



**Institute of
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PROJECTS HAVE ALWAYS HAD STAGE-GATES, THEY JUST WEREN'T GOVERNING ONES

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

Projects commonly implement defined stage-gates. These gates are embedded across each project phase and are used to control delivery. Typical examples include design completion, construction completion, mechanical completion, handover, and close-out. These points of transition are routinely tracked, reported, and, in many cases, linked to contractual and commercial controls.

These stage-gates are necessary for managing delivery. However, they do not function as governing stage-gates. Their purpose is to confirm progress through delivery phases, not to authorize outcomes. This distinction is material and has direct implications for accountability, risk, and trust.

Delivery stage-gates are designed to confirm that specified activities have been completed and that work may proceed. They focus on task completion, documentation status, and procedural compliance. In doing so, they support control of scope, schedule, cost, and coordination within the project environment.

This occurs not because delivery systems are deficient, but because they are not intended to govern outcomes. Delivery stage-gates measure progress. They do not require a formal authorization decision, nor do they require a named authority to accept accountability for outcome readiness.

Governing stage-gates serve a different function. At these gates, an explicit decision is required to authorize an outcome. That decision must be made by an identified Outcome Authority and must be supported by appropriate and sufficient evidence. Outcome Assurance provides the governing structure that defines these gates, the evidence required, and the authority responsible for the decision.

In the absence of governing stage-gates, responsibility for outcome readiness is dispersed. Delivery teams, contractors, operators, and sponsors each assume that readiness has been confirmed elsewhere. Risk is transferred implicitly rather than authorized explicitly. When issues arise during early operation, there is often no clear record of when, or by whom, the outcome was authorized.

This condition reflects a governance gap rather than a process gap. Efforts to address it by adding reports, checklists, or enhanced handover documentation do not resolve the underlying issue. Information does not substitute for authority.

Without a defined Outcome Authority exercising an authorization decision, accountability remains unclear regardless of the volume of evidence produced.

Project delivery frameworks are structured to manage work. They are not structured to assign outcome accountability. Even highly mature delivery systems will continue to advance without a clear authorization decision unless an Outcome Assurance governing layer is defined and enforced.

Governing stage-gates under Outcome Assurance are characterized by clarity of purpose. The outcome to be authorized is defined. Readiness conditions are established in advance. Required evidence is specified and proportionate. An Outcome Authority is identified. The authorization decision is formally recorded. Progress through the gate is not automatic and may be withheld if readiness is not demonstrated.

Projects rarely establish such governing gates independently. Delivery environments are subject to continual pressure to maintain momentum. Commercial arrangements and schedule commitments incentivize progression rather than readiness. In this context, withholding authorization is difficult to sustain within delivery logic alone.

Consequently, outcome authorization is frequently deferred until operation, when deficiencies are more costly and more complex to address. Outcome Assurance addresses this by positioning governing stage-gates outside delivery control structures and applying them consistently across projects.

Outcome Assurance does not replace delivery stage-gates or project management frameworks. It distinguishes between delivery milestones that release work and governing stage-gates that authorize outcomes. Each serves a different purpose and requires a different form of decision-making.

When governing stage-gates are established under Outcome Assurance, outcome authorization moves upstream. Evidence is planned and assembled deliberately. Roles and authorities are explicit. Transfer to operation occurs through a formal authorization decision rather than assumption or inference.

For owners and regulators, the presence of an identified Outcome Authority and defined governing stage-gates provides a clear basis for accountability. Projects are approved to deliver outcomes. Public safety, service continuity, and long-term value depend on explicit authorization that outcomes are ready. Where such authorization is absent, outcome failure is often treated as an operational issue despite originating from an unmade or undocumented governing decision.

The required change is limited and precise. Delivery stage-gates remain in place. Outcome Assurance introduces a defined set of governing stage-gates, each with a stated purpose, defined evidence, and an accountable Outcome Authority. This approach does not increase administrative burden. It improves clarity, traceability, and accountability.

Projects have always had stage-gates. What has been missing are governing stage-gates exercised by an Outcome Authority. Until outcomes are explicitly authorized, based on defined evidence and accountable decision-making, delivery progress will continue without full protection of the outcomes projects are intended to achieve.