



**Institute of  
Commissioning &  
Assurance**

# **OUTCOME ASSURANCE: THE CURE TO GOAL AMBIGUITY IN CAPITAL PROJECTS**

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## **The Reason Projects Fail Isn't What You Think**

Projects rarely fail at the finish line - they begin to drift off course from the moment the first task is assigned. Why? Because no one agrees on what 'done' truly means. With each team chasing its own version of success, no one is leading toward the real outcome. This silent drift - 'goal ambiguity' - is the root of most project failures, long before the first budget overrun surfaces.

### **Goal Ambiguity**

Each discipline operates in its silo. Designers aim for drawing approvals. Contractors chase punch-list closure. Purchasers issue POs. Operators plan staffing. Everyone can claim success in their lane, but no one's steering toward integrated systems that work on Day One. By the time startup arrives, the gap between what was built and what's needed is vast - and closing it drains time, budget, and morale.

### **What is Outcome Assurance**

Outcome Assurance is a leadership mindset that brings every decision back to one question: Will this asset deliver what was promised - on Day One? If the answer is unclear, work remains. When this outcome becomes the north star, ambiguity fades. Meetings shorten. Priorities sharpen. Excuses disappear. Projects stop drifting - because now, someone is leading.

## Commissioning Holds the Map

Commissioning professionals live by this north star. Their job: prove every component is safe to energize, and every system performs - under normal and fault conditions. They think backwards from Day One of operations, spotting risks others miss: untrained operators, mislabeled loops, or schedule shortcuts that guarantee failure. They don't just install certainty - they govern the conditions for it.

### Frame, Floor, Focus: The Leadership Model

Dr. Benjamin Hardy introduces the 'Frame, Floor, Focus' leadership model in his book *The Science of Scaling* - a business-focused framework that translates seamlessly to project environments. Commissioning leaders instinctively operate with this mindset, having internalised its principles through lived delivery experience.

**Frame:** Frame is how you define the scope of responsibility. A narrow frame fixates on tasks. A wide frame encompasses the outcome. When leaders frame their role all the way to operational readiness, early decisions take on strategic weight.

**Floor:** The floor separates work that moves the project toward the outcome from noise that drags it away. When the floor is too low - or not defined - drift becomes inevitable.

**Focus:** Focus is what remains when the frame is wide, and the floor is high. The commissioning team consistently holds the widest frame and the highest floor - making them the sharpest lens through which the outcome comes into view.

Commissioning veterans have this Frame, Floor, Focus mindset by necessity. When commissioning experts are put in a position of leadership from the first week of projects, they extend clarity to everyone else, all the way to the end of projects. This is the focus needed on projects – right from the start – so there are no ambiguous goals, and projects are prevented from drifting out of alignment. This focused leadership keeps people and systems in alignment, making it much easier for projects to achieve the intended outcome. However, without this alignment, it becomes extremely challenging (or impossible) to bring things back in alignment. Expensive delays and cost overruns are the result, as is the case for most projects.

## **Leading Through Outcome Assurance**

Outcome Assurance is leadership in action. It empowers commissioning professionals to align contracts, procurement, installation, and handover with one unambiguous definition of success. Design errors are caught while they're still just lines on a drawing. Equipment non-compliance is flagged before it ships. Operators train on systems that behave as expected. Silos dissolve - because every evidenced-based decision is tested against the outcome.

## **Lead Project Success with Outcome Assurance**

Commissioning professionals that prove the asset works hold the clearest picture of what success looks like, and what it takes to achieve project outcomes. Claim that advantage by enabling Outcome Assurance right from the start of projects. Projects are too risky to undertake any other way.



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Allow your Outcome Assurance leaders to speak about outcomes at the first kickoff meeting (even before FID), not starting at the turnover meeting. Don't start projects with goal ambiguity – get clarity on how to achieve the outcome right from the start. Remove noise and prevent distractions that cloud the goal and causes the project to drift from alignment. When commissioning leaders lead from the beginning, projects deliver what they promised, on the day they promised. Own the outcome, lead the outcome, and the whole team will find its focus to deliver the intended outcome.

## **Final Call to Action**

Commissioning professionals know what success looks like - because they're the ones who prove it. Give them the authority to lead through Outcome Assurance from Day One. Let outcome alignment define kickoff meetings (even before FID), not just turnover meetings. Eliminate the fog of goal ambiguity. When commissioning leads early, projects deliver as promised - on the day promised. Own the outcome. Lead the outcome. And let the project follow.