



**Institute of  
Commissioning &  
Assurance**

# THERE IS ALWAYS A MEETING WHERE NO ONE WANTS TO BE THE ONE TO STOP IT

**Issued by:** Institute of Commissioning and Assurance  
(ICxA)

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

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On most large projects, there is a recurring governance moment that is rarely captured in formal records or post-event reviews. A meeting is convened to determine whether the project is ready to proceed. Schedule pressure is evident, the participants are experienced, and outstanding issues are generally understood, even if not fully resolved.

In these meetings, no formal statement is made that the outcome is ready for authorization. Equally, no formal statement is made that it is not. The meeting concludes, and the project proceeds. Progression occurs without an explicit decision having been recorded.

This pattern does not reflect a lack of technical competence or professional judgment. It reflects a foreseeable consequence of unclear authority at critical authorization points. Where no individual or role is explicitly mandated to decide, decisions are deferred rather than made.

At such moments, risk does not arise from missing information. It arises from the absence of a clear, accountable decision. Participants face structural disincentives to intervene. Raising concerns may be perceived as obstructing delivery. Requesting additional evidence may be viewed as creating schedule impact. Declaring that an outcome is not ready can appear disproportionate when no formal mandate exists to support that judgment.

In the absence of defined authority, meetings tend to default to continuation. Issues are characterised as manageable, actions are recorded as ongoing, and the lack of objection is interpreted as implicit consent. Progression occurs without documented confirmation that readiness conditions have been satisfied.

When deficiencies later emerge during operation, reviews often find no single point at which the decision to proceed was formally taken. Responsibility is dispersed across a sequence of meetings and participants, none of whom were explicitly empowered to authorize or withhold progression. Accountability becomes diffuse by design rather than by accident.

This dynamic is not corrected through stronger facilitation, more assertive leadership, or additional discussion. It is a governance deficiency. Where outcome stage-gates are not clearly defined, evidence requirements are not specified, and authority to authorize outcomes is not explicitly assigned, decision avoidance becomes the most rational behaviour available.

Individuals avoid assuming unilateral risk without mandate. Groups avoid escalation in the absence of clear authority. Meetings avoid decisions that fall outside their defined remit. The system rewards continuation rather than explicit authorization. Outcome Assurance addresses this deficiency by establishing governing decision points. It defines when authorization is required, what evidence must be demonstrated to support that authorization, and who holds the authority to make the decision. Progression is no longer inferred from consensus or silence.

Under an Outcome Assurance framework, outcomes proceed only when readiness has been demonstrated and reviewed by the authorized authority. Decisions are explicit, recorded, and accountable. Silence is no longer treated as approval, and continuation is no longer assumed.

Projects do not fail because participants were inattentive or unwilling to act. They fail because the governing system did not require a clear decision at the moment one was necessary. Outcome Assurance makes that moment explicit and ensures it is governed, evidenced, and assigned.

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.

