

# HOWATT: Does cannabis use increase the risk for performance complacency in the workplace?

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Employers should prepare for cannabis legalization and the impact it might have on workplace productivity. (123RF)

Cannabis users often are stereotyped as being laid back, relaxed and chilled. Just watch an old Cheech and Chong movie and you'll get the picture. But when it comes to safety in the workplace, complacency matters.

Without science, any response would be guessing, based on the evaluator's bias with respect to being for or against legalization of cannabis. It will take research to determine if there's a "complacency effect" that negatively affects employees' performance in the workplace. The assumption is that a person who regularly uses cannabis is more relaxed, laid back and less likely to push themselves to their full potential.

As the legalization date of Oct. 17 approaches, many organizations are putting their final touches on their preparation for the recreational use of cannabis.

Some employers are not concerned and perhaps see the legalization of cannabis as a lot of hype that will not have any material impact on the workplace. An employer who takes this stance is most likely doing so because cannabis is a not a new drug to them. They've been managing it like other drugs such as opioids, cocaine and alcohol for many years.

	<u>HEALTH</u>	<u>ENGAGEMENT</u>	<u>PRODUCTIVITY</u>		
<u>Employee Cannabis Profile</u>	<u>Total Health Index Score</u>	<u>Total Health Engagement Index</u>	<u>Productivity Index</u>	<u>Average Days Missed</u>	<u>Average Days Unwell</u>
I do not use cannabis	71 per cent	68 per cent	70 per cent	3.0 per cent	30.8 per cent
I use cannabis recreationally	67 per cent	64 per cent	61 per cent	3.5 per cent	47.7 per cent
I use cannabis for medical purposes	63 per cent	61 per cent	51 per cent	5.9 per cent	76.8 per cent
I use cannabis recreationally and for medical purposes	62 per cent	59 per cent	49 per cent	5.4 per cent	78 per cent

The real difference with legalization of cannabis for recreational use and the anticipated increase in the number of employees using cannabis for medical purposes is the unknown.

The degree that the legalization of cannabis will have an effect on today's workplace is simply not known at this time. To think it will have no effect would be naïve. We need only look to Colorado and other states where cannabis has been legalized to see that legalization brought not only more tax revenue but also more risk of motor vehicle deaths and increased risk for accidents and addiction.

Cannabis is an addictive, psychoactive substance that reacts differently in the body when it's smoked or vaped compared to digested. There'll be a learning curve for many employees to help ensure they're safe and don't put their employment at risk.

Different than alcohol, where it takes the body an average of one hour to eliminate one ounce, the frequency of a person's cannabis use influences how long the drug will stay in their body and therefore how long it can be detected by a urine test.

For employees working in safety-sensitive workplaces, understanding fit for duty and how not to put themselves at risk will be a must to avoid putting their careers at risk. As well, employers would be wise not to assume that employees understand cannabis chemistry with respect to how cannabis acts in the human body.

I recently asked myself if cannabis, whether for recreational or medical use, would increase an employee's risk for complacency in the workplace. In the context of the workplace, complacency would be working to one's full potential with respect to output performance and ability to be safe.

When it comes to the employee's performance, an increase in complacency could impact their health habits, which in turn may negatively impact their motivation to exercise and eat healthy, along with their engagement and productivity levels.

Three areas that predict employees' success in the workplace are health, engagement and productivity. At Morneau Shepell we use a tool called the Total Health Index (THI) to measure employees' physical and mental health, workplace experience and life — financial, relationships, work-life blending. Over the past 12 months, we have added an optional question to get a baseline of cannabis use and its impact on total health.

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**Morneau Shepell** is a human resources services and technology company headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Established in 1966, Morneau Shepell serves approximately 20,000 clients in North America. [Wikipedia](#)

**Stock price:** [MSI \(TSE\)](#) CA\$27.69 -0.01 (-0.04%)

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**Headquarters:** [Toronto, Canada](#)

**Number of employees:** 4,300

Morneau Shepell's **Total Health Index (THI)** is a suite of evidence-based analytical tools that help employers improve health, engagement and productivity. THI goes beyond the scope of traditional assessment tools to capture data on all four components of total health – physical, mental, life and work.

## The four factors that influence total health

Data across four dimensions – physical, mental, work and life - create one comprehensive and powerful picture for employees so they gain a clearer understanding of where their health is suffering.



**As an employer, you obtain big picture feedback on your employees' health issues. You can choose to receive high-level information or drill down further for more in-depth analysis, without having to resurvey employees. THI provides you with a platform to turn your employee health data into actionable insights.**

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By having clear and actionable insights, you and your employees can make decisions that have the greatest impact on total health, leading to increased organizational effectiveness and better business performance. THI provides the strong evidence you need to best direct your spending on people and programs, and achieve the best return on your investments.

All clients who completed the THI with the cannabis question found a few interesting observations. The following chart lists five findings from this analysis. Based on our THI dataset, employees who don't use cannabis have better total health, engagement and attendance and lower presenteeism (i.e., coming to work when feeling unwell).

**What can't be lost when looking at these findings is why people are using cannabis, which may help to explain why scores of those who are using cannabis are lower. These findings suggest that employees who don't use cannabis on average have better health, engagement and productivity.** Further studies and data will agree or disagree with these early findings.

The above findings don't measure complacency. They only suggest that cannabis use may affect an employee's performance. Complacency is defined as "self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies." Will legalization of cannabis increase complacency in the workplace and give birth to the term "complacency effect"? Only time and research will tell.

The two to three years after Oct. 17 will be a time of discovery about what cannabis does and does not do to workforces, both positively and negatively. There most likely will be both. However, until we know, sage advice may be to not assume and to learn and prepare for the unknown.

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## Education



University of California, Los Angeles

Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior

Degree Name Post Doc

Field of Study Behavioral Science

Dates attended or expected graduation 2010 – 2012

Activities and Societies: Published several core books on the topic of addictions. In addition, I am editor of the Wiley Addiction Series

Currently researching the relationship between workplace dissatisfaction and addictions.



Walden University

Minneapolis, MN

Degree Name Ph.D

Field of Study Organizational Psyc.

Dates attended or expected graduation 2006 – 2010

Activities and Societies: This is the final piece of the puzzle for me. I am going to build on my expertise on human behavior and organizational performance. This program will add to my professional develop goals.



Heriot-Watt University

Edinburgh, Scotland

Degree Name MBA (c) certification complete

Field Of Study Human Resources Spec

Dates attended or expected graduation 2003 – 2008

Activities and Societies: After completing my Post Doc I wanted to improve my business competency. I have been and continue to be active in studying HRM and consulting both formally and informally - this is a degree I plan to complete one day.



Walden University

Minneapolis, MN

Degree Name Post MSc

Field of Study Clin. Psyc. Addictions

Dates attended or expected graduation 2002 – 2004

Activities and Societies: Complete additional studies in the area of addictions.



University of New Brunswick

Degree Name MEd

Field Of Study Counseling Psychology

Dates attended or expected graduation 1991 – 1993

Activities and Societies: Completed Choice Theory training as well became a faculty member of the William Glasser Institute



Acadia University

Glenside, PA

Degree Name BSc & BA

Field Of Study Education and Socail Sciences

Dates attended or expected graduation 1982 – 1987