



**Institute of
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Assurance**

WHY PROJECT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS DO NOT PROTECT OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Issued by: Institute of Commissioning and Assurance
(ICxA)

Outcome Assurance is required as a governing layer to protect outcome accountability beyond project delivery.

Executive Summary

Project Management (PM) frameworks play a critical role in structuring and controlling project delivery. They provide discipline around planning, execution, reporting, and control, and they remain essential to modern project environments. However, persistent underperformance across major projects demonstrates a structural limitation: PM frameworks do not protect accountability for outcomes. Projects regularly achieve formal completion without reliably delivering the outcomes they were justified on. This position paper explains why this occurs, identifies the governance gap responsible for the failure, and articulates why Outcome Assurance is required as a distinct governing layer above project management.

Purpose and Scope

This paper is issued by the Institute of Commissioning and Assurance (ICxA) to clarify the distinction between delivery governance and outcome accountability. It is intended for project sponsors, owners, senior executives, policymakers, and governance bodies responsible for authorizing capital projects and accepting outcomes into operation.

This paper does not critique project management as a profession or discipline. Instead, it identifies a systemic limitation in how accountability is defined and governed within existing PM frameworks.

The Delivery-Centric Design of PM Frameworks

Project Management frameworks are designed to govern the execution of work. They focus on defining scope, managing schedules and budgets, controlling change, and reporting progress against approved baselines. Success within these frameworks is primarily measured through completion of deliverables and adherence to planned constraints.

While this delivery-centric focus is appropriate for managing work, it does not extend to governing whether the intended outcome is achievable, assured, or realized. In most PM frameworks, accountability effectively ends at contractual completion and formal handover, even though the value of the project has not yet been demonstrated in operation.

Completion Is Not a Reliable Proxy for Outcome Capability

A common assumption in project environments is that successful delivery equates to successful outcomes. In practice, this assumption is frequently invalid. Systems may be installed but not function as intended. Assets may be handed over while remaining poorly integrated. Facilities may enter operation before they are truly ready to sustain performance.

PM frameworks measure completion. Outcomes depend on capability, integration, and readiness. Because outcome capability is not explicitly governed, validated, and authorized, it often becomes an assumed condition rather than a verified one.

The Governance Gap at the Delivery–Operations Boundary

The most significant accountability gap in projects occurs at the transition from delivery to operation. PM frameworks do not define outcome-based stage gates that require evidence of readiness before control is transferred. Nor do they assign a single authority accountable for protecting outcome intent across this transition. As a result, accountability fragments across delivery teams, owners, operators, and sponsors. Decisions to proceed or close are often driven by schedule, cost, or contractual considerations rather than outcome readiness. When operational issues emerge, accountability is retrospective and diffuse.

The Absence of Outcome Authority

Traditional project governance lacks a formally defined Outcome Authority with the mandate to protect outcome intent across the lifecycle. Project managers are accountable for delivery performance. Sponsors are accountable for investment decisions. Operators are accountable for operations.

No role is structurally accountable for authorizing that outcomes have been sufficiently assured.

Without an Outcome Authority, projects lack a legitimate mechanism to prevent premature handover or closure when outcome readiness has not been demonstrated. This is not a failure of individuals, but a failure of governance design.

Why Increasing PM Rigor Does Not Resolve Outcome Failure

Organizations often respond to poor outcomes by increasing reporting, adding governance layers, or tightening delivery controls. While these actions may improve visibility, they do not address the root cause.

Delivery controls cannot substitute for outcome accountability. Without explicit outcome-based authorization criteria, defined evidence requirements, and protected authority to withhold progression, additional PM rigor simply accelerates delivery without assuring capability.

Outcome Assurance as the Missing Governing Layer

Outcome Assurance is a distinct governing function that sits above project management. It does not replace PM frameworks, delivery methods, or technical standards. Instead, it defines outcome-based stage gates, readiness conditions, evidence requirements, and accountable authorities.

Outcome Assurance governs why the project exists, what outcome must be achieved, and when sufficient evidence exists to authorize progression, handover, or closure. It is discipline-agnostic, delivery-model neutral, and applicable across all sectors.

Accountability Must Follow the Outcome Lifecycle

For projects to reliably deliver value, accountability must extend beyond delivery completion and follow the outcome lifecycle through integration, validation, and transfer of operational control. Until this accountability is explicitly defined and

protected, projects will continue to succeed administratively while underperforming in reality.

Project management frameworks remain necessary. They are not sufficient.

Outcome accountability requires Outcome Assurance.