

The Theory of Planned Behavior: Putting It All Together



Over the past few weeks, we've explored each element of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB):

- **Attitudes** – how personal beliefs and evaluations shape our intentions.
- **Subjective Norms** – the social pressures, spoken or unspoken, that influence our choices.
- **Perceived Behavioral Control** – the sense of confidence (and resources) that determines whether we can follow through.

Now it's time to connect the dots.

According to Ajzen's model, these three forces don't operate in isolation. They interact—sometimes reinforcing each other, sometimes pulling in different directions—to predict whether someone will actually perform a behavior.

Think about it:

- A person may **believe** (attitude) that eating healthier is important.
- Their friends and family may **encourage** (norms) them to cook more meals at home.
- But if they can't afford fresh groceries or don't feel confident in the kitchen, their **perceived control** is low—and they may default to fast food.

The same dynamic plays out in aviation:

- A pilot may **believe** that filing a fatigue report is important (attitude).
- They may **sense** that colleagues and leaders expect them to speak up (norms).
- However, if they fear retaliation or are unsure how to access the reporting system, their **perceived control** is low—and the report may never be filed.

When all three align, behavior becomes much more predictable. That's where leaders come in.

Aerospace leaders can strengthen each link in the chain:

- **Shape Attitudes** - In daily life, people are more likely to exercise when they truly believe it improves their mood and energy—not just their long-term health. In aerospace, leaders can utilize real safety data and personal stories to help crews *recognize* the immediate benefits of taking safe actions. When people understand *why* a procedure matters, their attitude shifts from one of compliance to one of commitment.
- **Set Norms** - Social proof is powerful. When friends put their phones away at dinner, it feels natural to do the same. In flight departments, leaders set the tone. When captains consistently model checklist discipline, or when managers openly praise team members who raise concerns, norms solidify around speaking up and following procedures. The unspoken message becomes clear: *This is just how we do things here.*
- **Increase Control** - Even the best intentions fade without the right tools. A student may want to prepare for an exam, but without access to notes or a quiet place to study, their plan quickly unravels—and when friends invite them out, the pull to socialize can easily override the intention to study. Similarly, an operator may encourage safety reports, but if the system is clunky, confidential feedback isn't possible, or time pressures are overwhelming, people won't follow through. Leaders can reduce friction by simplifying reporting, ensuring easy access to resources, and training staff until safe actions feel second nature.
- **Reinforce and Sustain** - Motivation spikes when people feel supported. A student who receives encouragement from a teacher is more likely to persist, even when the subject is challenging. In aerospace, recognition matters too. Leaders who acknowledge safe choices—whether with a quick thank-you, public recognition, or

system-wide rewards—help sustain long-term commitment. Over time, these reinforcements build a culture where safe behavior is not only expected but also valued.

Looking Ahead

This concludes our series on the Theory of Planned Behavior. As aerospace organizations continue building strong safety cultures, TPB reminds us that behavior is never random—it is shaped, nudged, and enabled. Leaders who understand these dynamics can guide their teams toward consistently safer outcomes. Download our [infographic here](#).

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References

- Ajzen, I. (1985). *From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior*. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckmann (Eds.)