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WEBWORDS 21

A question of balance

Caroline Bowen

Now look at moi, look at moi, look at moi, ploise... I have one word to sigh to you, peoples: foind some balance...

Balance

Maintaining efficiency in the speech-language pathology workplace sometimes seems like two big balancing acts. Whatever combination our workload comprises – clinical practice, administration, teaching, or research – all of us, and all our colleagues, strive to maintain a comfortable, if not perfect, equilibrium between work routines, roles, responsibilities, requests and relationships on the one hand, and the pleasures, demands, distractions, interruptions obligations and relationships of our lives outside of work, on the other.

Well known for raising 12 children (Carey and Gilbreth, 1948), and not so famous for coining the terms *sait* (an avoidable delay), and *therblig*¹ (Gilbreth backwards), exponents in the art of achieving this balance were the amazing time and motion study expert [Frank Gilbreth](#)² 1868–1924, and the brilliant engineer and industrial psychologist [Lillian Moller Gilbreth](#)³ 1878–1972.

Incentives

Influenced by [F. W. Taylor](#) (1911)⁴, and acknowledged as the mother of modern management, Lillian Gilbreth was engrossed in the psychological and personal aspects of time management. She believed that workers are motivated by indirect incentives (for example, pay, conditions, productivity contests, and expenses), direct incentives (such as job satisfaction), and perverse incentives (avoidance of unintended consequences). Although the term was not in her vocabulary, Lillian addressed many of the issues surrounding what we now recognise as [professional burnout](#)⁵, observing the impact on time management of individual fatigue and workplace stress⁶.

Kym Torresi has provided HACC speech pathology services in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne for the last 10 years and is now coordinating the complex communication initiative in this area. **Donna McNeill-Brown** runs the HACC clinic at La Trobe University and facilitates in the PBL Master of Speech Pathology program. **Karen Sharrock** provides HACC speech pathology services in the cities of Moreland and Hume in Melbourne.

Correspondence to:

Donna McNeill-Brown

Speech Pathologist

La Trobe Communication Clinic

Faculty of Health Sciences

School of Human Communication Sciences

La Trobe University

Bundoora, Vic 3086

phone: (03) 9479 1921

email: d.mcneill-brown@latrobe.edu.au

Therblig [noun]

Constituent motions into which tasks can be analysed. In time and motion study, any of the basic elements involved in completing a given manual operation or task that can be subjected to analysis.

Therbligs

- search
- find
- select
- grasp
- position
- assemble
- use
- disassemble
- inspect
- transport loaded
- transport unloaded
- preposition for next operation
- release load
- wait (unavoidable delay)
- *sait* (avoidable delay)
- rest (for overcoming fatigue)

Moral incentive

Moral incentives are said to exist where a particular choice is widely regarded as the *right thing to do*, or as particularly admirable, or where the failure to act in a certain way is condemned as indecent. A person acting on a moral incentive can expect a sense of self-esteem, and approval or even admiration from her community; a person acting against a moral incentive can expect a sense of guilt, and condemnation or even ostracism from the community.

Wounded

Frank, meanwhile, was concerned with the technical aspects of worker efficiency and productivity. Visiting Germany in the early stages of the First World War to install new machines and establish laboratories, his attention was soon drawn to the plight of wounded soldiers returning to Germany. First working to improve surgical procedures, Gilbreth pioneered the educative use in operating theatres of motion picture photography. Then he turned his efforts to the rehabilitation of the soldiers themselves, developing methods of teaching them to compensate for their injuries (many of them were amputees) in order to better manage their daily activities. He and Lillian co-authored a paper presented at the 10th Sagamore Sociological Conference in 1917, called *Motion Study for the Handicapped*. It included a design for a typewriter with all capital letters and no shift key, eliminating the need for two-handed operation.

Therbligs

Central to Frank Gilbreth's work during this period was the study of the seventeen fundamental motions used to perform physical tasks, such as search, find, select, grasp, and position. He created a flow chart that illustrated each fundamental motion. The chart could be used to dissect tasks into their component motions, substitute other motions if possible, and adapt jobs to accommodate the rehabilitation needs of the soldiers.

Right and proper

Lillian's account of incentives did not include the notion from political economy of moral incentive⁷: a tendency for a person to make choices and behave in certain ways when he or she believes that it is the right, proper and appropriate thing to do. Conscientious, committed, empathic, highly responsible people with exacting work ethics, difficulty saying "no", and susceptibility to the guilt trips that can be closely associated with moral incentives, are well represented within our profession.

At the beginning of the retirement process, a life-stage that can last 30 years or more, it is common for caring professionals to search for the "right" way to do it, or to guiltily postpone the search! In early retirement, especially if it has crept up on them, they experience feelings of loneliness – missing work colleagues and clients; emptiness – missing a sense of challenge and productivity; and uselessness – missing the satisfaction of making a contribution.

Style

Redefining Retirement⁸, the cover story by Melissa Dittmann in the November 2004 *APA Monitor on Psychology*, pushes the point that achieving a balance – not just of the banking variety – is at the core of good retirement planning too. The balancing acts don't just go away, but are there in different forms. As the retiree comes to terms with what they are retiring from, and

what they are retiring to, home may feel crowded. Spouses and partners get under each other's feet and on each other's nerves – and relationships, everyday routines, and roles undergo a shake-up, regrouping around a new self-perception and a retirement style.

But as a retired psychology professor turned life transition consultant, Nancy K. Schlossberg (2004) found, there are many paths to retirement, and retirees do not necessarily maintain the same style throughout. "It's an evolving part of your career development, and the longer you live, the more your path will shift and change." By analysing interviews with a hundred or so retirees she identified six categories of retirement style:

- *continuers*: people who remain in touch with work skills and activities, modifying them to fit retirement; these are the volunteers and part-timers who actually remain in their field.
- *adventurers*: those who branch out, diversify and acquire new skills. These are the retirees who learn a language or a musical instrument, or who take up completely new paid work.
- *searchers*: individuals who learn by trial and error, seeking an identity and somewhere where they fit in, in retirement.
- *easy gliders*: the laid-back types who enjoy unscheduled time and like their daily happening to, well, just sort of happen.
- *involved spectators*: retirees who maintain an interest in their previous field of work but assume different roles, like artists who collect art.
- *retreaters*: become depressed, retreat from life and give up on finding a new path – obviously, peoples, Style Goddess Kath Day-Knight would be ready to have the last word on that.

Now look at moi, look at moi, look at moi, pliose... I have one word to sigh to you, retreaters: don't go there...

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Links

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