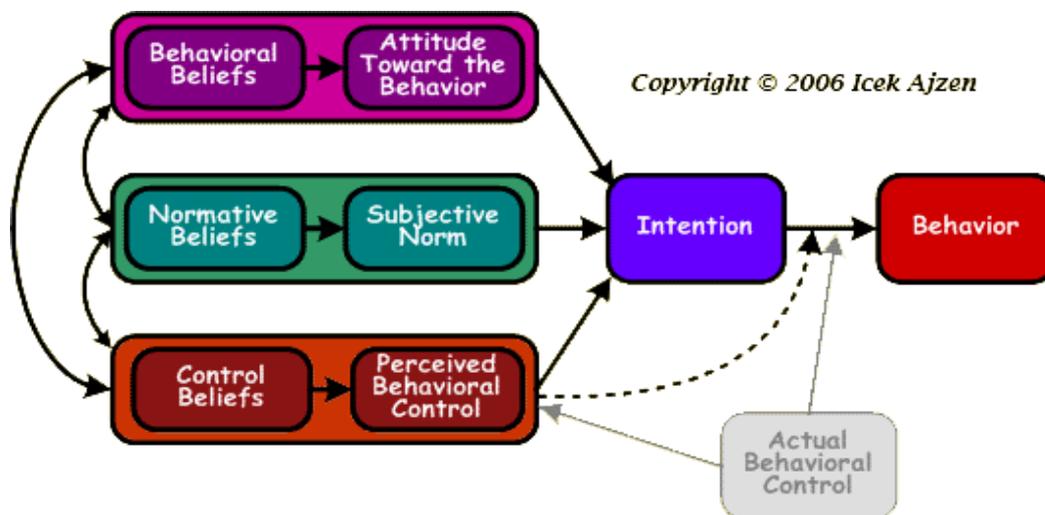


June 2016: Why do we take risks?

One of the many health and safety challenges organisations must understand, embrace and meet full-on is why people take risk and/or cut corners? Human instinct has developed such that if the safe and designed way of carrying out a task is slow, inconvenient or uncomfortable then at-risk behaviour will be evidenced through:

- A low perception of risk where people do not accurately perceive or calculate the degree of risk they face (ie they are making a conscious decision which is incorrect for the situation). This low perception of risk can be reinforced when the organisation focusses on zero injuries and defines success as the absence of injuries, which reinforces the perception of people that if they don't get hurt it must therefore be safe!
- (Bad) habits which are behavioural routines that occur unconsciously or involuntarily. To change a habit there must be a change in what prompts it (the antecedent) or the consequences that result
- Barriers such as poorly written procedures which are difficult to comply with, leading to non-compliance
- PPE not available or utilised incorrectly
- Use of incorrect tools and equipment

There has been much research and analysis of human behaviour, amongst them Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour.



Ajzen found that the best predictor of behaviour is intention. Intention is an indication of a person's readiness to perform a given behaviour, where the behaviour is the observable response in a given situation.

Ajzen found our intention is informed by three inter-related inputs:

1. Attitude – beliefs that link the behaviour of interest to expected outcomes and the (individual) subjective assessment of the probability that the behaviour produces the desired outcome. The "better the feeling" the greater the likelihood of adopting the desired behaviour

2. Norms – the perceived behavioural expectation informed by key stakeholders (colleagues, managers, etc) and the perceived social pressure to engage or not to engage in a behaviour
3. Control – Perceived presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of a behaviour and individual perceptions of their ability to perform a given behaviour and their confidence in performing the change and overcoming the process hurdles they might face.

As a general rule, the more favourable the attitude and the subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger the person's intention to perform the behaviour in question will be.

Relating this back to health and safety performance, leaders must create a working environment and organisational culture where employees are trusted and feel confident to contribute. This means involving employees in developing and reviewing procedures and safe systems of work as well as the procurement of equipment and PPE. Remember the people that carry out the task are the 'experts' and with guidance and collaboration from managers the workplace can be designed to ensure the safe and desired way of carrying out a task is easy, convenient and comfortable.

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

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