

# Complex interventions - Exploring the application of behaviour change theory to doctoral supervisor training

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## Doctoral students' health, wellbeing and happiness

**Context:** Doctoral supervision affects student health, wellbeing and happiness (1).  
Doctoral supervision is complex & consists of many specific behaviours (2,3,4,5).  
To create desired supervisory behaviours, we need complex intervention = doctoral supervisor trainings (6).

**Framework:** Com-B model (7)

- ➔ identify **capabilities**, **opportunities** & **motivations** that underpin supervisor behaviours
- ➔ design research supervisor training programme
- ➔ develop criteria to measure & evaluate effectiveness of training programme

**Aim:** Explore application of COM-B framework to doctoral supervisor training



Michie et al. (2011)

## Doctoral Supervisor Training

**When:** 3 afternoon sessions over 3 months

**Who:** Aimed at inexperienced doctoral supervisors;  
Delivered by experienced research-active supervisors & guest speakers

**What does it do:** Increase confidence, motivation, key supervisory behaviours covering the whole *supervisory journey*

**How - Sources of learning:**

**Pedagogic & psychological research:** doctoral pedagogy (3,4,5); biases in decision-making (8), Behaviour Change literature (7)

**Regulations:** local university, research councils, stakeholder interests; "global research education market" (9)

**Activities:** lectures, role play, problem-based learning, reflection, observation, peer discussion

**Supervisory journey**  
from deciding who to enrol, managing supervisory relationship, progress monitoring etc to post-viva dissemination & career support

## Methods & Results

**Questionnaires:** Given to N=87 supervisors at end of training; 70% returned completed questionnaires.

**Results:** >> Majority of supervisors reported increase in their knowledge, capabilities and confidence as a result of training.  
>> Minority asked for more exposure to actual supervisory practice.  
>> Many supervisors highlighted exchange & discussion with colleagues from different subject areas / types of doctoral program as useful and motivational.

## Take Home Messages

- ✓ **Behaviour change framework** provides a promising strategy for creating, implementing and evaluating doctoral supervisor trainings
- ✓ **Desired supervisory behaviours can** be created by improving staff **capabilities, confidence and motivation** through training  
- and by improving **opportunities**
- ✓ **Further research** is underway to test the long-term effects of supervisory training on supervisory behaviours **and** on the health, wellbeing and happiness of doctoral students.

**REFERENCES – please email me for details: s.lipka@derby.ac.uk**

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Pharrell Williams - Happy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6Sxv-sUYtM>

MSc Behaviour Change, University of Derby

<http://www.derby.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/behaviour-change-msc/>

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To cite this poster:

Lipka, S. (2018). Complex interventions - Exploring the application of behaviour change theory to doctoral supervisor training. Poster presented at the CBC Digital Health Conference 2018: Behaviour Change for Health: Digital and Beyond, 21-22 February 2018, London.

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- (9) McCallin, A., & Nayar, S. (2012). Postgraduate research supervision: a critical review of current practice, *Teaching in Higher Education, 17(1)*, 63-74.

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