The Whys and Wheres of SOS terms

Why does the Self-Organising System use special terms?

Our Principle and Values inspire us to find new ways of organising that foreground transparency and accountability, mitigate power and are based on autonomy and decentralisation. Naturally we also want to keep everything as simple as simple and inclusive as possible, but if we use the language of more traditional organisations, this comes with baggage and assumptions, and will drag us away from our Principles.

We use a small set of special terms in the SOS. These are set out below, together with the reasons for using each term, and other terms that we have considered using instead. We keep these under review, and feedback and advice can be shared with the SOS team via our reception channel on Mattermost or to xrmandates@gmail.com.

SOS term that we use	Why we use it	Alternatives we have considered
Role	This term is widely used and understood. There are no alternatives that have the same usage. We do not have 'jobs' or 'posts' in XR.	No clear alternatives

SOS term that we use	Why we use it	Alternatives we haveconsidered
Mandate	The concept of a mandate is central to how we distribute power across the movement, and the way we use it is entirely in line with common usage. Mandate is defined in the dictionary as "the authority given to a group of people," and that's exactly the way we are using it. This term is embedded in UK teams, and is literally used in every meeting and thousands of conversations. Changing it now would probably not be viewed favourably.	Authority
Purpose	The purpose of any mandate is the end state that the role or team is working towards. The alternatives bring other connotations that we prefer to avoid. For example, Goal sounds like something you would stop trying to do once you achieved it, whereas Purpose is the reason for your existence, whether you have achieved it (temporarily or permanently) or not.	Goal, Aim, Vision
Accountability	The accountabilities of a role or circle are what you are accountable for. They are the tasks that the rest of the movement can expect you to do — the responsibility that comes with your autonomy. Typically you will have to do a lot of other tasks to achieve the purpose of your role, but these are at your discretion. Others can only hold you to account for your accountabilities. Task and Activity do not cover the dimension of expectation and accountability. Responsibility is closer, but still not as clear as Accountability.	Responsibility, Task, Activity

SOS term that we use	Why we use it	Alternatives we have considered
Domain	Domain is a special case of resources. Some resources are not exclusive. For example, lots of teams use the Hub and the resources on it in the course of their work. However, controlling access to specific permissions on the Hub — for maintaining specific information, for example — is not something that we want all rebels or all teams to be able to do. A Domain is something that a team or role has exclusive control over, as part of their mandate. Hence we use Domain as a specialist term. The only other term that has been mentioned is Resource, but that could be confusing because of its wider, more general use.	Resource
Circle	Circle refers to a team that has been created, and operates, within the terms of the Constitution. Frequently we use Team synonymously with Circle, but sometimes it is useful to distinguish a Circle from other types of team (project teams, local groups etc.) It ties into the whole decision making structure of the SOS.	Team, Group
Sub-circle, Broader-circle	This is a simple extension of the Circle term that reflects how the teams appear visually at organism.extinctionrebellion.uk and shows how teams are nested within each other, each having a part of the broader circle's authority delegated to them. We avoid Child and Parent in relations between circles, because it comes with cultural baggage concerning parental authority and oversight. This is exactly the opposite of the autonomy granted to sub-circles, which can decide how they go about achieving their mandate without the broader circle having any say, beyond setting priorities for its wider programme of work.	Child circle, Parent circle

Where and when do Self-Organising System terms vary?

> Any person or group can organise autonomously and take action in the name and spirit of XR so long as the action fits within XR's principles and values. In this way, power is decentralised, meaning that there is no need to ask for permission from a central group or authority.

How groups organise is up to them, as long as it aligns with the Principles and Values (including "We are based on autonomy and decentralisation" and "We actively mitigate power"). There is no requirement to follow the XR UK Constitution, but the advantage of doing so is that provides a set of agreements about how we distribute authority and decision-making across the movement. This provides clarity and transparency so that we do not lose time arguing about who has the right to make each decision.

Many groups - particularly Local Groups, Affinity Groups and some Community Groups - may feel that the full constitution is not appropriate for them. For example, they may not want to commit to having all the Core Roles in the constitution. But at the same time they may want to follow the basic 'pattern' of the Self-Organising System approach. (This also helps if, at a later date, the group circumstances change and it wants to sign up to the constitution.)

To support and enable this, the XR UK Hub uses the same basic structure of data for these groups, but uses different terms, as shown in the following table.

Signed up to the consitution	Not signed up
Mandate	Scope
Purpose	What this group/position is for
Role	Position
Accountability	Activity
Domain	Resources
External Coordinator	Connector
Internal Coordinator	Coordinator
Working Group, Circle, Sub-circle, Group, Team	Group, Team

Groups in the right hand column have not actually received a mandate from a broader circle. A mandate is how a circle or team distributes power and authority to its sub-circles. Groups on the

right simply have their own authority under the Principles and Values (see top of page).

And because there is no mandate for the group, other groups cannot hold them 'accountable' for performing specific activities. So we replace 'Accountability' with 'Activity'. And so on.