

Pharmacological cognitive enhancement in the workplace: new interdisciplinary challenges

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Over the last decade, the part of the scientific community that deals with the study of the ethical, legal and societal implications of new technologies and technological trends has become increasingly interested in the phenomenon of enhancing the cognitive capabilities of healthy humans through pharmacological means. In this context, especially students from the US are supposed to be using prescription drugs such as methylphenidate (Ritalin) and modafinil (Provigil) for learning and successfully coping with exams and project assignments. Such use is supposedly also widespread among other social groups, for example, in different professions where it is important to maintain long-term concentration, attention and alertness, and where there are strong pressures to be highly productive, efficient and competitive. Thus, such substances are presumably also in use among surgeons, nurses, pilots, researchers, financial traders, entrepreneurs and soldiers. This contribution will address questions such as what kind of substances and effects we are talking about, how their use is connected with different professions today and in the past, and what challenges and implications they present for the future of work and the workers themselves. Finally, we will also touch on some aspects of modern work and life that encourage such use, as well as some of the broader ethical and societal issues respectively implications that such technological trends bring with them.