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Reliability, Maintenance, Asset Management. All three terms are used singly and in various combinations to describe what we do. The problem many of us have is figuring out the right combination to use when working with the many groups we deal with every day.

A number of practitioners, most often in the process industries, have adopted "reliability" as the preferred term. Bob Latino, in the excerpt from his book "Root Cause Analysis," points out the difference between reliability and maintenance, noting that proactive work will be more successful in a structured reliability department rather than a traditional reactive maintenance organization.

Some progressive organizations are using "physical asset management" to describe what they do. Top tier software companies are describing their products as enterprise asset management (EAM) software rather than the more familiar computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) software. They view asset management as a higher-level function than reliability or maintenance because of its business orientation and enterprise scope. However, you often receive a blank stare when you use the term with people outside the inner circle of practitioners with this enterprise view.

Although some people clearly distinguish between reliability, maintenance, and asset management, most use the generic "maintenance" as the term for describing the function of delivering productive capacity and ensuring equipment availability. MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY covers the bases by calling itself "the magazine of plant equipment reliability, maintenance, and asset management."

As an alternative to using a name or title to communicate what they do, some groups depend on their actions to carry the message. As one maintenance professional reminded us, "If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, what makes you think it's not a duck?" That approach works, but only if you have an appropriate waddle and quack and the other person knows the difference between a duck and a goose.

Based on the classic communication model of source-encoder-transmitter-channel-receiver-decoder-destination, the problem is typically at the encoder stage. We usually don't get to know the other party well enough to learn how to encode our message so it will be received and decoded as we intend.

The bottom line—we must pay more attention to the people we wish to communicate with and learn what is important to them so we can tell our story effectively. Otherwise, we are playing the children's game "Duck Duck Goose," trusting our identity to the chance call of another player. **MT**