



Original

The prediction of workers' food safety intentions and behavior with job attitudes and the reasoned action approach¹

Verlin B. Hinsz^{a,*}, Gary S. Nickell^b^a North Dakota State University, U.S.A.^b Minnesota State University Moorhead, U.S.A.

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ABSTRACT

The production of safe food is an important objective for many food-processing facilities given the health and organizational costs of food contamination. This investigation examines how reasoned action and job attitudes approaches can predict factors that contribute to the production of safe food. The reasoned action approach suggests these behaviors are predicted by perceived behavioral control and intentions to engage in food safety behaviors, and that these intentions are anticipated by attitudes regarding the behaviors and perceived social norms to engage in food safety behaviors. The job attitudes approach examined how job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment could predict worker's self-reported efforts to provide safe food. A survey of workers at a poultry producing facility indicates that the job attitudes and the reasoned action variables were all predictive of food safety behaviors, however, further analyses indicate that workers' reports of their food safety intentions and behaviors were best predicted by the reasoned action approach with job attitudes failing to add to the prediction of food safety. Implications for other behaviors involving safety and security are discussed.

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La predicción de la intención y el comportamiento de los trabajadores en seguridad alimentaria desde las actitudes laborales y el modelo de acción razonada

RESUMEN

La producción de alimentos seguros constituye un objetivo importante de los servicios de procesamiento de alimentos en vista de los costes sanitarios y organizativos de la contaminación alimentaria. Este estudio analiza de qué modo los enfoques de la acción razonada y de las actitudes laborales pueden predecir factores que contribuyan a la producción de alimentos seguros. El enfoque de la acción razonada señala que estos comportamientos los predice la percepción del control e intención comportamentales de implicarse en comportamientos seguros y que esta intención la anticipan las actitudes relativas a los comportamientos y percepción de normas sociales de compromiso con los comportamientos alimentarios seguros. El enfoque de actitudes laborales analiza en qué medida la satisfacción, la implicación laboral y el compromiso con la organización pueden predecir el esfuerzo manifestado por el trabajador para producir alimentos seguros. La encuesta aplicada a los empleados de una empresa avícola indica que las variables de actitudes laborales y de acción razonada predecían los comportamientos de seguridad alimentaria, si bien un análisis más a fondo indica que la manifestación de los trabajadores con respecto a su intención y comportamiento sobre seguridad alimentaria se predecían mejor desde el enfoque de acción razonada, mientras que las actitudes laborales no aportaban predicción de seguridad alimentaria. Se comentan las implicaciones para otros comportamientos referidos a la seguridad (sanitaria y jurídica).

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Palabras clave:

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Implicación laboral

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* Corresponding author: Department of Psychology, Dept 2765, North Dakota State University, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.
E-mail address: Verlin.Hinsz@NDSU.edu (V.B. Hinsz).

An emerging concern in organizations is the impact of safety and security behaviors by employees (Bitzer, Chen, & Johnston, 2009; Hinsz & Nickell, 2004). The provision of safety and security by organizational members is important for retailers (e.g., shoplifting), military installations (e.g., sentry duty), schools (e.g., external person shooting), food service (e.g., food poisoning), and public events (e.g., marathons). However, safety and security are qualitatively different from other classes of behavior associated with performance (e.g., quantity, quality; Hinsz & Nickell, 2004). The outcome of performing appropriate safety and security behaviors is that no negative outcomes arise. The negative outcomes might not arise without safety and security behaviors, but performing safety and security behaviors makes it less likely that the negative outcomes occur. Therefore, safety and security behaviors may be considered important aspects of performance to be assessed, rather than the observable quantity produced. If safety and security behaviors are the important criteria, then to achieve those behaviors, it may be very useful to focus on understanding the predictors of the safety and security behaviors (Hinsz & Nickell, 2004).

Intentions and reasoned action

The prediction of behaviors such as those involved in safety and security should be amenable to models of behavioral prediction used for other behaviors (e.g., turnover, Hinsz & Nelson, 1990; goal pursuit, Hinsz & Ployhart, 1998). In particular, the reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) may serve as a foundation for conceptualizing safety and security behaviors (cf., Hinsz, Nickell, & Park, 2007; Nickell & Hinsz, 2015). A substantial body of research supports the reasoned action approach (see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, for a partial review as well as Armitage & Conner, 2001 and Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988, for meta-analyses). The research reported here is concerned with the application of the reasoned action approach to the behavior of people at work in organizational settings. The reasoned action approach has been routinely applied to social and health behaviors (Ajzen, Albarracín, & Hornik, 2007; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In organizational settings, the reasoned action approach has been applied to technology adoption (Morris, Venkatesh, & Ackerman, 2005), turnover intentions (Hinsz & Nelson, 1990), employee commitment, (Becker, Randall, & Riegel, 1995), and a variety of workplace health behaviors (e.g., Blue, Wilbur, & Marston-Scott, 2001; Borland, Owen, Hill, & Schofield, 1991).

An important feature of the reasoned action approach is that intentions are considered the immediate precursors of the behaviors people perform. These intentions are people's judgments about the likelihood that they will or will not engage in the behavior as it is defined. As a reasoned action, this approach assumes that people determine and intend to engage in behaviors that they chose. Consequently, what are considered safety and security outcomes are influenced by the behaviors of individuals. These individuals have intentions to engage in the behaviors as a function of their dispositions, beliefs, and experiences. In particular, according to the reasoned action approach, intentions are predicted by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (see Figure 1).

The attitudes of organizational members play important roles in their behaviors on behalf of the organization (Brief, 1998). However, the impact of attitudes toward different kinds of work behavior is not as strong as some might expect (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). There are a number of reasons why work-related attitudes are not highly predictive of work behaviors. Clearly, issues of poor measurement haunt research involving attitudes and behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Additionally, research demonstrates that a correspondence in the specificity of the attitudes and behaviors is required (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). If the

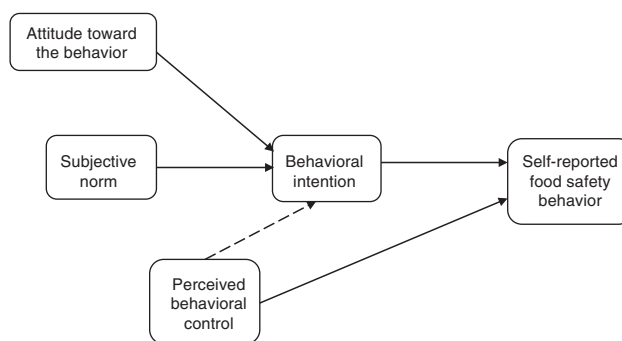


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationships of reasoned action approach constructs relative to the prediction of food safety behaviors and intentions.

behavior of interest is at a general level (e.g., quit a job) then the attitude needs to be measured at the general level as well (e.g., attitude toward quitting a job). Alternatively, if the researcher is specifically interested in a more specific behavior (e.g., quitting your job in the next six months), then the attitude needs to be measured at a corresponding level (e.g., attitude toward quitting your job in the next six months). When attitudes and behaviors are measured at corresponding levels, with sufficient specificity and high quality measures, then research indicates that attitudes achieve relatively high predictions of the corresponding behaviors.

The prediction of behavior is enhanced if factors such as perceived social (subjective) norms are used to complement attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). If attitudes reflect the person's positive and negative views of the person engaging in the behavior, then the subjective norm reflects the person's perceived social norms about that person engaging in the behavior. That is, to what degree does the person believe others who are important to the person approve or disapprove of the person engaging in the behavior. Although behaviors are differentially predicted by attitudes and subjective norms, research indicates that properly assessed subjective norms make significant contributions to the prediction of behavior. It is important to recognize the potential that these perceived social norms will have on safety and security behaviors, such as food safety behavior of interest here (Nickell, Hinsz, & Park, 2005). Not only do people do what they want to do (i.e., behave according to their attitudes) but they also do what they believe others want them to do (i.e., behave according to perceived social norms).

An additional factor that enhances the prediction of some behaviors is the person's perception of the degree to which they have control over performing the behavior or not. Behaviors and people are conceptualized to vary in the degree to which performance of the behavior is under the person's control (Ajzen, 1991). Certain individuals might have low perceived control (e.g., low locus of control or low self-efficacy). Meanwhile, certain behaviors are perceived to be more under an individual's volition (e.g., keeping your workstation tidy) while others are less so (e.g., parking in a desirable spot). Because of differences in the nature of behavior, some behaviors are better predicted by perceived behavioral control than others. Because safety and security behaviors are indirectly related to important outcomes, we expect that perceived behavioral control will be predictive of safety and security behavior.

Intentions, perceived behavioral control, attitudes, and subjective norms can be organized in a predictive model represented by the reasoned action approach (see Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates that safety and security behaviors such as food safety would be predicted by perceived behavioral control and intentions to perform safety and security behaviors. These intentions would be predicted by attitudes toward performing the safety and security behaviors as well as perceived norms to engage in the safety and security

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