

# A GUIDE

FOR **WORKING INTERNATIONALLY**



Laurea University of Applied Sciences X Universidad Autónoma de Encarnación





# Contents

3

## Introduction

4

## Grouping Cultures

5

## Cultural Positioning

6

## Linear-Active culture

Finland

10

## Multi-Active culture

Paraguay

Guatemala

Somalia

Morocco

Greece

Russia

29

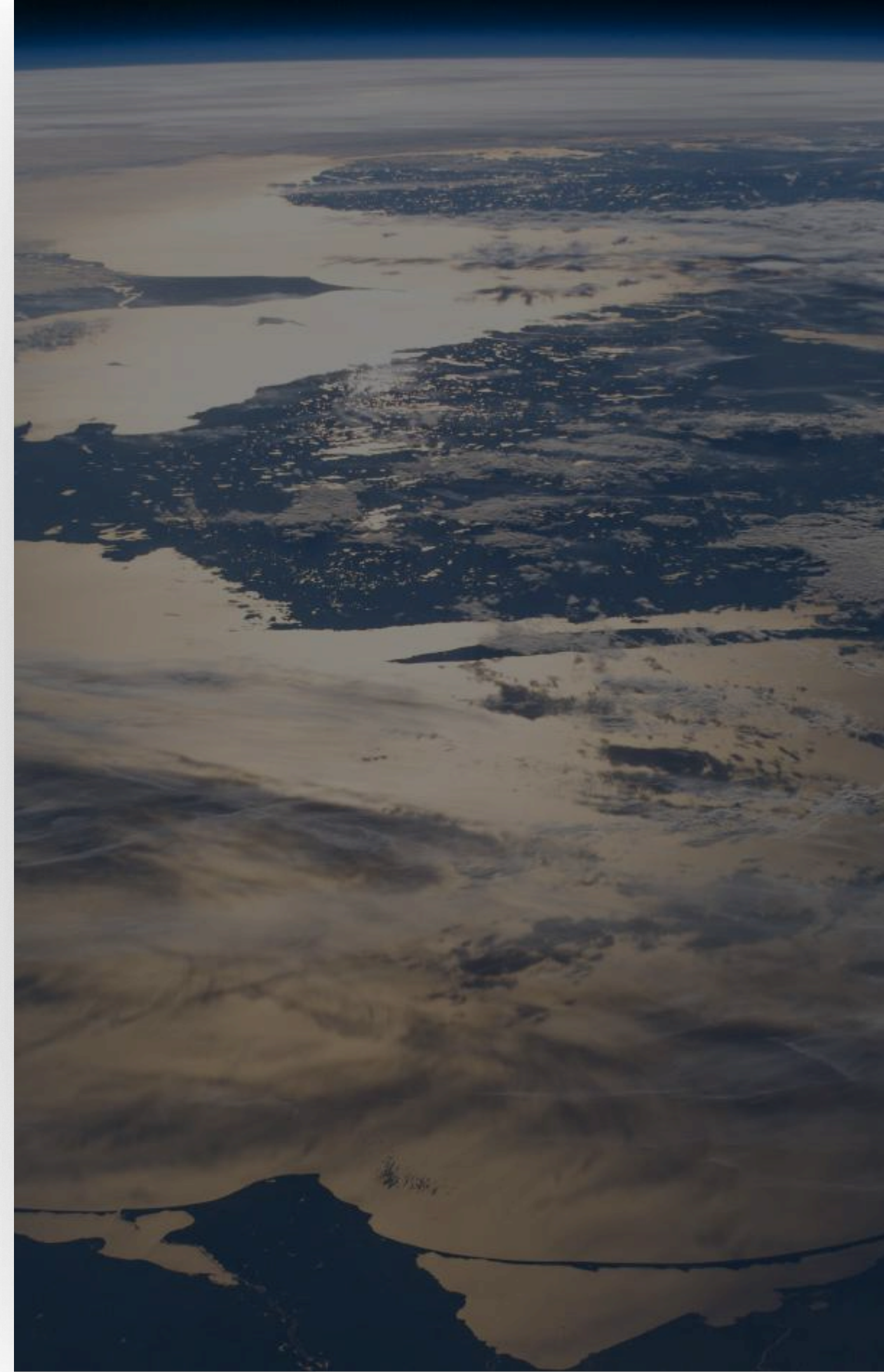
## Reactive culture

Japan

Sri Lanka

36

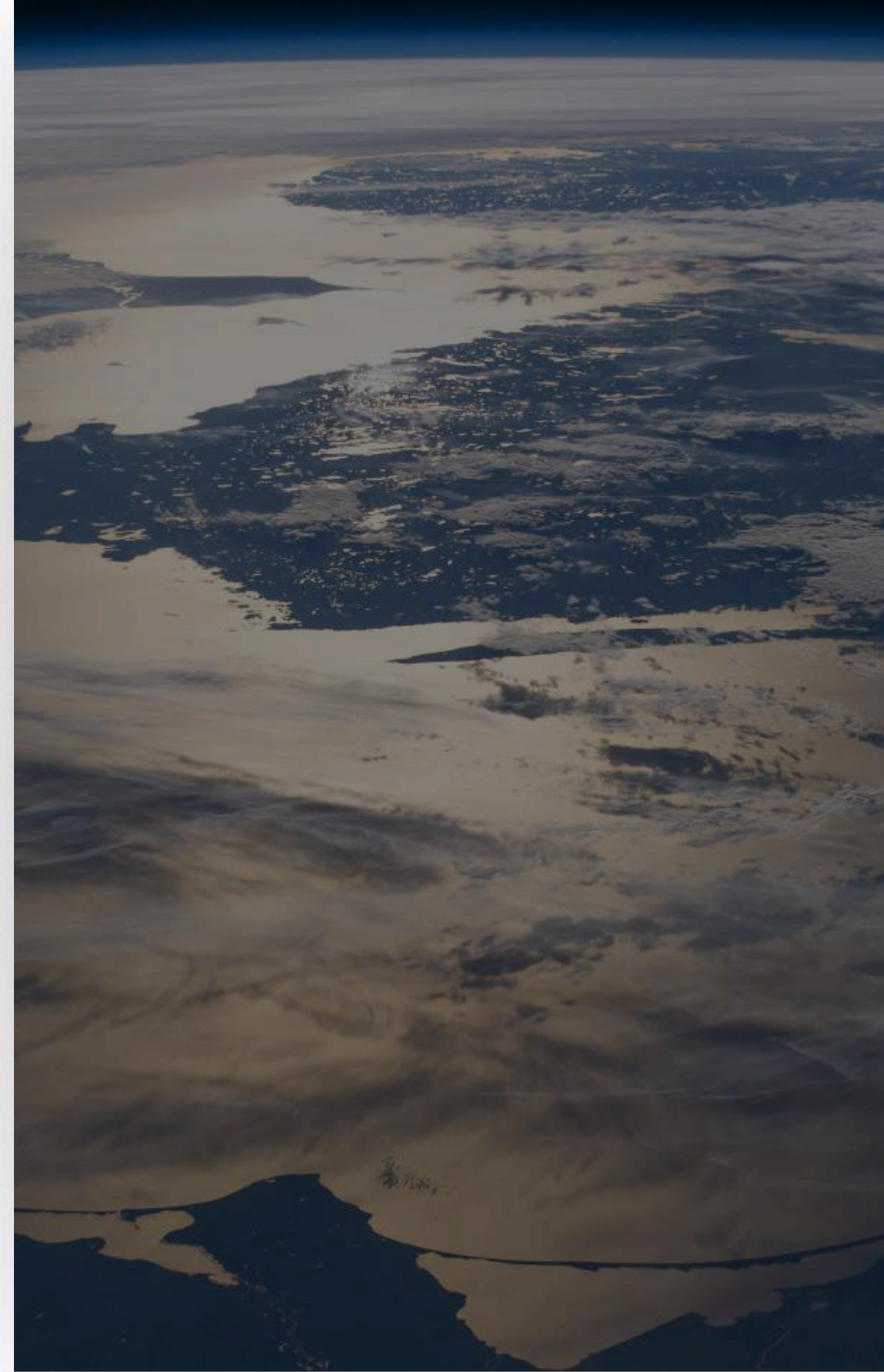
## Sources & Further Readings





# Introduction

- The purpose of the Guide is to highlight unique features of different cultures and give practical tips to people who work in multicultural work environments. The aim is to help people to navigate across cultures in the international world of work.
- The Guide is a product of Cooperative Online International Learning (COIL) implementation between Universidad Autónoma de Encarnación, Paraguay & Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The production included online and onsite working of intercultural student groups from mid-March to late May 2025.
- The theoretical framework was constructed by using various culture models: Hofstede, Trompenaars and Lewis. In addition, the creators' own cultural knowledge and experiences have enriched the contents of the Guide.



# Grouping Cultures

In this Guide, the cultures represented are grouped according to the **Lewis Model**. It is a model that explains how different cultures behave and communicate by grouping them into three styles:

## MULTI-ACTIVE

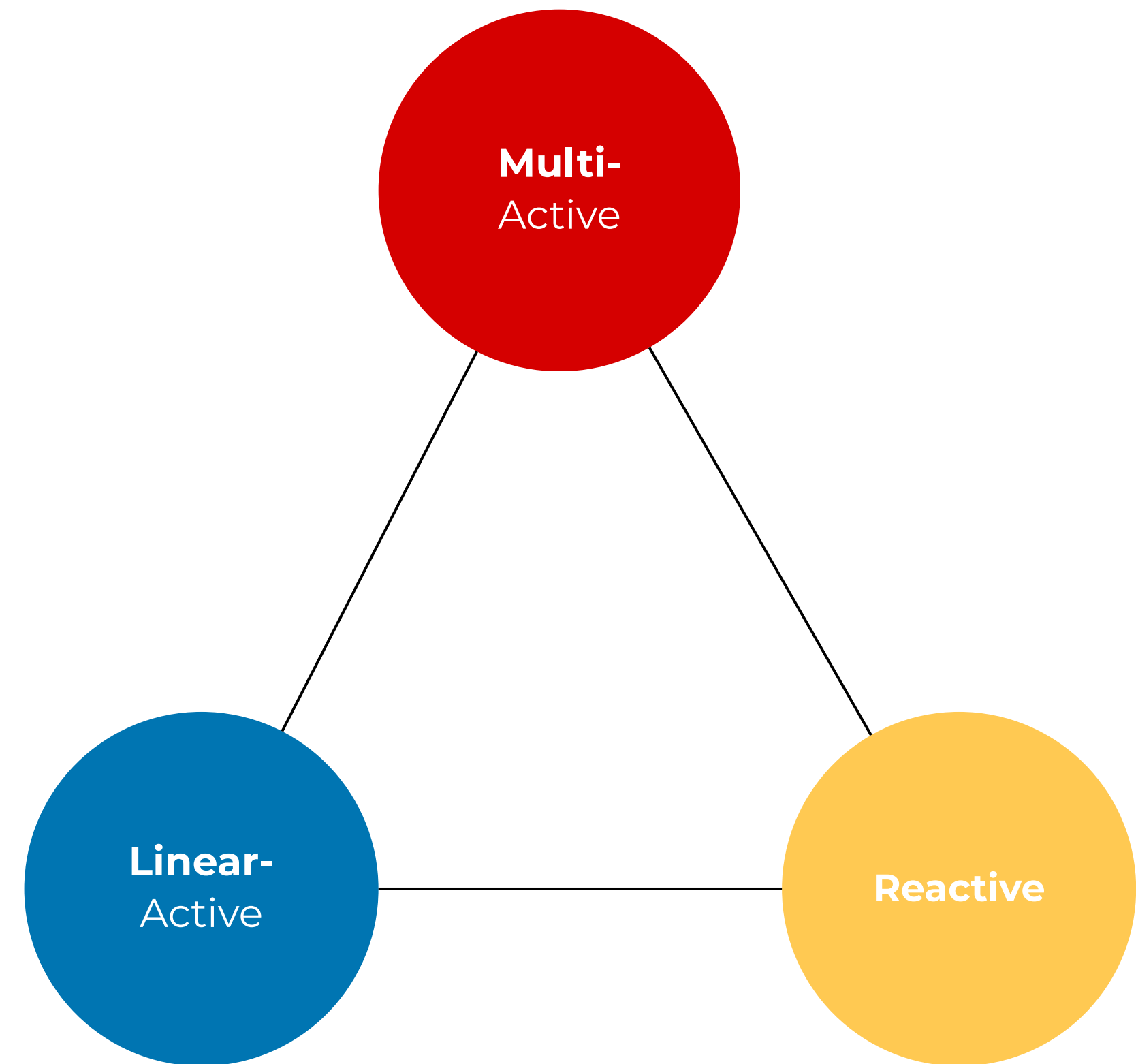
People-oriented  
Flexible and expressive  
Emotion-driven communication

## LINEAR-ACTIVE

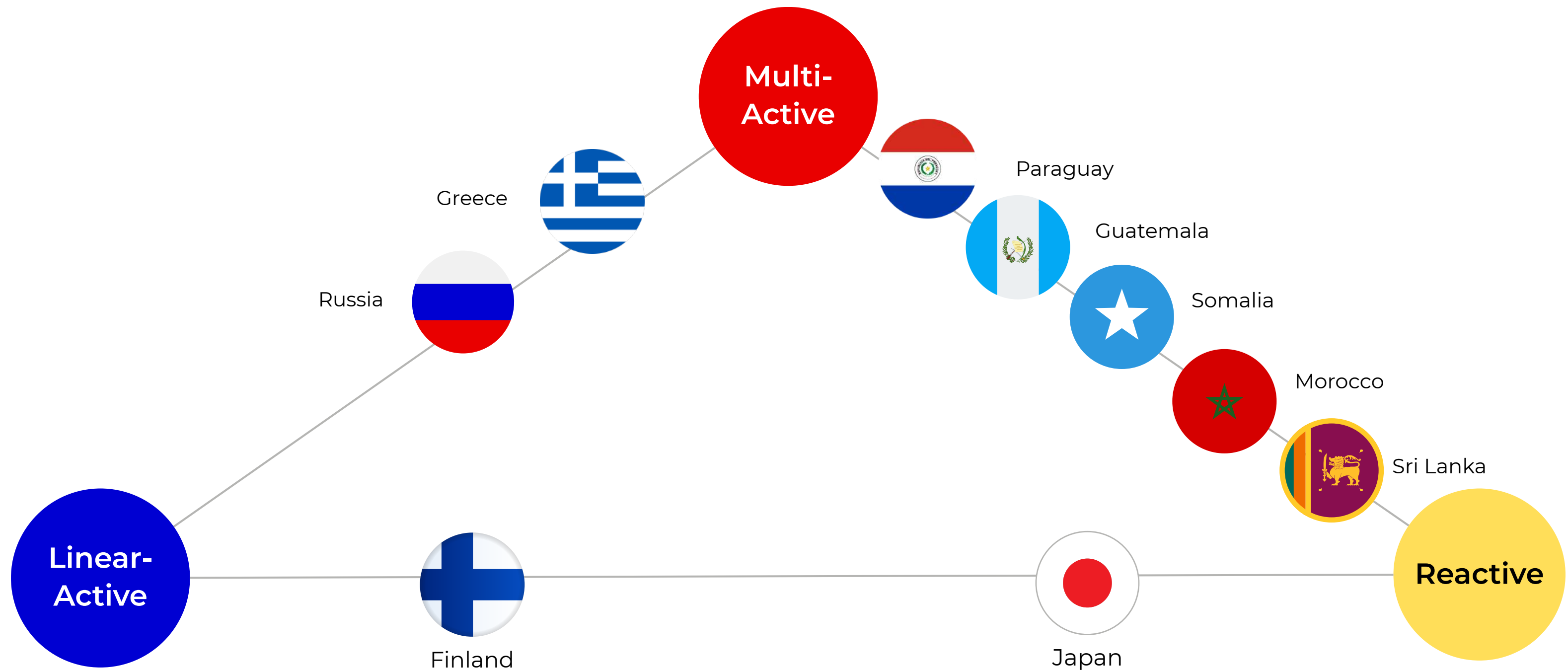
Task-oriented  
Structured and punctual  
Direct communication

## REACTIVE

Listener-oriented  
Respectful and indirect  
Harmony over confrontation



# Cultural Positioning





The background of the image is a dark blue sky. A Finnish flag, featuring a white field with a blue Nordic cross, is waving from the bottom left towards the top right. The flag is slightly translucent, allowing the text to be visible through it.

# LINEAR-ACTIVE

culture

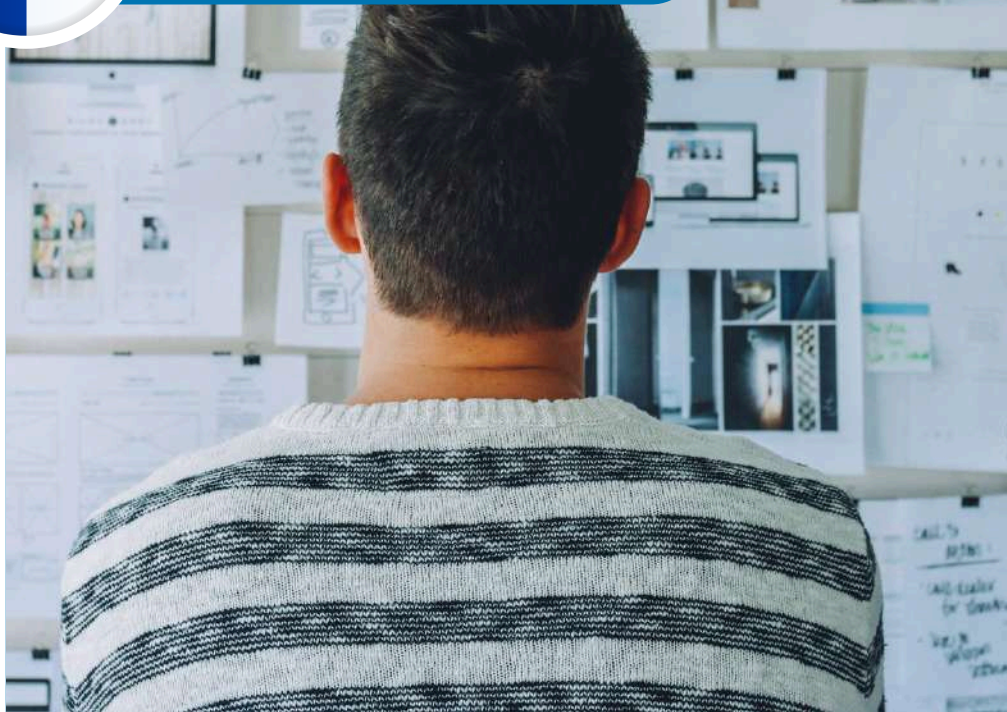
The image shows the national flag of Finland, which consists of a white field with a blue Scandinavian cross. The flag is waving in the wind against a dark, overcast sky. The word "FINLAND" is superimposed in the center of the flag in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**FINLAND**





# Finland



## Well Planned is Half Way Done

Finns are known for their careful preparation. They tend to avoid unnecessary confusion and focus on building a solid foundation from the very beginning.

- It is considered **impolite** to not be on time. Let your Finnish colleagues know, if you are **even a little late**.
- A lot of issues with Finns can be avoided by **communicating** early on if there are **changes** to **the plans**.



## Words Don't Get the Job Done

Silence is golden when working with Finns. They prefer to focus on the task at hand and tend to avoid unnecessary small talk during work.

- **Trust** is mostly **task based**. A Finn doesn't need to know **you**, but **your work**.
- Finnish leaders **value** and are mostly interested in **results**. Show your **work first** and **speak then**.
- Finns socialize **not** by **small talk**, but during **coffee/tea** breaks.



## In the Country by the Countries Ways

Strong respect for rules, procedures, and contracts. Authority is respected, but workplaces feel informal. Preference for independent work or structured teams.

- To Finns **being lawful** is a high **virtue**. Presenting that you are doing things 'by the book' **creates trust** with the Finns.
- **Authority** needs to be **earned** with Finns, they **don't respect** just a **title**.
- Finns live in an **equal society**, they will treat **everybody** and expect to be treated **equally**.





## Finland



### If Work was Fun the Lords Would Do It

Finns tend to have a strong work ethic and prioritize efficiency and focus. They are quite pragmatic and value practicality over fun.

- Overtime is seen as a burden and a lot of it will lead to issues with Finns.
- Finnish leaders can encourage you to take vacations. Not because of badly done work, but because it is seen as reward.
- Finns see work as something to be done without distractions.



### The One who Reaches for the Spruce, Tumbles to the Juniper

Finns don't seek the spotlight. Rather than aiming to stand at the top, Finns tend to do the job well and contribute for the team.

- Finns consider rude and immodest to boast about their own success.
- In team work Finns expect to get their share of the credit.
- To Finnish a good leader gives them also individual credit.
- Leaders taking credit for their subordinate's work is frowned upon.



### In Addition to Words, You Need it Black and White

Finns don't put trust on words alone, documentation is needed. Finns have a low-context communication, which means things are spelled out explicitly rather than be left between the lines.

- Finns value and expect honesty. They would rather you be honest than please them.
- Because of this Finns have hard time to pick up cues in indirect speech and may seem rude.
- Finns expect there to be documentation about everything even slightly important.





# MULTI-ACTIVE

culture



A photograph of the Paraguayan flag, featuring horizontal stripes of red, white, and blue with the national coat of arms in the center, flying from a black pole. The flag is positioned in front of a grand, light-colored stone building with classical architectural elements, including large columns and arched windows with black metal grilles. A white balustrade is visible at the bottom of the frame. The word "PARAGUAY" is superimposed in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

**PARAGUAY**





# Paraguay



## Hospitable, Engage in Small Talk

The culture is known for being **hospitable** and **warm**, and it is common to **start interactions with small talk before moving on to more serious matters**, as a way to build trust and rapport.



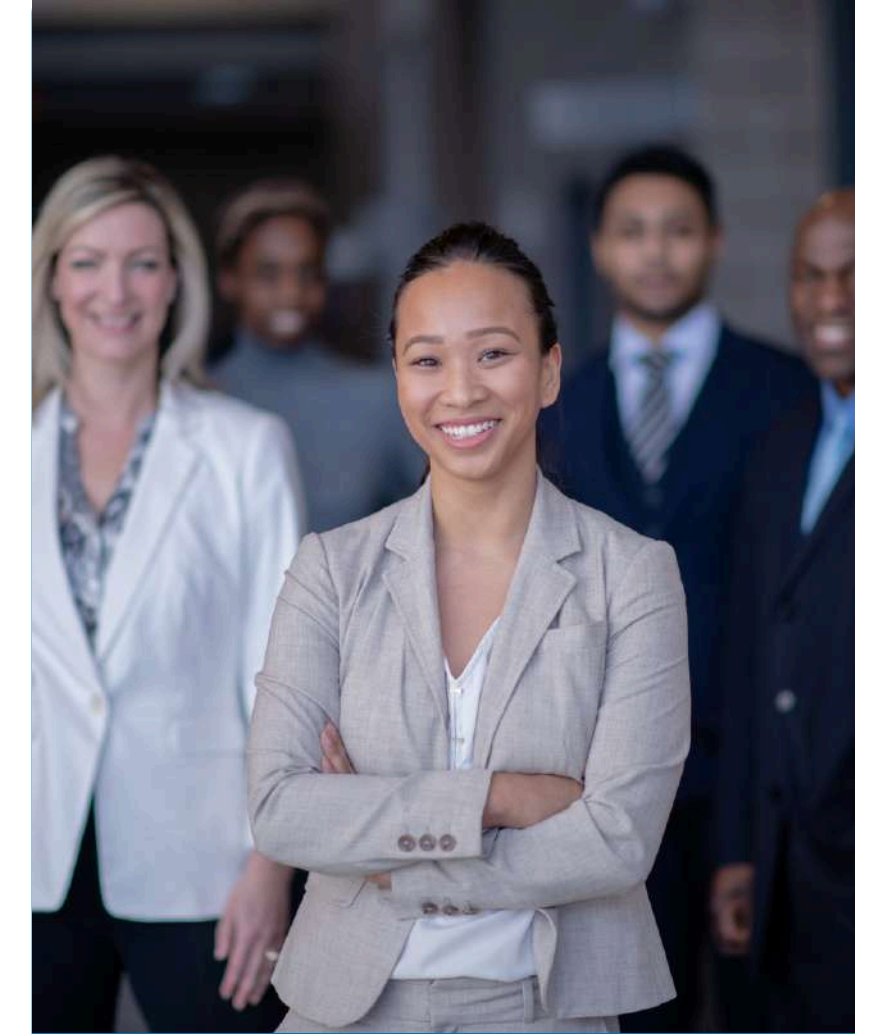
## Time Flexibility

Time flexibility is also typical; while **punctuality** is appreciated in formal contexts, there is generally a **relaxed** attitude toward time, especially in social or informal situations.



## Hierarchy is Respected

Paraguayan society **tends to observe a respect for hierarchy**. Decisions are often made by those in higher positions, and there is an expectation of deference to authority figures in both work and family environments.



## Professional Titles as a Sign of Respect

In Paraguay, **people commonly address others using their professional titles**, such as "Professor Juan" or "Engineer Rodrigo". This practice reflects respect and formality in the workplace.





# Paraguay



## Reserved Communication Style

Paraguayans **tend to be reserved** in group settings, more inclined to listen than to speak.



## Importance of Family

Family plays a central role in Paraguay, influencing work and leadership. Close ties may be seen as lack of independence and can cause interruptions, especially in remote work.



## Indirect Communication

In Paraguayan culture, communication and feedback are often indirect. People avoid confrontation, using subtle or roundabout expressions to maintain harmony and respect.



## Collectivism vs. Individualism

Paraguayan culture **values group harmony**, which may limit innovation and personal feedback. Leaders avoid criticism, and individual recognition can seem self-centered.



# GUATEMALA







# Guatemala



## Build Trust Through Personal Relationships

Trust is a foundation for doing business. Start with a casual conversation before getting to the agenda.



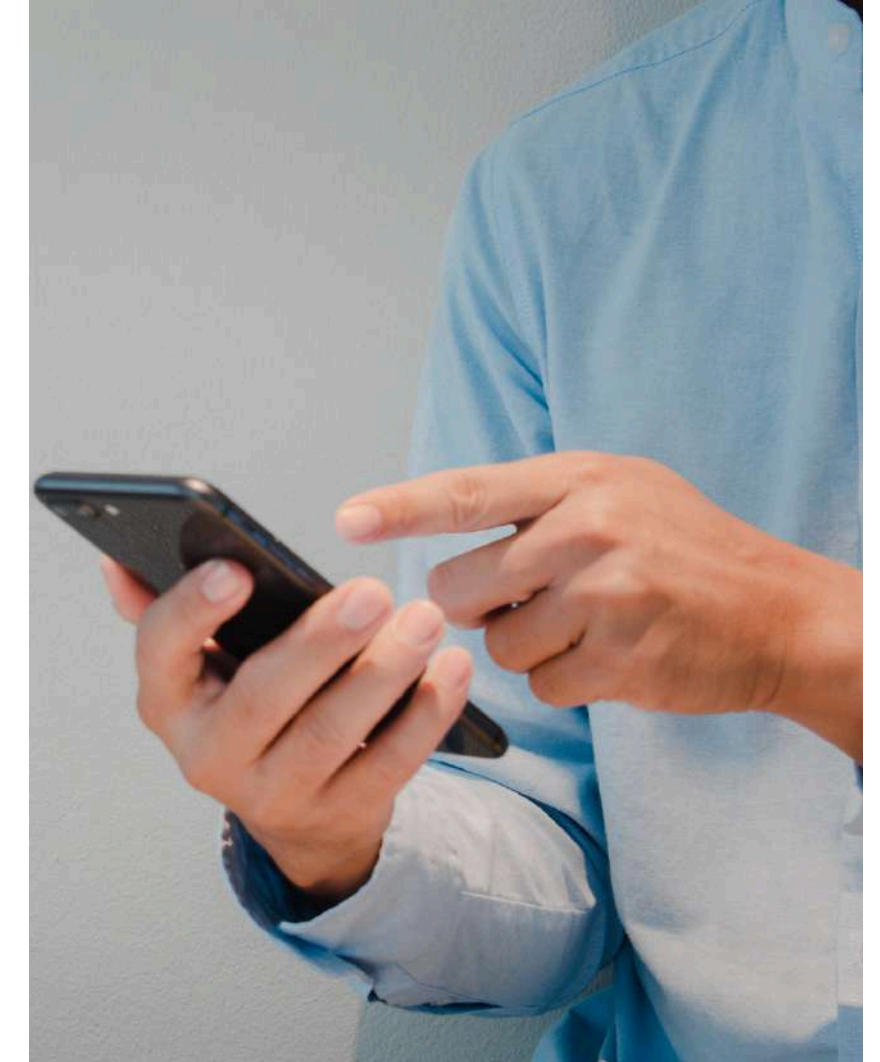
## Elders and Authority Figures are Highly Respected

Address senior staff with Mr/Mrs and their professional title if applicable (Professor, Engineer, etc.), unless invited to use first names.



## Be Sensitive to Indirect Communication

People may not be direct because they are trying to show politeness. Look for cues like hesitation, body language, or vague responses. Follow up gently if you need clarity.



## Be Flexible with Time

Punctuality is appreciated in most business-centric environments, but allow for some flexibility, especially in casual gatherings. Meetings may start late or run longer.





# Guatemala



## Be Courteous and Use Formal Language

Start interactions with formal greetings, both in person and in writing. After meetings, send polite follow-up emails to recap and confirm action items if needed.



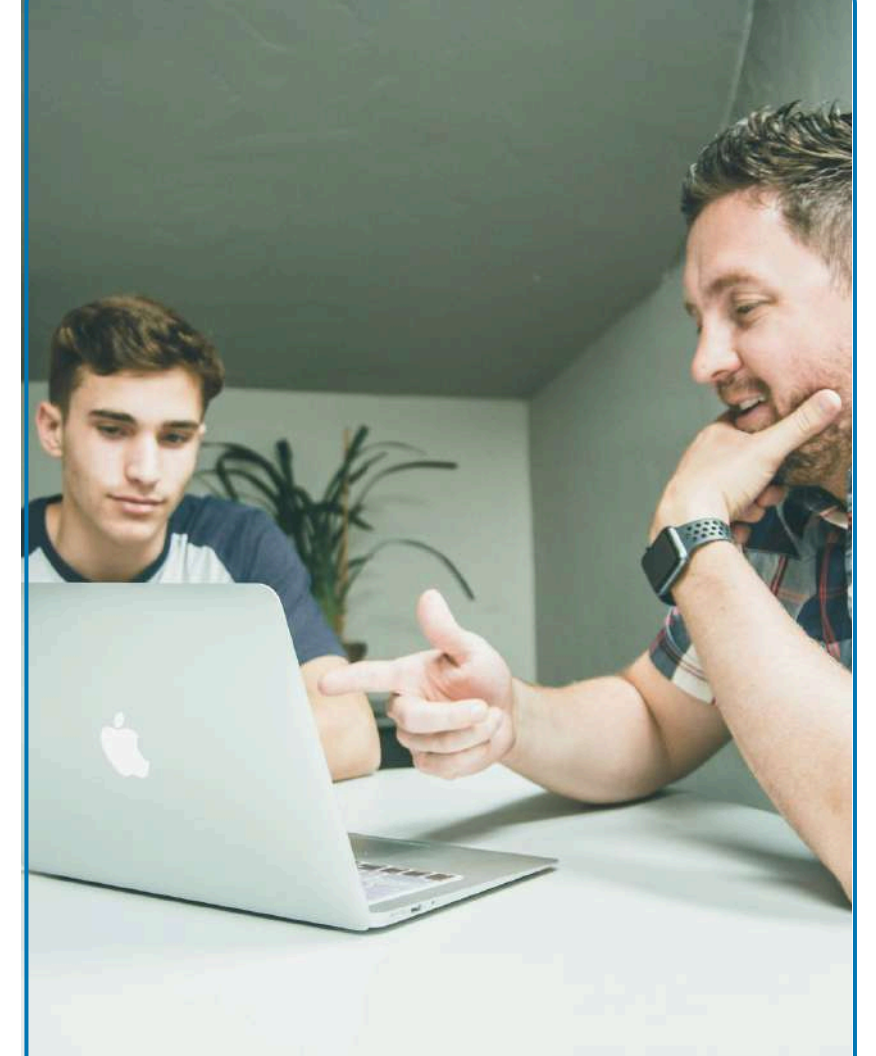
## Physical Touch Beyond a Handshake

Among strangers or in formal/professional settings, a handshake is preferred. Greetings with kiss on the cheek are common among women and between men and women who have a close working relationship.



## Cultural Sensitivity Matters

Especially when working with teams in rural areas), avoid assumptions about Latin America as a monolith. Guatemala has a rich indigenous culture, with over 20 Mayan languages spoken.



## Be Subtle when Providing Feedback

Be tactful and diplomatic. Avoid direct confrontation by putting someone on the spot or causing embarrassment.





**SOMALIA**





## Somalia



### Collective Loyalty to Family, Clan, or Community Shapes Decision-Making

Collective loyalty to family, clan, or community **shapes decision-making and responsibility.**

**Misinterpretation:** “Somalis don’t take initiative or are too dependent.”

**Tip:** **Emphasize collaborative goals;** give shared tasks; recognize group contributions.



### Respect is Earned, not Assumed

Dialogue and negotiation are **signs of respect.** Hierarchies are flexible—leaders earn trust rather than assume authority.

**Misinterpretation:** “They’re disrespectful or challenge authority too much.”

**Tip:** **Encourage dialogue;** clarify when formal structure is needed; value respectful questioning.



### Direct but Poetic Communication

**Rich use of metaphor and bold speech is respected.** Debate can be passionate and direct, especially when ideas matter.

**Misinterpretation:** “Too emotional or confrontational.”

**Tip:** **Offer feedback** on tone gently; explain local norms without criticism; encourage balance.





## Somalia



### Time is Flexible

Personal relationships often outweigh strict scheduling. **Delays can reflect priority on human connection.**

**Misinterpretation:** *“They don’t respect deadlines.”*

**Tip:** **Frame deadlines** as relationship-building; clarify time expectations without judgment.



### Respect is Shown Nonverbally

Avoiding eye contact can indicate humility or cultural respect, especially across gender or age.

**Misinterpretation:** *“Lack of confidence or honesty.”*

**Tip:** **Educate team about cultural respect signals**; normalize diverse expressions of professionalism.



### Greetings Open the Door to Trust

A **proper greeting**—especially with elders or respected peers—is essential. It **reflects politeness and openness.**

**Misinterpretation:** *“They’re being overly formal or religious.”*

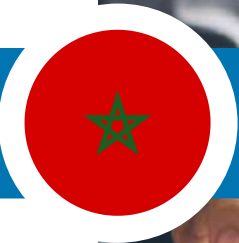
**Tip:** **Promote intercultural awareness**; welcome diverse greeting styles.



A low-angle photograph of a Moroccan flag in the foreground, with a minaret in the background. The flag is red with a green pentagram. The minaret is made of light-colored stone with intricate blue and white geometric patterns. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

**MOROCCO**





# Morocco



## High-Context Communication

Communications are often indirect, relying on tone, body language, and context. Indirect language can be used to avoid conflict.



## Relationship-Driven Approach

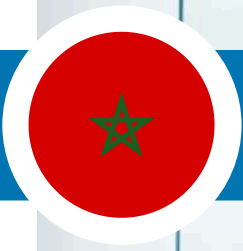
Personal connections and trust are prioritized over strict task orientation. Small talk and social interactions are important for building trust.



## Flexible Time Management

Time is viewed more fluidly, with deadlines seen as guidelines. Multitasking is common, requiring patience and adaptability.





## Morocco



### Adapt to Indirect Communication

Pay attention to non-verbal cues and tone to avoid misunderstandings. Be aware that a direct response may be softened to maintain harmony.



### Understand Hierarchy and Respect

Show respect for seniority and avoid openly challenging authority. Use appropriate titles to avoid unintentional disrespect.

### ALSO

#### Invest in Relationships

Take time to build personal connections and establish mutual respect.

#### Plan for Flexibility

Include buffer time in schedules and be prepared for changing timelines.

Understand that personal relationships may influence deadlines.

#### Be Mindful of Personal Priorities

Recognize the importance of family and personal commitments in work-life balance.



The image features the Greek flag, with its characteristic nine horizontal blue and white stripes and a white cross on a blue square canton, waving on a tall flagpole. The background is a dark, overcast sky with wispy clouds. In the lower-left corner, the top of a white domed church with a cross on its spire is visible. In the lower-right corner, the green foliage of a tree is partially seen. The word "GREECE" is centered in the image in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

**GREECE**





### Trust Comes Before Business

- Greeks often prefer to work/ make deals with people they know and trust.
- They build loyalty through personal interaction.
- Greeks may expect favors based on relationships.

"Know-who oftentimes outweighs Know-how in business"



### Respect the Hierarchy, but Don't Be Rigid

- Decision-making is often centralized, and leaders are seen as protectors.
- Avoid pushing flat structures too soon.

"Leadership is respected & expected to show strength, fairness and care."



### Adapt to Flexible Time Orientation

- People may prioritize relationships over the clock.
- Punctuality is not strict in social settings.

"Time is relative. Deadlines are not set in stone."





## Greece



### Direct Talk, Emotionally Delivered

- Greeks **communicate directly, but with emotion and context.**
- They may raise voices or argue emotionally.
- They talk more than listen.

**“Expect strong opinions and even stronger passion.”**



### Online Work Needs Human Touch

- In virtual settings, **warmth and facial expressions compensate** for the missing coffee break.
- Build presence and recognition online.

**“Video on. Tone matters. Emojis help.”**



### Decision-Making: Expect Clear Direction from the Top

- Greeks **expect top-down decision-making** & may be uncomfortable in flat hierarchies or when expected to self-manage.
- Ambiguity in leadership roles can lead to hesitation or conflict.

**“Decisions are expected from leaders. Clarity builds confidence.”**





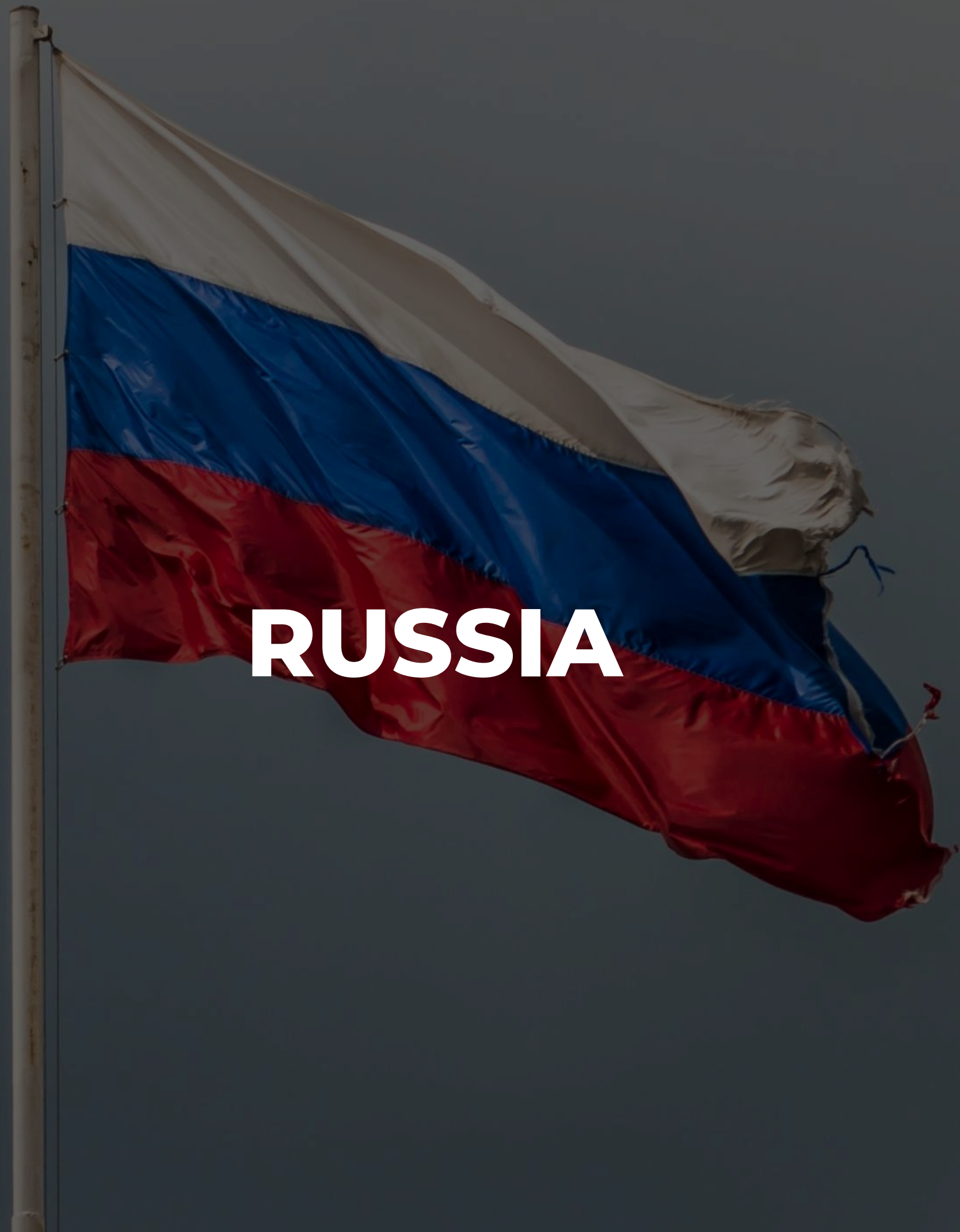
# Greece

## BONUS TIPS

- **A thoughtful local gift** from your country can be a powerful icebreaker. Hospitality and gestures of goodwill are highly valued.
- **Don't be surprised by personal questions.** These are often meant to build connection, not to intrude. Respond openly, within your comfort.
- **Use formal address and respectful language.** Always use the plural form out of respect when speaking to superiors or older in age/seniority colleagues. Start with Mr./Mrs. & surname, unless requested otherwise.
- **Dress to impress.** Professional appearance is important in Greek business culture. It reflects respect for the role and occasion.





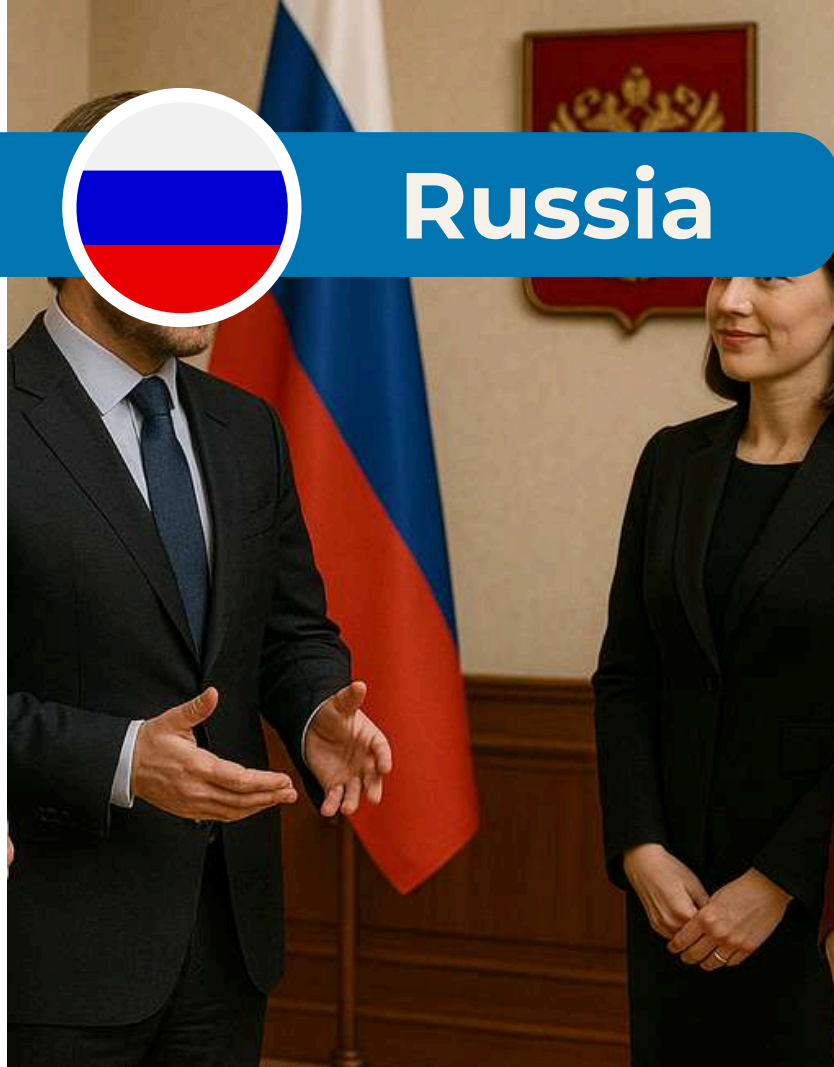


**RUSSIA**





# Russia



## Invest in Appearance

Pay attention to how you dress, it might be a deal breaker!



## Respect the Authority and Hierarchy

There is high power distance in Russia, decisions are made at executive level. Clear emphasis on leadership position, they carry responsibility.



## Always Bring Something with You and Be a Hospitable Host

Hospitality is very important and bringing gifts is essential. The higher you stand in an organization the nicer the gift has to be.



## Take Your Time to Build Trust

Russians value long-term relationships and appreciate trust that develops gradually over time.





# REACTIVE

culture



The image shows the Japanese flag, which consists of a white field with a large red disc in the center. The flag is waving on a flagpole against a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The word "JAPAN" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the red disc.

**JAPAN**





## Japan



**“Listening” is Polite**

**Focus on listening carefully rather than sharing their opinions actively.**

- **Interrupting** other person's speech = may be regarded as **rude**.
- *“Silence” is one of the communications* = carefully **observing others and thinking about their opinions before they speak.**



**Say Something Indirectly**

**Care about harmony in the group, so try to avoid conflict.**

To **avoid making the other person feel uncomfortable** use indirect words such as “maybe”, “if it's possible” when they want to reject something.

**E.g.** *“Option A sounds good, but I think maybe option B will be better”* = I don't agree with option A.

*“I will go there if it's possible.”* = Someone invites me to the party but honestly I want to reject to go there.





# Japan



**“Be on time” Shows Politeness**

**Show respect for other people’s time and schedules. Being on time shows reliability and earns trust**

- “Act 5 minutes early” is more polite. **E.g.** If the meeting will be started from 10:00 am, everyone should be there by 9:55 am.
- Japanese “be on time” is *not just about punctuality*. It’s a way to show respect and politeness for others.



**Keeping Personal Space Shows Respect**

**Keep physical distance especially with people who meet first time or in business places.**

- It’s a way to show humility and respect for others.
- Exchange “Meishi” (business card) with a slight bow instead shaking hands, hug or kiss in business situation.



A low-angle photograph of a historic stone clock tower with two visible clock faces. To the left, the flag of Sri Lanka is flying on a tall pole. The scene is set against a clear blue sky. The text 'SRI LANKA' is overlaid in the center in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**SRI LANKA**





## Sri Lanka



### High-Context Culture

Messages are often conveyed through tone, gestures, and social cues rather than direct words.



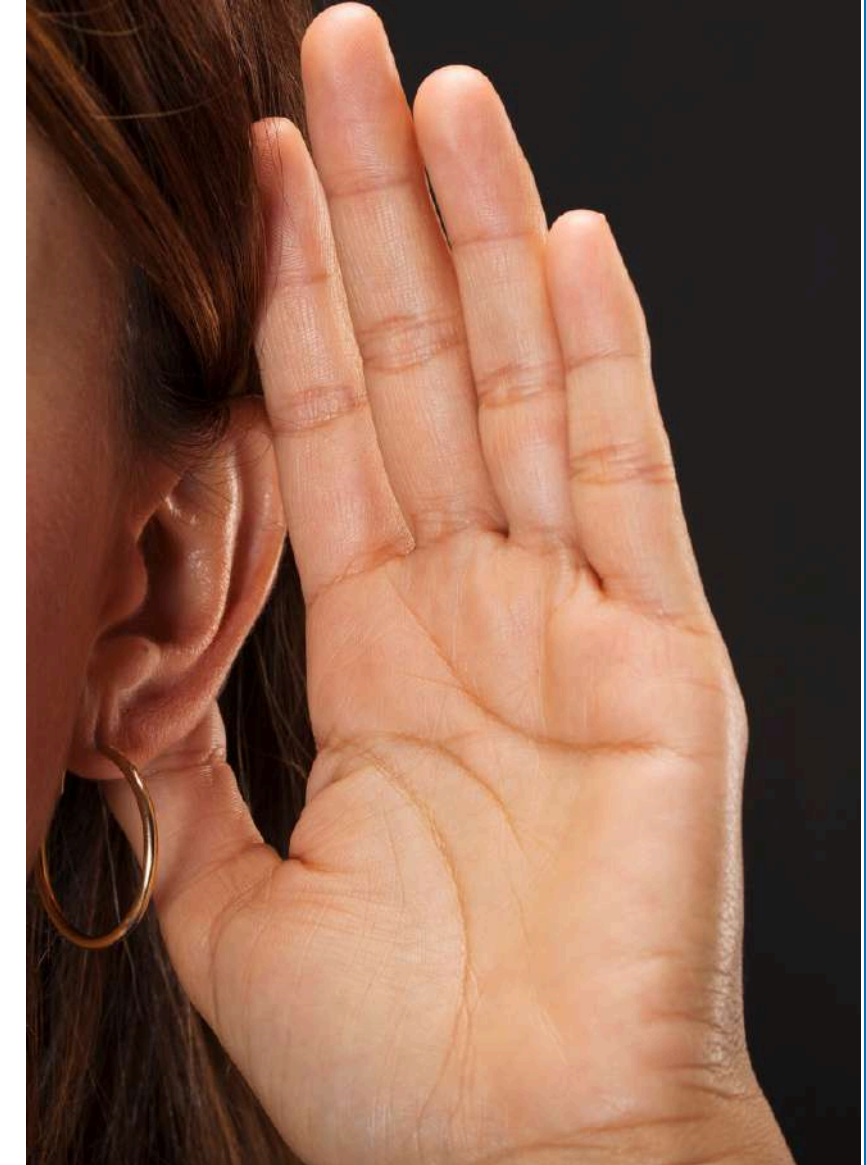
### Harmony Over Confrontation

Maintaining group harmony is important. Open conflict is rare and often discouraged.



### Indirect Communication

People communicate politely and subtly. Open disagreement is avoided, especially in formal settings.



### Listener-Oriented

Sri Lankans usually listen carefully, avoid interrupting, and respond thoughtfully.





# Sri Lanka

## Communication at the Workplace

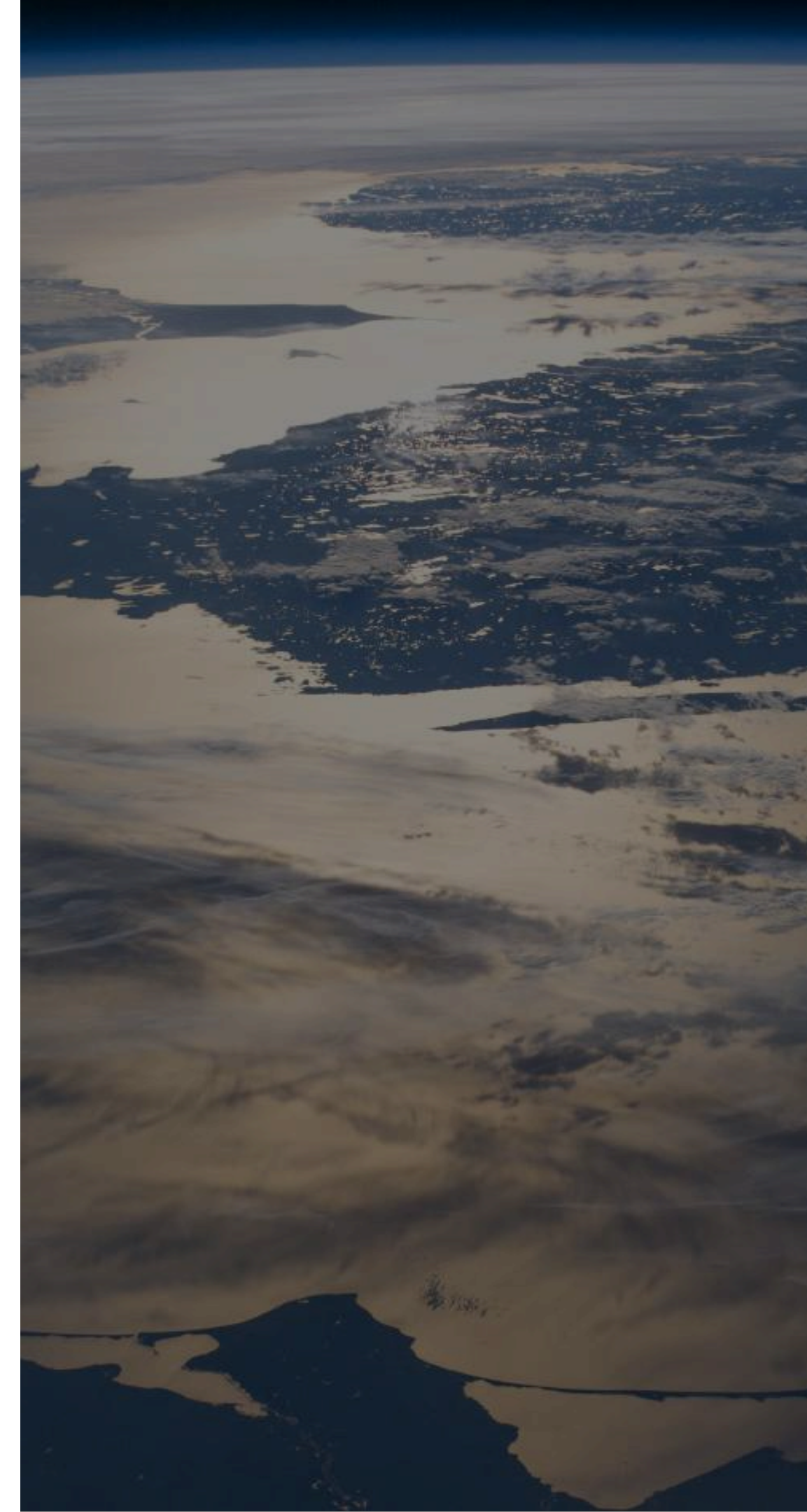
- Be patient and allow pauses, don't expect instant answers.
- Avoid aggressive or overly direct communication styles.
- Respect hierarchy and titles authority and age often matter.
- Focus on relationship-building, not just tasks.
- Don't pressure for quick decisions, decisions are often made after reflection or group consultation.
- Workplace culture respects hierarchy — leaders can feel unapproachable.
- Favoritism and personal connections often override rules. Bribes and political influence can affect outcomes, especially in public sectors.





# Sources & Further Readings

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# Production Team



Imane Tawil  
Ioanna Karniaoura  
Tiia Marjamaa  
Miyu Ikebayashi  
Ville Vigren  
Venla Heiliö  
Katariina Bruun  
Salla Parviainen  
Elena Weler  
Elina Nordström

Elsy Alvarado Fajardo  
Lindgren Kenth  
Andrei Koskinen  
Marian Mohamud  
Petra Terävä  
Ardianë Begolli  
Joonas Honkanen  
Tritni Adikaril Mudiyansele  
Robin Hedman

Zadkiel Emiliano Troche Gamon  
Helen Melisa Burgos Britez  
Agustina Yeruti Denis Espínola  
Erico Sebastian Pereira Galeano  
Mercedes Verónica Gowdak Mancini  
Lia Araceli Valenzuela Ferreira

# Project Supervisors

Elina Wainio  
Senior Lecturer, Business Management

Liz Escurra Ferreira  
Lecturer, Business Management