



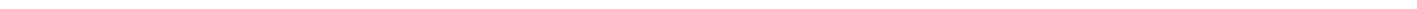
**Institute of
Commissioning &
Assurance**

BEYOND ESG: INTRODUCING SOCIAL TECHNICAL OUTCOME ASSURANCE

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1. Executive Summary

As infrastructure delivery enters a new era of complexity, scrutiny, and social responsibility, the limitations of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting frameworks are becoming increasingly apparent.

While ESG successfully elevated the conversation around sustainability and ethical investment, its translation into *governed outcomes* remains inconsistent and often superficial.

This paper introduces **Socio-Technical Outcome Assurance (OA)** - a next-generation paradigm that advances ESG by embedding stakeholder requirements, lifecycle traceability, and asset system transparency into the DNA of infrastructure creation and operational excellence.

Grounded in the disciplined practice of commissioning leadership, Socio-Technical OA provides a scalable, policy-ready alternative to governance models focused on outputs rather than enduring public value.

2. The Limits of ESG as a Delivery Framework

- **Intent without assurance:** ESG signals aspirations but lacks mechanisms to ensure delivery.
- **Generic metrics, little traceability:** ESG indicators often ignore the technical systems and dependencies that underpin infrastructure impact.
- **Disconnected from governance:** ESG operates parallel to core project controls, rather than embedded within them.

Despite global uptake, **ESG fails to provide outcome-level assurance** - particularly on long-horizon critical infrastructure systems and capital programmes where delivery pathways span years or even decades.

3. What Social Technical OA Offers

Social Technical OA reframes governance around three key pivots:

- **Social + Technical Integration:** No longer treating communities, socio-economic factors, and environmental systems as separate domains. Outcome Assurance recognises that social legitimacy is not just earned—but engineered—through the way infrastructure performs, adapts, and endures over time.
- **Commissioning as Strategic Governance:** Moving commissioning upstream - from late-stage Quality Assurance to a leadership role at Final Investment Decision (FID). This shift enables assurance from concept to continuous improvement.
- **Lifecycle Outcome Traceability:** Demanding a line-of-sight from policy intent and business needs to delivered impact - creating auditable pathways across design, delivery, operations, and adaptation.

4. A Model for Policy, Finance, and Commercial Alignment

Social Technical OA doesn't sit alongside delivery - it governs it. By **embedding commissioning leadership into policy frameworks, investment protocols, and procurement standards**, it enables:

- Investors to de-risk capital by verifying value pathways.
- Policymakers to trace decisions to measurable outcomes.
- Delivery agencies to unify design, risk, and performance.

This is **not a new set of metrics - it's a new mode of thinking:** governance through outcomes, not optics.

5. Why ICxA Is Leading This Conversation

The Institute of Commissioning & Assurance (ICxA) is the only body purpose-built to govern outcomes through commissioning. With a mandate to formalise commissioning as a sovereign discipline, ICxA:

- Anchors commissioning in governance, not just engineering
- Develops internationally aligned accreditation frameworks
- Advances systems-based thinking that bridges policy and performance

Social Technical OA is a natural extension of ICxA's mission - and a call to industry, government, and investment leaders to stop measuring outputs and start commissioning outcomes.

6. Next Steps: Towards Global Adoption

This paper invites stakeholder collaboration to develop Social Technical OA as an open, adaptable framework. Over the coming months, ICxA will host roundtables, working groups, and insights briefings to shape:

- A Social Technical Outcome Assurance Principles Charter
- A cross-sector Social Technical OA Maturity Model
- Pilot projects with multilateral agencies and national infrastructure bodies

7. Conclusion

The future of governance won't be judged by how well we track technical outputs or unverifiable results - but by how effectively we assure planning consent, regulatory alignment, and ESG commitments through evidence-based decisions and traceable reporting across every stage of the infrastructure lifecycle. **Socio-Technical Outcome Assurance is that future.** And it begins by rethinking commissioning - not as a task, but as a system of trust.