Intelligent Working Environments and the Ethics of Human Resources:
A First Survey

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The last years have been witnessing not only the growth of the so-called new technologies, but also the constant interaction between those technologies. This phenomenon has led to what is often termed the “converging” technologies, or NBIC technologies (in reference to Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, technology Information and Cognitive sciences). The so-called “intelligent environments” are representative of this phenomenon, as well as of the transformations that it implies. According to the estimations that we find in the academic literature, the first applications in intelligent environments should be available in about ten years. As the authors of the report on “Ambient Intelligence” of the Rathenau Instituut in the Netherlands state, this means that, in the next few years, the ambient intelligence is going to radically transform the organization of our everyday life, of our relation to the world, to the others and to ourselves, as well as our global perception of the reality.

Some scholars have begun to show some interest for the ethical issues implied in the development of intelligent environments. However, very few among them have been interested in the questions raised by the use of such environments at work. The objective of this presentation is to offer a first survey of the main ethical issues raised by the development of the intelligent working environments, especially as regards the capacity of such environments to collect and handle personal and medical data such as the heart rate, the cerebral activity or the emotional state of a person for instance.

To this purpose, I will first try to clarify what is meant by “intelligent working environments”, and say a few words regarding their origins, their characteristics and their applications (I). I will then try to point out the main ethical issues raised by the medical data that are likely to be measured and used by intelligent working environments (II). Finally, I will offer some elements of reflection regarding the ethical principles that should guide the development of intelligent working environments in the future (III).

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