PUBLISHED IN **TEDxHandleyBlvd Women** · TEDx stage · practice script, pre-delivery
PUBLISHED 14 March 2025
AUTHOR Ravi R. Iyer, MD
SOURCE TEDxHandleyBlvd Women, "Think Again" — The Hive at Shenandoah University, Winchester, Virginia, 14 March 2025. No public address recorded for the talk.
Event page: https://www.ted.com/tedx/events/58758 — TEDxHandley Blvd Women event page, March 14, 2025, Winchester, Virginia.
RECORDED 23 November 2026 · record AR-2025-03-001

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT IS

This entry carries the author's own practice script, written before the talk was given. It is not the talk. The talk was delivered from memory and the wording changed on the stage, so the script and the spoken talk differ. No recording, audio or transcript of the delivered talk is reproduced in this document, and none is held in the Record. The delivered talk remains with its publisher. Where its public address is known it is given above, under Source; it is never copied here.

TEDX PRACTICE SCRIPT · TEDXHANDLEYBLVD WOMEN

The Power of Community for Viruses, Warthogs and TEDx Virality

Why most TEDx talks are never seen — and what a virus, a warthog and a waterhole know about reaching people.

By **Ravi R. Iyer, MD**



From the talk at TEDxHandleyBlvd Women. Retained as part of the record of how the talk was presented.

Why do most TEDx talks get seen by only a few 100 people?

The statistics are depressing.... 76% of all TEDx talks published in the month of October 2021 had less than 1000 views. On average TEDx talks had 411 views, and the lowest number of views for the month was a talk with 26 views..... Bilyana Georgieva, curator of the unofficial Top 10 World's TEDx Chart to suggested that these stats indicate a limited reach beyond family and friends. I believe that this statistic is far more worrisome indicator.

> PAUSE--- EYE CONTACT--- PERSUADE VISUALLY

Only a small number of speakers ever manage to get chosen to present an Idea Worth Sharing on a TED/TEDx stage.... would it not be a tragedy if only a few 100 heard it? The TED/TEDx stages are an incredible forum for really amazing, transformative ideas. For me the problem is not the lack of ideas. It is the lack of reach for these great ideas and the lost opportunity for great impact that should concern us. It is not the ones that get millions of views that should matter. It's the many that do not get seen that are concerning. The tree that falls unseen and unheard in the forest only becomes compost. The spread of an idea requires it to PENETRATE...be SHARED..... it needs to PERSIST in the global conversation.

Most people think of a talk going viral as strictly the number of people that come in contact with the "viral message" and share or "infect" other people, but there is actually a second part of this equation that is just as important, and I'll come back to this but first let's look at the nature of viruses....

What makes one viral infection produce a simple family outbreak, another an epidemic and a third a pandemic?

For a viral outbreak three possibilities exist for the potential transmission or decline of a disease, depending on how many healthy people contract a contagious disease from one infected person with that disease:

If each infected person spreads the infection to LESS THAN one other person, then, the disease will decline and eventually die out. It is a less than 1:1 transmission ratio

If each infected person spreads the infection to ONE OTHER PERSON... the disease will stay alive and stable, but there won't be an outbreak or an epidemic. This is a 1:1 transmission ratio

If each existing infection causes more than one new infection. It is a greater than 1:1 transmission ratio AND There may be an outbreak or epidemic.

Example COVID would infect 3-6 new individuals from each infected patient which explains the wildfire spread of the disease in a classic case of global virality. Framed in the context of a message.... Think of the population of infected individuals as a community AND think of the virus as a message that is passed on in the community. A propagation rate of 3 or higher makes it very likely that the spread of either a virus or a message would become exponential.

Now for anything to spread exponentially it must have ease of transmission and penetration into its target.

Viruses accomplish this by using specialized structures on their surface that bind to receptors on the human host cell and allow the virus to penetrate the human host cell and delivers its payload of infective genetic material for the human cell to make copies of the virus and spread it.

In the case of a video or a talk that becomes viral.... The message has to similarly bond with the emotional centers in the brains of the audience.

The human brain is an amazing organ and we commonly pride ourselves as creatures of reason and intellect which are functions that reside in the portion of our brain called the neocortex. Which is all of this area that I show in this model. But contrary to popular belief, we do not decide with our reason.... Instead we decide with our emotions that reside in the centers of our primitive brain, the amygdala and we only use the intellectual reasoning of the neocortex to justify and execute the strategies that will actualize the gut instincts of our emotional centers. The Amygdala is a deep-seated primitive part of the brain known as Amygdala.....shown by these two red peanut sized circles which is the seat of our emotions and is where we live and experience .... Fear, Fury, Rage, Love, Lust, Affection, Attraction, Repulsion, Desire, Sexual proclivity, procreative drives, possession and territoriality, tribalism and so on.....

AND only a talk or a video that excites our emotional centers in the Amygdala will be remembered because the Amygdala is tightly connected with memory.

The best TED and TEDx talks all have this same mechanism... they operate by artful delivery that activates the emotional centers of the amygdala and support it with the rationalizations of the neocortex.

They create emotional CONNECTION through the Amygdala stitched with the threads of neocortical reasoning and produce.... Communion with the audience.... and when there is Communion, heart speaks to heart and Communication happens and a Community is born. ... [PAUSE]

A community ladies and gentlemen, is not a collection of bodies occupying the same space..... A community is a collection of Hearts speaking the same speech

Mentioned: I HAVE A DREAM

[LONG PAUSE].... BUT Simple activation of emotion will not allow for persistence of the message.... For that something more is needed....

This is where we learn a lesson from Africa. On the African savannah grazing animals never drink at the waterhole alone. There will be Zebra, Giraffes, Wildebeest, Warthogs, Elephants and Antelope all gathered around a single waterhole even when the many mouths are confronted with a shrinking resource. The answer lies in the safety they experience from predation. As a diverse community with varied sensory and situational awareness, they can keep each other safe and hence increase the odds that all of them have the best opportunity for both water consumption and survival [PAUSE FOR IMPACT].... since either alone is meaningless.

These two examples from biology demonstrate the strategy used by viruses and warthogs that I call the Viral Waterhole effect. The greatest chance for successful growth and survivability of any endeavor happens when a community of new participants are engaged in each round of propagation.... and it was this principle that I wanted to capture in my journey towards the TEDx stage

Ninety days before my talk I used the same community effect to propagate my TEDx talk. I started writing blogs, posts, articles and newsletters about my selection and preparation, my flubs and successes, my anxieties and my excitement. With each post I was creating ripples of engagement, and successive cycles of exposure to the message of my impending talk. My 5000 patients, my 2000 Facebook friends and followers, my 1500 LinkedIn connection, my high school in eastern India where I had graduated from 50 years ago... these were my community for the virus of my message. And they were getting exposure twice a week about my journey and their fever was mounting along with mine. My writings and posts were acting like the attachment receptor that viruses use and connecting my community to the message of my impending TEDx talk. By the time I delivered my talk on Oct 5th, 2024, I had written enough material to compile all my articles, posts, and blogs into a book that I published on Amazon at the same time as my talk went live on YouTube.

But I adopted the strategy of the Waterhole by also adding live links to the talks of everyone in my community of speakers who shared the TEDxGary stage with me. I wrote about the Gary, Indiana community. Their aspirations and their challenges.... about how the TEDx platform was acting as an agent of social change and revitalization of the community by bringing ideas of empowerment and hope from speakers all over the world. I wrote about the restaurant where I had my meals had a write-up and included a link to their website.. I spoke of the wonderful service and fantastic quality of their food. .... Included pictures of my experience, the Air-BnB I stayed at, and its website.

Inclusion of the rest of the TEDx speakers and the larger community that hosted the event in my book was a replication of the Waterhole effect and it was ANALOGOUS to allowing a diverse community to drink with me at my waterhole.

I then sent links to the talk and a free digital copy of my book to my followers and my community.

The effect was massive. Everyone in Gary, Indiana and all the speakers shared my talk and the book widely to their networks. My high school principal in India held a watch party with the entire school... all 5000 students of them. They shared and reshared all over India and Southeast Asia. The talk went viral across the globe. Forty-four days later it crossed 1 million views on Christmas eve, and it is still climbing standing today at over 2 million views and the 3rd most viewed TEDx talk released in 2024.

But there's a second half of the equation that I didn't realize I had accidentally tapped into. Instead of just making myself a single "patient zero" I had made everyone who was part of my journey a patient zero as well. It was their talk as much as it was mine. My Road to the Red Dot became their road. We became one community with a single shared idea infecting all of us. ... and everyone was a patient zero and a super spreader. All of us were one global community infected with the virus of my TEDx talk sharing it in feverish engagement and excitement.

The enduring lesson for all of us is this....

The need to be seen, heard and validated is a fundamental trait of all humans and when this need is coupled with the power of community connected by engagement in a shared idea that people can emotionally engage with..... igniting their imagination with the fever of possibility and belonging and they naturally spread it to their network of friends and family....and this has the same operational characteristic as a viral pandemic. Except that this time instead of people falling sick they all are elevated to a higher state of shared existence. And that is an Idea That Changes Everything and is Worth Thinking Again Upon.

REFERENCES:

1. Rupa Gupta, Timothy R. Koscik, Antoine Bechara, Daniel Tranel. The amygdala and decision-making. Neuropsychologia, Volume 49, Issue 4, 2011, Pages 760-766, ISSN 0028-3932, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2010.09.029. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0028393210004197

   Abstract: Decision-making is a complex process that requires the orchestration of multiple neural systems. For example, decision-making is believed to involve areas of the brain involved in emotion (e.g., amygdala, ventromedial prefrontal cortex) and memory (e.g., hippocampus, dorsolateral prefrontal cortex). In this article, we will present findings related to the amygdala's role in decision-making, and differentiate the contributions of the amygdala from those of other structurally and functionally connected neural regions. Decades of research have shown that the amygdala is involved in associating a stimulus with its emotional value. This tradition has been extended in newer work, which has shown that the amygdala is especially important for decision-making, by triggering autonomic responses to emotional stimuli, including monetary reward and punishment. Patients with amygdala damage lack these autonomic responses to reward and punishment, and consequently, cannot utilize "somatic marker" type cues to guide future decision-making. Studies using laboratory decision-making tests have found deficient decision-making in patients with bilateral amygdala damage, which resembles their real-world difficulties with decision-making. Additionally, we have found evidence for an interaction between sex and laterality of amygdala functioning, such that unilateral damage to the right amygdala results in greater deficits in decision-making and social behavior in men, while left amygdala damage seems to be more detrimental for women. We have posited that the amygdala is part of an "impulsive," habit type system that triggers emotional responses to immediate outcomes.

   Keywords: Amygdala; Decision-making; Emotion; Ventromedial prefrontal cortex; Hippocampus

2. Kate M Wassum (2022) Amygdala-cortical collaboration in reward learning and decision making eLife 11:e80926. https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.80926
3. Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, United States;
4. Brain Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, United States;
5. Integrative Center for Learning and Memory, University of California, Los Angeles, United States;
6. Integrative Center for Addictive Disorders, University of California, Los Angeles, United States

   Abstract

7 Adaptive reward-related decision making requires accurate prospective consideration of the specific outcome of each option and its current desirability. These mental simulations are informed by stored memories of the associative relationships that exist within an environment. In this review, I discuss recent investigations of the function of circuitry between the basolateral amygdala (BLA) and lateral (lOFC) and medial (mOFC) orbitofrontal cortex in the learning and use of associative reward memories. I draw conclusions from data collected using sophisticated behavioral approaches to diagnose the content of appetitive memory in combination with modern circuit dissection tools. I propose that, via their direct bidirectional connections, the BLA and OFC collaborate to help us encode detailed, outcome-specific, state-dependent reward memories and to use those memories to enable the predictions and inferences that support adaptive decision making. Whereas lOFC→BLA projections mediate the encoding of outcome-specific reward memories, mOFC→BLA projections regulate the ability to use these memories to inform reward pursuit decisions. BLA projections to lOFC and mOFC both contribute to using reward memories to guide decision making. The BLA→lOFC pathway mediates the ability to represent the identity of a specific predicted reward and the BLA→mOFC pathway facilitates understanding of the value of predicted events. Thus, I outline a neuronal circuit architecture for reward learning and decision making and provide new testable hypotheses as well as implications for both adaptive and maladaptive decision making.

8 Study reveals amygdala's role in complex decision-making: Findings may lead to better diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders https://news.ohsu.edu/2019/06/10/study-reveals-amygdalas-role-in-complex-decision-making#:~:text=Neuroscientists%20have%20now%20discovered%20that%20the%20amygdala%2C,to%20the%20world%20as%20we%20know%20it.&text=There%20were%20more%20neurons%20in%20the%20amygdala,new%20opportunity%20than%20in%20the%20ventral%20striatum

9 Subcortical Substrates of Explore-Exploit Decisions in Primates. Vincent D. Costa1,2,3,4 costav@ohsu.edu · Andrew R. Mitz1 · Bruno B. Averbeck1

Summary

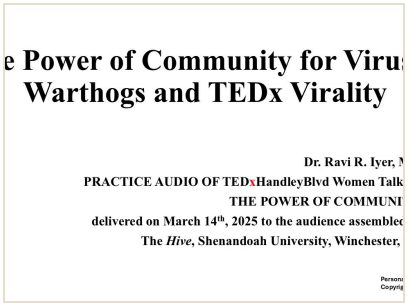
10 The explore-exploit dilemma refers to the challenge of deciding when to forego immediate rewards and explore new opportunities that could lead to greater rewards in the future. While motivational neural circuits facilitate learning based on past choices and outcomes, it is unclear whether they also support computations relevant for deciding when to explore. We recorded neural activity in the amygdala and ventral striatum of rhesus macaques as they solved a task that required them to balance novelty-driven exploration with exploitation of what they had already learned. Using a partially observable Markov decision process (POMDP) model to quantify explore-exploit trade-offs, we identified that the ventral striatum and amygdala differ in how they represent the immediate value of exploitative choices and the future value of exploratory choices. These findings show that subcortical motivational circuits are important in guiding explore-exploit decisions.

11 Dixon, M. L., & Dweck, C. S. (2022). The amygdala and the prefrontal cortex: The co-construction of intelligent decision-making. Psychological Review, 129(6), 1414–1441.

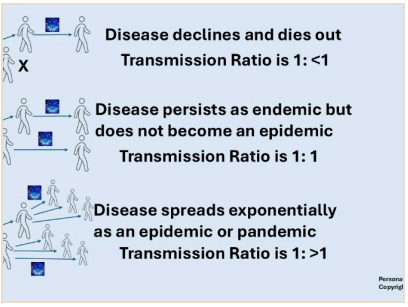
Abstract

12 A revised view of the amygdala, its relationship with the prefrontal cortex (PFC), and its role in intelligent human decision-making is proposed. Based on recent findings, we present a framework in which the amygdala plays a central role in the value computations that determine which goals are worth pursuing, while the PFC plays a central role in generating and evaluating possible action plans to realize these goals. We suggest that the amygdala and PFC continuously work together during decision-making and goal pursuit as individuals compute and recompute the value and likelihood of different goals while interacting with a dynamic world. Once seen as chiefly involved in simple stimulus–outcome associative learning, the amygdala is shown to play a sophisticated role in human decision-making by contributing to the moment-by-moment integration of multiple costs and benefits to determine optimal choices. We discuss implications of the framework for brain development, emotion regulation, intelligence, and psychopathology. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2023 APA, all rights reserved)

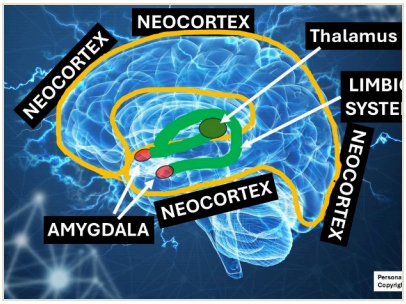
IMAGES FROM THE ORIGINAL





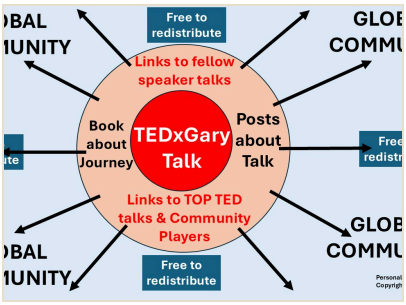


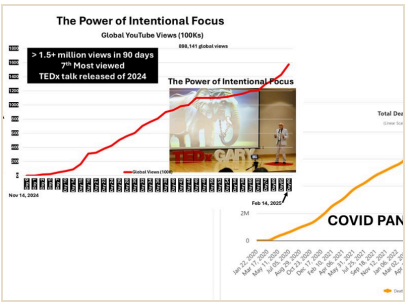


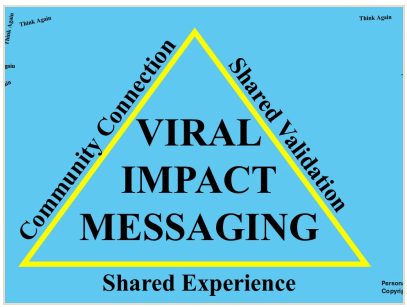












SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY, AS PUBLISHED BY THE EVENT

Dr. Ravi Iyer, MD

Dr. Ravi Iyer, MD is a Harvard-trained Physician-scientist, 3x viral TEDx speaker, best-selling author, inventor, and entrepreneur and a Who's Who in America and Who's Who in TOP Doctors of America listee, whose 42-year career in medicine, science and leadership includes a 9-year Directorship of a Hospice caring for dying patients, and a 4-year Chairmanship of a 225-bed hospital.

Dr. Iyer's TEDxGary talk on The Power of Intentional Focus was the 3rd most globally viewed TEDx talk in 2024, and he is acclaimed as an expert on People First Leadership and conducts workshops on Burnout Resistant Leadership; Cognitive Alignment for teams and courses on Strategies Of Neuroaligned Groups. His programs have been rated as transformational for enabling individuals, teams, and organizations to discover methods by which they can remain connected to their purpose with focus, creativity, resilience and flexibility as they navigate the challenges of their enterprise and their life.

Reproduced exactly as published on the TEDxHandley Blvd Women event page, https://www.ted.com/tedx/events/58758, read 23 November 2026. The event records the date as March 14, 2025. The biography is the event's text, not the Record's, and is entered because it is what the publisher put on its own page.

As of its writing. This biography was published in March 2025, about four months after the TEDxGary talk, and places that talk **third** most globally viewed TEDx talk of 2024. It was third at the time of writing. The talk went on accumulating views and the author records it as the most-viewed TEDx talk released in 2024. Both are accurate as of their moments: a biography is a snapshot of a ranking, not a standing claim about it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ravi R. Iyer, MD is a physician-scientist, entrepreneur, author and five-time TEDx speaker who has spent four decades exploring a deceptively simple question: what makes human beings, and the organizations they create, perform at their best? A Harvard-trained physician, corporate strategist and the founder of multiple healthcare and performance ventures, he is the creator of Neuroalignment, a framework for building high-performance organizations around the realities of human cognitive diversity. His work sits at the intersection of biology, leadership, technology and human behavior.

THE AKAASHIK RECORD

A permanent, complete and unedited register of the writing and public work of Ravi R. Iyer, MD. Each entry records where the work first appeared, when, and at what address, so that the record stands independently of any platform that carries it. Entries are never removed. © Ravi R. Iyer, MD. Recorded by arrangement with the original publisher; all rights in the original publication remain with its owner.

Name forms. One person, credited as Ravi R. Iyer, MD; Ravi R. Iyer; Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer, MD; Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer; Ravi Iyer, MD; Ravi Iyer; Ravi Ramamoorthy; R. R. Iyer; R.R. Iyer; R. Iyer. The author's name is Ravi Iyer, and has been for many years. His work is nonetheless credited under several forms. In India the canonical surname is Ramamoorthy and Iyer is the clan name appended to it, and where a form is entered under that convention the credit follows it: on the signed speaker release for TEDxChantilly he entered Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer, and that talk stands credited on the TEDx channel to Ravi Ramamoorthy. The five ted.com event pages credit him under four different forms between them — Dr. Ravi Iyer at TEDxGary, Dr. Ravi Iyer, MD at TEDxHandley Blvd Women, R.R. Iyer at TEDxUMKC, and Ravi Ramamoorthy Iyer at both TEDxMontgomery College and TEDxChantilly HS. The Record lists every form the work is credited under, so that it remains findable under each.