

VANCOUVER COASTAL  
HEALTH

# DEVELOPING AN EMPLOYEE ACCORD

## WHO

Employee Engagement Unit at  
Vancouver Coastal Health

## GOALS

Enable employees to create a social  
contract with management around  
mutual expectations

## HOW

Live, real-time collaboration using  
mobile devices to rate and shortlist  
an initial list of 19 employee-  
generated expectations

## OUTCOME

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An empowering engagement process,  
leading to a highly-supported  
shortlist of staff expectations and  
employee accord with management

Clearly expressed agreements setting out mutual expectations are a critical component of a healthy and vibrant work culture. But creating such agreements in a transparent and participatory way can be slow or even impossible when dealing with large groups. Tapping into the internet's digital collaboration trend, Vancouver Coastal Health's employee engagement team deployed Ethelo to streamline a real-time engagement with staff to develop an Employee Accord. The platform enabled staff to shortlist the most important set of expectations they had of management, from among 700+ potential combinations, and clearly articulate the kind of organizational support they needed in order to do their jobs effectively.

## BACKGROUND

# RECIPROCAL MODES OF COMMUNICATION FOR EXPRESSING MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS ARE AT THE CORE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.

With important departmental changes ahead, the directors of the Employee Engagement Unit (EEU) of Vancouver Coastal Health wanted to develop a “social contract” with staff. Management met and identified a set of expectations they would like staff to fulfill. Grouped into six core areas, these expectations included: ‘being respectful in your interactions with one another’, ‘taking ownership over your own development and career’, along with four others.

Wanting to foster an equal exchange, however, management needed the input from its EEU team-members around the flip-question:

*“What do you personally need from EE Leadership to live the EE way?”*

Ethelo was chosen as a platform to streamline the engagement and help the EE Unit management come to a mutually beneficial agreement with staff.



*We were looking for a tool that allowed a deeper level of deliberation and engagement than was possible with surveys. What drew us to choose Ethelo was its unique ability to identify strongly supported decisions within constrained situations*



Conrad Cone, Innovation & Engagement Advisor, Vancouver Coastal Health

## THE NEED

# OPEN-ENDED IDEATION

Briefed for the task, 240 EEU team-members gathered at Vancouver's Roundhouse Community Centre for a 4-hour session. In the first stage of that session, staff and management broke into 6 focus groups to focus on 6 key areas; Autonomy, Workload, Respect, Clarity, Collaboration and Development. Each focus group was composed of a facilitator and between 15 and 20 staff. Each group discussed and came up with two to four distinct "statements of expectation" which expressed what staff felt they required from EE leadership to meet the specific expectation that management had of staff in that area.

After identifying common themes and narrowing down the content, the 6 groups identified a total of 19 expectations across the 6 core areas. For example, under the area of Autonomy, staff identified for 4 expectations:

1. Empowerment & innovation: Create a supportive environment that fosters empowerment and innovation.
2. Time & resources: Advocate for me to have dedicated time and resources to implement new ideas.

3. Receptive climate: Create a climate that is receptive to change and risk-taking.

4. Opportunities for open dialogue: Provide opportunities for open discussion, dialogue, and feedback.

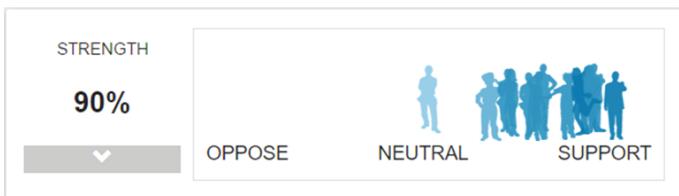
## BRINGING ETHELO INTO THE SCENE

# AN INTUITIVE SHORTLISTING EXPERIENCE

Having gathered the 19 expectations, the EE Unit now needed a shortlist containing one core expectation for each of the six focus areas. This required a way to enable staff to prioritize 6 selected expectations among a total of 768 potential combinations.

Ethelo's platform provided an intuitive rating environment where over 170 employees evaluated each other's proposed expectations. Ethelo's algorithm then turned those ratings into a ranked list of 768 agreement scenarios, highlighting the one that would maximize the entire group's overall approval and support.

In this case, the combination of 6 expectations with the highest likelihood of staff buy-in received an Ethelo 'strength of support' rating of 90%, as illustrated in the support distribution below. This metric combines the group's overall level of support and the degree of unanimity around any given outcome.



### A TRANSPARENT, REAL-TIME PROCESS

A key distinctive of this process was the platform's ability to engage staff in real time and present results quickly and transparently. After meeting in the

6 facilitated focus groups for 1 hour, the 19 resulting expectations were loaded into the Ethelo platform over a 30 minute break. During this time, management reviewed the 19 expectations to ensure they were all actionable (they were).

After the break, all staff convened in the main area and were given a URL to type into their handheld devices. They were guided through a collective voting process. Participants simultaneously evaluated each of the 19 proposed expectations. This process took about 10 minutes. When it was done, the Ethelo engine evaluated the inputs and identified the most strongly supported set of six expectations, choosing one expectation from each category. Each employee could see the shortlisted that the group as whole had selected.

The feature of real-time collaboration and transparency was significant. The internet has made it possible to make information readily available to everyone. However, enabling numbers of staff to collaboratively identify an agreement made the the experience into a two-way process. By transparently showing that the results had been generated by the staff working together, Ethelo created greater buy-in and support of the outcome. In short, staff could see that they had collectively made a decision.

This point was perhaps underscored by the result that 3 out of the 6 shortlisted expectations had explicitly to do with open dialogue, feedback, and two-way communication.

# RESULTS

In addition to the publicly-viewable results page, Ethelo also allowed for open commentary at the end of the process. This enabled staff to express and socialize additional comments, observations and concerns. Moreover, the anonymity of the comments gave way for staff to express their points of view with confidence and without fear of reprisal. A total of 12 comments, 4 replies, and 54 'likes' were collected – totaling 70 feedback interactions (which represented a 41% feedback rate among the 171 voting participants).

All in all, the process enabled senior management to present their expectations towards staff, but also to enable employees to do the same in a highly engaging manner. In less than 15 minutes, Ethelo used the insights of the entire team to rank in order of support 768 potential agreements, leading to a highly-supported shortlist of 6 employee expectations.

The Ethelo results are currently being turned into a workable action plan, aimed at preparing the EE team for important departmental changes ahead.

*“Ethelo enabled us to take a large set of potential options generated by small focus groups, and quickly identify an agreement that was broadly supported by staff. Notably, this took place in a live setting, with several hundred people using a broad variety of handheld devices.”*

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