

The Unspoken Rulebook: When Informal Communication Backfires at Zeplitta

Jagrati Gupta and Vijay Lakshmi Singh

Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow, India

Abstract. Zeplitta Limited was a software-as-a-service (SaaS) company established in India. Priya Sharma, with eight years of experience, joins Zeplitta as a Project Manager. Priya uses casual, informal interactions with her coworkers to encourage open and honest communication within the team. In the beginning, her teammates admired her communication style as it enhanced relationships among team members. But later, some coworkers criticized her communication style and filed a grievance against her with the HR Manager. The HR department publicly criticized Priya's communication style. Following the incident, colleagues started avoiding Priya by deliberately ignoring her and not inviting her to social gatherings. These incidents reduced Priya's psychological safety and performance. She lost interest in work and was not an active participant in extra job roles. The management at Zeplitta later struggled to understand why a high performer like Priya was working as an average performer.

Keywords: informal communication; organizational culture; psychological safety; hierarchy; empathy.

Declaration: This is a fictional case, and is curated for classroom discussion only. The details used in this case are fictitious in nature, and any resemblance to real persons and organizations is coincidental.

Zeplitta Ltd.

Zeplitta was founded in 2012 by Harshit Srivastava, with its headquarters in Bengaluru, India. Zeplitta had 20 employees in its founding year. The company dealt with customized enterprise products and operated in a highly competitive market. By 2017, Zeplitta had become the fastest-growing software company in India, with a workforce of 5000 employees. During a board meeting, on the growing demand for Zeplitta's software, the company decided to expand its workforce in 2018 by adding over 500 employees.

Zeplitta knew the importance of maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce. It helped them build a strong pool of ideas and solutions for their strategic and operational functions. To improve employee coordination and cooperation, and to inculcate the company's cultural values, initiatives such as an onboarding program, communication workshop, relationship-building activities, and open house sessions were undertaken at Zeplitta.

This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.

Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JOBE/abstractjobe18zeplitta.html>

Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson pneilson@neilsonjournals.com

© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2025.

Zeplitta valued professionalism, respect, and structured communication. The company placed strong emphasis on maintaining hierarchical clarity in decision-making, accountability in roles, and maintaining discipline and conduct. The communication policies at Zeplitta that guided employee behavior were implicit and based on a shared cultural understanding amongst employees.

About Priya Sharma

Priya Sharma was born and brought up in Lucknow in a joint family. She was always polite, respectful, and kind to everyone, regardless of age or gender. She was a bright and hardworking student and a class topper.

After completing her MBA in Information Systems, Priya joined Singhal Ltd. as a Management Trainee in 2010. Singhal Ltd. was an IT company that encouraged open communication and teamwork within its organizational setup. She was a promising employee, and soon her track record showed her delivering projects at Singhal Ltd. very well. Managers and colleagues appreciated Priya's punctuality, communication, timely project delivery, and adherence to work ethics. With over 8 years of consistent effort, in October 2018, she was promoted to Associate Project Manager in the company.

Then in 2018, for career growth and improved pay, Priya decided to move to Bengaluru. In January, 2019, Priya was hired by Zeplitta as a Project Manager. At Zeplitta, Priya used casual interactions with her coworkers to encourage open and honest communication within the team, as she had done previously with good effect.

The Incident

Priya's past leadership style focused on approachability, open dialogue, and informal communication for building trust within the team. Priya followed the same leadership style at Zeplitta during the initial months. Team members responded positively to her leadership style. They felt comfortable in sharing their ideas, solutions, and thoughts in discussions and when needed. Priya's leadership style significantly improved the trust and collaboration among the team members. As a result, the project outcomes of the team was timely and of good quality (Exhibit 3).

Eventually under Priya's leadership, in 2021, the overall performance index of the team was the highest (Exhibit 3). The team exceeded client expectations, maintained strong quality standards, and generated the highest business value among peer teams (Exhibit 4). Priya's team was recognized as the star-performing team of the year 2021. Thus, Priya's team performance at Zeplitta reinforced her reputation as a capable and effective leader.

Over time, however, perceptions among coworkers shifted regarding Priya's communication and leadership style. Priya's informal remarks and light-hearted communication were viewed by some peers as misaligned within Zeplitta's culture and was thought to be disrespectful to the hierarchy. These concerns were