



**Institute of  
Commissioning &  
Assurance**

# COMMISSIONING WAS NEVER THE PROBLEM, ITS SCOPE WAS

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(ICxA)

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

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For decades, commissioning has played a critical role in projects that must operate safely, reliably, and as intended. When applied well, it has surfaced integration risk, verified system performance, and prevented operators from inheriting assets that are incomplete or unstable.

Yet commissioning is often blamed when projects fail to deliver the outcomes they were approved to achieve.

That criticism misidentifies the cause.

Commissioning was never the problem. The problem is that it has been expected to govern outcomes it was never authorized to govern.

Over time, commissioning has been overloaded with outcome expectations created upstream. It has been asked to compensate for gaps in governance, late or unresolved design decisions, compressed schedules, fragmented accountability, and unclear authority for determining readiness. Because commissioning typically occurs closest to the transition into operation, unresolved outcome risk surfaces there. Visibility has been mistaken for responsibility.

This is not a failure of commissioning capability. It is a failure of scope definition.

Commissioning is an implementation discipline. Its role is to produce evidence through verification, testing, and demonstration that systems perform in accordance with defined requirements. It is inherently downstream. It operates within fixed inputs - design intent, acceptance criteria, schedules, and contractual boundaries. Commissioning generates evidence, but it does not define stage-gates, authorize outcomes, or assign accountability for outcome decisions.

When commissioning is expected to guarantee outcomes without a governing framework, it is placed in an untenable position. It is asked to protect outcomes without authority, to make readiness determinations without mandate, and to resolve integration failures whose causes originate well before its involvement.

Outcome Assurance corrects this structural misalignment.



Outcome Assurance does not replace commissioning. It contains it within a governing framework.

This is why outcome failure cannot be resolved by improving individual competence alone. Training, experience, and good intent do not create consistency. They do not survive schedule pressure without governing structure.

Outcome protection becomes repeatable only when it is governed.

Outcome Assurance is a governance layer, not an implementation activity. Its function is to define how outcomes are authorized, protected, and transferred into operation. It establishes outcome-based stage-gates, defines readiness objectives, assigns explicit authority for authorization decisions, and specifies the evidence required to support those decisions. Within this structure, commissioning is a critical evidence-producing function, but it is no longer relied upon to implicitly govern outcomes.

Under Outcome Assurance, commissioning evidence does not stand alone. It is evaluated against predefined readiness conditions at formal stage-gates, and authorization decisions are made by an explicitly accountable outcome authority. The governing question is no longer whether commissioning activities are complete, but whether the outcome meets the conditions required for authorization to proceed.

This distinction is fundamental.

Where Outcome Assurance is absent, outcome decisions rely on informal judgment, consensus, or schedule pressure. Readiness is inferred rather than authorized. Accountability diffuses across delivery teams, and commissioning becomes the default decision point by proximity rather than by governance design.

Outcome Assurance makes outcome authorization explicit. It formalizes stage-gates, separates evidence production from decision authority, and defines readiness as a governed determination supported by evidence. In doing so, it removes from commissioning responsibilities it was never structured to carry.

This framing elevates - not diminishes - the role of commissioning.



When commissioning operates within Outcome Assurance, its outputs gain clarity and authority. Test results, verification records, and integration evidence are no longer treated as completion artifacts or defensive documentation. They become formal inputs to governed authorization decisions. The technical rigor of commissioning is preserved, while inappropriate outcome accountability is removed.

This also resolves a long-standing industry tension.

Commissioning professionals have often been held accountable for outcome failures they did not create, while upstream governance decisions remained unexamined. Owners and regulators, in turn, have relied on commissioning as a proxy for assurance, without a formal mechanism to authorize outcomes. Outcome Assurance closes this gap without assigning blame. It recognizes that commissioning has always been essential - but never sufficient on its own.

By separating governance from implementation, Outcome Assurance clarifies roles. Project management controls delivery. Commissioning produces evidence. Outcome Assurance governs stage-gates and authorizes outcomes.

This separation enables accountability to scale.

As projects increase in complexity, integration, and public consequence, outcomes cannot depend on informal practices or professional heroics. They require defined authority, explicit stage-gates, and evidence-based authorization decisions that are independent of delivery pressure. Commissioning supplies critical evidence to this system, but it does not substitute for governance.

Seen in this context, Outcome Assurance is not a critique of commissioning. It is a protection of the profession's proper scope.

It prevents commissioning from being burdened with implicit governance responsibilities. It clarifies how commissioning evidence is used, where authorization decisions are made, and who is accountable for outcome readiness.

Commissioning was never the problem. It was asked to govern outcomes without authority.

Outcome Assurance provides the governing framework - so commissioning can focus on evidence, stage-gates can be governed explicitly, and outcomes can be authorized with clarity, consistency, and accountability.