

The Investment Environment

Chapter 1

Real & Financial Assets

- Real assets = assets used to produce goods and services (productive capacity)
 - physical assets (land, buildings, machinery etc.)
 - "human assets" (labor, human capital)
- Financial Assets = claims on real assets
 - stocks and bonds
 - contribute *indirectly* to productive capacity by allowing the transfer of funds to most profitable opportunities
 - define the allocation of income among investors

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Real & Financial Assets

- Distinguish between real and financial assets:
 - in balance sheet: real assets are *only* on asset side, while financial assets can be on both sides
- Summing up balance sheets:
 - financial assets cancel out
 - real assets sum up to the net wealth of the economy
- financial assets are destroyed during normal operation of business, while real assets only by accident or depreciation

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Role of Financial Assets and Markets

1. Consumption timing
 - financial assets allow the transfer of purchasing power from one period to another (shift consumption)
2. Allocation of risk
 - investors can find the assets with the desired level of risk and return
3. Separation of ownership
 - large companies need large investment, hence many investors, but one or few managers

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Separation of Ownership – Problems

Separation of ownership causes *principal-agent* (or *agency*) problems – agents (managers) don't always have the best interest of principals (shareholders) in mind

Solutions:

- compensation plans (e.g., stock options)
- board of directors
- outsider monitoring (e.g., large investors, security analysts)
- takeover threat (proxy contest)
- proposed – stock-based compensation

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Crisis in Corporate Governance

- Accounting Scandals changes to financial data so as to hide the actual condition of the firm (e.g., Enron, Global Crossing)
- Analyst Scandals = misleading or overly optimistic reports by financial analysts (e.g., Merrill Lynch)
- Allocation of Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) to corporate executives to repay for personal favors (e.g., CSFB)

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Financial System Clients and Their Needs

- Household Sector
 - primary need: invest funds
 - different incentives due to taxes, risk tolerance
- Business Sector
 - primary need: raise funds
 - want to get the best price for securities with the lowest issue cost possible → middlemen
- Government Sector
 - primary need: raise funds
 - can only sell bonds, but also regulates financial market

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Meeting the Needs of Participants

- Financial Intermediation = channeling funds from investors (savings) to the business sector
 - Examples: banks, insurance companies, credit unions, investment companies (mutual funds)
- **Advantages:**
 - economies of scale (large sums to be invested)
 - diversification
 - specialization → lower transaction costs
- Investment Banking = firms that specialize in advising on and issuing securities (IPOs)
 - An important asset is *credibility*

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Meeting the Needs of Participants

- Financial Innovation & Derivatives
 - due to the need for investment diversity
 - examples: securitization of mortgages
 - *primitive securities* offer returns based on the status of the issuer
 - *derivative securities* offer returns based on additional factors related to the price of other assets (used in general for risk management)
- Responding to Regulation & Taxes
 - Examples: Eurodollar market, zero-coupon bonds

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Markets and Market Structure

Four types of markets:

- *direct search market* – buyers and sellers look for each other directly (non-standard goods, sporadic participation)
- *brokered market* – if goods are sufficiently active (e.g., primary market, market for large block transactions)
- *dealer market* – dealers trade in their own interest, making profit from the bid-ask spread (e.g., the over-the-counter stock market)
- *auction market* – all economic agents converge to one place (e.g., NYSE)

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Investments and Innovation

Ongoing trends:

- Globalization
- Securitization
- Financial engineering
- IT and communications revolution

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Key Trends - Globalization

Foreign investment opportunities:

- purchase foreign securities using American Deposit Receipts (ADRs – domestically traded claims to foreign stocks) or WEBS (World Equity Benchmark Shares – claims on portfolios of foreign stocks)
- purchase foreign securities in USD
- buy mutual funds that invest overseas
- buy derivatives that depend on prices in foreign security markets

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Key Trends - Securitization

- pools of loans are aggregated into *pass-through securities*
- enables issuers to bypass intermediaries, because of the large volume
- examples: mortgages, collateralized automobile receivables (CARs), credit card debt etc.
- also allowed the “cleansing” of bank balance sheets of loans to developing nations (Brady bonds – partially collateralized with US Treasury bonds)

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Key Trends - Financial Engineering

- design and creation of securities with custom-tailored characteristics, in general with regard to exposure to certain types of risk
- deal with bundling or unbundling cash-flows to suit the requirements of traders
- usually involves primitive and derivative securities:
 - common stock combined with options
 - mortgage pass-through certificate split into 2 classes: only principal payment and only interest payment

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Key Trends – Computer Networks

- helped introduce some innovations: online trading, online information dissemination etc.
- lowered transaction costs
- allow the bypass of intermediaries like investment bankers (e.g., Spring Street Brewing Company) or the creation of online investment bankers

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