

## The Hidden Forces Behind Behavior



Why do you decide to go for a run, recycle a bottle, or speak up in a meeting? It might feel like a spur-of-the-moment choice—but science says otherwise.

### The Origin of the Theory

In the 1970s, social psychologists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen developed the Theory of Reasoned Action to explain the link between what people believe and how they behave. A few years later, Ajzen noticed something missing. People often intend to act but hesitate or hold back when they don't feel competent. To capture this added dimension, he expanded the framework in 1985 into what we now call the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

By 1991, the model was fully formalized, and it has since become one of the most widely used tools in behavioral science. It's been applied to health choices like quitting smoking, environmental behaviors like recycling, and even large-scale organizational change.

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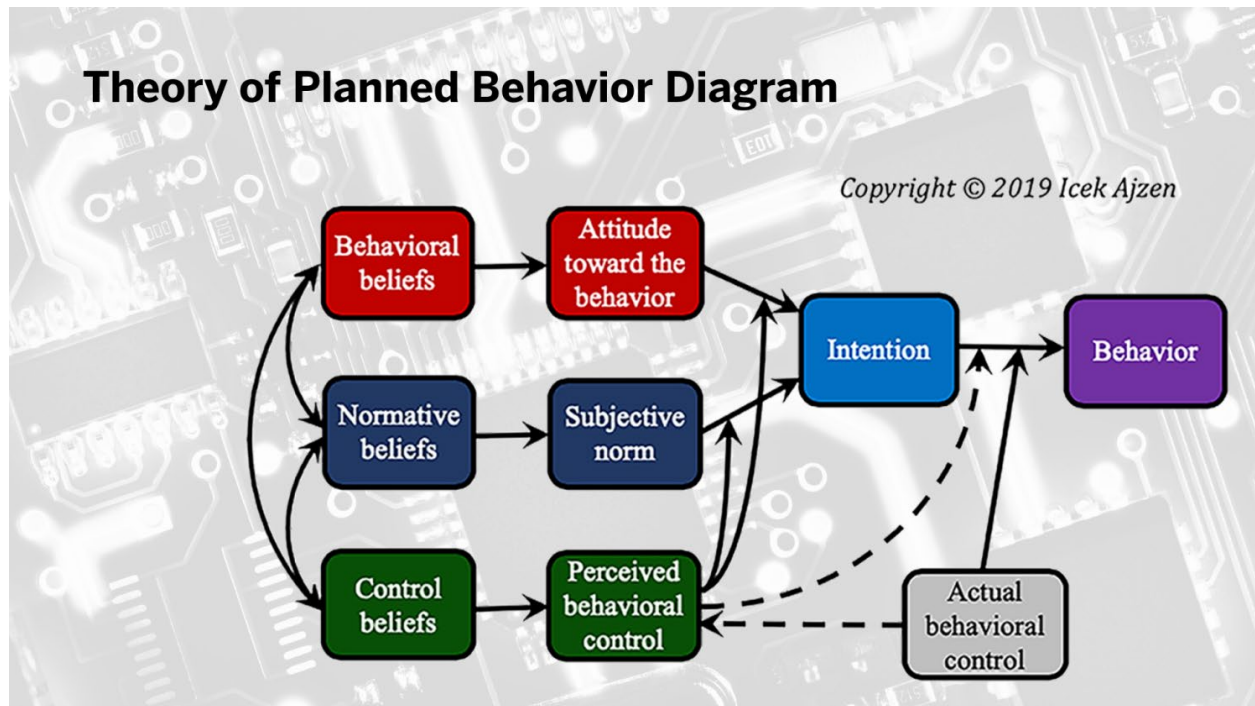
### The Science Behind It

The theory highlights three main forces that shape our actions:

- **Attitude** – how we personally view the behavior, whether positively or negatively.
- **Subjective Norms** – the social pressure we feel from others to act (or not act).

- **Perceived Behavioral Control** – the level of confidence we have in our ability to follow through.

These three influences shape our intentions, which in turn drive much of what we actually do. Put simply, tomorrow's actions usually begin with today's beliefs, expectations, and sense of control.



*Theory of Planned Behavior Diagram by Icek Ajzen (Copyright © 2019)*

### Everyday Example

Consider something as ordinary as going to the gym.

- If you believe exercise is good for your health (**Attitude**),
- And your friends encourage you to join them (**Subjective Norm**),
- And you feel confident you can handle the workout (**Perceived Behavioral Control**), you're far more likely to go.

On the other hand, if you dread exercise, no one in your circle values it, or you doubt your ability to complete the workout, you're more likely to stay home. The same three factors that influence this simple decision apply to much higher-stakes choices.

## Aviation Example

Take the decision of whether to perform a go-around during a challenging approach.

- If a captain views go-arounds as a professional, safety-first choice rather than a failure (**Attitude**),
- And the company culture encourages speaking up and supports conservative decision-making (**Subjective Norm**),
- And both pilots feel fully capable of executing the maneuver safely (**Perceived Behavioral Control**), then a go-around is far more likely to happen.

But if any of these factors point in the other direction, the crew may press on—sometimes with tragic results.

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## Takeaway

The Theory of Planned Behavior helps explain why safe intentions don't always translate into safe actions. Over the next six weeks, we'll explore each factor in detail—starting with **Attitude**, the foundation of how our beliefs shape the choices we make.

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## References

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