



**Institute of
Commissioning &
Assurance**

THE HOLE IN THE HEAD - AND WHY COMMISSIONING FILLS IT

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Introduction: A Profession with a Blind Spot

In his landmark 2014 article, “Project Management: A Profession with a Hole in Its Head,” Professor Peter W.G. Morris (UCL) issued a bold critique of traditional project delivery. His diagnosis was clear: project management lacks integrated, experience-informed, and conceptually coherent knowledge. It over-indexes on process and under-delivers on strategy, adaptability, and outcome assurance. Morris’s metaphorical “hole in the head” wasn’t rhetorical - it exposed the cognitive and structural blind spots that continue to undermine large-scale infrastructure delivery. A decade later, the **Stewart Review** and **Crossrail Sponsorship Reports** confirm that these gaps remain unresolved.

What Morris Saw Then

“Managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other.” - *Peter Morris, 2014*

Morris called for a balance of:

- Episteme – Conceptual understanding
- Techne – Applied skills
- Phronesis – Practical wisdom in action

He warned that governance structures unable to integrate all three would repeatedly fail to deliver meaningful outcomes.

What Stewart & Crossrail See Now

- The Stewart Review calls for smarter forecasting, clearer governance, and deeper integration.
- Crossrail Reports reveal fractured sponsorship assurance, late-stage discovery of systemic misalignment, and a lack of readiness ownership.

Both echo Morris’s core insight: process isn’t the problem - outcome blindness is.



The ICxA Response: Commissioning-Led Governance

Where Morris identified the hole, ICxA builds the bridge. Our commissioning-led governance model directly addresses the structural failures he exposed.

Historical Gap	ICxA Remedy
Siloed planning	Lifecycle-aware commissioning from Day One
Overreliance on process	Evidence-based assurance linked to system performance
Governance fragmentation	The Outcome Authority role - strategic, accountable, qualified
Reactive integration	Commissioning as a forward discipline, not a recovery effort

Why Commissioning Fills the Hole - Not Just the Gaps

ICxA's credential pathways embody the principles Morris championed:

- **Clarity** – Codified standards and globally aligned frameworks
- **Methodology** – Grounded in lived experience across systems, governance, and operational transparency
- **Knowledge** – Focused on evidence-led decisions under pressure and complexity



The Cost of Inaction

Without commissioning-led governance, we will continue to see:

- Fragmented oversight
- Flawed forecasting
- Reactive fixes
- Cost overruns
- Public backlash
- Underperforming assets

It's Time to Lead with Commissioning Wisdom

Commissioning isn't what you do at the end - it's how you embed outcome certainty from day one.

As Professor Morris warned, delivery systems must think holistically or risk structural failure. ICxA members, credential holders, and institutional allies are ready to fill the "hole in the head" - with leadership, clarity, and assurance.