

A Critique of Hall's Contexting Model

A Meta-Analysis of Literature on Intercultural Business and Technical Communication

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Edward Hall's model of low-context and high-context cultures is one of the dominant theoretical frameworks for interpreting intercultural communication. This article reports a meta-analysis of 224 articles in business and technical communication journals between 1990 and 2006 and addresses two primary issues: (a) the degree to which contexting is embedded in intercultural communication theory and (b) the degree to which the contexting model has been empirically validated. Contexting is the most cited theoretical framework in articles about intercultural communication in business and technical communication journals and in intercultural communication textbooks. An extensive set of contexting propositions has emerged in the literature; however, few of these propositions have been examined empirically. Furthermore, those propositions tested most frequently have failed to support many contexting propositions, particularly those related to directness. This article provides several recommendations for those researchers who seek to address this popular and appealing yet unsubstantiated and underdeveloped communication theory.

Keywords: *contexting; high context; low context; intercultural communication; directness*

The works of Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall are fixtures in nearly all of the academic literature having anything to do with cross-cultural comparisons, particularly in the management and communication fields (Driskill, 1997; Hunsinger, 2006; Thatcher, 2001; Varner, 2000, 2001; T. Weiss, 1992). One indicator of the influence of these cross-cultural researchers and theorists is how frequently they are cited. As of July 2007,

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according to the *Web of Science Social Sciences Cited Reference Index* (2007), Hofstede had been cited over 6,100 times for his three major works: 4,138 times for the first edition of *Culture's Consequences* (1980), 532 times for the second and highly revised edition of *Culture's Consequences* (2001), and 1,488 times for *Cultures and Organizations* (1991). Hall had been cited over 3,300 times for his three major works: 1,552 times for *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), 1,124 times for *Silent Language* (1959), and 659 times for *Beyond Culture* (1976). Their works have also become integral parts of intercultural communication textbooks and courses. In particular, Hall's contexting model has been identified as the most commonly used cultural model in intercultural communication courses (Fantini & Smith, 1997).

Surprisingly, the works of Hofstede and Hall have been treated quite differently. Whereas Hofstede's works have been published in refereed journals (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1984, 1988) and extensively tested, replicated, refined, and critiqued (Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorman, & Gupta, 2004; Schwartz, 1999; Trompenaars, 1994), none of Hall's works about contexting have been published in refereed journals, and they have escaped close scrutiny by other researchers. Studies that use contexting as an explanatory framework for cross-cultural variation almost invariably accept the contexting continuum (Hall's ranking of cultures from low context to high context) and fail to critically examine exceptions. Hermeking (2006) suggested that Hall's model has received little criticism because Hall was vague in his presentation of the model and ranked cultural groups rather than national cultures.

A close examination of the validity of the contexting model, its major propositions, and the degree to which it is embedded in intercultural business and technical communication (IBTC) fields is particularly warranted because contexting is one of the most common frameworks explaining differences in business communication styles across cultures (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Limaye & Victor, 1991; Varner, 2000). I begin my examination with a literature review of contexting, which includes a critique of Hall's (1976) research methodology and a description of non-IBTC literature that has attempted to develop instruments of contexting or non-IBTC literature that has involved empirical studies of contexting in more than 10 countries or cultures. Next, I provide my method and findings for a meta-analysis of IBTC articles since 1990. I conclude with a discussion of the contexting model and recommendations for its future use in IBTC research. In a broader sense, I examine the degree to which the IBTC fields treat theory development.

Literature Review of Contexting

The primary work from which Hall (1976) created his contexting model was *Beyond Culture*. In explaining this model, he defined high-context and low-context messages as follows:

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (p. 79)

Hall made a number of distinctions between HC and LC cultures. In HC cultures, information is widely shared and thus requires extensive cultural programming whereas in LC cultures, information is less widely shared and thus requires less cultural programming. HC cultures emphasize stability whereas LC cultures emphasize change and mobility. In HC cultures, providing too much information is considered talking down to others whereas in LC cultures, doing so is considered being thorough. In HC cultures, communication is an art form that is unifying and cohesive and thus displays sophistication, nuance, and cultural identity. In LC cultures, communication is primarily task oriented. HC cultures appreciate slow, indirect messages whereas LC cultures insist on fast, direct messages. HC cultures extensively use informal information networks whereas LC cultures prefer formal information networks. HC cultures interpret laws with personal involvement and thus bend rules to accommodate relationships whereas LC cultures interpret laws impersonally and thus maintain strict adherence to rules. Fundamentally, HC cultures tend to employ more holistic thinking whereas LC cultures tend to employ more linear thinking.

Hall (1976) described cultures as being either primarily HC or primarily LC. But he explained that cultures could be arranged on a continuum from extremely LC to extremely HC cultures. He classified the following cultures on such a continuum in order of lowest to highest context: Swiss-Germans, Germans, Scandinavians, Northern Americans, French, English, Italians, Latin Americans, Arabs, Chinese (added in Hall & Hall, 1987, 1990), and Japanese. This contexting continuum (i.e., ranking of cultures from LC to HC) is frequently credited to Rosch and Segler (1987) as an extension of Hall's contexting model; however, Rosch and Segler merely placed Hall's ranking in a graphical format, which is often replicated in intercultural communication texts (e.g., Beamer & Varner, 2008; Victor, 1992).

Hall (1976) provided numerous anecdotes of various cultures but, unlike Hofstede (1980), never mentioned his method for developing his model. Hall provided in one paragraph his rankings of cultures from LC to HC, but he did not describe how he conceptualized or measured these rankings. Although he provided few indications about how he collected data, several of his comments suggest that he did so primarily through qualitative interviews and observation. He did not mention using methods for qualitative data collection that would be considered rigorous by today's standards, such as identifying alternative explanations (identifying best fit), negative case analysis, triangulation, review by inquiry participants, expert audit review, theory triangulation, sampling techniques, bias acknowledgment and credibility of researcher (researcher as instrument), coding schemes, analysis framework, or audit trail (Patton, 2002).

In qualitative research in which the researcher is the instrument, a description of motivations and biases is particularly important. In his latter works (Hall & Hall, 1987, 1990), Hall frequently described his intentions of helping individuals improve their intercultural relationships. In particular, he emphasized his desire to help American executives understand the often confusing behavior of executives from other cultures. In early works in which he developed contexting theory, however, Hall did not indicate motivations or biases. But close examination of *Beyond Culture* indicates that Hall (1976) generally characterized HC cultures in more favorable terms than he did LC cultures. Throughout his work, he strongly criticized LC U.S. institutional behavior in government, businesses, courts, and schools, which each represents the interests of the powerful at the expense of common people. He criticized many of the American tendencies directly tied to LC culture, including engaging only in linear thinking, looking at ideas not events, not taking the time to get to know people, ignoring important parts of context such as relationships, producing bad art, creating bureaucracy, relying on modern management methods, depending on management consultants, using government funds inefficiently and unfairly, conducting inaccurate research in social and biological sciences, manipulating the legal systems to benefit the powerful, having less personal work relations, behaving with ethnocentrism, and scapegoating to protect the powerful. For example, Hall expressed his disappointment with American LC behavior in the following statement: "Given our linear, step-by-step, compartmentalized way of thinking, fostered by the schools and public media, it is impossible for our leaders to consider events comprehensively or with priorities according to a system of common good" (p. 9). Conversely, he frequently mentioned the positive aspects of HC cultures in terms of

maintaining effective relationships and examining issues from a holistic perspective.

In later research, Hall and Hall (1987, 1990) examined contexting in intercultural business situations in several cultures. In 1987, Hall and Hall described Japanese business culture and conducted 165 open-ended interviews with American and Japanese professionals. Then in 1990, Hall and Hall conducted 180 interviews in the United States, Germany, and France. Other than describing the number of interviews, however, they provided no information about methodology or analysis, and they interpreted many aspects of contexting within these cultures with little variation from prior works.

Few subsequent studies have attempted to develop measures of contexting so that variation between cultures could be identified clearly. Gudykunst, one of the most renowned researchers in the intercultural field, has conducted several studies about contexting (see, e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). In their 1996 study, Gudykunst et al. developed an instrument to measure the level of contexting based on the following theoretical dimensions that contrast a theoretical LC characteristic with a theoretical HC characteristic: giving precise versus ambiguous information, revealing true intentions versus maintaining harmony, being dramatic versus being reserved, being precise versus using understatements, and disclosing person-based versus group-based information. They surveyed university students in the United States, Australia, Japan, and Korea. Ultimately, 80 of the communication style survey items loaded onto eight factors:

1. *inference*: having the ability to infer others' intentions, needs, and feelings
2. *indirectness*: having the tendency to communicate implicitly
3. *sensitivity*: showing respect to others, being tactful, not offending others, using qualifying words, adjusting to others' feelings, and listening carefully
4. *dramatics*: telling exaggerated stories, using picturesque speech, using colorful words, telling jokes, and nonverbal expressiveness
5. *feelings*: being aware of emotional responses toward others and using these responses as guides to behavior
6. *openness*: disclosing personal information
7. *precision*: using precision in messages
8. *silence*: valuing periods of silence during communication

Gudykunst et al. (1996) hypothesized that cultural individualism and collectivism would relate to the eight LC and HC communication dimensions. Their eight hypotheses are depicted in Table 1. The table also includes whether these hypotheses were supported and the effect sizes (d) for

Table 1
Results of Gudykunst et al.'s 1996 Contexting Study

Contexting Hypotheses	United States (<i>n</i> = 283)		Australia (<i>n</i> = 110)		Japan (<i>n</i> = 192)		Korea (<i>n</i> = 168)		Hypothesis Supported	<i>F</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>H1.</i> Members of LC cultures are more likely to have an ability to infer indirect messages of others.	4.89	0.74	4.77	0.75	4.51	1.03	4.67	0.85	Yes	8.30*	.21
<i>H2.</i> Members of HC cultures are more likely to be sensitive to others' feelings.	5.04	0.66	5.00	0.83	5.09	0.68	4.93	0.62	No	6.00	
<i>H3.</i> Members of HC cultures are more likely to use indirect communication.	3.41	0.81	3.48	0.84	3.40	0.79	3.65	0.82	No		
<i>H4.</i> Members of LC cultures are more likely to display dramatic communication.	4.36	0.87	4.14	0.99	4.07	0.93	3.97	0.84	Yes	7.47*	.20
<i>H5.</i> Members of LC cultures are more likely to be aware of their own feelings toward others.	4.87	0.96	4.83	0.82	5.04	0.80	4.82	0.84	No	2.46	
<i>H6.</i> Members of LC cultures are more open to disclosing personal information.	4.29	1.00	3.95	1.02	4.02	1.13	3.68	0.89	Yes	12.66*	.26
<i>H7.</i> Members of LC cultures are more likely to use precise communication.	4.61	0.77	4.36	0.74	4.44	0.83	4.49	0.76	No	2.76	
<i>H8.</i> Members of HC cultures are more likely to value silence.	3.63	0.84	3.78	0.92	3.04	0.89	3.18	0.77	No	29.19*	.39

Note: *H* = hypothesis; LC = low context; HC = high context.

*Significant main effects

significant relationships. Effect sizes have been calculated based on formulas described by Rosnow and Rosenthal (1996, 2000). Assuming that the United States and Australia were LC cultures and Japan and Korea were HC cultures based on Hall's (1976) descriptions, they anticipated seeing significant differences between the two culture types. But only three of the eight hypotheses (*H1*, *H4*, and *H6*) were supported. Four hypotheses were insignificant (*H2*, *H3*, *H5*, and *H7*). The remaining hypothesis (*H8*) was significant, but it was not supported. Based on effect sizes of .2 considered to be small, .5 considered medium, and .8 and greater considered large (Cohen, 1992), the three hypotheses that were supported had small effect sizes (ranging from .20 to .26). The significant hypothesis that was not supported, however, was the only one that approached having a medium effect size (.39).

Gudykunst et al. (1996) concluded that on a cultural level, the results supporting contexting were weak. But self-construals were significant predictors of all of these hypotheses. In other words, contexting was better explained on an individual rather than a cultural level. They concluded that their instrument was a reliable measure of contexting; however, individual-level variables such as independent and interdependent self-construals are better predictors of contexting than are cultural-level variables such as individualism and collectivism.

One of the major limitations of Gudykunst et al.'s (1996) work is that it examined only four cultures. Hofstede (2001) explained that in order to identify etic (applicable to all cultures) dimensions of cultural variability, data from a minimum of 10 to 15 societies are necessary. Otherwise, researchers run the risk of treating cultures as individuals, not as wholes. Hofstede argued that cultures "are wholes, and their internal logic cannot be understood in terms used for the personality dynamics of individuals" (p. 17).

Kim, Pan, and Park (1998) were the next known researchers after Gudykunst et al. (1996) to attempt developing an instrument that measures contexting. Based on Hall's (1976) work, they identified five theoretical categories of contexting: social orientation, responsibility, confrontation, communication, and dealing with new situations. They developed a 16-item survey based on various survey instruments and administered this survey to graduate management students from three cultures: American ($n = 96$), Chinese ($n = 96$), and Korean ($n = 50$). Kim et al. assumed that the Americans would exhibit LC tendencies and that the Koreans and Chinese would exhibit HC tendencies. The majority of survey items (10 items in the social orientation, responsibility, and confrontation categories) primarily addressed issues associated with individualism and collectivism, and the results on these items for the Chinese and Korean students were significantly more collectivist compared to those for the American students. Although Hall (1976) indirectly

identified issues related to individualism as LC and collectivism as HC, this identification made up only a small portion of his line of reasoning. Thus, the survey items captured a limited portion of Hall's contexting model.

Although Hall (1976) developed contexting primarily as a communication model, Kim et al. (1998) devoted only two survey items to communication preferences, and the results for these items do not support traditional assumptions about contexting. The first item states, "A person's word is his bond and you need not spell out the details to make him behave as he or she promised." The traditional assumption is that members of HC cultures would agree with this statement much more often than would those from LC cultures. Yet, in this study, the Americans agreed with this statement significantly more often than did the Koreans. Although the Chinese agreed with this statement more often than the Americans did, the result is not significant. The second item states, "A person cannot think unless he/she can put it into words." Based on the assumption that members of LC cultures focus more on articulation of thoughts and ideas, members of LC cultures should agree with this statement whereas members of HC cultures should disagree with this statement. Contrary to that assumption, all three groups disagreed with the statement. The Americans showed the most disagreement, but the difference was not significant. Regarding the failure of the communication items to support their contexting hypotheses about communication, the authors reasoned that because the "Chinese and Korean samples were active managers for whom there is frequent communication with foreign parties and . . . the business communication environment today mainly follows the Western norms[, they] may have [been] normatively conditioned . . . to become quite Westernized" (p. 519). The researchers considered their study to be a good initial effort in developing a measure of contexting but concluded that "given the wide scope of the high-versus low-context culture concept, and its complexity in establishing a workable scale, it seems that much more research is needed before one can measure the concept in an accurate and comprehensive way" (p. 520).

Ohashi (2000) was the next researcher to develop a measure of contexting. She criticized Gudykunst et al.'s (1996) measure for deviating from Hall's (1976) original model of contexting. Ohashi stated that whereas Hall's model assumes that HC and LC communication are two ends of a unidimensional construct, Gudykunst et al.'s measure assumes HC and LC communication are separate dimensions. In contrast, Ohashi based her 20 questionnaire items on social norms in a society. Thus, the wording of each item is similar to the following:

I believe that in the United States/Japan it is generally considered that a listener should be able to understand what a speaker is trying to say even if the speaker does not say anything that he or she intends to communicate. (p. 77)

After surveying 230 American college students and 223 Japanese students, Ohashi applied confirmatory factor analysis and retained 7 of the original 20 items. The 7 items focus on how listeners should be able to infer meaning when it is not directly stated and the intent of the speaker. Also, several items address emphasis on politeness versus clarity and form versus content. Ohashi concluded that "the present study also showed that the social norm of high-context communication is still very much alive in Japan" (p. 68) and that "the results confirm that the Japanese participants in this study are a more high-context communication culture than the U.S. American participants" (p. 50). But these statements may be overly enthusiastic because the mean score on the 7-point Likert scale for the Japanese students was 4.89 compared to 4.30 for the American students. These scores place both the Japanese and the American students near the midpoint of the scale, thus showing slight agreement for the HC items for both groups. Assuming that Japanese and Americans represent opposite ends of a scale on contexting, as Ohashi claimed, we would expect Americans to show strong disagreement and Japanese to show strong agreement for the questionnaire items.

Richardson and Smith (2007) are the most recent researchers known to have developed a measure of contexting. They used a 17-item modified version of Ohashi's (2000) measure, retaining 14 of these items after confirmatory factor analysis. They hypothesized that Japanese would score higher on a HC–LC scale than would Americans. They also hypothesized that members of HC cultures would prefer more media-rich channels of communication, such as face-to-face or telephone conversations whereas LC cultures would prefer less rich channels of communication, such as e-mails or letters. But the results of their survey of 75 American university students and 79 Japanese university students showed only a small significant difference between the two groups on the 5-point Likert HC–LC scale (Japanese: $M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.39$; American: $M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.52$). Thus, Richardson and Smith concluded that

the small effect size implies that claiming the US as an LC culture and Japan as an HC culture may be an overstatement, especially with the fact that the mean score for [the] Japanese sample was at the midpoint of the scale. (pp. 490-491)

Furthermore, HC–LC scores from their survey did not confirm their media-richness hypothesis.

Only a few known studies about contexting have satisfied Hofstede's (2001) standard that data from 10 to 15 countries or cultures are necessary to develop etic dimensions. These include Shao, Bao, and Gray's (2004) study of comparative advertising and Koeszegi, Vetschera, and Kersten's (2004) research about negotiation. Also, Trompenaars (1994) developed a set of cultural dimensions with a large number of country samples. He stated that one of his cultural dimensions is analogous to contexting.

Shao et al. (2004) examined the perceived effectiveness of comparative versus noncomparative advertising in terms of attitude toward the ad and persuasion effect. They hypothesized that LC cultures would be persuaded by and hold more positive attitudes toward direct comparative ads whereas HC cultures would be persuaded by and hold more positive attitudes toward indirect comparative ads. The researchers sampled 196 individuals from 36 countries, classifying these individuals as LC or HC depending on their country of origin. They concluded that individuals from LC cultures thought more direct ads had a greater persuasion effect than did those from HC cultures but that the LC and HC cultures did not differ in attitudes toward the ads. Their study was exceptional in terms of the number of countries sampled; however, Shao et al. did not reveal which countries they sampled or how they grouped them as LC or HC cultures. They simply mentioned that they included an average of 5 individuals per country. Such a small sample per country clearly limits the generalizability of their findings.

Koeszegi et al. (2004) examined the contexting model in regard to a negotiation support system (NSS). Their sample comprised 1,102 negotiations of 2,204 master of business administration (MBA) students from 11 national cultures: Austria, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Ecuador, Finland, Hong Kong, India, Russia, Taiwan, and the United States. They grouped the countries into LC (Austria, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Finland) and HC cultures (Ecuador, Hong Kong, India, Russia, Taiwan). The negotiations, which took place from 1996 through 2000, were training exercises that employed the *Inspire* NSS. Koeszegi et al. addressed these research questions: (1) Do LC cultural members evaluate analytical support better? Is this analytical support more compatible with their thought patterns? (2) Do HC cultural members add additional contextual information? Do they exchange more messages? They concluded that the behaviors and attitudes of the NSS users did generally support the contexting model. HC cultural members (from Ecuador, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) sent significantly more written messages during the negotiation exercises. The researchers reasoned that because

Table 2
Use of Negotiation Support System (NSS) Communication
Tool to Establish Social Context

User Country	Average Number of NSS Uses
Ecuador (HC)	11.16
Taiwan (HC)	9.26
Finland (LC)	9.24
Hong Kong (HC)	8.99
Switzerland (LC)	8.23
Canada (LC)	8.14
Austria (LC)	7.64
United States (LC)	7.43
Germany (LC)	7.01
India (HC)	6.84
Russia (HC)	6.70

Note: HC = high context; LC = low context.

members of HC cultures need greater social and physical context, and because the students conducted the exercises online, the students from HC cultures required additional context through written messages. The students from LC cultures, on the other hand, were content simply to exchange offers. In other words, their communications were considered almost exclusively task oriented. Also, Koeszegi et al. concluded that the LC users' more positive evaluation of the NSS as an analytic tool indicated that linear logic was more compatible with LC cultures than with HC cultures. The researchers did not, however, measure contexting. Furthermore, a close look at country-level scores raises questions about their fit with Hall's contexting continuum, which the authors so frequently cited. Table 2 lists these countries and the average number of times their respective members used the written communication tool. Users from Finland, considered an LC culture, were among the most likely to use written messages (hypothesized as HC behavior). On the other hand, users from India and Russia, considered HC cultures, were the least likely to use written messages (hypothesized as LC behavior).

Trompenaars (1994), in his survey of managers in 43 countries, identified six cultural dimensions. He considered the dimension he labeled specificity—diffuseness as being analogous to Hall's contexting model because cultures that emphasize specificity (LC) are "direct, to the point, purposeful in relating, precise, blunt, definitive, and transparent" whereas cultures that emphasize diffuseness (HC) are "indirect, circuitous, seemingly aimless

forms of relating, evasive, tactful, ambiguous, even opaque” (p. 98). Similar to Victor (1992), Trompenaars identified a close relationship between diffuse (HC) cultures and the importance of face. In diffuse cultures, ideas and people are inseparable. Thus, using indirect and ambiguous speech helps people in these cultures to maintain harmony and avoid losing face. Thus, in diffuse cultures, avoiding criticism is important, and people’s work and personal lives are enmeshed.

Trompenaars’s (1994) rankings, however, contradict many of Hall’s rankings. For example, Trompenaars ranked the only Arab country in his list (United Arab Emirates) as being LC. He likewise ranked Japan as being LC. He ranked the United Kingdom as being more LC than Germany or the United States. His ranking of Chinese cultures is particularly problematic because he ranked mainland China as HC but placed Singapore and Hong Kong in the middle of the rankings. His ranking of Latin Americans also contradicts Hall’s ranking because he classified the two Latin American countries (Mexico and Uruguay) as moderately to extremely LC, respectively.

In summary, then, I found that Hall (1976) provided no explanation of the method or analysis he used in creating his contexting model. He also provided no explanation for his ranking of various cultures along the contexting continuum, which has become a prominent part of nearly all intercultural texts and courses. Subsequently, several sets of researchers have developed instruments for measuring contexting. Of these, Gudykunst et al. (1996) concluded that contexting was better predicted by self-construal than culture; however, they tested their instrument with just four cultures. Kim et al. (1998) concluded that their instrument was a good initial effort at understanding contexting, but it could not comprehensively measure contexting. Furthermore, their study was limited to just three cultures and produced unexpected results about communication preferences. Ohashi (2000) and Richardson and Smith (2007) also developed measures of contexting. Their studies were limited in that each only examined two cultures (Japanese and American), and both showed only a slight difference between what is considered a prototypical HC culture (Japanese) and a prototypical LC culture (American). No known studies have subsequently used the instruments developed by any of these researchers. Only a few researchers have empirically tested propositions of contexting in more than 10 to 15 cultures, the minimum number of cultures necessary to develop etic cultural dimensions, according to Hofstede (2001). Their studies, however, have done little to validate Hall’s contexting model. In fact, they have demonstrated major divergence from Hall’s contexting continuum (Koeszegi et al., 2004; Trompenaars, 1994). With such little empirical validation in the

literature outside of business and technical communication, the study I present here is needed to identify the degree to which contexting is embedded in IBTC literature and the degree to which the contexting model has been developed and tested in IBTC literature.

Method

To examine (a) the extent to which contexting is embedded in IBTC research and (b) the extent to which contexting theory has been developed and validated in IBTC research, I address the following research questions:

1. How widely is contexting theory used compared to other etic theories of cross-cultural variation in IBTC literature?
2. Which non-IBTC texts are cited most frequently in IBTC literature?
3. Which cultural regions are most often explained by contexting in IBTC literature?
4. What business and technical communication articles have been cited most frequently in the IBTC literature? What emphasis is placed on contexting in these works?
5. What intercultural textbooks have been cited most frequently in IBTC literature? What emphasis is placed on contexting in these textbooks?
6. What instruments or measures of contexting have been used in IBTC literature?
7. To what degree have contexting propositions been empirically validated in IBTC literature?
8. To what extent are empirically based studies of contexting cited in IBTC literature?
9. What limitations of contexting theory have been raised in IBTC literature?

The nature of these research questions lends itself to the meta-analytic perspective that treats studies as units of analysis. With this method, researchers can find answers to their research questions by integrating the findings of many studies. This method involves identifying which studies to include in the research, developing a scheme for coding these studies, and then conducting an analysis of the coded data (Cook et al., 1992; Glass, 1976). Although many meta-analyses employ sophisticated statistics, in this analysis I primarily rely on descriptive statistics for several reasons. First, the studies I examine do not match the conditions necessary for meta-analyses that employ sophisticated statistics. That is, these studies are not all carefully controlled experiments in which measurements are precise, and they do not all use equivalent or comparable measures or instruments

(Pettit, 1994). As I discussed in the literature review and will show in the findings section, prior studies of contexting have not employed any standard measures of contexting that have been used in more than one study, and none has examined more than four cultures. Thus, these studies' measurements cannot be considered precise, and comparability across studies is difficult. Second, many of the research questions are best answered with descriptive statistics. For example, many questions deal with the degree to which contexting theory is embedded in IBTC literature. These questions are best answered with counts and percentages.

I selected 224 articles from the IBTC literature published from 1990 through 2006. I chose articles published since 1990 for several reasons. First, experts consider that the present stage of globalization began around this time because countries (e.g., China, India, Russia) representing a large proportion of the world's economy became increasingly integrated into the global economy. Second, intercultural communication became a prominent focus in business and technical communication during this period, largely due to seminal works describing the need for additional research in this area (e.g., Beamer, 1992; Limaye & Victor, 1991; Victor, 1992).

I selected articles from seven business and technical communication journals: *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (32 articles), *Journal of Business Communication* (40 articles), *Business Communication Quarterly* (79 articles), *Management Communication Quarterly* (14 articles), *Technical Communication Quarterly* (17 articles), *Technical Communication* (27 articles), and *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* (15 articles). I selected these articles because their authors identified them as cross-cultural comparisons or as culture-specific studies.

I coded the articles for the following: contexting characteristics, etic theories (culture-general theories of variation), references to other business and technical communication literature, references to other works about contexting, references to works of major etic cross-cultural theorists and researchers, references to other business and technical communication articles, countries or cultures examined, and whether the article was based on empirical research. I then entered each coded item into a database in order to be able to quantitatively describe the results in a manner consistent with meta-analysis procedures (Light & Pillemer, 1982). My most complex coding task was to identify contexting characteristics. I developed and refined these categories during several iterations of examining the selected articles, and I was heavily influenced by existing works that include summaries of contexting propositions (Beamer & Varner, 2008; Victor, 1992).

Table 3
Primary Theories or Dimensions to Explain
Cross-Cultural Communication

Theory	1990-1995 (n = 44)		1996-2000 (n = 93)		2001-2006 (n = 87)		Total (N = 224)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contexting	5	11.36	26	27.96	18	20.69	49	21.88
Individualism–collectivism	4	9.09	21	22.58	16	18.39	41	18.30
Power distance	3	6.82	12	12.90	9	10.34	24	10.71
Politeness–facework	1	2.27	15	16.13	8	9.20	24	10.71
Uncertainty avoidance	2	4.55	9	9.68	4	4.60	15	6.70
Masculinity	1	2.27	9	9.68	3	3.45	13	5.80

I was able to answer nearly all of my research questions by analyzing the IBTC research literature. The second part of one research question (R5), however, involves an analysis of the most frequently cited intercultural textbooks. It addresses the degree to which contexting is embedded in commonly used intercultural textbooks. Analyzing textbooks is useful because ideally they represent a synthesis of the finest research, and they identify how knowledge is being transmitted (DeVoss, Jasken, & Hayden, 2002).

Findings

In this section, I present the findings of my meta-analysis of the IBTC literature as they pertain to each of my research questions.

R1. How widely is contexting theory used compared to other etic theories of cross-cultural variation in IBTC literature? Contexting is the most frequently used theory in the IBTC literature during the period of 1990 through 2006, with 49 articles referencing it (see Table 3). The next most important theories cited were Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions of individualism–collectivism (41 articles) and power distance (24 articles). The only other theory that was referenced more than 10 times was politeness–facework (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Contexting was cited in just 5 articles from 1990-1995, which amounted to 11% of the IBTC articles during that period. Its importance grew during the 1996-2000 and 2001-2006 periods, with references in 26 articles and 18 articles, respectively, accounting for 28% and 21% of all the IBTC articles during those periods.

Table 4
Most Cited Non-Intercultural Business and Technical Communication (ITBC) Research Works in the ITBC Literature

Research Work	Times Cited
<i>Culture's Consequences</i> (Hofstede 1980, 2001)	45
<i>Beyond Culture</i> (Hall, 1976)	34
<i>Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind</i> (Hofstede, 1991)	30
<i>Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business</i> (Trompenaars, 1994)	18
<i>Silent Language</i> and "Silent Language in Overseas Business" (Hall, 1959; Hall, 1960)	17
<i>Hidden Differences: Doing Business with the Japanese</i> (Hall & Hall, 1987) or <i>Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French, and Americans</i> (Hall & Hall, 1990)	11
<i>Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage</i> (Brown & Levinson, 1987)	9
<i>Dance of Life</i> (Hall, 1983)	9
<i>The Hidden Dimension</i> (Hall, 1976)	4

R2. Which non-IBTC research works are cited most frequently in IBTC literature? The most frequently cited non-IBTC texts are Hofstede's (1980, 2001) two editions of *Culture's Consequences* (45 citations) in which he described his research about cultural dimensions (see Table 4). Hofstede's (1991) *Cultures and Organizations*, a practitioner's guide to his cultural dimensions, is the third most cited text (30 citations). Hall's (1976) *Beyond Culture* is the second most cited text (34 citations). When totaling all of Hall's work (Hall, 1959, 1976, 1983; Hall & Hall, 1987, 1990), he is cited 75 times, equal to that of Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001).

R3. Which cultural regions are most often explained by contexting in IBTC literature? Anglo and Chinese cultures are by far the most frequently described cultures in terms of contexting (see Table 5). Anglo cultures are framed in terms of contexting in 20 articles, and Chinese cultures are framed in terms of contexting in 18 articles. But Chinese cultures are the most likely to be described in terms of contexting, with nearly half (42%) of the articles describing Chinese culture doing so. With the exception of the western European region (7 articles), no other cultural region was framed in terms of contexting in more than 5 articles.

R4. What business and technical communication articles have been cited most frequently in the IBTC literature? What emphasis is placed on

Table 5
**Cultural Regions Explained by Contexting in Intercultural
 Business and Technical Communication Literature**

Region	No. of Articles	Contexting Used as Explanation	% of Articles Citing Contexting
Anglo (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada)	70	20	29
Greater China (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong)	43	18	42
Western Europe (not including United Kingdom)	39	7	18
Korea and Japan	18	4	22
Latin America	16	5	31
Southeast Asia	11	3	27
Russia and Eastern Europe	10	2	20
Arab countries	5	2	40
South Asia	4	1	25

contexting in these articles? Four of the five most cited business and technical communication articles concern conducting effective research about intercultural business or technical communication. All five of the articles cite Hall, and only one of the articles (Beamer, 1992) does not include a description of contexting (see Table 6).

R5. What intercultural textbooks have been cited most frequently in IBTC literature? What emphasis is placed on contexting in these textbooks? Table 7 lists the most cited intercultural communication textbooks in ITBC literature. The three most cited textbooks are each specific to the business or technical communication fields: Victor's (1992) *International Business Communication*, Varner and Beamer's (1995; Beamer & Varner, 2008) *Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace*, and Hoft's (1995) *International Technical Communication*. Each of these textbooks extensively uses contexting as an explanatory framework for cross-cultural variation. For example, Victor (1992) devoted an entire chapter to contexting in his seminal work on international business communication. Based on pages listed in the index, he referred to contexting on 36 pages whereas he referred to individualism–collectivism on 22 pages and power distance on 5 pages. In the latest edition of their book, Beamer and Varner (2008) also discussed contexting extensively. Based on pages listed in the index, they referred to contexting on 36 pages compared to the 34 pages on which they referred to individualism–collectivism and the 13 pages on which they

Table 6
Most Cited Business and Technical Communication Articles in Intercultural Business and Technical Communication, 1990-2006

Article	Times Cited	Contexting	Hall Cited
“Learning Intercultural Communication Competence” (Beamer, 1992)	15	No	Yes
“Approaches to Managerial Influence in the People’s Republic of China” (Krone, Chen, & Xia, 1997)	12	Yes	Yes
“Cross-Cultural Business Communication Research: State of the Art and Hypotheses for the 1990s” (Limaye & Victor, 1991)	10	Yes	Yes
““The Gods Must Be Crazy’: The Challenge of the Intercultural” (T. Weiss, 1993)	10	Yes	Yes
“Technical Communication Across Cultures: Five Philosophical Questions” (E. H. Weiss, 1998)	9	Yes	Yes

Table 7
Most Cited Intercultural Communication Textbooks in Intercultural Business and Technical Communication Literature

Textbook	Times Cited
<i>International Business Communication</i> (Victor, 1992)	27
<i>Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace</i> (Varner & Beamer, 1995; Beamer & Varner 2008)	21
<i>International Technical Communication: How to Export Information About High Technology</i> (Hoft, 1995)	16
<i>Intercultural Communication</i> (Scollon & Scollon, 1995)	11
<i>Communication Between Cultures</i> (Samovar & Porter, 2004; Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981)	11

referred to power distance. Hoft (1995) explained that for individuals to operate effectively across cultures, they should use models of culture. She provided four models of culture to choose from: Hall’s (1976), Victor’s (1992), Hofstede’s (1980, 2001), and Trompenaars’s (1994). Contexting constitutes a large portion of these models because it is a central component of Hall’s, Victor’s, and Trompenaars’s (specific versus diffuse) models.

R6. What instruments or measures of contexting have been used in IBTC literature? Only one study in the 49 articles that used contexting to explain cross-cultural variation attempted to comprehensively measure various dimensions of contexting. Thomas (1998) compared business letters of American and Korean MBA students. Assuming that Koreans were HC and that Americans were LC, she tested the following seven sets of language characteristics that have traditionally been tied to the contexting theory. First, she examined the level of specific versus general information. Second, she examined the amount of contextual information. Third, she examined politeness strategies in terms of modal auxiliaries, passive constructions, and face-saving phrases. Fourth, she examined the level of accountability based on use of personal pronouns. Fifth, she examined the directness of the organization: direct (recommendation in the first sentence), modified direct (recommendation in the first paragraph), and indirect (recommendation later in the message). Sixth, she examined implicit versus explicit messages in bad-news situations. And seventh, she examined linear versus recursive reasoning. To her surprise, she found that none of her hypotheses about contexting differences were confirmed. Generally, both Americans and Koreans wrote similarly and were fairly direct, linear, and detailed. Thomas stated that this research “strongly suggest[s] that our interpretations of the high/low context model in terms of text are in error” (p. 20). Furthermore, she stated that “the notion of high- and low-context cultures is useful at a macro level, but it becomes problematic when applied to text” and that all her “interviews with the South Korean students reveal a pragmatic, common-sense approach to doing business with a strong focus on the bottom line” (p. 21).

R7. To what degree have contexting propositions been empirically validated in IBTC literature? Throughout the IBTC literature, many propositions are made about characteristics associated with HC and LC cultures. Table 8 contains a summary of the general categories of contexting described in IBTC literature and contrasts the characteristics of HC and LC cultures. Table 9 contains a summary of the empirical studies in IBTC literature related to the various contexting categories. By far, the categories of directness and management of information are the most described categories related to contexting. But few articles that use contexting as part of their explanatory frameworks are empirical. Directness has been the most addressed contexting category; however, it is also the least empirically supported category, with one study supporting it, two studies with ambiguous or mixed results, and five studies not supporting it. The most supported category is communication channel, with four studies supporting it, one study with mixed results, and no

Table 8
Contexting Categories and Related Cultural Characteristics in Intercultural Business and Technical Communication Literature

High-Context Characteristic	Low-Context Characteristic
<u>Contexting category</u>	
Directness of communication	
Primary message is implicitly coded.	Primary message is explicitly coded.
Primary message is stated at the end of a communication.	Primary message is stated at the beginning of a communication.
Open conflict is avoided.	Issues are openly confronted.
Politeness is emphasized.	Politeness is not emphasized.
Management of information	
Information is widely shared.	Information is not widely shared.
Informal communication networks transmit most important information.	Formal communication networks transmit most important information.
Ambiguous information is preferred.	Precise, detailed information is preferred.
Slow messages are appreciated.	Fast messages are appreciated.
Close attention is paid to social cues and context.	Less attention is paid to social cues and context.
Physical cues are important.	Physical cues are unimportant.
Values and beliefs about work and relationships	
Relationships take precedence over problems or tasks.	Problems or tasks take precedence over relationships.
Emphasis is on maintaining stability.	Emphasis is on change and mobility.
Goals are long-term.	Goals are short-term.
Communication channel	
Oral communication is preferred.	Written communication is preferred.
More text is required in written communication to create context.	Less text is required in written communication because context is unimportant.
Literalness and symbolism	
Artful language (proverbs, poems, sophistication, historical references) is preferred.	Task-related language is preferred.
Words are not trusted.	Words are trusted.
The meaning of words varies greatly.	The meaning of words does not vary greatly.
Persuasion and logic	
Reasoning is holistic.	Reasoning is linear.
General principles are appealing.	Specific points are appealing.
Truth is relative.	Truth is absolute.
Contracts and rules	
Contracts are interpreted flexibly.	Contracts are interpreted rigidly.
Oral agreements are binding.	Written agreements are binding.
Adherence to rules and laws is weak.	Adherence to rules and laws is strong.
Expressiveness and display of emotion	
Communication contains little self-disclosure.	Communication contains high self-disclosure.
Little emotion is displayed.	Much emotion is displayed.

Table 9
Empirical Studies in Intercultural Business and Technical Communication
Literature Related to Various Contexting Categories

Contexting Category	No. of Articles/ No. of Empirical Articles	Empirical Articles That Support Contexting	Empirical Articles With Mixed Results Regarding Contexting	Empirical Articles That Do Not Support Contexting
Directness	32/8	1 (Thatcher, 1999)	2 (Alred, 1997; Stevens, 2000)	5 (Beamer, 2003; Bell, Dillon, & Becker, 1995; Conway & Wardrope, 2004; Connor, Davis, De Rycker, Phillips, & Verckens, 1997; Thomas, 1998) 1 (Thomas, 1998)
Management of information	32/3	2 (Ding, 2004; Wang, 2000)		
Values and beliefs about work and relationships	20/0			
Communication channel	19/5	4 (Kohl, Barclay, Pinelli, Keene, & Kennedy, 1993; Sun, 2006; Thatcher, 1999, 2006)	1 (Stevens, 2000)	
Literariness and symbolism	16/0			
Persuasion and logic	14/5	2 (Ding, 2004; Du-Babcock, 1999)	1 (Alred, 1997)	2 (Bell, Dillon, & Becker, 1995; Thomas, 1998)
Contracts and rules	4/1		1 (Hagen, 1998)	
Expressiveness and display of emotion	2/0			

studies not supporting it. The categories of management of information, persuasion and logic, and contracts and rules each has five or fewer empirical studies that have addressed them, and a great deal of uncertainty still exists about how well supported these propositions are. The categories of values and beliefs about work and relationships, literalness and symbolism, and expressiveness and display of emotions have not been studied empirically in any of the IBTC articles. That is particularly surprising for values and beliefs about work and relationships because the proposition that HC cultures value relationships whereas LC cultures value achievement and tasks was described in the literature reviews or theoretical frameworks of 20 of the articles. It is also surprising that the literalness and symbolism category has not been empirically researched in any of the contexting articles because Hall (1976) referred to this contexting category repeatedly.

R8. To what extent are empirically based studies of contexting cited in IBTC literature? Thomas (1998) is the only researcher in the IBTC literature who attempted to comprehensively measure contexting. She found that none of her hypotheses about contexting was supported and that the model should be seriously questioned. But her study has been cited in only one IBTC article since, and that article failed to mention that Thomas rejected the contexting model (Houston, 2002). The studies of Gudykunst et al. (1996) and Kim et al. (1998), the only other known works to have attempted to comprehensively measure contexting, were not cited in any of the IBTC articles.

Ironically, one of the most frequently cited empirical studies of contexting in the IBTC literature is Campbell's (1998). Examining the HC features of a letter written by a Chinese scientist, Campbell pointed out some of the commonly described HC features of the letter from his own point of view. Interestingly, he described showing the letter to Japanese colleagues, who are members of a culture that is assumed to be HC, and they criticized the letter for lacking sufficient directness and purpose and for providing unnecessary information. Thus, many IBTC articles cite this study for supporting contexting when in fact the only viewpoints of assumed HC cultural members provided by the study seem to contradict traditional contexting propositions.

R9. What limitations of contexting theory have been raised in IBTC literature? No article in the IBTC literature was found that directly critiqued or challenged Hall's (1976) methodology for developing the contexting model or the contexting continuum although Victor's (1994) article implied that the contexting model is nonempirical:

While Hall's works laid the foundation for the field, they are non-empirical and limited to a handful of cultures. Even some of these cultures (for example, Arabic and Scandinavian) are too cross-culturally heterogeneous within the culture to be accurate. Additionally, researchers need to examine Chinese, Mexican, Brazilian, Hindu, and other key cultures Hall overlooks. (p. 42)

Several IBTC authors, however, have questioned portions of the contexting model or its relevance with short statements. For example, Beamer (2003) stated the following concerning her research about Chinese letters: "Hall's high-context and low-context construct of communication suggested that Chinese prefer indirectness, but that is not the case in these business letters, not even in the majority of requests" (p. 233). And Zaidman (2001) made the following statement:

[Contexting] does not explain variations within a culture or variations among cultures that share a broad value. For example, a schema such as HC-LC does not distinguish between the HC communication of a Japanese businessperson and the HC communication of an Indian. Moreover, it is unable to account for the communication of an Indian manager who has been extensively exposed to an LC system of communication. Thus, the limitations of the global-culture approach are that complexity and variation in communication patterns are often ignored and the approach is insensitive to adaptation of communication strategies. (p. 410)

But critique of Hall's model is rare. The few statements that challenge contexting are short one- or two-sentence statements.

One major limitation of contexting theory that is not expressed explicitly by any IBTC authors but that pervades the literature is that modernization and globalization increasingly create a LC business culture (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, the relevance of the model is challenged because most trends seemingly point toward the adoption of LC communication practices in so-called HC cultures. Several articles in the IBTC literature illustrate this trend toward the adoption of LC communication practices around the world by focusing on direct, precise, persuasive, and articulate management and interpersonal communication styles (Goby, 1999a, 1999b); written documentation, such as ISO certifications (Thatcher, 2006); the increased legalistic approach to liability and the enforcement of consumer regulations (Lipus, 2006); the adoption of business communication textbooks that emphasize benefits of LC communication (Tebeaux, 1999); and the increasing use of technology that relies less on contextual cues (St. Amant, 2002; Starke-Meyerring, 2005). With English increasingly adopted as the global business language, LC

communication can be expected to increase in importance because contexting is tied to the language used for business (Du-Babcock, 1999). The increased use of LC communication in a global business environment may be one reason why over half (9 out of 17) of the international business practitioners who responded to a survey about useful components of an intercultural communication course considered contexting unimportant. By contrast, educators who took the same survey overwhelmingly (21 out of 22) considered contexting an essential or important part of the course (Martin & Chaney, 1992).

Another limitation of contexting theory in the IBTC literature is that articles that make cultural contrasts between HC and LC cultures do not mention the HC behavior in cultures traditionally considered LC; thus, differences between so-called HC and so-called LC cultures are exaggerated. For example, HC language devices in American culture, such as the use of puns, idioms, metaphors, humor, and hyperbole, are often pointed out in IBTC literature that discusses American culture in isolation but not in literature that contrasts it with HC cultures. Furthermore, LC cultures are often advised to avoid using such HC communication patterns by using simplified language with less nuance and by avoiding using too much humor when dealing with HC cultures (DeVoss et al., 2002; Griffin, 2004; Horton, 1993; Serebryakova-Collins, 1998; Thrush, 2000). Such treatment of HC behavior in LC cultures interferes with a balanced discussion of the contrasts between cultures.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on this meta-analysis of the IBTC literature, I can reasonably say contexting is the most important communication theory in IBTC. Furthermore, its influence has grown since the early 1990s, with nearly one quarter of all IBTC articles citing it over the past decade. Yet, the theory was never described by Hall with any empirical rigor, and no known research involving any instrument or measure of contexting validates it. Furthermore, studies that seem to have challenged contexting have gone unnoticed in subsequent research.

Ironically, contexting is most frequently discussed in terms of directness, yet empirical studies nearly all fail to support this relationship. In other words, the relationship between directness and contexting based on traditional classifications of HC and LC cultures is particularly tenuous. Most of the contexting categories simply have not been researched enough to make firm conclusions. But the fact that contexting has not been empirically

validated should not necessarily be construed as a failure of the theory. One conclusion of this study is that not only have there been a limited number of empirical studies, but each of the empirical studies has been quite limited in scope: The studies have not examined the majority of contexting propositions or a sufficient number of cultures to identify etic variation. The body of contexting propositions, however, has been developed by IBTC researchers with diverse cultural backgrounds and substantial intercultural experience; thus, the propositions deserve serious attention. Nonetheless, the contexting model simply cannot be described as an empirically validated model.

A clear failure of the IBTC literature regarding contexting is that none of the research mentions the limitations of the model and nearly all the research seems to completely accept the model despite the lack of empirical validation, which has led to generalizations in the IBTC literature that are perhaps unwarranted. For example, George (2003) interpreted the public relations breakdown between Americans and Arabs and Muslims in the aftermath of the Iraq War as a communication issue. George stated that "the message and language from a low context culture (US) did not resonate with the audience of a high context culture, such as Arab and Muslim countries" (p. 104). Such statements demand empirical validation when other substantive issues could so clearly be more divisive.

Based on the findings of this study, then, IBTC researchers should consider contexting to be a nonrigorously developed model without empirical support. Thus, researchers who cite contexting or interpret intercultural communication in terms of contexting should do so cautiously. Certainly, researchers who describe contexting should also identify the limitations of this model. Also, given many of the trends toward LC communication in a global business environment, IBTC researchers may not be best served by continuing to use contexting as an explanatory mechanism for cultural differences. But for those who would like to continue research about contexting, I provide the following recommendations:

1. *Develop measures or instruments for contexting.* Because existing research does not reveal any reliable basis for comparing cultures in terms of contexting, future research must employ rigorously developed measures. Such measures would allow a basis for effectively contrasting cultures and would allow for replication and extension studies.
2. *Include more countries and cultures in studies of the contexting model.* The value of an etic model is that it provides a comparison across many countries and cultures, yet the existing contexting model fails to incorporate most cultures in the world. Those studies that have attempted to measure contexting have measured only American, Australian, Japanese, and Korean societies,

finding little or no difference between these cultures. For contexting to be a meaningful theory that explains cross-cultural variation, a minimum of 10 to 15 cultures must be included in a study.

3. *Develop categories or dimensions of contexting.* A close look at the numerous contexting propositions indicates that multiple dimensions may be possible. Thus, classifying cultures simply as HC and LC may be inappropriate. The process of developing, testing, and refining a measure for contexting could reveal whether contexting is a multidimensional construct.
4. *Focus on the circumstances in which various cultures use both HC and LC messages.* A balanced research approach requires understanding when cultures value HC messages and when they value LC messages. Hall (1976) pointed out that all cultures use both HC and LC messages.
5. *Focus on areas of contexting other than directness.* Scant attention has been paid to contexting areas such as persuasiveness and logic, communication channel, rules and contracts, management of information, and literalness and symbolism. Close examination of Hall's works reveals that these issues are much more at the heart of his theory than directness.

This study also reveals problems with the dissemination of reliable knowledge in the IBTC field. Despite lacking empirical support, contexting has become a deeply embedded component of IBTC textbooks and training platforms. Business and technical communication instructors and intercultural communication trainers should be aware of the limitations of contexting and avoid overemphasizing its applicability to global business interactions.

In this article, I have critiqued Hall's development of the contexting model and described a meta-analysis of IBTC literature since 1990. This meta-analysis reveals that the contexting model is based on little or no empirical validation. Future IBTC research, then, should cautiously treat the extensive set of contexting propositions that have emerged in the IBTC literature. Furthermore, the role of contexting in IBTC textbooks and courses should be diminished until reliable research about contexting is available.

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