

Confidence, Control, and the Choices We Make



Have you ever wanted to do the right thing, but felt the odds were stacked against you? That space between intention and action is where *Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)* comes in.

Ajzen (1991) described PBC as our belief in how easy or difficult it will be to perform a behavior. It blends two things:

- **Self-efficacy** (confidence in one's ability), and
- **Controllability** (whether external factors support or block action).

Research has shown that PBC doesn't just predict whether people act—it also strengthens the intention to try. For example, a meta-analysis by Armitage & Conner (2001) found that perceived control significantly improves the prediction of health behaviors such as exercise, diet, and smoking cessation. In other words, if people believe they *can* do something, they are far more likely to attempt and sustain it.

Everyday Examples

- **Fitness.** Many people intend to exercise regularly. But if they don't feel confident using gym equipment—or if the nearest facility is too far away—the intention fades.

- **Healthy eating.** Someone may want to cook at home, but without time, skills, or access to fresh food, the behavior stalls.
- **Driving in bad weather.** A cautious driver may *intend* to take the highway, but if icy conditions feel overwhelming, they'll change their plan.

We all know the frustration of good intentions that never materialize—not because we didn't care, but because the situation felt outside our control.

Aviation Examples

In aviation, this gap can be dangerous:

- **Pilot decision-making.** A captain may intend to divert for fuel, but if they believe dispatch won't support the decision—or if alternate airports seem too complex—they may press on.
 - **Maintenance actions.** A technician may want to ground an aircraft for a discrepancy, but without the right tools, parts, or organizational backing, they may sign it off.
 - **Crew communication.** A first officer may spot a hazard, but if they doubt they can speak up without reprisal, they may stay silent.
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Why it Matters for Safety

Attitudes and norms matter, but without perceived control, they're not enough. In fact, Ajzen (2002) emphasized that when people feel low control, even strong intentions may not lead to action. For safety leaders, this is a wake-up call: if professionals don't feel capable—or supported—safe behavior may never happen.

What Leaders Can Do

- **Train for pressure.** Scenario-based training builds confidence in handling the unexpected.
- **Provide resources.** Staffing, tools, training, and time make safe choices realistic.
- **Reinforce support.** When leaders back up diversion decisions, delay calls, or “speak-up” moments, they increase confidence across the team.

When professionals believe they *can* act safely—and that the system will support them—safe intentions become safe behaviors.

Looking Ahead

Next week, we'll wrap up this series by connecting the dots: how attitudes, social norms, and perceived control combine to predict behavior—and what aerospace leaders can do to influence them all.

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References

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