Why does the Self-Organising System use special terms?

Our Principles and Values inspire us to find new ways of organising that foreground transparency and accountability, mitigate power and are based on autonomy and decentralisation. We also want to keep everything 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 sos@extinctionrebellion.uk.

SOS term that we use	Why we use it	Alternatives we have considered
Circle	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
Role	This term is widely used and understood in common usage, and there are no better alternatives with 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 have considered
Mandate	Our use of this term is in line with the dictionary definition of mandate as “the authority given to a group of people.” 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. This term is embedded in UK teams, and is used in almost every meeting and thousands of conversations. It would be very difficult to change it now.	Authority
Purpose	Alternative terms 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 mandate are literally what the circle or role is accountable for. They are the activities that the rest of the movement can hold you to account for. 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	A domain is a special, exclusive kind of resource. Some resources are not exclusive. For example, lots of teams use the Hub and the resources on it in the course of their work. So this would not be a domain. However, controlling access to specific permissions on the Hub — for maintaining specific information, for example — is something that we want to restrict to particular roles or circles. So we give them the domain of these Hub permissions. 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
Sub-circle, Broader-circle	We avoid referring to Child and Parent circles, because these come 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