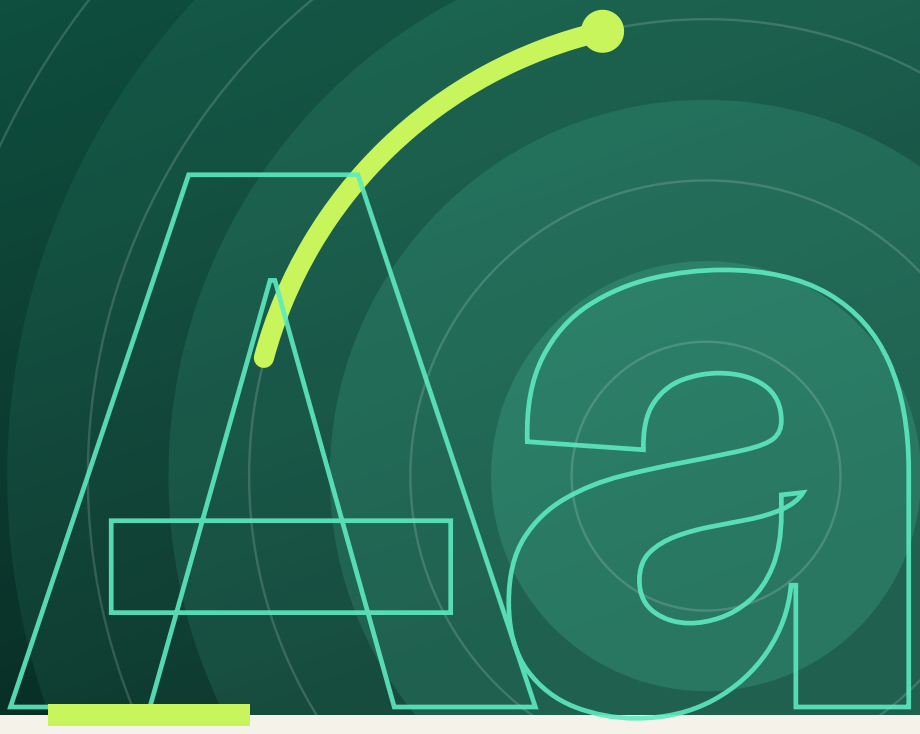

Glossary of Technical Practice

61 terms from the TPBOK, in plain language, each tied to its domain.

International Insignia of Certified Technical Practitioners

22 October 2026

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IICTP Library · Version 0.2. Public draft for comment. 22 October 2026.

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ABOUT THIS GLOSSARY

How to use it

61 terms from *The Standard for Technical Practitioners* (TPBOK™), in plain language.

Each entry shows the domain where the term is used most: **D1** Architecture & Systems Design, **D2** Engineering Governance & Agile Delivery, **D3** Applied AI & Emerging Tech Integration, **D4** Infrastructure & Security, **D5** People Leadership in Engineering. The matching Domain Guide explains the term in context.

A to Z

A

Architecture decision record (ADR) D2

A short, numbered record of one significant decision: its context, the decision, and its consequences. Superseded, not edited.

B

Bounded context D1

A part of a system inside which every term has one meaning and one model. Boundaries between contexts are explicit.

Bulkhead D1

Separating resources (threads, connections, instances) so that exhaustion in one area cannot drain another.

Bus factor D5

The number of people who would have to leave before a part of the system could no longer be maintained.

C

Career ladder D5

A written description of expectations at each level of an engineering career, used for growth and promotion.

Change fail rate D2

The share of deployments that cause a failure needing immediate remediation (DORA).

Circuit breaker D1

A wrapper around calls to a dependency that stops calling it for a while after repeated failures, so callers fail fast instead of waiting.

Cognitive load D5

The mental effort a task demands; a team's capacity for it is limited.

Concept drift D3

A change in the relationship between a model's inputs and the outcome it predicts.

Context window D3

The maximum number of tokens a model can consider at once, including instructions, inputs and its own output.

Cost of delay D2

The value lost per unit of time while an item waits to be delivered.

Cycle time D2

Elapsed time from when a work item starts to when it finishes.

D

Data drift D3

A change in the distribution of a model's inputs compared with its training data.

Data leakage (ML) D3

Information in training or evaluation that would not be available when the model is used, making scores falsely high.

Dead-letter queue D1

A place where messages that repeatedly fail processing are moved, so they stop blocking the queue and can be inspected.

Definition of Done D2

The shared, checkable quality bar an increment must meet before it counts as done.

Dual track D5

A career structure in which engineers can progress as individual contributors or as managers, with equal recognition.

E

Embedding D3

A vector of numbers representing text so that texts with similar meaning are close together.

Error budget D4

The amount of failure an SLO allows over its window (e.g. 0.1% of 30 days = 43.2 minutes).

Evaluation set D3

A curated set of inputs with expected outcomes or grading criteria, used to test an AI feature the way a test suite tests code.

Excessive agency D3

Giving a model more tools, permissions or autonomy than its task needs.

Expand and contract D2

Making a breaking change safely: add the new form beside the old, migrate consumers, then remove the old.

F

Faithfulness (groundedness) D3

The degree to which every claim in a generated answer is supported by the sources provided.

Feature flag D2

A runtime switch that turns behaviour on or off without deploying new code.

Fine-tuning D3

Further training of a pretrained model on examples of desired behaviour.

G

Generative culture D5

A performance-oriented culture (Westrum) in which information flows freely, messengers are welcomed and failures lead to inquiry.

H

Hallucination D3

Fluent model output that is false or not supported by the provided sources.

Hybrid retrieval D3

Combining keyword (sparse) and vector (dense) search, then merging the ranked results.

I

Idempotent D1

An operation that has the same effect whether it is performed once or many times.

Information hiding D1

Putting each design decision likely to change inside one module, behind an interface that does not reveal it.

Infrastructure as code (IaC) D4

Defining infrastructure in versioned, reviewed code that a tool applies, instead of manual changes.

L

Least privilege D4

Giving every person and workload only the access its task needs, for only as long as it needs it.

Liveness / readiness probe D4

Orchestrator health checks: liveness decides whether to restart a container; readiness decides whether to send it traffic.

M

Model card D3

A short record of a model's intended use, performance (including by subgroup), limitations and ethical considerations.

O

Outbox (transactional) D1

Writing an outgoing event to a table in the same database transaction as the state change, then publishing it separately, so the state and the event cannot disagree.

Overfitting D3

A model fitting its training data so closely that it performs poorly on new data.

P

PACELC D1

If there is a Partition, choose Availability or Consistency; Else, choose Latency or Consistency.

Precision / recall D3

Precision: the share of flagged cases that are correct. Recall: the share of real cases that are found.

Prompt injection D3

Text that reaches a model and tries to override its instructions; *indirect* injection arrives through content the system processes, not from the user.

Psychological safety D5

A shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking: asking, admitting mistakes, disagreeing.

R

Recovery point objective (RPO) D4

The maximum acceptable data loss, measured in time, after a failure.

Recovery time objective (RTO) D4

The maximum acceptable time to restore service after a failure.

Release train D2

A fixed release cadence where the date is fixed and the scope varies.

Reranking D3

Re-scoring retrieved candidates with a more precise model before passing the best ones on.

Retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) D3

Retrieving relevant passages at question time and instructing the model to answer from them.

S

Service level expectation (SLE) D2

A forecast of how long a work item should take, with a probability (e.g. 85% within 8 days).

Service level indicator (SLI) D4

A measure of user experience, such as the share of requests that succeed within a time limit.

Service level objective (SLO) D4

A target for an SLI over a time window, such as 99.9% over 30 days.

Software bill of materials (SBOM) D4

A machine-readable list of the components in a piece of software.

Sponsorship D5

Using one's influence to give someone opportunities and visibility, as distinct from mentoring (advice) or coaching (questions).

Strangler fig D1

Replacing a legacy system by routing one capability at a time to new code until the old system can be removed.

Stream-aligned team D5

A team that owns a flow of change for a product, service or user journey, end to end (Team Topologies).

STRIDE D4

Threat categories: Spoofing, Tampering, Repudiation, Information disclosure, Denial of service, Elevation of privilege.

T

Tail latency D1

The latency of the slowest requests (e.g. the 99th percentile), which users of large fan-out systems feel most.

Technical debt D2

The extra future effort caused by code or design that no longer fits what is now known.

Token D3

The unit of text a model reads and writes; limits, latency and price are counted in tokens.

Training-serving skew D3

A difference between how features are computed in training and in production.

Trunk-based development D2

All developers integrate into one main branch at least daily, using short-lived branches if any.

Trust boundary D4

A point where data or control passes between parts of a system with different levels of trust.

W

Work item age D2

Elapsed time since an unfinished work item started.

Z

Zero trust D4

A security model in which no request is trusted because of its network location; every access is authenticated and authorised.

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61 terms from the TPBOK, from bounded contexts to zero trust, defined in plain language and tied to their domain.

Part of the IICTP Library. Every book is free to download at iictp.org.

- Domain Guide 1: Architecture & Systems Design
- Domain Guide 2: Engineering Governance & Agile Delivery
- Domain Guide 3: Applied AI & Emerging Tech Integration
- Domain Guide 4: Infrastructure & Security
- Domain Guide 5: People Leadership in Engineering
- Illustrative Questions
- Casebook
- Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

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