Conceptualizing Culture as Communication in Management and Marketing Research[1,2]

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Chapter 8
Conceptualizing Culture as Communication in Management and Marketing Research

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Culture is communication and communication is culture.

—Hall, 1959, p. 169

Decades of management and marketing researchers are grateful to Geert Hofstede for bringing an empirical approach to studying culture in the workplace. Since Hofstede's (1980) original publication of the cultural values of IBM employees in 40 nations, hundreds of researchers have used the Hofstedean framework to understand culture's influence on managerial, consumer, and organizational behavior. This includes conceptualizing culture as a nation-level construct capturing a set of shared values and measuring culture empirically through self-reports of value statements. For managers and marketers, this approach has proven fruitful. When our goals are to explain and predict the behavior of employees, managers, and consumers in an increasingly global workplace, we agree that there is utility in measuring culture empirically at the individual level, in describing and categorizing individuals from different nationalities when shared values are apparent (though some authors in this volume might question the value of such an approach), and in empirically testing the relationship between cultural values and organizational outcomes. At the same time, we believe that it is time to move beyond the empirical study of cultural values to address other facets of culture that have the power to predict marketing and management behaviors.

Despite our tendency to focus on culture as values, many definitions of culture go beyond this conceptualization. For example, Parsons and Shils (1951) note that culture includes an organized set of rules or standards to which an individual is committed. D'Andrade (1984) sees culture as not only shared meaning but also symbolic discourse. And Herskovits (1955) defines culture even more broadly as the human-made part of the environment. However, in management and marketing, researchers have not taken advantage of many of these alternative conceptualizations of culture.

To help understand our perspective on where Hofstede began and where we propose to go from here, we turn to Triandis's (1994, p. 6) definition of culture as "unstated assumptions, standard operating procedures, ways of doing things that have been internalized to such an extent that people do not argue about them." Within the field of cross-cultural management, the study of culture has largely been focused on what anthropologists refer to as "culture as an ideational system" (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 29). That is, we have focused, à la Hofstede, on the study of the cognitive aspects of a culture (the unstated assumptions); its values, beliefs and norms; and the development of empirical tools to measure them. Since Hofstede first measured individualism–collectivism in 1980, there have been many theoretical advances (Triandis, 1995), including the introduction of a vertical–horizontal subdimension (e.g., Chen and Li, 2005; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998) and the vast literature on the independent–interdependent self-concept (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991). There have also been empirical advances in the measurement of individualism–collectivism, such as subsequent individualism–collectivism scales (Singelis et al., 1994), Schwartz's (1994) scales for tradition and achievement, and House's scales for institutional and in-group collectivism (House et al., 2004).

What has received significantly less attention from cross-cultural management scholars is the study of the standard operating procedures and internalized ways of doing things that is also included in Triandis's definition. There has been relatively little management research into culture as an adaptive system, that is,an examination of culture that links groups of people and their adapted behavioral patterns to the ecological setting in which they live (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). It is in this vein that we turn to anthropologist Edward Hall's conceptualization of culture as a way to move cross-cultural research beyond Hofstede.

In his seminal book, *The Silent Language* (Hall, 1959) and in numerous publications that followed, anthropologist Edward Hall proposed that cultures could be differentiated on the basis of the relationship between communication in that culture and the interactants' reliance on the context in which it is presented. Hall noted that individuals within certain cultures—those he labeled as high context—rely on indirect communication and contextual information, such as the distance between interactants or the nature of the relationship between them, to convey meaning, stating that, "Without context, the (linguistic) code is incomplete since it encompasses only part of the message" (Hall, 1976, p. 86). In contrast, Hall proposed that individuals in low context cultures rely more on direct communication and explicit words to convey meaning. Unlike Hofstede's, Hall's research methodology was not based on quantitative analyses of survey responses but instead on anthropological observations. These observations led him to propose that populations in Eastern societies, for example, Japan and China, tend to be more high context culturally, and populations in Western societies, for example, the United States and Germany, tend to be more low context. Essentially, Hall suggested that people are embedded within a social context and that culture can be captured in the different ways people communicate—specifically, in the extent to which they rely on cues within their context to convey meaning.

Clearly, this conceptualization of culture as an adaptive system goes beyond value models such as Hofstede's that focus on culture as an ideation system.

Hall's theories regarding culture have been shown to have external validity by numerous practitioners, consultants, and diplomats and by academics writing for practitioner audiences. For example, the theory of high and low context cultures is a foundation for books and training seminars regarding cross-cultural management and communication (e.g., Gesteland, 1999; Harris and Moran, 1991; Lewis, 2006; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) and negotiations across cultures (Cohen, 1991). Hall's theory of direct and indirect communication was discussed by Brett, Behfar and Kern (2006) in *Harvard Business Review*, and his theory regarding reliance on the context of time was addressed by Bluedorn, Felker and Lane (1992) in the *Academy of Management Executive*. We also note that Hall himself often consults for government and businesses, that he frequently uses organizational examples in his books, and that his 1960 *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Silent Language in Overseas Business," remains a staple in many cross-cultural business classes. Thus, there seems to be wide acceptance among practitioners of international management and marketing that Hall's ideas regarding culture ring true.

It is interesting then, given the new conceptualization of culture that Hall presents and the apparent external validity of Hall's theories, that the attention given to Hall in academic literature has been extremely limited. In this chapter, we propose a thorough examination of Hall's conceptualization of culture—both by comprehensively examining the theory and by reviewing how Hall's theory has been treated within management and marketing literature—with the goal of offering new ways to operationalize culture and model its effect on behavior in and between organizations.

In the next section, we review and synthesize Hall's work on culture as communication, breaking down his comprehensive theory into four key components. We then discuss how Hall's general theory and these four components have been presented within prominent journals in the management and marketing disciplines. Our review of the academic literature demonstrates that research regarding high and low context theory has been sparse and shallow at best. The full scope of Hall's conceptualization of communication as culture has not been studied by management and marketing researchers. Furthermore, our review demonstrates that we have little understanding of the antecedents of the four components of Hall's theory and their organizational consequences. Finally, our summary reveals that measurement of high and low context cultures falls prey to the same weaknesses that many see in Hofstedean research; measurement is virtually always done by aggregate categorization of countries as high or low context, not on an individual level.

Based on this understanding of where we stand in the management and marketing literature with respect to Hall, we conclude this chapter by discussing how we can advance our full understanding of Hall's theory of culture as communication within cross-cultural research. We note some of the limitations of Hall's work and suggest how they might be overcome, and we propose avenues to extend Hall's model of culture to understand the antecedents and consequences of high and low context communication fully in an organizational setting.

Culture as Communication in Management and Marketing Literature

Upon a thorough reading of Hall's many works on culture (1959, 1966, 1976, 1983; Hall and Hall, 1987, 1990), it quickly becomes apparent that his conceptualization of culture as communication is deep and multifaceted. Hall notes that communication occurs through many

channels in the interaction context (e.g., tone of voice, space between interactants, status of interactants), and one way to understand culture is to examine the different ways that people attend to and rely on these many contextual factors when communicating and interacting with others. Hall describes cultures as falling somewhere along a low–high context continuum that is bounded by low reliance on these contextual factors to convey meaning at one end and high reliance on context on the other. In other words, in low context cultures, people do not use many different channels to communicate but instead communicate directly with unambiguous words. In contrast, in high context cultures, people use many different channels and sources of information to convey meaning; communication occurs within a complex and rich interaction context.

Hall's (1959) general model of culture is quite complex, composed of nine distinct primary message systems. However, we believe the fundamental elements of Hall's conceptualization of culture as communication can be distilled into four key (non-orthogonal) components. The first component, communication style, relates to Hall's ideas about the degree to which messages are conveyed directly or indirectly and the extent to which people rely on explicit or implicit meaning. The second component, relationship context, captures Hall's ideas about the degree to which people attend to the nature and strength of relationships and to which relationships influence their communication and interaction patterns. The third component, time context, a dimension Hall termed monochronic–polychronic, captures the way people attend to time and let time influence their communication and social interaction. Finally, the fourth component, space context, relates to the degree to which people use and attend to space, for example physical or auditory, in social interaction.

According to our conceptualization, low–high context is not just about how we say or do not say things but also refers to how we use different kinds of information in our environment when we communicate and interact with others. Clearly such aspects of culture are relevant to the workplace, and Hall (1960) himself introduced many organizational applications. For example, in a description of the German workplace, Hall and Hall (1990, p. 64) note, "directness will govern human relations" (communication style), "formality and politeness, including proper respect for social and business status, will pervade daily business life" (relationship context), and "privacy and personal space will be safe from intrusion" (space context). Furthermore, he describes the differences in time context in Ethiopian organizations: "The time required for a decision is directly proportional to its importance. This is so much the case that low level bureaucrats there have a way of trying to elevate the prestige of their work by taking a long time to make up their minds" (Hall, 1960, p. 88).

Despite Hall's own application of his theory to business, a review of articles mentioning Hall that have appeared in prominent journals within management and marketing demonstrates that researchers in these fields have not embraced Hall's work in theory development or empirical research (please see Tables 8.1–8.5). In the remainder of this section, we will first review research articles in management and marketing that have referenced Hall in a broad, general sense. Then we will briefly discuss each of the four components of low–high context and review how they have been addressed by management and marketing researchers. In the final discussion section of this chapter, we will suggest how researchers can improve the understanding and application of Hall's theory in both theoretical and empirical research.

References to Hall's Theory in General

In Table 8.1, we include articles that mention Hall's theory in general, without reference to a particular facet of low–high context. We found only eight such articles appearing since 1990. We see a call for deeper examination of the role of context within organizational research (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991) and a call to be aware of the influence of context on the methodologies we use in international business research (Mueller, 1991); both articles highlight the need for a deeper understanding of Hall's theory. Most of the articles that mention Hall do so only briefly to justify an untested proposition or as an ex-post explanation of findings, without a deeper examination of specifically which component of Hall might be influential in the research or exactly why. For example, Takada and Jain (1991) and Helson, Jedidi, and DeSarbo (1993) hypothesize that the rate of new product adaption will be faster in high context cultures than in low context cultures without explaining the operant mechanism; what is it about high context cultures that would lead them to this hypothesis, and why? Similarly, in the models proposed by Shaw (1990) and Weiss (1993), it is not clear whether the propositions are motivated by differences in communication style or by the differing levels of attention paid to nature of the relationship between the interactants (relationship context). As a result, across all these articles, theory development is lacking.

Table 8.1. Articles Addressing Hall in General

Author	***Journal, Year***	***A Priori Hypothesis / Proposition or Post-hoc Analysis / Interpretation of Findings***	***Cultural Group(s) Studied***	***Method & Measurement***
Boyacigiller and Adler	*Academy of Management Review*, 1991	Proposition • "The low-context orientation of the United States (and also England) may explain the minimal emphasis organizational theory historically has placed on such contextual factors as history, social setting, culture, and government. Organizational science has become trapped, that is, trapped within geographical, cultural, temporal, and conceptual parochialism" (p. 276).		• Propositional paper concerning the content of organizational research.
Helsen, Jedidi,	*Journal of*	Post-hoc analysis:	Austria, Belgium,	• Latent class

and DeSarbo	*Marketing*, 1993	• Analyzed relationship among low, medium, high context countries and diffusion patterns (mo relationship found). • Follows up on Takada and Jain, 1991 who suggested the rate of adoption is higher in high context cultures.	Denmark, Finland, France, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, U.K., U.S.	analysis of diffusion patterns • Country-level categorization
Hennart and Zeng	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 2002	Hypothesis • Parents of international joint ventures do not have a common silent language, which will affect longevity.	Japan, US	• Proportional hazard model • Country-level categorization
Kim, Pan, and Park	*Psychology & Marketing*, 1998	Post-hoc interpretation of findings • Chinese and Korean subjects exhibit high context tendencies and American subjects exhibit low context tendencies.	China, Korea, US	• 16-item low/high context scale • Items mainly value based.
Mueller	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1991	Post-hoc interpretation of findings • "…were this study to be replicated, an effort would be made to employ several translators for each language. There is a potential for the loss of information in the translation process. This potential is particularly strong in the case of the Japanese sample, as Japan is considered a high context culture" (p. 30).	US, Germany, Japan	• Content analysis of advertisements
Shaw	*Academy of Management Review*, 1990	Proposition • Individuals from high-context cultures are more likely to engage in controlled information processing than persons from low-context cultures.		• Proposes a cultural model of cognitive processing
Takada and Jain	*Journal of Marketing*, 1991	Hypothesis: • The rate of adoption is faster in high context cultures than in low context cultures (supported).	Japan, South Korea, Taiwan	• Bass new product growth model • Country-level categorization
Weiss	*Organization Science*, 1993	Proposition • Low context negotiators do not understand rejection statements made by high context negotiators.		• Proposes model of cross-cultural negotiations

Finally, the literature in Table 8.1 highlights a weakness in operationalization and measurement that is demonstrated repeatedly in research applying Hall's theories. Those studies that did have testable hypotheses assigned countries into categories of high or low context without any confirmatory measurement. Can Hennart and Zeng (2002), for example, be certain that their populations in Japan and the United States differ with respect to high and low context communication, and indeed, differ in their "silent language" (an assumption in their hypothesis) without first measuring that this is so? Of all the articles listed in Tables 8.1–8.5, Kim, Pan, and Park's (1998) is the only example that includes a measurement of high and low context. However, the 16 items used in their scale are mainly value based (similar to those found in the

scales of Hofstede) rather than measuring communication and interaction styles and behaviors. Therefore, possible antecedents of communication behaviors are confounded with the behaviors themselves.

Communication Style: Direct–Indirect and Explicit–Implicit Messages

The component of Hall's low–high context theory with which most people are familiar captures the degree to which people are direct or indirect when communicating. Hall (1976) notes that in low context cultures people tend to say directly in unambiguous words the message they want their interlocutor to hear. Thus, meaning is explicit; it is not hidden in subtle nonverbal cues or obscure metaphors. In contrast, in high context cultures, people rely on internal and external context as channels to convey information. Internal context refers to information carried by the individual, for example in the non-verbal cues or previous experience one brings to a social interaction. External context refers to information contained in the environment, for example in the subtle information that can be conveyed by one's choice of location for a meeting. Interestingly, in high context communications, it is not only the sender who will encode an indirect or implicit meaning, but it is expected that the receiver will search for and decode the intended implicit meaning as well. Hall (1976) makes clear the distinction between low versus high context communications and the demands placed upon both parties to the communication with the following description:

> People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low context systems. When talking about something they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his [or her] interlocutor to know what's bothering him [or her], so that he [or she] doesn't have to be specific. The result is that he [or she] will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly – this keystone – is the role of his [or her] interlocutor (p.113).

It has been proposed that the directness–indirectness of low–high context communication also relates to how people in different cultures make arguments. The styles of persuasion characteristic of low context cultures in the West are primarily direct and include Aristotelian argument (Johnstone, 1989; Walker, 1990), appeals to fact and objective proof (Walker, 1990), logic-based argument (Harris and Moran, 1991), and rational argument (Glenn et al., 1977). The styles of persuasion characteristic of high context cultures in the East are more indirect and include appeals to ideology and general principles (Glenn et al., 1977; Pye, 1982; Walker, 1990), spiral reasoning (Ting-Toomey, 1988), and appeals to emotion (Glenn et al., 1977; Johnstone, 1989).

Of the four components of Hall's theory of culture as communication, it is the direct–indirect communication style that has been studied most extensively by academic researchers, particularly in the field of communication (Gudykunst, 1983; Holtgraves, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1999). In the fields of management and marketing, direct–indirect communication as a cultural dimension has been addressed primarily in the negotiation, advertising, and feedback literature. In Table 8.2 we briefly summarize the management and marketing literature employing the construct of direct–indirect communication styles.

Table 8.2. Articles Addressing Hall's Theory of Communication Style

Author	***Journal, Year***	***A Priori Hypothesis / Proposition or Post-hoc Analysis / Interpretation of Findings***	***Cultural Group(s) Studied***	***Method & Measurement***
Adair	*International Journal of Conflict Management*, 2003	Hypotheses: • Low and high context negotiators will reciprocate behaviors that are culturally-normative to them (supported).	Germany, U.S., Israel, Sweden, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Adair and Brett	*Organization Science*, 2005	Hypotheses: • Low and high context dyads will differ in the kind of behavioral sequences they exhibit due to the indirect and flexible nature of high context communication (supported).	Germany, U.S., Israel, Sweden, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization

Adair et al.	*Negotiation Journal*, 2004	Hypotheses: • High context dyads will use more affective persuasion and low context dyads will use more rational persuasion (partially supported).	France, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, Brazil, U.S.	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Adair, Okumura, and Brett	*Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2001	Hypothesis: • Low context U.S. negotiators will explicitly state preferences and priorities more often, and high context Japanese negotiators will use offers more often to express preferences (supported).	U.S., Japan	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Adair, Weingart, and Brett	*Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2007	Hypotheses: • Multiple hypotheses to show offers are a source of information for Japanese negotiators but act as anchors for U.S. negotiators (supported).	US, Japan	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Al-Olayan and Karande	*Journal of Advertising*, 2000	Hypothesis: • Arabic magazine ads contain fewer information cues and less price information than U.S. magazine ads (supported).	United States and the Arab world (12 Middle Eastern and 10 African countries)	• Content analysis of advertisements • Country-level categorization
An	*International Journal of Advertising*, 1992	Hypothesis: • Multinational brands' local Web ads are likely to use symbolic visuals for high context nations and literal visuals for low context nations (supported).	US, UK, Germany, Japan, China, Korea	• Content analysis of Web advertising • Country-level categorization
Bailey, Chen. and Dou	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1997	Hypothesis: • U.S. respondents will take more initiative to seek individual performance feedback than respondents from Japan or China (partially supported, in Japan but not in China).	China, Japan, US	• Questionnaire • Country-level categorization
Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet	*Journal of Advertising*, 1992	Hypothesis: • French ads use more emotional appeals than American ads; American ads contain more informational cues than French ads (supported).	France, US	• Content analysis of advertisements • Country-level categorization
Choi, Lee, and Kim	*Journal of Advertising*, 2005	Proposition: • As cultural icons, celebrity endorsers can be used effectively in high context cultures as an implicit means of conveying messages to consumers (supported).	South Korea, US	• Content analysis of commercials • Country-level categorization
George, Jones, and Gonzalez	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1998	Proposition: • Low context direct style and high context indirect style can lead to negative affect in cross-cultural encounters.		• Propose model of affect in cross-cultural negotiations
Lin	*Journal of Advertising Research*, 1993	Post-hoc interpretation of findings • In high context cultures, comparative or logic-based appeals are not desired, familiar symbols or icons more effectively convey product image; in low context cultures reliance is on rhetoric and logic (supported).	Japan, US	• Content analysis of commercials • Country-level categorization
Mueller	*Journal of Advertising Research*, 1991	Exploratory study: • Examined link between high–low context and use of soft sell, hard sell, and advertising based on product merit.	Japan, US	• Content analysis of commercials • Country-level categorization
Rao and Hashimoto	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1996	Hypothesis: • Japanese managers use more total influence and reason with their Canadian subordinates than with their Japanese ones (supported).	Canada, Japan	• Survey • Country-level categorization
Rao and	*Journal of*	Post hoc discussion:	Examination of US	• Questionnaire

Schmidt	*International Business Studies*, 1998	• Negotiators may be adapting to their Far Eastern and Eastern European counterparts by adopting a soft and indirect, high context style.	cross-national business alliances in 41 countries	• Country-level categorization
Sully de Luque and Sommer	*The Academy of Management Review*, 2000	Proposition: • Organizations in holistic cultures will convey feedback more through context using indirect and implicit messages; organizations in specific-oriented cultures will convey feedback more through information exchanged by direct messages.		• Cultural model of the feedback-seeking process
Ting-Toomey	*International and Intercultural Communication Annual*, 1985	Proposition: • Attitudes toward conflict will be direct and confrontational in low context cultures and indirect and nonconfrontational in high context cultures.		• Model of conflict and culture
Tse, Francis, and Walls	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1994	Hypothesis: • High and low context used to support hypothesis that individualism–collectivism influences reactions to conflict. Specifically, collectivists will have more negative reactions to conflict (supported).	Canada, China	• Experimental–negotiation scenarios • Country-level categorization
Zhou, Zhou, and Xue	*Journal of Advertising*, 2005	Hypotheses: • U.S. ads use more direct, visual product comparisons than Japanese ads (supported); U.S. ads visually identify brand names earlier than Chinese ads (supported); pacing is faster in U.S. ads (supported).	China, US	• Content analysis of advertisements • Country-level categorization

One area of research that has relied on Hall's low–high context theory to predict differences in direct and indirect communication is negotiation and conflict. For example, Adair and colleagues (Adair et al., 2001, 2007; Adair and Brett, 2005) have grounded their predictions in Hall's theory and found that low context negotiators are more likely to state their preferences directly in words, whereas high context negotiators are more likely to reveal their preference structure indirectly by making multiple offers. These authors also use low–high context to explain negotiators' use of rational versus affective persuasive strategies and negotiators' interaction patterns, for example reciprocity and other behavioral sequences (Adair, 2003; Adair and Brett, 2005; Adair et al., 2004).

Researchers investigating the provision of feedback across cultures have also employed Hall's theories. Sully de Luque and Sommer (2000) present a model in which organizations in what they termed "holistic cultures" ("specific-oriented cultures") were proposed to provide feedback more (less) through context using indirect, implicit (specific, explicit) messages. Rao

and Hashimoto's (1996) examination of Canadian and Japanese organizations demonstrates that Japanese managers used more influence and reason with their Canadian subordinates than with their Japanese ones. Bailey and colleagues (1997) show that respondents from the United States will seek more direct, individualized feedback than will respondents in Japan, but not those in China.

Researchers in advertising have clearly capitalized on low–high context theory to explain differences in advertising content across cultures. This literature demonstrates that advertising in high context cultures is likely to include fewer informational cues and less price information (Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000), more symbolic visuals relative to literal visuals (An, 1992), more emotional appeals (Biswas et al., 1992), more use of celebrity endorsers, cultural icons, and symbols relative to rhetorical and logical appeals (Choi et al., 2005; Lin, 1993), and less use of directly comparative visuals (Zhou et al., 2005) compared with advertisements in low context cultures.

This body of research employing Hall's theory on communication style has clearly expanded our understanding of the organizational consequences of direct–indirect communication. Yet to highlight the research in just one area—feedback—a number of theoretically important questions are unanswered. For example, are Canadian managers (Rao and Hashimoto, 1996), who likely are lower context than Japanese ones, as adept at altering their communication style to the local context as are Japanese managers, who, because of their high context nature, are attuned to adapting communication to a given context? Or why in the study by Bailey and colleagues (1997) do respondents from China and Japan, countries both aggregately categorized as high context cultures, act differently in seeking feedback?

Furthermore, it is interesting that despite the plethora of studies that have been conducted on direct–indirect communication style, we have little understanding of the antecedents of this component of low–high context cultures. It is important to note that, as shown in the research of Tse and colleagues (1994) and Drake (1995), low–high context is sometimes even treated synonymously with individualism and collectivism, further confusing behavior with values—which, as we discuss in the conclusion, are likely antecedents of behavior. Finally, we observe that though the research cited here was conducted in numerous countries, measurement of low–high context was consistently done by aggregate country categorization, a weakness that leaves open the opportunity for explanations other than differences in propensities toward direct–indirect communication styles.

Contextual Information I: The Language of Interpersonal Relationships

According to Hall (1960), one of the channels through which information is conveyed in communication is the relationship between the interlocutors. In some cultures, things like status or relationship history convey important information that is used to guide social interaction. Hall notes that it is particularly in high context cultures that people attend to and draw meaning from the relationship context between the two parties. For example, in his 1960 *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Silent Language of Overseas Business," Hall stresses the importance of understanding the "language of friendship":

> As a general rule in foreign countries friendships are not formed as quickly as in the United States but go much deeper, last longer, and involve real obligations…. Friends and family around the world represent a sort of social insurance that would be difficult to find in the United States (p. 91).

It is not surprising then that research by Gudykunst (1983) demonstrates that members from high context cultures are more cautious in interactions with strangers, rely more on cues about

stranger's backgrounds, such as status, and ask more questions about stranger's backgrounds, such as their network of colleagues, than do members of low context cultures. This is because the relationship context influences the manner and context of communication.

The relationship context also influences the degree to which face-saving measures will be employed in communication and the extent to which communication is in service of relationship promotion rather than conveyance of information. For example, Ting-Toomey (1999) notes that concern for face in low context cultures is primarily for self-preservation, whereas in high context cultures, people are more likely to engage in both self- and other-face maintenance. She also characterizes the different communication styles as person-oriented (i.e. low context) versus status-oriented (i.e. high context).

Hall discussed the importance of managers' understanding the role of relationships in different cultures. For example, he suggests that in low context cultures, a written contract defines a relationship and one's ability to end or promote it; however, in high context cultures, the relationship itself determines how business is conducted. Thus, he recommends that to succeed, managers from low context cultures conducting business in high context cultures need to learn the language of relationships.

Marketer John Graham, with colleagues from both management and marketing, has conducted virtually all of the academic research employing Hall's theory regarding relationship context (see Table 8.3). One set of articles demonstrates the relatively greater importance of relationships in high context cultures. Money, Gilly, and Graham (1998) show the emphasis on the strength of network ties and extensive social interaction in business networks in Japan compared with the United States, and Money and Graham (1999) demonstrate among sales force employees that valence for pay influences Americans' job performance but not Japanese and that

the overall job satisfaction of Japanese was most influenced by value congruence. Graham, Mintu, and Rodgers's (1994) negotiation simulation in 10 countries shows that in high context cultures, personal relations are more important for negotiation satisfaction, and status relations are more important for negotiation profits. Another set of articles by Graham and colleagues demonstrates that relationship context impacts negotiation behavior and outcomes in high context cultures. For example, in Japan, relationship context dictates that buyers typically have more power and therefore earn more than sellers (Campbell et al., 1988; Graham et al., 1988). But in high context China, when the relationship context changes due to a strong seller's market, Adler, Brahm, and Graham (1992) find that buyers did not earn more than sellers.

Table 8.3. Articles Addressing Hall's Theory of Relationship Context

Author	***Journal, Year***	***A Priori Hypothesis / Proposition or Post-hoc Analysis / Interpretation of Findings***	***Cultural Group(s) Studied***	***Method & Measurement***
Adler, Brahm, and Graham	*Strategic Management Journal*, 1992	Hypothesis: • Chinese buyers will achieve higher profits than sellers (not supported).	China, U.S.	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet	*Journal of Advertising*, 1992	Hypothesis: • Sexual appeals are used more frequently in French ads than in American ads because of closer interpersonal relationships in France (supported).	France, US	• Content analysis of advertisements • Country-level categorization
Campbell, Graham, Jolibert, and Meissner	*Journal of Marketing*, 1988	Post-hoc interpretation: • Buyers earn more than sellers in high context, but not medium- or low context cultures (supported).	France, Germany, U.K., U.S.	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Graham, Kim, Lin, and Robinson	*Journal of Consumer Research*, 1988	Hypothesis: • Buyers earn more than sellers in high context, but not medium- or low context cultures (partially supported).	China, Japan, Korea, U.S.	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Graham, Mintu, and Rodgers	*Management Science*, 1994	Hypothesis: • Relative to low context cultures, in high context cultures, personal relations are more important for negotiation satisfaction, and status relations are more important for negotiation profits (supported).	U.S., Canada, Mexico, U.K., France, Germany, U.S.S.R., Taiwan, China, Korea	• Negotiation simulation • Country-level categorization
Money and Graham	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1999	Multiple Hypotheses • Summary of findings: Education and valence for pay influenced the Americans' performance, but not the Japanese. Pay level was tied to individual performance for the Americans, but not for the Japanese. For the Japanese, overall job satisfaction was influenced by value	Japan, U.S.	• Causal model • Country-level categorization

		congruence.		
Money, Gilly, and Graham	*Journal of Marketing*, 1998	Hypothesis: • Long business relationships that are characterized by high levels of trust and extensive social interaction with business contacts are manifested in higher levels of word-of-mouth activity among Japanese firms (supported). • Strength of ties is higher in the referral networks of Japanese buying companies than it is in American companies, both in the United States and Japan (supported).	Japan, US	• Qualitative, interview • Country-level categorization

Graham's research has advanced our understanding of how Hall's theory of relationship context is concretely manifested, particularly in business negotiations, and highlights the importance of relationship networks and status within high context cultures. However, our understanding of the antecedents of these behaviors related to relationship context remains clouded. For example, Money and Graham (1999, p. 198) describe their results as "consistent with Hofstede's (1991) characterization of the United States as a highly individualistic culture and Japan as a collectivistic culture …, and Hall and Hall's (1987) description of the United States as a low-context culture and Japan as a high-context culture." Once again, the theories of Hall and Hofstede are simultaneously used as explanations, leaving little understanding of how the two theories are truly related.

Finally, the advertising article by Biswas and colleagues (1992) demonstrates again the weaknesses regarding the measurement of low/high context. The authors show that sex appeals are used more in French advertisements than in American ones and suggest that this is because high context French people have closer interpersonal relationships than do low context Americans. Because of the aggregate country categorization of high and low context cultures however, rather than the individual level measurement of communication and relationship context, we cannot be certain as to the mechanism of causality.

Contextual Information II: The Language of Time

A third aspect of low–high context is how people draw on the context of time when relating to others. Hall (1960, p. 17) characterized cultures according to their perspective on time and stated that the "importance of this basic dichotomy cannot be overemphasized." At one end of the dichotomy, he described polychronic cultures in which people have a fluid and flexible view of time. In such cultures, time is in the background. People handle interruptions and simultaneous processing seamlessly, and relationships and meetings are not constricted by schedules and clock time. Hall suggests that Arab, African, Latin American, Asian, and Mediterranean societies are examples of polychronic cultures (Hall and Hall, 1987). At the other end of the dichotomy, Hall described monochronic cultures in which time is fixed and measurable. It speaks loud and clear, and thus people are highly attentive to clock time. Because of this attention to clock time, people in monochronic cultures tend to process information and arrange tasks sequentially. Their day is oriented around schedules and deadlines, and disruptions are not only annoying but also disorienting. Not surprisingly, examples of monochronic cultures include the United States, Germany, and Switzerland (Hall and Hall, 1987). This distinction between the strict, objective, monochronic view of time and the more fluid, contextual, polychronic view of time is part of the context-free and context-rich forms of relating in low versus high context cultures, respectively. This is because in polychronic cultures, time is not just about the clock; it is also relational (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Hall's study of time launched the field of chronemics, which is defined as the study of temporal communication, including the way people organize and react to time in contexts such as negotiation (Macduff, 2006). A number of studies have reinforced the notion that perceptions of time are culturally bound (e.g., Jones, 1988; Levine, 1988; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner,

1997, who refer to this dichotomy as sequential versus synchronic). The use of scheduling—and indeed of clock time—has been linked to the Industrial Revolution in the West, and with increasing globalization, technology makes the use of clock time pervasive in markets around the world (Goudsblom, 2001). Yet Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) suggest that even with these developments, non-industrial, polychronic perceptions of time are firmly ingrained and are likely to remain in many parts of the world.

Hall discussed the implications of the monochronic and polychronic views of time for international business managers. The time context component seems to be one that raises the most intense emotions because adherence to time, or the adjustment of it in lieu of relationship concerns, often implies respect. For the monochronic individual, being forced to wait 40 minutes for a meeting that had been scheduled far ahead of time is often taken as a show of disrespect. And it seems inconceivable—and likely rude—that during the business meeting their polychronic partner would allow constant interruptions—phone calls, messages, even other people (Gesteland, 1999; Hall, 1960; Hall and Hall, 1990).

Research addressing Hall's theory of time is presented in Table 8.4. Organizational researcher Richard Brislin has explored Hall's theory of time as it relates to international business and proposed ten different time components that international managers should consider (Brislin and Kim, 2003; Brislin and Lo, 2006). Other researchers have proposed bringing the study of time into research on organizational culture and strategic planning (Bluedorn et al., 1999; Schnieder, 1989). There has been little on the empirical side, however, particularly with respect to national culture. Much of this research has focused on developing scales to capture organizational time values, for example the Polychronic Value Scale (Bluedorn et al., 1999) or the Polychronic Attitude Index (Kaufman et al., 1991). We found only two quantitative studies

investigating organizational consequences of Hall's time context. Cunha and Cunha (2004) study the conflict that polychronic Southern European managers experienced when they were pressured to adopt a Northern, monochronic model of time management. Manrai and Manrai (1995) measure perceptions of time devoted to work versus social endeavors in low and high context cultures.

Table 8.4. Articles Addressing Hall's Theory of Time Context

Author	*Journal, Year*	*A Priori Hypothesis / Proposition or Post-hoc Analysis / Interpretation of Findings*	*Cultural Group(s) Studied*	*Method & Measurement*
Armagan, Ferreira, Bonner, and Okhuysen	*Research on Managing Groups and Teams*, 2006	Proposition • Managers from Turkey and Portugal will do more multi-tasking, spend more time, and build more relationships during negotiation than managers from the United States.		• Propose model of time and culture in negotiation
Bluedorn and Denhardt	*Journal of Management*, 1988	Proposition • Monochronic American managers experience stress when they visit polychronic cultures.		• Review of time in organizational literature
Bluedorn, Kalliath, Strube, and Martin	*Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 1999	Proposition • Polychronicity should be studied as a dimension of organizational culture.		• Develop inventory of polychronic values
Brislin and Kim	*Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 2003	Proposition • Culture affects time in international business interactions.		• Propose 10 time concepts in international business
Cunha and Cunha	*Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 2004	Proposition • International managers in Portugal must find synthesis between Northern time and Latin time.		• Semiotic analysis • Interviews
Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist	*Journal of Consumer Research*, 1991	Implications • Polychronicity can be used to study culture and consumer behavior.		• Develop polychronic attitude index
Manrai and Manrai	*Journal of Business Research*, 1995	Hypotheses • In high context cultures, people perceive more time is devoted to work, and in low context cultures it is perceived more time is devoted to social/leisure activities (supported).	International student sample	• Causal model • Country-level categorization
Schneider	*Organization Studies*, 1989	Proposition • Strategic planning in low context cultures will be more urgent and pressured than in high context cultures.		• Propose model of culture and strategy formulation

Virtually all the research cited here suggests the importance of understanding monochronic and polychronic cultures. With few exceptions however, what is needed is further

examination and a deeper understanding of how different views of time influence business practice, performance, management, strategy, and negotiation and of the factors that prompt such differing time-related behaviors.

Contextual Information III: The Language of Space

Hall suggests that space too—or proxemics—is an important communication channel. Most obvious is the level of the physical boundary; one can state territory, or "communicate power," by maintaining (or infringing on another's) "invisible bubble of space" or by choosing a corner office on a top floor (Hall and Hall, 1990). Also, cultural studies of haptics, or the use of touch in social interaction, are related to the language of space. Similarly, Ting-Toomey (1999) characterizes cultures as high or low contact, though she does not relate this directly to the low–high context distinction.

Hall (1960) relates the importance of understanding space as a form of communication for the cross-cultural manager. He tells the American businessperson:

> In the Middle East and Latin America, the [U.S.] businessman [or woman] is likely to feel left out in time and overcrowded in space. People get too close to him [or her], lay their hands on him [or her], and generally crowd his [or her] physical being. In Scandinavia and Germany, he [or she] feels more at home, but at the same time the people are a little cold and distant. It is space itself that conveys this feeling (p. 90).

Less obvious than personal distance is when space communication works at the level of the other senses, because "Few people realize that space is perceived by all the senses, not by vision alone. Auditory space is perceived by the ears, thermal space by the skin, kinesthetic space by the muscles, and olfactory space by the nose" (Hall and Hall, 1990, p. 11). Thus, factors such as the use of silence or interruption, emotion, and body language come into play. How people define and interpret these different forms of space in communication and social

interaction provides another piece of contextual information that differentiates the low and high context cultures.

For example, silence is interpreted by low context people as an uncomfortable void and a space to be filled with more conversation. In high context cultures however, silence is not an empty space but a communicative act; the empty auditory space communicates meaning (Gudykunst and Matsumoto, 1996). Thus, Graham (1985) finds that Japanese negotiators used silence more than either U.S. or Brazilian negotiators. Graham (1985) also finds that Brazilian negotiators engaged in more facial gazing, interruptions, and touching, all examples of using space to communicate, than did U.S. or Japanese negotiators, though he does not explicitly mention Hall or low–high context theory in that study.

Emotion and body language are also important space elements that have implications for social interaction in international marketing and management. As discussed by Cohen (1991, p. 33), "people are justifiably receptive to hidden meanings, always on the alert for subtle hints known from experience to be potentially present in the tone of conversation and the accompanying facial expressions and gestures (body language) of their interlocutors." However, in high context cultures, people are more likely to be attuned to auditory and physical cues than in low context cultures.

Despite the clear relevance of space for international business communication, both within and between organizations, there has been very little research on this dimension of low–high context (Table 8.5). The only article that specifically mentions Hall as a theoretical motivation is George, Jones, and Gonzales (1998); they propose in their model of affect in cross-cultural negotiations that individuals from high context cultures use more touching during communication, which can be uncomfortable for low context negotiators.

Table 8.5. Articles Addressing Hall's Theory of Space Context

Author	*Journal, Year*	*A Priori Hypothesis / Proposition or Post-hoc Analysis / Interpretation of Findings*	*Cultural Group(s) Studied*	*Method & Measurement*
George, Jones, and Gonzalez	*Journal of International Business Studies*, 1998	Proposition • Individuals from high context cultures use more touching during communication, which can be uncomfortable for low context negotiators.		• Propose model of affect in cross-cultural negotiations

It is important to note that this work raises an issue that ultimately is a key limitation of Hall's theory. The term "high context" as applied by Hall includes people from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The hypothesis of George and colleagues would seem to be true in Latin American cultures for example. But clearly, the prediction would not apply to less affective but also high context cultures such as Japan or China. We will discuss this limitation at more length in the conclusion. More generally, this limitation and the overall lack of understanding of the space context suggests that it is imperative that we gain a greater understanding of how communication and space context influence business behavior and performance and the antecedents of an interactant's attention to and use of space.

Discussion: Conceptualizing Culture as Communication

In 1959, Edward Hall proposed a novel theory of culture, one that examined culture as an adaptive system—linking groups of people and their adapted behavioral patterns to the ecological setting in which they live (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). Specifically, he suggested that culture is captured in communication and that communication is based upon the context in which it is presented. This view of culture is radically different from the dominant cultural paradigm within management and marketing, that of Geert Hofstede (1980), who, two decades after Hall, presented an ideation system of culture based upon values and beliefs. Based on our synthesis of Hall's theory and review of it as employed in the management and marketing

literature, we draw several conclusions and propose a number of ways to move cross-cultural research beyond Hofstede. Essentially, we want to reach back into Hall's theory to move cross-cultural business research into the future.

First, low–high context communication is not simply about conversational directness and indirectness but also about what kind of context people attend to and how people rely upon cues within that context to convey meaning. Specifically, we propose that Hall's conceptualization of culture as communication consists of four core components: communication style and the contexts of interpersonal relationships, time, and space. While several researchers have referred to Hall's general theory in passing, the management and marketing community has not incorporated the full depth and breadth of Hall's theory in its theoretical and empirical endeavors. The component of direct–indirect communication has received considerable examination from an array of researchers, but the components of relationship, time, and space context remain relatively unexplored. We suggest that perhaps it is better to think of Hall's contribution not merely as a single low–high context dimension but as something akin to a "cultural syndrome" (Triandis, 1995) that reflects multiple dimensions of communication and social interaction style. By understanding how people in different cultures use multiple channels and rely on information from multiple contexts to communicate, we can better understand the different patterns of social interaction that take place in organizations.

Second, we have little understanding of the antecedents of communication and interaction behaviors and patterns and only an embryonic understanding of the organizational consequences. Some scholars have suggested individualism/collectivism as an antecedent to direct/indirect communication (Gibson, 1997; Holtgraves, 1997) or facework (Ting-Toomey, 2005). But clearly, as noted by Gibson (1997), there are additional psychological antecedents that explain the

communication style and behaviors captured by low–high context. Also, many of the scholars who have explored low–high context behaviors in the workplace have focused first on individualism–collectivism, rather than Hall's low–high context, as the explanatory framework. We propose that what is needed is a framework that will clearly specify antecedents for each of the four components of Hall's theory as well as the consequences. It is our belief that within this framework, Hofstedean values will likely be viewed as explanatory variables for Hallsian communication behaviors. Just as Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) propose that attitudes precede behaviors, we suggest that the specific values inherent in individualism–collectivism (I/C) may lead to specific high and low context behaviors. Clarifying which I/C values prompt which low–high context behaviors will not only provide us with a stronger theoretical framework of culture as communication but also help dispel the notion that the theories of Hofstede and Hall are perfectly correlated or somehow synonymous. In addition, we suggest that values other than I/C will be needed to explain certain high–low context behaviors. For example, values related to high and low power distance should be influential in prompting behaviors related to status in relationships.

Third, our review of the literature very clearly points out the need for a tool to measure, at the individual level, Hall's four components of culture as communication. Without such a measurement scale, researchers who employ Hall will be susceptible to the same criticisms levied at researchers of Hofstedean values who aggregately categorized nations as individualist or collectivist. And important, theoretical advancements—such as the framework suggested—can be made only if measurement is done at the individual level, allowing researchers to pinpoint or eliminate alternative explanations for high or low context behavior. For example, a clearly specified framework will allow researchers to identify more precisely the value antecedents of

high or low context communication and its influence on misunderstanding and conflict between work team members (based on a measure of communication style), planning behavior (based on a measure of time context), and the role of relationships, status, or social norms in the workplace (based on measures of the contexts of relationship and space).

Now that we have an understanding of the state of knowledge surrounding Hall's low–high context theory in management and marketing, we suggest that we can embrace Hall and at the same time recognize and build on existing limitations in the theory. Specifically, we note that the theory does not adequately predict communication in all high context cultures. For example, on the one hand Latin American cultures are low context, because they are very direct and expressive when relating to others. On the other hand, these cultures are high context because they have a strong relational focus and a fluid and long-term view of time. So how would Hall characterize these cultures? Do they fall on the midpoint between low and high context on Hall's dichotomous continuum? Or is there yet another dimension we need to consider to account for styles of relating in these cultures?

Management consultant Richard Lewis recognized this distinct style of relating in Latin and Mediterranean cultures, and he proposed a tripartite model of culture in his book *When Cultures Collide* (2006). Rather than a continuum, he proposed a triangle with three points that represent three distinct types of cultures. One point of the triangle is represented by purely low context cultures, which Lewis calls "linear active." Another point represents Latin and Mediterranean cultures, which Lewis describes as "lively, loquacious peoples who do many things at once" and calls "multiactive" (Lewis, 2006, pp. xviii–ix). At the third point are high context Eastern cultures, which Lewis (2006) calls reactive. While some cultures are extreme linear-active (the United States), multiactive (Brazil), or reactive (Japan), other cultures fall

somewhere between the extremes or even in the middle of the triangle. It is important to note that Lewis's categorization is based on his many years of qualitative observations and quantitative assessments of managerial communication styles around the world. But after taking a step back and examining what might be the theoretical underpinnings of Lewis' categorization scheme, we find that his categorization of cultural communication styles is best construed as an extension of Hall's low/high context theory.

So what does this mean for management and marketing research? We propose that scholars should embrace and extend Hall, considering how we can use his theory to develop models that account for the different cultural styles of relating within and between organizations around the globe. To this end, the suggestions just provided will allow us to overcome the current limitations in Hall's theory and to develop research that more accurately captures what Lewis suggests is the external reality of high and low context behaviors.

We propose the development of frameworks that do not simply identify antecedents and consequences of high versus low context behaviors but rather will specify the causal relationships for each separate component in Hall's conceptualization. Furthermore, the measurement of each of the four components will allow us to present a continuous variable for each component, rather than a dichotomous one. For example, an individual would not simply be classified as high or low context but rather as relatively more direct and explicit in communicating, relatively less attuned to the relationship context, and so forth. Thus, high and low context need no longer be viewed as a single, dichotomous construct but rather as four continuous constructs. The suggested framework and measurement will facilitate the examination and identification of respondents who may be relatively more high context in some aspects of their communication and relatively lower context in other aspects. Essentially, we

could identify not only two cultural types as Hall proposed, or even three cultural types as are suggested by Lewis, but rather of a multiplicity of cultural types, some that may have yet to be explored. We will then truly be able to move cross-cultural research beyond Hofstede by comprehensively examining the specific antecedents and organizational consequences of multiple types of communication and interaction patterns across individuals and societies, thus deepening our understanding of culture as communication.

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