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## Greece

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This month, we are reviewing Greece, located in the far south of the Balkan Peninsula. Greece combines the mountains of the mainland with over 1,400 islands, the largest of which is Crete. One third of the 10.7 million population lives in and around Metropolitan Athens. The vast majority (around 98%) of the population are Greek Orthodox Christians. Many people believe strongly in their faith, and there are Christian churches on almost every street.

Greece is a European Union member state and like several other countries, it was forced to accept austerity measures in return for bailouts. Greece has now successfully completed a three-year eurozone emergency loan programme to tackle its debt crisis. Deeply unpopular cuts to public spending, a condition of the bailout, are set to continue. But for the first time in eight years, Greece can borrow at market rates.

Greek, the official and primary language of Greece is spoken by the majority of the country's population. English is the dominant foreign language spoken in the business world of Greece and also taught in schools. The Greek language is rich and difficult to learn. Any attempt to address your colleagues in Greek will be regarded as a compliment. *Kyrie* (Mr) or *Kyria* (Mrs) can be used with the first or last name. Generally, colleagues use first names to address each other on a daily basis.

One of the main characteristics of the Greek culture is strong family bonds, even though in big cities there might have been a recent change in this respect. Traditionally, the father is the centre of the family; he is responsible for all its members and the one who makes the final decision. There is a strict hierarchy and younger members are expected to show respect to the older

This also shows in the workplace. Whilst Greek managers have adapted their traditionally autocratic and paternalistic style, most of the time, subordinates expect clear guidance and instructions from managers to complete their tasks.

Greece is also a Collectivist society which means that the 'We' is important – people belong to in-groups (families, teams or organisations) who look after each other in exchange for loyalty. In business it is important to build up trustworthy and long-lasting relationships.

As a nation Greeks are generally not comfortable in ambiguous situations - bureaucracy, laws and rules are important to make the world a safer/better place to operate in. Whilst procedural systems may be drawn up, they are not always adhered to – the quality of co-operation between departments and colleagues depends largely on the personal relationships of those concerned. This is why Greeks also prefer to maintain long-term relationships with partners they already know and trust than try out more risky options.

The working culture of Greeks is based on a sense of honour, dignity, loyalty and a sense of duty – what is referred to in the Modern Greek language as the value of '*philotimo*'. There is no equivalent for this word in English; literally translated, it means 'love of honour' and as a concept it implies a self-imposed code of conduct based on trust and fairness. A person who is considered *philotimos* behaves toward

members of his or her in-group in a way that is 'polite, virtuous, reliable, proud, truthful, generous, self-sacrificing, tactful, respectful and grateful'.

Greeks can be assertive and very vocal. They would rather resolve conflict by voicing their concerns to each other clearly, and then coming to a resolution. Thus secrecy or keeping within oneself is discouraged.

Finally, punctuality is expected, but meetings may not start until the most senior person arrives. Meetings may use an agenda but the flexibility of the Greek attitude means that items that are not specifically on the agenda can still be introduced for discussion during the meeting. Open discussions and passionate debates are considered as both stimulating and essential for the correct decisions to be taken.