



Finland

We are currently focusing on the Nordic countries and this month, we focus on Finland. Finland is a country in the far north of Europe, bordered by Norway, Sweden and Russia. Unlike their fellow-Scandinavian neighbours to the west, the Finns are not a Germanic people but rather speak a language related to Estonian, some languages of Siberia and, more distantly, Hungarian. Finland has raised itself from a struggling war-battered country in 1945 to one of the most developed countries in the world. Finland is the only Nordic EU member to use the euro as the national currency. The country spends heavily on education, training and research - investment which pays dividends by delivering one of the best-qualified workforces in the world.

Finns are warm-hearted people but they have a desire for solitude. They are invariably hard-working and well-educated but can appear to seem slow to react to other cultures. They are tolerant but distrust and dislike people who gossip, are melodramatic and over-emotional. In many respects, the Finns have protected themselves from the greed of individuals, as greed and excess are cultural taboos - society works towards the common good. They have a robust self-esteem (in terms of self-reliance), a deep-rooted sense of their values and a healthy sense of irony.

The most typical of Finnish values, *sisu*, is difficult to translate. However, it implies courage, toughness, stamina, stubbornness, single-mindedness and tenacity – the ability to endure hardship and adversity.

In the workplace, Finns are self-disciplined, industrious individualists who nevertheless like teamwork and team spirit. Their responsibility and authority should be clearly defined, because they like to be left alone to get on with their job. They intensely dislike close supervision.

Finns highly emphasise equality and egalitarianism and believe that every person deserves the same advantages and opportunities. Women and minorities have a strong presence in both political and corporate life. Finns firmly believe in the protection of democracy and human rights. They hold a deep-rooted sense of fairness.

Organisations are not usually hierarchical and are relatively flat in structure. There is always an informal relationship between the boss and the workers, and senior managers/bosses are approachable in a way that would be impossible in southern Europe. Finns respect managers who are experienced and hardworking rather than managers with status alone.

Finns judge you by your degree of *luotettavuus* (reliability). Do what you have said you are going to do! You keep to time, deliver on deadline, and to the highest quality possible. Your reliability is defined by your competence and the fact that you never promise what you cannot deliver or do. It is generally recognised that they will never let you down either.

Because the Finns are honest and straight talking, they can be very frank when they need to tell people when things are going wrong. Whilst some cultures find their directness off-putting, Americans, on the other hand, prefer their frankness.

The Finns are also reserved, and while some western Europeans and North Americans will greet new colleagues with a smile, Finns tend to view this as insincerity. Personal relationships with colleagues are

not as important as in other business cultures. It is not required to build friendships with business partners as Finns prefer to keep their personal and professional lives separate.

According to author, Richard D. Lewis, like many British, Finnish top executives exercise control from a position just outside and above the ring of upper-middle managers who make the day-to-day decisions. Their top executives have the reputation of being decisive in difficult times. Most managers make decisions without constant reference back to HQ and this ability and mobility gives them a distinct advantage.

People take both criticisms and arguments very personally, and you may have a major disagreement on your hands if you adopt a conflict approach. It's always preferable to try a consensus-based approach and get people working together to solve a problem. They are deep thinkers and don't show much emotion, so you could easily upset them and not know it. Remember the Finns are very much like the Asians in respect of Face saving.

Finally, Finns are amongst the world's best listeners and tend not to interrupt giving careful consideration to the opinions and proposals of others. Concentration levels are high and they may give little or no feedback to a presentation which of course may be troubling to you!