

New research into productivity could allow surgeons to perform an extra 53 operations a year

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Surgical teams could save enough time in each procedure to execute 53 extra operations a year, finds new research from Trinity Business School.

According to the research, organising surgical teams based on 'horizontal familiarity' – such as surgeons working with other surgeons that they are familiar with, and sub-team members knowing one another – can boost productivity and improve performance.

The researchers, Profs. Yufei Huang at Trinity Business School, Emmanouil Avgerinos at IE Business School, IE University and Ioannis Fragkos at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, also found that including team members who have experience of failure can also boost performance as these individuals are likely to want to improve their approach to operations and ultimately increase their knowledge and understanding.

From analysing 6,206 cardiac operations at a private hospital in Europe, the researchers found that horizontal familiarity among surgeons saved up to 18.37 minutes, which works out to 1.84 hours a month, leading to enough time for an extra 53.11 operations per year.

According to the research however, 'vertical familiarity' – familiarity amongst team members on different levels – is less likely to improve productivity or performance due to the inherent hierarchy in surgical teams, leading to less communication between surgeons and less senior team members.

The researchers suggest that this research could also be applied to other high stakes professions such as accident investigators, fire fighters and air crews.

It could also be harnessed to improve productivity and efficiency in surgical operations at a time when it is needed most, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yufei Huang, Associate Professor in Operations Management at Trinity Business School says:

"While the healthcare industry often focuses on developing new technologies or new medicines, the management aspect is also very important. If we do the management well, it can significantly improve productivity and performance."

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