

Episode #: 07

Episode Title: Is AI making us lazy? With Tibusay Vera

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Intro

Louise Everett (00:11)

Welcome to ClarityMatters. Today's episode asks a provocative question: is AI making us mentally lazy? We're living through something unprecedented. Never before in human history have our brains been exposed to so much stimulus — constant information, constant answers, constant input. And now AI can draft our emails, analyse our data, summarise reports and recommend decisions. In cognitive science, there's a concept called cognitive offloading, which is using tools to reduce mental effort.

We've always done it with calendars and calculators, but AI goes further. It doesn't just store information - it reasons. It suggests. It becomes a cognitive partner. Our brains love efficiency. They love habit. The more we rely on something, the more our brain adapts to it. So if we increasingly outsource thinking to AI to get fast answers with almost no friction, at what point does convenience begin to erode our capacity for deeper thinking — especially in roles that depend on judgment, experience, nuance? Maybe the real question isn't just *what can AI do?* It's *what is it doing to us?* Today, we'll explore where AI genuinely enhances human capability, where it may quietly undermine it, and the habits that help you use it without losing your cognitive edge.

I'm so thrilled to be joined by neuroscientists Tibusay Vera. Tibusay is the creator of the PEPE© Model – Neuroscience for Change, a leading neuroscience-based framework for driving and adapting to change. She is also Founder of Sparkling Performance consulting solutions. Tibusay, a very warm welcome to ClarityMatters. It's wonderful to have you here. Thank you, Louise, and thank you for inviting me to come here.

Tibusay (02:04)

Thank you, Louise, and thank you for inviting me to come here. I'm quite excited.

Main conversation

Louise (02:09)

Tibisay, you work globally with leaders and organisations to embed brain-friendly practices into change, transformation, leadership and AI integration. You're a Fellow of the Institute of Leadership and Management and a member of the British Neuroscience Association. We first met when I attended your *Pillars of Neuroscience for Coaches and*

Consultants course in 2021, and it's safe to say the world has changed significantly since then. With the acceleration of AI since 2022, this must be an especially fascinating moment for someone working at the intersection of neuroscience and change. So let's get straight to it: some are questioning if AI is making us mentally lazy. From what we know about the brain, is that happening, or is AI just changing where we put our effort?

Tibisay (03:08)

It's a great question, Louise. And usually that's kind of the question people tend to ask: are we becoming lazy? I would say from the neuroscience perspective, I would say our brain is usually trying to save energy, right. So that is kind of the explanation. So I would not call it that we are becoming lazy. What I would say is we are trying, our brain is usually trying to save energy. So what I think is happening is: our brain consumes around 20% of the total energy of our volume, and it only represents as an organ the brain percent.

So it's always trying to find efficient ways to do the activities. And this is what is happening. So every time they have the opportunity to save energy then it will go into that route. So very much it is trying to offload everything that is possible. And this happened in the past with a calculator. It happened with GPS and right now it's obviously happening with AI.

So what I think really is happening in the brain is rather than we becoming lazy, the brain is finding new ways to offload things. And AI is a great tool for that. So what we're doing is not to stop thinking - because that's another question I usually get: 'I thought that means we are becoming lazy people who stop thinking, are we having more time in our brain to stop thinking?'

I would say no. Our brain just is redirecting the cognitive load and redirecting the thinking into different areas. So it's almost like you're saying that extra capacity that now got offloaded, rather than us becoming lazy, we are going to use it for a different thinking.

Louise (05:06)

So the brain loves habits.

Tibisay (05:09)

Exactly. And that's another reason why we're going to have it.

That's a great conclusion on this because the brain tries to save energy. Then the brain works in habit. Brains love patterns because patterns save energy. The brain doesn't like change. Talking about change because change requires a lot of energy. So anything that requires energy or saves energy, the brain is going to take advantage of. So if something saves energy, it will love it. If something expends energy, it will hate it and it will act accordingly?

Louise (05:51)

This is fascinating. So, and I remember from the course that you ran, the brain loves reward as well. So is the brain getting that – there's two parts to this. We've adapted to generative AI systems very quickly. There's not been a lot of change management that's been required there necessarily. So is it because the brain has felt that instant reward or perceived instant reward that it gets from using AI?

Tibisay (06:23)

That's a great question. And I think two things: by having AI as we've been talking, it saves a lot of energy. So you don't need a lot of change management like you say, the brain very quickly likes it because it's helping to offload. Now to your point of are we having a reward as a result. Yes, the brain is having an immediate reward because a lot of dopamine comes as a result of it.

I will explain: if I ask a question, I straight away get the answer. I will get a reward signal straight away. And that will release a little bit of dopamine, and dopamine is what makes us feel excited. And I think that's the reason why many of us who use AI – and I use AI a lot, I don't know how I would live my life now without AI. And we feel excited every time that we get an answer, we say, oh, that's good. And we feel that kind of excitement come from that reward system and the dopamine.

Louise (07:30)

So even though the answer may not be right, we're still getting the reward, so the brain wants to keep going back.

Tibisay (07:40)

The brain likes to get a result out of it. So we go back. We get an immediate need, it can become kind of addictive. Because when we have some dopamine release, then the more dopamine we have in our brain, the more addicted we become. So it is kind of an addiction. It's saying like social media is a step into the dopaminergic system.

Louise (08:09)

This is fascinating, also a little bit scary. So AI gives us fast answers with little effort. We've established that. But at what point does that convenience start to weaken our ability to do harder thinking, especially in roles that rely on judgment, focus and experience? For example, in communications.

Tibisay (08:33)

Yeah, I don't think we become less intelligent. I don't think that would actually happen. We will change the type of abilities that we need and as a result, the type of thinking. I'll give you an example: analytical thinking. It's something that AI does very well. AI does a lot of calculations. AI is very good at patterns, at putting things together. And in terms of communication, as you say, to make a very nice sentence about it or a story with all the data

- that is analytical thinking. Now, what AI doesn't do, and people are questioning if it will actually do, is critical thinking.

It's just your question of making judgments, trying to decide: is this answer correct? Is it not? How is this going to impact a population? And it's more the criticality, that's where AI is not as efficient. So what we expect to happen and hopefully is happening, because it could go the other way around, is that slowly people will become less analytical, I suppose. It would have less learning in terms of analytical – that will happen – and hopefully it will become more critical. The risk that we are having when things become scary is: are we actually going to become more critical or not? What do we do as a population within education to support critical thinking, to support that judgment and not to be lost? Because it would be very easy just to take AI answers, AI functionalities that will come and not to become critical about it. And that is what we need to make sure we defend, we keep it that critical. It is the questioning of what will we get. It is about, what do I do with this information, what would it impact?

It is up to the human thinking to make a decision. What do we do with all this? And that will not be replaced by AI, at least not anytime soon, that we can predict it. So from the brain perspective, also, there is a little bit of concern of learning. Our brain learns by effort. I'm talking about reward. So our brain does not learn by just taking info. If I can take a lot of info I don't learn, maybe I will have short memory. I can study for an exam, but then I will forget very quickly unless I put in effort later on. Because now we're making less effort for many things that we are getting as a result of AI, that is a concern about our learning. It is a concern about learning that critical skills that we need. From the neuroscience perspective, there is something called the error system, the error signal. To be specific, the error signal, which is basically the difference between my expectations and what I actually get. And that's how we learn, how the brain learns.

I have some expectations of learning a specific thing, of writing a communication, of doing a transformation, and this is my result that I want to get. If my actuals achieve what I was expecting, I'm going to have a big signal of reward, and that is dopamine. And as a result, I'm going to do it more and more. If I don't achieve what I was expecting, I'm going to have some removal of dopamine. That's so important, that's why we need to learn from failure. Because when we stop having dopamine, we feel demotivated. But if we become a habit of learning for failure, if we support learning for failure, we are making people learn from the effort that I did. That's a risk with AI. There is a risk that now we are not having so much effort, where the learning will come from.

Louise (13:12)

And without that learning, is there a case to say then we won't be as good as, we won't have that strong critical thinking?

Tibisay (13:21)

It could lead in, how are we going to keep the critical thinking? And I think that is what we need to start to think about. How do we support critical thinking within our organisation? Are our systems in the organisations ready to support critical thinking?

Same in education, schools, many people at schools have asked me: should we allow AI or should we not? And I say: it is here. And if you forbid kids to use AI for an essay that they have to submit, they will find a way to do it. It is here. You better allow them to use it. And now let's evaluate the criticality of information, rather than the content. Right. So we need to support that judgment. We need to, the rewards in the organisations, in the culture that we have, we need to move more into criticality. I still see, my daughter is applying to universities now, and I still see a lot of universities as a first line, what they require is analytical thinking. I still see it, if you search on LinkedIn, it's there for change. I work a lot in change. What is required for this role? Analytical thinking. And I'm thinking that, yes, we may require this analytical part still. But I think we need to start to change that. What is required is critical thinking. That is what will not be replaced by AI.

Louise (15:08)

On that point, how do we, how does the brain learn critical thinking? What's the process? What has to be done? So how do we become critical thinkers?

Tibisay (15:23)

Yeah, and that's a great question. It's thinking how do you train for it. And I would say it is using that error system, it's effort right. It's trying for people to focus. What is the effort? What are my expectations that I have? Are they, do they actually make sense? It's trying when from very early when children learn to read, what story does it tell you? In organisations, once we have a story, we have a change, we have an objective - what will we have if we get it? What will we not have? Does it make sense? All these people who keep doing things because they have been doing it for the last 20 years, we cannot reward that. So we need to find a way. To your question, the brain learns based on reward - reward or penalties, right? So a threat or reward, that's the way it works.

So we need to start from an organisational culture to reward making judgment, to reward failure. When we reward failure and people learn from failure, people will become more critical. If I only reward the perfect achieving the goal, then I'm not supporting people to deviate from something that is safety and risk free. So it is about people taking more risk, fail, and rather than reward just the success, reward the thinking process about it.

Louise (17:14)

This is fascinating because we're at that point where we've got a little paradox. We need to put, we need to make effort, and there are tools that make things effortless. So it's striking that balance between those two. And through the work you're doing with many organisations on transformation, are you already seeing some of those steps to develop and

enhance critical thinking and protecting that sense of judgment, or are we not quite there yet? Are we still in the embedding AI phase? I

Tibisay (17:51)

I would say there are some organisations who are doing a great job at this. Having said that, there is a huge amount of organisations who are not doing it. So I would say we are not there yet. A lot needs to happen. Especially, new enterprise technology organisations, fast moving organisations, you see, that is more important for them.

And as a result, they are starting to reward that. You are starting to see, or I'm starting to see a lot, out there in the market. People are starting to pay attention now to failure, right? Now people are recognising that failure is important to happen, which is good. Five years ago, when I was teaching and I was training organisations about the importance of recognising failure, it was like, are you saying that we need to encourage failure? And I say, no it's not to encourage, mistakes come anyway. It's what do we do with that information, how do we deal with that information? But now everyone somehow has heard a talk, has read an article about it, a book, which I think, we are at least starting to have the grounds ready. I think a lot needs to be put there still, to promote critical thinking.

Louise (19:28)

So for our listeners, what kind of, I know we've talked around critical thinking, is there any way of breaking that down even further? You know, what kind of thinking should professionals actively protect and keep human? Particularly in communication, leadership and decision making?

Tibisay (19:51)

I would say it's asking the right questions. I think that's probably one of the most valuable things, is questioning. I love that because - I'm biased a little bit, to caution, right - but I think, the power of asking the right question is something that we need to develop and something to protect. Actually because that's the power of asking also the right question to AI, right. So I would say asking the right questions, training employees, training our children as a population to really find what to ask. And this is one of the advantages now on the other side of AI. You can test what you are asking because that's something that it has: what you ask is what you get. I work in transformation and trying to help people with transformation in AI, and you find the type of people who say, I never get 100% right.

It's like, yes, it helps me to offload many things, but there are things that it did not fully get right. And I say, have you asked the right question? Let's play about with it, let's play. Let's ask in a different way. One small, different word that you use, you will get a different answer. So that's one thing that is interesting. And I will invite anyone here to go and play. I think is so important for also, another thing that we need to protect is intentions. I think it is more important than ever for people to be very clear about what they are looking for. And AI also helps us to test this. It's not about a goal that I have. But what are my intentions of having

that goal? What is my intention of intention of that goal? Because if we are clear of our intentions, my questions change and then you get different results. That's what I would say we need to also focus on.

Louise (22:10)

So you need to have judgment to keep the intentions. You know, these things are connected.

Tibisay (22:17)

I'll give you a clear example. If I get out of AI a communication or a message to send out to the employees, it is about: is it right what I am getting? How are people going to be impacted by this message that I'm going to send? Because now it's not about the content only, because the content, AI will give you a very nice transcript about what you're going to send. But now we need to promote in the culture: what is going to be the impact of that email if I send it? Who will be most impacted? Is this email aligned to my intention, or whose intention is aligned to it? That is critical thinking, and that is judgment that we need to start to promote. And that I think within the culture or the organisation, within teams, I think that's what we need to start to promote more. I would say, how do you defend that judgment?

Louise (23:25)

Absolutely. And it's interesting because that is the topic that's now coming up, how to protect it, how to encourage it. How to keep developing it, keep going. If listeners wanted to use AI without losing their edge, what's the one habit you would ask them to build into how they work?

Tibisay (23:48)

I think AI will not really replace us. What I think AI will replace is humans who don't use AI and who are not critical about using AI. Just as a starting point as of today - because AI changes so much - but as of today, if people want to take a tip out of here is: use AI and test. Test what answer you get. Test what you want to hear because this is great with AI. I do this with my daughter all the time. I say, what do you want to hear? So that helps her to think of her intention. I want to hear that. Alright, go on, test it. Ask AI to see if it gives you the answer. And she says no, it is not. Ask another way. What else can you ask?

Can you ask based on your intention? And then she says, oh yeah, it does. So that's why I say go and play with AI and see, based on your intention, what different answer you will get.

Louise (25:01)

Do you suggest to her that she needs to then fact check that and check the output?

Tibisay (25:08)

I do, because we know AI on top of that, especially public AI, is not necessarily reliable 100%. Right? It still has all the hallucinations that come with it. So yes, I think that's something that we need to be aware of. We need to check the outputs. We need to make sure what we're getting is right. And this is again promoting criticality, promoting judgment. And every time that you go and check, you are making a judgment: am I trusting this source, or am I not trusting this source? So yes, I think we need to always be aware, let's go and check. It is almost like the same training that I used to give, and I still do about brain bias, right? When we are, for example, collecting information for feedback of our employees, we are biased to specific things, right? And I always say go and check your thinking.

Have you asked somebody who is not in your team, somebody who maybe is not very close to you? Go and check to see what they think about that person before you do the performance review. Because that helps with bias. It is exactly the same with AI. You got the answer. Go now and check. Don't be biased, now to AI.

Let's go and check. So what else? Are you still getting the same answer? Why do you have it? And that is supporting just what you are saying. That is how we protect critical thinking, how we protect judgment. I think that's the way to get the best of both worlds, using AI.

Louise (26:52)

A couple of questions that I love to ask of all of my guests. So this year, Claritas is celebrating 20 years. Over that time, communications has changed. It's evolved rapidly in speed and scale and scrutiny. But some lessons still endure. If you could go back to your 20-year-old self, what's the one piece of career advice you would give?

Tibisay (27:18)

I would say enjoy the way. Don't focus on just perfection or something. The world will change many, many times. So what is perfect today or what is true today will not be true or perfect tomorrow. So I would say enjoy the way. Make efforts for what I do. But I will allow probably myself to fail more, to have had failed more, that's probably what I would say.

Louise (27:51)

That's interesting and ties in beautifully with what you were saying earlier, that we learn from failing and how much we get from that, and how that's all connected to effort and therefore then critical thinking.

Tibisay (28:09)

I think so, yeah.

Louise (28:10)

Lovely. And if we were to look forward, so switching gears, if you could put one a piece of advice or one idea into a 20-year time capsule, what would it be and why does it matter?

Tibisay (28:30)

Wow. The world is changing so much that I would like to hear this recording in 20 years' time to see what I've said. I think I would say let's keep humans as humans. I think AI is becoming more human. We usually keep ourselves less and less human by not having emotions, for example, into place. I say as a message there is, how much importance are we putting into emotions in the place, how much importance are we having in being human? Being human is about being emotionally intelligent, making decisions with emotions. AI is not there. It is about protecting that ability to make judgments. So that's what I would put is, make sure you pay attention to your intuitions.

Louise (29:45)

Yeah. I've been hearing this quite a bit recently about retaining human to human connection and how important that is. And what struck me when I joined your course all those years ago, was how many chemicals are actually involved in change and transformation. You know, human brain chemicals. We think of change as almost a sort of transactional thing that happens in organisations. It's all about humans, and the way, the chemical reactions and what's going on in the brain for us. So I think that will endure, you know, as you're suggesting, you know, let's hope that will endure, you know, 20 years ahead and, yeah, I was fascinated to learn that and understand that. So, yeah, long let that remain.

Tibisay (30:48)

It is. It is fascinating to think, people think of emotions as something fluffy. And as you say, and we learn that when we're doing the neuroscience for change or the pillars, is that emotion is just a mix of neurotransmitters, chemistry, electricity and a cocktail of neurotransmitters. Really, that's what it is. Paying attention and working with the right cocktail at the right time is the power of being human.

Sometimes we are working with our neurobiology against us, and making the neurobiology work on our side is one of the most important, I think, assets that somebody can have. That is where the power and the high performance will come, I think.

Louise (31:46)

Wonderful. Tibusay, thank you so much. This has been so thought provoking. I've got so many other questions that I could ask you, for another call.

Tibusay (31:58)

So many good questions, Louise. You are testing me like playing all these questions, go on.

Louise (32:11)

It's such a fascinating topic. And I know our listeners will thoroughly enjoy hearing your perspectives. Thank you so much for taking the time with us today.

Tibusay (32:20)

Thank you, Louise. Thank you for inviting me.

Louise (32:22)

That's it for today's episode of ClarityMatters. If this conversation challenged how you're working with AI, please share it with someone who needs to hear it. Until next time. Think deeply. Lead consciously and don't give away the part of your thinking that makes you exceptional. Thanks for tuning in.