

# Lillian Gilbreth: Management Ideas on Work - Life Balance

## Abstract

Families are undergoing rapid changes due to increased pace of urbanization and modernization. Women all over the world belonging to all classes have entered into paid occupation. Women's exposure to educational opportunities is substantially higher than it was some decades ago. This has opened new vistas, increased awareness and raised aspirations of personal growth and here comes the need to strike a balance between work and life otherwise it will result in Work Family Conflict (WFC) or Family Work Conflict (FWC). Therefore, this article discusses the management ideas of Lillian M Gilbreth to work - life balance. It reclaims her position in the history of management thought and presents the universal applicability of her philosophy of management in an analysis of her work in scientific home making. Today her ideas are becoming very useful when more and more women are working in the office.

**Keywords:** Efficiency, Ergonomics, Happiness, Home-Maker, Work-Life Balance.

## Introduction

Lillian Gilbreth examines the home and all the requirements of a home maker using time and motion studies. She opens in stating "Home-making is the finest job in the world" and she goes on to discuss how to eliminate wasted effort in the home. She affirms that doing so will lead to more satisfaction, less fatigue, more interest in the work and more free time to do other things.

## Aim of the Study

The basic objective of this article is to bring some of the management ideas developed and discussed by Gilbreth to secure worklife balance in the present context.

1. Domestic Management and home economics
2. Efficiency Technique at home
3. Improving satisfaction
4. Concept of Sharing Duties
5. Work life balance
6. Visual Management

Lillian Moller Gilbreth was an American psychologist and industrial engineer. She was the mother of modern management. Together with her husband she pioneered industrial management techniques still in use today. There is first and most famously, their work on motion study and fatigue, which became the part of the core of scientific management and it also contributed to the foundation of ergonomics. Second and of equal importance is the Gilbreths contribution to the psychology of management. Third Gilbreth was an active teacher both before and after her husband's death and trained some of the most important figures in the business world. Finally in her later years Gilbreth became an important role model for women in management. She used the ergonomics principles in designing kitchen and other domestic spaces leading to the development of yet another new discipline home economics. She was the first super women to combine a career with her home life.

Former ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar said "It is not easy to define work life balance for women managers. You have to give 100% to work and 100% to life, so you have to give 200% to have both in a whole some manner" She added women leaders conviction, capability and confidence are the three Cs that will help them to grow.

Ginni Romethy first women CEO of IBM said, "It is vital to be a role model."

Indra Nooyi former CEO of Pepsico said "The biological clock and the career clock are in the total conflict with each other."

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"I don't think women can have it all, I just don't think so." She added "At the end of the day, don't forget you are a person, don't forget you are a mother, don't forget you're a wife, don't forget you're a daughter."

Like women today, Dr. Gilbreth faced questions related to her roles as a wife, mother, daughter and professional including the issue of how to balance the demands of work women face today ranging from dealing with relatives, including mother-in-law, to resolving budget deficits in the office and from catering to demanding clients to attending to sick children at home.

In the mid 1920's Gilbreth turned her attention to domestic spaces and patterns of work. She saw the home as a work place and home maker as both worker and manager.

Her goals were –

1. Increase productivity
2. Reduce drudgery
3. and accumulate happiness

She disseminated her ideas to thousands of home makers. She began to study house work and home management. She applied analytical methods the couple developed for study motion on a time as well as the lessons learned while raising twelve children made famous in the film *Cheaper by the Dozen* and advocated ways to increase the efficiencies and satisfaction of the household.

She wrote two books. *The Home maker and Her Job* (1927) and *Living with our children* (1928). In them she stressed her belief that "Home should be happy places in which individuals can achieve fulfillment and a degree of freedom" and stated that "wives and mothers are entitled to be effective and efficient managers"

#### **Domestic Management and Home Economics**

Gilbreth collaborated with her husband until his death in 1924. Afterwards she continued to research, write, in addition to consulting with business and manufacturers. She also participated in professional organizations such as the American Society of Mechanical Engineers until her own death nearly 50 years later in 1972. In addition Gilbreth turned her attention to the home despite her aversion to house work and the fact that she had long employed full time household help. Her children once described her kitchen as "model of inefficiency."

Due to discrimination within the engineering community, Gilbreth shifted her efforts towards research project in the female friendly arena of domestic management and home economics. She applied principles of scientific management to household tasks and "sought to provide women with shorter, simpler and easier ways of doing housework to enable them to seek paid employment outside the home."

The Gilbreth's children often took part in the experiments she used to conduct to simplify the domestic work to make sure that house maker can devote some time for additional work both at home and outside. Her concept of "circular kitchen" – a physical layout that reduces unnecessary motion and

improve task efficiency – is known now a days as the "work triangle".

#### **Efficiency Technique at Home**

Gilbreth's desire to apply efficiency techniques to home makers duties did not come solely from an interest in efficiency but also from a desire that they gain some freedom and fulfillment. Gilbreth was described back in the 1940's as "a genius in the art of living".

She is remembered for her role in optimizing home kitchen. Always eager to make life easier for her fellow women. She interviewed more than 4000 home makers and totally redesigned the traditional American kitchen. She made lives better for people everywhere, redefined what is meant to be a career woman.

Gilbreth was not a proponent of strict Gender roles particularly if they were less convenient to the family. "If a man" she writes wishes to cook or perform some other house hold activity, if it gives him pleasure or allows him to relieve someone else who hates that particular task, he should be allowed to do so."

#### **Improving Satisfaction**

Allowing men to perform tasks that were traditionally done by women would not only increase efficiency of the household but also improve the satisfaction of its members because the men performing the task would be free to perform a job he may enjoy as at the very least he would relieve someone else the stress of doing it by taking his or her shift every so often.

Either way, she believed the family unit would be happier without such stark gender lines and pre occupations with conventionality.

Gilbreth was different from most other home makers of her time because her main focus was the happiness of the individual member of the family while most mothers in the 1920's prided themselves on efficiency, cleanliness and luxury of their household, Gilbreth valued the aesthetic things of home. She referred to home making as "housekeeping plus" and the plus being the creativity and indirectly expressed by each member, and what makes a happy home. Her idea of a perfect home included specified areas for things necessary to human function such as rest, creativity, work and study and socialization. The individual happiness of each family member was her prime essential.

#### **Work Life Balance**

She believed that work life balance can be achieved with harmony. She added "Ultimately this was her dream to foster an intimacy between all family members "providing to them (our children) that we can learn by doing, proving that filling the time allotted to us with creating and achieving gives satisfaction and real happiness, making the most of them not as servants or masters but partners, companions and fellow adventures.

The answer to home problems is to teach men, how to combine a career and a home.

At home she took advantage of good plans and schedules but she said "A system is there to

simply things. If it makes you happy to junk it then you should junk it."

And despite what society in the 1920s, '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, and even '70s, might have dictated about gender roles. Dr. Gilbreth did not believe running a household should fall only upon the shoulders of the wife and mother. As a consultant advising national leaders on work place efficiency, Dr. Gilbreth also made popular the study of making the home operate more smoothly, an effort she felt would make men more aware of the challenges she felt should be shared by all in the household.

#### **Concept of Sharing Duties**

In introducing the Concept of sharing duties 50-50, Dr. Gilbreth noted "For the first time, perhaps every member of the house hold will realize it is a problem as his problem as well as the home makers. Doing so, Dr. Gilbreth said, would share the load and free up family members to pursue their dreams and be the best they could be. And that was important, seeing that Dr. Gilbreth also subscribed to this insightful philosophy:

"*The best engineering mind in the family*" she said.....need not be lodged in a masculine body.

Michelle Obama shared simple tricks for achieving walk-life balance "Even when you schedule your family, there is still plenty of time for work, but we do not plan like that, She said, "We let work inundate everything. We have to start setting the priority of allowing people to put their lives before their work." "You have to schedule the balance."

#### **Visual Management**

Lillian was a firm believer in visual management, and she made work visible at home, what we would now call "PERSONAL KANBAN". It has gained a traction in the recent years we can find the undercurrent of this notion in the following quote, from a speech Lillian gave to the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's club in New York in 1930: "we considered our time to valuable to be devoted to actual labor in the home. So we worked out a plan for the running of our house adopting charts and a maintenance and follow-up system as it used in factories..... Household tasks were divided among the children we had three rows of hooks, one marked 'jobs to be done' ; one marked 'jobs being done' and a third marked 'jobs completed' with tags moved from hook to hook to indicate the progress of the work."

This is now a very popular working style in organization and at home. She worked with manufacturers such as GE to help them to improve appliance design in the home with the goal of reducing wasted time and effort in the home. Today this board has become popular among working and non working women along with students who are preparing for competitive examinations.

#### **Conclusion**

Lillians own balance of home and work had taught her not to judge, but to give women the tools to work out to best balance themselves. She sought to reduce drudgery of household chores. Her goal was to help other working mothers find more time for leisure and creativity. She called those moments "HAPPINESS MINUTES".

By adopting the management ideas of Gilbreth work-life balance can be smoothly achieved and home can be transformed in to happy places with high happiness index of all family members.

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