

Collaborative problem-solving glossary

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Introduction

The Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution Glossary highlights terms often used in Collaborative Problem-Solving processes.

For additional terms used in a variety of fields including negotiation, peacebuilding, dialogue and deliberation, restorative justice, and others, see the Other Glossaries section below.

OCDR Glossary

- **Active listening** – A way of listening that focuses entirely on what the other person is saying, and confirms understanding of both the content of the message and the emotions and feelings underlying the message, to ensure that understanding is accurate - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Assessment (“conflict assessment”)** - an information-gathering process to better understand whether to proceed with a collaborative problem-solving (CPS) process and what that process might look like if you do move forward
- **Cognitive biases** - Patterns of thinking that are largely automatic and result in errors in how we interpret situations and make decisions
- **Collaboration** - People, teams, or groups that are working cooperatively to achieve a goal – for example, making plans, designing projects, deciding on policies, or implementing actions
- **Collaborative problem-solving** – A multi-step process that includes consultation, issue assessment, preparing participations for problem-solving, facilitated consensus-building, and implementation - <https://mn.gov/admin/government/ocdr/services/>
- **Conflict** - The perceived incompatibility of interests, needs, and goals (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991); “any place people are stuck.” - Ken Cloke, presentation on *Magic of Mediation: Apology and Forgiveness*, October 16, 2023 at Mediation and Restorative Services
- **Conflict resolution** – An informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (based on [Harvard Program on Negotiation blog post, “What is Conflict Resolution and How Does It Work?”](#)); Conflict resolution seeks to resolve the incompatibilities of interests and behaviors that constitute the conflict by recognizing and addressing the underlying issues, finding a mutually acceptable process and establishing relatively harmonious relationships and outcomes. (Search for Common Ground, www.sfcg.org; also see [Conflict Management vs Conflict Resolution - ADR Times](#))
- **Conflict management** – Either the: 1) long-term management of intractable conflicts - whether at the individual, group, societal or international level - so that they do not escalate out of control 2) the practice in organizations of designing systems to prevent, reduce, respond effectively to and sustain

resolution of conflict - Gosline et al., 2001, cited in Dunford et al., 2020; Ford, 2019; Laraine Mickelson, personal communication, March 4, 2024

- **Conflict transformation** - This term refers to a fundamental change (usually an improvement) in the nature of a conflict--a de-escalation or a reconciliation between people or groups - based on [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Conflict entrepreneurs** – People who make money or have some gain from contributing to conflict or violence; the term is used in conflict resolution/peacebuilding, communications and organizational development fields – from Amanda Ripley, [High Conflict: Why We get Trapped and How We Get Out](#)
- **Consensus** – Using empathy, open communication, reflection and understanding to come to agreement on a topic of shared interest – based on [National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation’s definition](#)
- **Culture of contempt** – A situation where “the other side” in political disagreements are labeled immoral and dangerous - <https://ideas.ted.com/sick-and-tired-of-the-culture-of-contempt-here-are-5-ways-you-can-subvert-it/>
- **Deliberation** – Weighing possible actions and decisions carefully, by examining their costs and consequences in light of what is most valuable to us – [National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation’s definition](#)
- **Design committee or team** - A small group, sometimes of representative stakeholders selected for their roles or expertise, that designs the CPS process
- **Dialogue** – In “dialogue and deliberation,” dialogue is “often defined as a conversation between two or more people or an exchange of ideas or opinions,” especially where people share personal stories, experiences and beliefs with the goal of developing shared understanding and may include working toward a common goal. – based on the [National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation’s definition](#)
- **Facilitation** – The process used by a neutral third party to help people in conflict to listen, talk, and decide on issues (Susskind, McKernan & Thomas-Larmer, 1999); in CPS, this is a neutral third party (see Neutral) who helps groups develop a process design, facilitates meetings, and help moves the group towards consensus
- **Framing** - Framing is the process of defining what a problem is about. Just as a frame can be placed around a photograph, including some portions of the picture, but cropping other portions out, people can define some aspects of a problem as important, while they ignore (or are unaware of) other issues that do not concern them. - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Impartiality** – This refers to the attitude of the third party. An impartial third party will not prefer one side or one side's position to another side's position but will approach them both as equally valid...[which] can be hard to achieve. - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Integrated conflict management system** - An intentional, managed and interdependent system of supports designed to prevent, reduce, respond to and sustain resolution to conflict (OCDR definition)
- **Interests/needs** - Interests or needs are the underlying desires and concerns that motivate people to take a position (see Position, below) - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Listening/active listening** – This is a way of listening that focuses entirely on what the other person is saying and confirms understanding of both the content of the message and the emotions and feelings underlying the message. - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Mediation** – A conflict resolution method conducted by a neutral third party (see Neutral) who works with disputing parties to help them identify and develop options (see Option) and make decisions using consensus (see Consensus) – based on [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Mindset** – A belief that orients the way we handle situations—the way we sort out what is going on and what we should do - from [“Mindsets: What They Are and Why They Matter,” Psychology Today](#)
- **Multipartiality** – Including and working with people with diverse perspectives working toward a common goal; “taking a stand without taking a side” – from [Search for Common Ground](#)
- **Negotiation** - Negotiation is bargaining -- it is the process of discussion and give-and-take between two or more disputants, who seek to find a solution to a common problem - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)

- **Neutral** – a third party who provides alternative dispute resolution services; the neutral facilitates resolution and does not take sides in a dispute – [MN Judicial Branch’s Alternative Dispute Resolution/Mediation webpage](#); [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#) definition of “neutrality”
- **Options** – possible solutions generated by parties or a group in conflict that meet individual and group needs
- **Position** - Positions are what people say they say they want; positions are often either/or statements (see Interests above) - based on [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Performative conflict** – conflict for the sake of news coverage or garnering support for a cause, “to have a prominent platform in the culture war” - Yuval Levin, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute, [Building a More Civil and Collaborative Culture in Congress: Some Diagnostic and Prescriptive Reflections \(2021\)](#)
- **Reframing** - Reframing is the process of redefining a situation--seeing a conflict in a new way, based on input from other people who define the situation differently than you do - from [Beyond Intractability Glossary](#)
- **Restorative circle process** – A process for sharing perspectives and experiences that involves participants seated in a circle, use of a talking piece, facilitation by a “circle keeper,” intentional conversation about values and relationships, process for opening and closing the circle, focus on building relationships as much as tackling difficult issues – from [What Do We Mean by “Circle?” - Living Justice Press](#)

Other glossaries

- <https://www.beyondintractability.org/library/glossary> - Beyond Intractability’s list of more than 200 definitions of commonly used terms in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding fields
- <https://www.ncdd.org/glossary.html> - National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation’s glossary of common terms in civil discourse, dialogue and deliberation, and conflict resolution