



FUJITSU

Are you busy  
delivering  
outcomes, or  
just busy?

There's a lot of people who claim to be delivering 'outcomes' in their organisations; they're constantly busy with multiple activities, filling their days, expending their budget, and delivering projects. But are they delivering outcomes, or are they just busy?

**In simple terms an 'outcome' is the long-term benefit an organisation is trying to achieve. Outcomes are directly linked to your mission; they are the reason you exist; the end result you seek defined by achievement of goals and objectives. In contrast 'outputs' are more immediate activities, tangible artefacts, and are often short-term in their completion. They are the means to an end, but not the end itself.**

Contrary to popular opinion, developing a strategy is not an outcome, it's an 'output'. The existence of a strategy will not deliver on your mission (but it is a great first step). Buying a new data platform is also not an outcome; the technology in isolation will not achieve your mission, but, as part of a coordinated approach, it could be a significant accelerator.

In a disaster relief scenario, the 'outcome' may be to reduce disease and illness by providing clean drinking water to affected victims. The project checklist may include purchasing the water, securing transport, and distributing the water – but these are all 'outputs' – the means to the end. If the water is distributed to the wrong areas, or it is delivered too slowly the outcome will not be achieved. Focussing on outputs alone does not guarantee outcomes.

Outputs are important stepping-stones to outcomes, but only when they are planned, structured, and governed through a strategic roadmap. Activities and outputs must link directly to a strategic objective; they must be coordinated across the organisation to avoid waste and duplication; and they must be monitored and measured. Activity without a clear connection back to a strategic objective is just wasted effort.

One reason we get so preoccupied with outputs is our short project lifecycles and even shorter budget cycles. We create strict milestone-based payment for suppliers requiring them to produce a physical asset in order to be paid. This forces suppliers to think in terms of outputs – short term artefacts to trigger milestone payments. Similarly we create short timeframes (generally a single budget cycle) to demonstrate benefits realisation – we don't allow our projects the time and flexibility they require to be truly successful, so we end up measuring the easy things (which ultimately are the wrong things).

Outcomes often require a commitment of time and resources beyond a single budget cycle. They require more flexible contractual arrangements where deliverables are phrased as outcomes, or at a minimum, as a series of outputs explicitly tied to an outcome. They require contracts to be genuine partnerships between clients and suppliers, not purely opportunities to transfer risk. They require a level of trust, mutual respect and maturity among all the stakeholders where all parties are committed to a common goal.

If you really want to achieve your goals, then focus on outcomes. You'll still be busy, but at least you'll be doing the right things.