MERIDIAN

Machine & Meaning

Technology's search for human purpose

Volume 12 | Issue 7 | 2026-07-15

In this issue

- Teaching machines to hesitate
- Debate: should software ever say no?
- Profile: the engineers building doubt
- The ethics of everyday algorithms

Rather than chasing the latest gadget, the July issue steps back to examine the principles inside our technology. Engineers, ethicists and artists debate how to design tools that respect human judgement.

Technology | Sofia Lindqvist

Teaching Machines to Hesitate

Why the next frontier of AI design may be knowing when not to act

Speed has long been the measure of machine intelligence. Faster searches, faster predictions, faster answers. But in a lab in Gothenburg, a team of engineers is pursuing the opposite: systems that pause.

The project, led by cognitive scientist Dr. Johan Berglund, builds software that signals uncertainty and asks for help instead of pressing ahead. In medical triage trials, such systems referred ambiguous cases to human clinicians and cut serious errors substantially.

The value of a pause

Hesitation, Berglund argues, is not a flaw but a feature of good judgement. Experienced surgeons, pilots and judges all know when to slow down. Most software does not.

Designing for doubt is harder than it sounds. Users tend to distrust tools that seem unsure, and companies fear that caution will look like weakness. The team has therefore spent as much time on interface design as on algorithms, testing phrasing, colour and timing.

> *“The goal is not a machine that is always right. It is a machine that knows when it might be wrong.”*

If the approach spreads, it could reshape how we think about trust. A tool that admits its limits invites collaboration rather than blind faith, and leaves room for the human judgement that no system should replace.

Thank you for reading Meridian.