

# MYERS ALLEN

# Principles of Corporate Finance



# Principles of Corporate Finance

TENTH EDITION

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#### PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE FINANCE

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Note: Present value tables are available on the book's Web site, www.mhhe.com/bma.

You can see examples of arrows 4a and 4b in Table 1.1. GlaxoSmithKline financed its drug research and development by reinvesting earnings (arrow 4a). Shell decided to return cash to shareholders by buying back its stock (arrow 4b). Shell could have chosen instead to pay the money out as additional cash dividends.

Notice how the financial manager stands between the firm and outside investors. On the one hand, the financial manager helps manage the firm's operations, particularly by helping to make good investment decisions. On the other hand, the financial manager deals with investors—not just with shareholders but also with financial institutions such as banks and with financial markets such as the New York Stock Exchange.

#### The Investment Trade-off

Now look at Figure 1.2, which sets out the fundamental trade-off for corporate investment decisions. The corporation has a proposed investment project (a real asset). Suppose it has cash on hand sufficient to finance the project. The financial manager is trying to decide whether to invest in the project. If the financial manager decides not to invest, the corporation can pay out the cash to shareholders, say as an extra dividend. (The investment and dividend arrows in Figure 1.2 are arrows 2 and 4b in Figure 1.1.)

Assume that the financial manager is acting in the interests of the corporation's owners, its stockholders. What do these stockholders want the financial manager to do? The answer depends on the rate of return on the investment project and on the rate of return that the stockholders can earn by investing in financial markets. If the return offered by the investment project is higher than the rate of return that shareholders can get by investing on their own, then the shareholders would vote for the investment project. If the investment project offers a lower return than shareholders can achieve on their own, the shareholders would vote to cancel the project and take the cash instead.

Figure 1.2 could apply to Wal-Mart's decisions to invest in new retail stores, for example. Suppose Wal-Mart has cash set aside to build 10 new stores in 2012. It could go ahead with the new stores, or it could choose to cancel the investment project and instead pay the cash out to its stockholders. If it pays out the cash, the stockholders could then invest for themselves.

Suppose that Wal-Mart's new-stores project is just about as risky as the U.S. stock market and that investment in the stock market offers a 10% expected rate of return. If the new stores offer a superior rate of return, say 20%, then Wal-Mart's stockholders would be



#### **FIGURE 1.2**

The firm can either keep and reinvest cash or return it to investors. (Arrows represent possible cash flows or transfers.) If cash is reinvested, the opportunity cost is the expected rate of return that shareholders could have obtained by investing in financial assets. happy to let Wal-Mart keep the cash and invest it in the new stores. If the new stores offer only a 5% return, then the stockholders are better off with the cash and without the new stores; in that case, the financial manager should turn down the investment project.

As long as a corporation's proposed investments offer higher rates of return than its shareholders can earn for themselves in the stock market (or in other financial markets), its shareholders will applaud the investments and its stock price will increase. But if the company earns an inferior return, shareholders boo, stock price falls, and stockholders demand their money back so that they can invest on their own.

In our example, the minimum acceptable rate of return on Wal-Mart's new stores is 10%. This minimum rate of return is called a *hurdle rate* or *cost of capital*. It is really an **opportunity cost of capital**, because it depends on the investment *opportunities* available to investors in financial markets. Whenever a corporation invests cash in a new project, its shareholders lose the opportunity to invest the cash on their own. Corporations increase value by accepting all investment projects that earn more than the opportunity cost of capital.

Notice that the opportunity cost of capital depends on the risk of the proposed investment project. Why? It's not just because shareholders are risk-averse. It's also because shareholders have to trade off risk against return when they invest on their own. The safest investments, such as U.S. government debt, offer low rates of return. Investments with higher expected rates of return—the stock market, for example—are riskier and sometimes deliver painful losses. (The U.S. stock market was down 38% in 2008, for example.) Other investments are riskier still. For example, high-tech growth stocks offer the prospect of higher rates of return, but are even more volatile.

Notice too that the opportunity cost of capital is generally *not* the interest rate that the company pays on a loan from a bank or on a bond. If the company is making a risky investment, the opportunity cost is the expected return that investors can achieve in financial markets at the same level of risk. The expected return on risky securities is normally well above the interest rate on corporate borrowing.

Managers look to the financial markets to measure the opportunity cost of capital for the firm's investment projects. They can observe the opportunity cost of capital for safe investments by looking up current interest rates on safe debt securities. For risky investments, the opportunity cost of capital has to be estimated. We start to tackle this task in Chapter 7.

Estimating the opportunity cost of capital is one of the hardest tasks in financial management, even when the stock, bond, and other financial markets are behaving normally. When these markets are misbehaving, precise estimates of the cost of capital can be temporarily out of the question.

Financial markets in the U.S. and most developed countries work well most of the time but just like the little girl in the poem, "When they are good, they are very good indeed, but when they are bad they are horrid."<sup>5</sup> In 2008 financial markets were horrid. Security prices bounced around like Tigger on stimulants, and for some types of investment the market temporarily disappeared. Financial markets no longer offered a good yardstick for a project's value or the opportunity cost of capital. That was a year in which financial managers really earned their keep.

We give more specific examples of investment decisions and the opportunity cost of capital at the start of the next chapter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The poem is attributed to Longfellow:

There was a little girl,

Who had a little curl,

Right in the middle of her forehead.

When she was good, She was very good indeed,

But when she was bad she was horrid.