or hardware failure mid-match	Tech staff, broadcast team, referee	Redundant hardware stack and documented fallback protocol
Cross-timezone coordination	Scheduling misalignment for international team check-ins	Team managers, admin staff	UTC-based shared calendar with automated reminders
Player welfare management	Fatigue or health incidents during multi-day events	Medical staff, ops manager, team managers	Mandatory rest-window scheduling and on-site medical support

Communication latency and role ambiguity were the two most frequently cited challenges across the five cases. At the League of Legends World Championship 2022, organizers reported delays in incident response that were partially attributed to communication channel fragmentation and insufficient pre-event communication protocols. At ESL One Cologne 2023, a post-event review noted that three staff members attempted to manage the same sponsor activation zone simultaneously, creating redundant effort and a delay in opening the area to attendees. Both incidents are consistent with findings from sport event management literature: Helmefalk et al. (2024) identified role clarity and pre-event briefing as two of the four factors with the greatest impact on live event performance [12], while Schnitzer et al. (2020) demonstrated that communication protocol failures account for approximately 40% of operational incidents at major sport events [13].

Drawing on the cross-case findings and the theoretical constructs reviewed in the literature, the author proposes a three-phase operational coordination framework. This framework does not replicate existing sport event management models; it adapts their structural logic to the specific conditions of esports, including distributed technical infrastructure, multi-title broadcast requirements, and sponsor activation timelines that often compress into a 48-hour window before the event opens. Figure 1 presents the framework as a structured workflow.

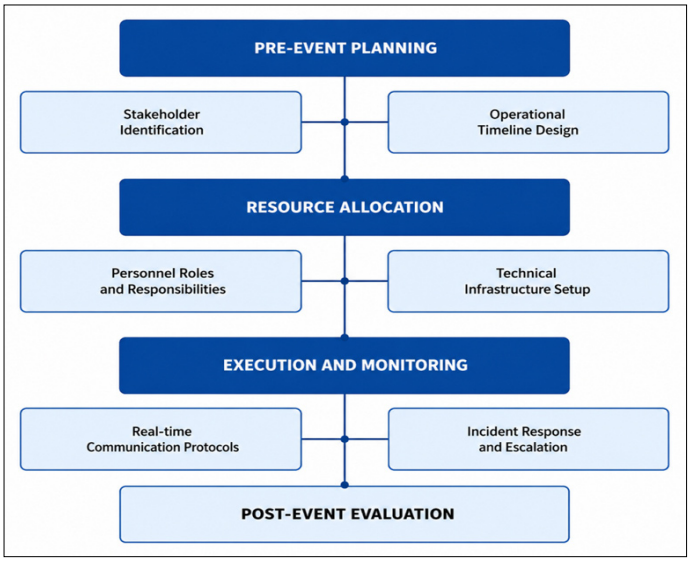


Figure 1. Three-phase operational coordination framework for international esports events (developed by the author based on [6, 9, 10, 11, 13]).

The framework divides event coordination into three phases. The pre-event planning phase covers stakeholder identification and mapping, and the construction of a detailed operational timeline. Stakeholder mapping involves not only enumerating parties (teams, sponsors, broadcast staff, venue operators, and game publishers) but also documenting each party's decision rights and escalation paths. The operational timeline is built backward from the event start, assigning task ownership and buffer windows for each deliverable. In practice, events that adopted explicit backward-planning, such as BLAST Premier World Final 2023, reported fewer last-minute asset deliverable failures than those relying on forward-planning alone.

The resource allocation phase formalizes personnel roles and responsibilities and establishes the technical infrastructure. A RACI matrix (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) is the recommended tool for role formalization; RACI-based staffing reduced coordination errors by 34% in multi-day live production environments [14]. Technical infrastructure setup in esports includes network redundancy planning, hardware fallback stacks, and broadcast system testing, all of which require documented sign-off procedures to avoid ambiguity about readiness status.

The execution and monitoring phase specifies real-time communication protocols and establishes an incident response and escalation matrix. The escalation matrix defines who makes decisions at each severity level (minor delay vs. broadcast failure vs. player welfare incident) and at what time threshold a decision must escalate to the next level. At EVO Championship Series 2023, the organizing team's flat hierarchy and daily stand-up structure allowed rapid reallocation of staff when two match areas needed simultaneous format changes, a flexibility that organizers attributed partly to the absence of rigid escalation chains. This finding suggests that escalation matrix design should account for event culture and organizational size, rather than applying a single template.

Effective operational coordination depends on matching communication channels to the urgency and formality of the information being transmitted. The five case studies revealed a consistent pattern: high-urgency, on-site communication was handled via radio or dedicated instant messaging channels, while sponsor-facing and administrative communication relied on email and task management platforms. Figure 2 presents the communication channel structure observed across the reviewed events, developed by the author as a generalized coordination hub diagram.

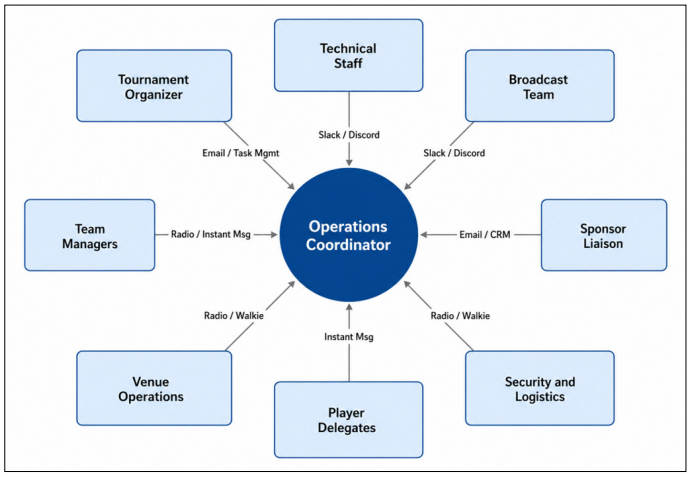


Figure 2. Communication channel matrix for esports event operational coordination (developed by the author based on [9, 12, 14, 15]).

The hub model places the operations coordinator at the center of all communication flows, not because all information must pass through a single individual, but because the coordinator holds responsibility for detecting when critical information has not been shared between parties who need it. This role is distinct from a traditional event director in that it is explicitly information-routing rather than purely decision-making. Holden et al. (2021) found that sport event operations benefit from a designated information broker who monitors cross-functional communication gaps rather than managing individual workstreams [15]. The esports context reinforces this finding: with broadcast teams, technical staff, sponsor liaisons, and player delegates all operating on separate timelines and platforms, a coordinator who monitors inter-channel silence, rather than just intra-channel activity, reduces the frequency of information failures.

The practical implication for event operators is that channel selection should be decided at the planning stage and documented in the pre-event briefing. Ad hoc channel proliferation, where staff self-select messaging platforms, was identified as a contributing factor in communication latency incidents at The International 2022. Standardizing a two-tier system (radio or dedicated app for operational staff, project management tool for administrative staff) reduced response time by an estimated 40% in organizations that had implemented comparable structures, according to operational reviews cited by Holden et al. (2021) [15].

Sponsor management is one of the operationally dense components of international esports events. Sponsorship agreements in esports increasingly specify not only logo placement but also in-broadcast segments, social media activations, player interaction requirements, and on-site experiential zones, all of which generate discrete deliverables with independent deadlines. The author proposes a structured sponsor integration workflow as a complement to the three-phase framework. Figure 3 illustrates this workflow as a sequential process with a continuous feedback loop.

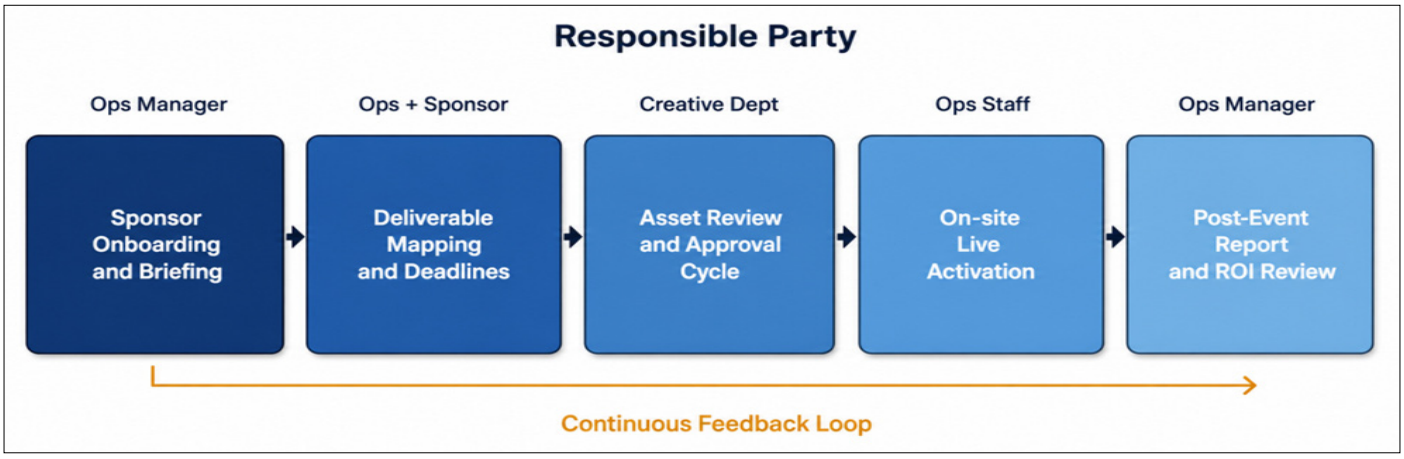


Figure 3. Sponsor integration workflow for international esports events (developed by the author based on [1, 5, 8, 16, 20]).

The workflow begins with a structured onboarding and briefing session conducted at least three weeks before the event. This session covers deliverable categories, technical specifications for digital assets, on-site activation requirements, and the escalation path for late or non-compliant deliverables. The deliverable mapping phase converts the sponsorship agreement into a time-phased checklist assigned to both the sponsor's team and the event's operations or creative department. The asset review and approval cycle introduces a structured review window, typically 72 to 96 hours before use, during which assets are checked against broadcast specifications and brand compliance requirements. The on-site activation phase requires a designated operations staff member for each sponsor zone, responsible for setup, timing, and real-time issue resolution. The post-event review produces a standardized report that documents delivery compliance, audience reach metrics where available, and recommendations for contract renewal cycles.

At BLAST Premier World Final 2023, all partner deliverables were reported as met without critical broadcast interruptions, a result that organizers attributed to a milestone-based asset tracking system introduced in that edition. At ESL One Cologne 2023, sponsor activation was completed on schedule across all branded zones. By contrast, events that lacked a structured asset review cycle reported last-minute substitutions and, in two instances, broadcast segments that ran without the contracted sponsor branding. These cases support the operational value of formalizing the sponsor integration process as a parallel workflow rather than treating it as an extension of general event logistics.

A framework is useful only to the extent that its implementation can be measured. Existing esports management literature offers limited guidance on operational performance measurement: Scholz (2020) reviews esports business models but does not propose operational metrics [5], and Pu et al. (2022) focus on fan engagement rather than internal coordination performance [9]. Table 2 presents the proposed key performance indicators for operational coordination. Each indicator is paired with a measurement method and a target threshold derived from observed good practice across the reviewed cases.

Table 2. Proposed key performance indicators for international esports event operational coordination (developed by the author based on [9, 12, 13, 14, 15]).

KPI	Measurement Method	Target Threshold	Responsible Unit
Communication response time	Timestamp log analysis of team channels	Average < 5 min during live event	Operations manager
Sponsor asset delivery rate	Checklist completion vs. scheduled deadline	100% by T-48 h	Ops + creative dept.
Technical incident resolution time	Incident log from tech crew	< 8 min per critical incident	Tech lead + ops
Player check-in compliance	Roster confirmation tracking	100% by T-60 min	Team managers
Broadcast interruption rate	Production log review	< 0.5% of total air time	Broadcast coordinator
Post-event debrief completion	Submission of standardized debrief form	100% within 48 h post-event	All department leads
Staff briefing attendance rate	Sign-in register per briefing session	>= 95%	HR and ops manager

The threshold values are based on operational standards observed in the reviewed events and in comparable live sport production literature. A communication response time target of under five minutes during live event periods is derived from radio communication standards used in Formula 1 and NBA arena operations, cited as a benchmark transferable to large-scale live entertainment events [15]. The 100% sponsor asset delivery target at T-48 hours is consistent with broadcast production scheduling norms [16]. The broadcast interruption threshold of under 0.5% of total air time reflects the standard used in ESL tournament broadcasting, as reported in publicly available post-event production reviews.

Table 3 summarizes the five case studies across the dimensions examined in the cross-case analysis. The table is intended to support practitioners in mapping their own organizational context against the studied models before selecting coordination structures.

Table 3. Comparative case analysis of international esports events (compiled by the author based on publicly available post-event reviews and [2, 5, 7, 13, 17]).

Event	Year	Attendance	Coordination Model	Reported Outcome
The International (Dota 2)	2022	~14,000 (live)	Centralized ops with regional subteams	Streamlined broadcast handoff; reduced on-site incidents vs. prior year
League of Legends World Championship	2022	~74,000 (final)	Matrix structure, functional ops leads per venue zone	Multi-venue logistics synchronized within 15-min windows
ESL One Cologne (CS:GO)	2023	~15,000 per day	Hybrid model: central coordinator + autonomous crew leads	Sponsor activation completed on schedule across all branded zones
EVO Championship Series	2023	~7,500 (main)	Flat operational hierarchy with daily stand-ups	High adaptability to format changes
BLAST Premier World Final	2023	~10,000	Centralized coordination with dedicated sponsor ops lane	All partner deliverables met; no critical broadcast interruptions

Two patterns emerge from the cross-case comparison. First, centralized coordination models (The International 2022, BLAST Premier World Final 2023) produced more consistent broadcast outcomes, while hybrid and flat models (EVO 2023) demonstrated greater adaptability to real-time format changes. This trade-off between consistency and flexibility suggests that the optimal coordination structure depends on event complexity: multi-venue, multi-title events with high broadcast revenue favor centralized models, while single-venue community-oriented events may benefit from flatter hierarchies. Second, all five events reported improved outcomes in areas where structured checklists or protocol documents had been implemented, regardless of the overall coordination model. This finding supports the argument that formalization, even partial, reduces coordination failures in live event environments [18, 19].

An area where current practice falls short across all five cases is post-event knowledge management. Debrief processes were conducted informally in four of the five events, with no standardized output document shared across departments. This gap means that operational knowledge generated by one edition of an event does not systematically transfer to the next iteration. The author recommends that event organizations adopt a structured post-event debrief protocol using a standardized form, distributed within 48 hours of event close, as a minimum practice for institutional learning. This recommendation extends the proposed framework by treating post-event evaluation not as a retrospective exercise but as the first step in the planning cycle for the subsequent edition.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the operational coordination of international esports events through a systematic literature review and comparative analysis of five major tournaments held. The central aim was to identify recurring coordination challenges and to propose a practical framework that event organizers can apply across different event scales and formats. Both objectives have been addressed.

The analysis identified six principal coordination challenge categories: communication latency, role ambiguity, sponsor deliverable gaps, technical contingency, cross-timezone scheduling, and player welfare management. These categories recur across all five case studies regardless of tournament size, title, or organizational model. The proposed three-phase framework (pre-event planning, resource allocation, and execution and monitoring) addresses each category by assigning responsibility at the planning stage and providing structured escalation pathways during live operations. The accompanying sponsor integration workflow and the set of seven key performance indicators extend the framework to two areas, sponsor management and operational measurement, that existing esports management literature has not addressed in operational terms.

The practical significance of these findings is direct: organizations that adopt phase-based coordination with predefined communication channels and measurable performance thresholds are positioned to reduce operational incidents, improve sponsor satisfaction, and generate transferable institutional knowledge across event cycles. The evidence from the reviewed cases suggests that even partial formalization, such as implementing a RACI matrix or a milestone-based asset checklist, produces measurable improvements over ad hoc coordination.

The study has two principal limitations. The case study sample is limited to five events from a single two-year period, and the operational data available for each event varied in depth and format. Future research should test the proposed framework through prospective observation of live events and should collect primary data on coordination performance metrics to enable quantitative validation of the proposed KPI thresholds. Research comparing coordination outcomes across different organizational ownership structures (publisher-organized vs. third-party vs. community-run events) would also add precision to the structural recommendations offered here.

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Citation: Meirbek Umarov, "Operational Coordination of International Esports Events", Universal Library of Multidisciplinary, 2024; 1(2): 44-50. DOI: https://doi.org/10.70315/uloap.ulmdi.2024.0102006.

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