# 1

# The World Tour

## The Curtain Rises

The Great Hall of the People on Beijing's Tiananmen Square is accustomed to choreography. For more than four decades, the vast auditorium echoed to the well-rehearsed speeches of China's communist rulers, urging their compatriots to yet greater sacrifices in the name of Socialism. Alternatively, it rang with plaudits for its leader, Chairman Mao Zedong, the Great Helmsman, each of whose appearances were greeted by the thunderous ovations of thousands of "parliamentarians" gathered from all corners of China for the spectacle.

The auditorium of the Hall of the People can seat more than 8,000 people. Its dimensions symbolized the place where the unity of the nation was displayed. It was a perfect location for mass culture, such as the staging of "proletarian opera"—as long as this did not interfere with its pre-eminent political role.

Most of the former uses to which the Great Hall was put are now overlooked. They are, at best, oddities from the past, not unlike the giant portrait of Chairman Mao that continues to flutter in a corner of Tiananmen. The Great Hall of the People is still home to the National People's Congress, the Chinese parliament, but the bill of fare of its extracurricular activities has changed radically.

In the autumn of 2003, it hosted performances of the Irish dance spectacle *Riverdance*. The show is based on the Irish tradition of step or tap dancing, and the music, written by Irishman Bill Whelan, blends traditional Irish folk music, Japanese drumming, flamenco, and modern dance rhythms. The 70 strong troupes of Riverdancers were in Beijing in response to a personal invitation made by Premier Zhu Rongji during a visit to the Irish Republic.

*Riverdance* started out modestly enough. It was an intermission piece in the Eurovision Song Contest staged in Dublin in 1994. The winning song is long forgotten, but *Riverdance* goes from strength to strength. Its success has been global. It has been staged in 27 countries, and it is estimated that a quarter of the planet's population may have seen it through television broadcasts. In spite of the show's phenomenal successes in venues such as Madison Square Garden in New York, Tokyo's International Forum, and Wembley in London, success in China was a dream that had driven the show's organizers for years. The Great Hall of the People was just one stop on a tour of the Far East comprising 46 shows in Malaysia and Hong Kong, as well as China.

The response was amazing (as it had been when *Riverdance* visited Japan); the Chinese media gave blanket coverage to *Riverdance* in the week preceding the first show. Nevertheless, there was nervousness among the cast and organizers as to how a Chinese audience would respond to something so novel and so different. The Chinese are accustomed to large-scale spectacles, but these usually have a very distinct and crude ideological purpose. *Riverdance* makes no such demands on potential audiences.

The worries proved misplaced. Each of the six shows in Beijing was sold out, and two extra matinee performances had to be included. In addition to the Great Hall of the People, the Riverdancers staged a performance at a site on the Great Wall of China.

*Riverdance* caught my attention because, though it may have deep Irish roots, it is very much an international phenomenon. Its original stars were the American dancers Michael Flatley and Jeanne Butler. Its current lead male dancer, Conor Hayes, is Australian, and the *Riverdance* troupe includes dancers from the United States, Spain, Russia, and Kazakhstan, as well as Ireland. So international is *Riverdance*'s style that it has been rubbished by cultural purists in Ireland.

Much of the financial backing for *Riverdance* came from the United States, but the experience and excitement generated by it flows around the world, recognizing nothing so puny as a national border. The audiences who witnessed the *Riverdance* spectacle in Beijing reacted with more genuine enthusiasm than to any of the clichés that fell from the lips of the Great Helmsman.

The symbolism of the performance was not lost on those involved. Bill Whelan commented, "*Riverdance* is a political thing as much as a cultural thing."[1]

*Riverdance* in the Great Hall of the People is a suitable metaphor for the global economy. It originated in the Western world. Its roots in Ireland, one of the global economy's most dynamic success stories, are significant. It blends elements from Ireland's culture with features from other cultures and backgrounds, which are, in turn, performed by people from throughout the world. It was originally choreographed by an American and was performed on the largest stage in one of the world's fastest-growing economies: China. *Riverdance* is not insular, and no one could say that it is bland.

## The World as a Stage

So how does *Riverdance* connect to the work of executives? Simply and directly. Any executive in a global corporation—and which decent-size corporation is *not* global?—is involved in similar global projects. These projects are complex, involve participants from throughout the world, demand cultural sensitivity, require global financing, and are often targeted at emerging economies.

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players...."[2] This was an elegant metaphor for Shakespeare, but for us, it is not metaphorical: It is reality. The world is one huge arena for economic activity, no longer compartmentalized by barriers or other unnecessary stage furniture. We all form part of a giant troupe of interdependent actors and actresses. We don't all recite the same lines or even perform similar repertory pieces, but none of us is entirely independent.

The interconnected, interactive, global economy is a reality. It is often confusing and disorientating: It challenges both the way we see business and the way we do business.

The global economy presents itself in many different forms, like an actor donning different masks and costumes. For example, there are the gigantic global flows of money. There is also the growing mountain of credit-card purchases, a process enhanced by the Internet. We can see it, too, in the trade deficit between the United States and China. The world's biggest economy has run up a huge trade deficit with China about which it worries incessantly; it might also worry about being technically bankrupt. China, too, has a growing trade deficit, as it seems to voraciously suck raw and semifinished materials, machines, and robots into its economy. But these are worries that belong to the old world of increasingly outdated economic paradigms and indicators.

The global economy is largely invisible. (That's why I called my previous book *The Invisible Continent*.) It should not be confused with some dark matter that hovers and lurks menacingly, ready to grab and devour the unwary. The global economy's effects are clearly evident throughout the world. We are all players on the global stage, and we all feel its effects.

## A Speedy Global Tour

In fact, to set the scene, it might be a good idea to take a whirlwind tour around the world. During our trip, we will see examples of the global economy in action. So, as we began this chapter in China, let us also begin our "Cook's Tour" of the globe there.

The city of Dalian is situated near the southeastern tip of the Liaodong peninsular that hangs down from the coast of northeast China, the region formerly known as Manchuria. It is a part of China, but it faces into the Yellow Sea toward Korea and Japan.

The climate guarantees year-round ice-free status to its ports, so Dalian and its neighbors were always destined to enjoy the fruits of trade, communist or not. Dalian's immediate hinterland, on the Liaodong peninsular, is dominated by a beautiful coastline and a landscape of hills, valleys, and forests rich in natural resources, such as coking coal and iron ore. Yet Dalian has always known that it must look outward for its prosperity.

The port was established by the Russians in the late nineteenth century. The Japanese later introduced heavy industry. Dalian adopted a role as an *entrepot* for northeast China. But in the past decade, the city has changed from being a sleepy port into one of China's most important and dynamic industrial centers, with a population surpassing five million. It has combined its old industrial base in Liaoning Province, centered on steel making and chemical and machine-part manufacture, with new service- and technology-related ventures. There is a reservoir of skilled personnel, supplied by a number of universities and technical institutes. Its demand for labor appears insatiable.

The city continues to grow in physical size and population. It attracts immigrants from throughout northeastern China, drawn by wage levels that, while low by Western standards, are far higher than those available in rural China. Its citizens live in a city with its own commuter train system, as well as good housing, many parks, and leisure facilities, and, above all, clean air and water.

The city's inhabitants have more sophisticated needs than those of their grandparents. In the heyday of Maoist orthodoxy, the workers were badly paid, badly housed, and badly fed. They were given no opportunity to complain. Their leisure hours might be spent attending showings of revolutionary films or, in warmer weather, reading from Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*.

Today's employees are provided with far better and more interesting facilities. Dalian's shops are stocked with an international range of consumer goods: everything from designer fashion to the latest DVD players. Far more people can buy these, thanks to the city's growing prosperity. Cinemas show the latest commercial blockbusters, but many residents prefer to watch DVDs, available in the city's many electrical and TV emporia.

Dalian has benefited from the seismic change that has swept aside official Chinese thinking on the economy since 1992, when Deng Xiaoping proposed the "one country, two systems" development blueprint. Long gone are the days of central planning. Instead, regional governors and bosses are encouraged to track their own course for the future. This sometimes involves bending the rules, but as long as the exceptions allowed by local bosses remain localized—and they are successful—breaches of discipline are ignored. This has been especially true after the even more drastic reforms launched by then-Premier Zhu Rongji in 1998. Mayors and other local bosses also know that if they fail to deliver annual growth rates in excess of 7 percent for two successive years, their employment will be terminated. Imagine if Michael Bloomberg in New York, Shintaro Ishihara in Tokyo, or Ken Livingstone in London faced such strictures.

In the person of Mayor Bo Xilai, Dalian possessed an extraordinary local ruler. Bo stood out from the crowd—literally—for in a land where smallness of stature is the rule, he stood well over 6 feet tall. He hailed from the western borderlands of China in Shanxi province. He came from a family with respected political pedigree: His father had taken part in the grueling Long March of the early 1930s, when Mao led his small group of followers on a two-year forced evacuation by foot from southern to northern China. Bo Xilai studied at Beijing University, newly reopened after the madness of the "Cultural Revolution" had seen students and faculty members sent to work in the fields. He was also young, in his late 40s, a comparatively brash young upstart in a land whose political leadership was dominated by 70-somethings. He joined the Communist Party in 1980 and worked in its various branches. His diligence and skill were rewarded when he was appointed mayor of Dalian in 1992. As the city opened to the outside world, Bo and his team attracted inward investment from throughout the world, especially from Japan. Today, there are estimated to be 3,000 Japanese firms operating within Dalian's city limits.

Bo redefined the job description of the typical Chinese city mayor. No longer content with managing sewerage and housing, he became his city's chief architect and marketing officer, establishing close links with the cream of Japanese industry and business. But his role did not end after the businesses were established. He recast himself as something akin to the manager of a five-star hotel, keenly and solicitously interested in the welfare of his guests. Foreign businesses were regularly contacted to find out how they were doing and whether they were encountering any difficulties that might be ironed out.

Bo was rewarded for his success in Dalian by being kicked upstairs. He was appointed governor of the whole province of Liaoning. At the time of his departure in February 2001, vast crowds of city residents (particularly women) gathered to see him off. They seemed genuinely sad. In a land long used to choreographed mass hysteria, this might have been dismissed, but the sorrow appeared spontaneous. Bo's rise continues: In early 2004, he was named the Minister of Commerce for the whole People's Republic at the age of 53.

Helped by the charismatic Bo, Dalian, along with over a dozen other regions in China, has become a *de facto* regional state, setting its own economic agenda. While still a part of China and, in theory, subject to the rule of Beijing, it is largely autonomous. The reality is that its ties with Beijing are weaker than those with business centers throughout the world.

Success breeds success, and companies that do well in Dalian act as catalysts attracting other businesses, not necessarily from the same sector. As in similar regions of China, there has been an explosion in the provision of services, whether financial or technical. Dalian is almost a self-sufficient economic entity, with many services being available to business and residents on their doorstep. Dalian has also been at the forefront of the provision of cross-border business process outsourcing (BPO) services in China, in particular in areas such as direct data entry, often for Japanese businesses. These newer developments have been spearheaded by Bo's protégé, Mayor Xia Deren. The historical memories of the Japanese in this part of China might not always have been positive, but these are left in the past, where they belong. Japanese language courses are popular and are regularly oversubscribed. As a consequence, an estimated 50,000 Dalian residents speak fluent Japanese.

It is curious that Dalian, a modern business and economic center, should also enjoy a vibrant tourism industry. Its beaches and water-sports facilities have been protected. A special tourist zone, the Golden Pebble Beach, has been erected, with marinas, two golf courses, and hotels catering for all budgets. Many of Dalian's visitors fly in from elsewhere in China. They form part of the vast and still growing consumer class in China. They have money to spend, not just on automobiles and consumer electronics, but on other aspects of the "good life," such as leisure and private education for their children. Dalian attracts visitors from outside China, too. Many Korean and Japanese tourists now prefer Dalian to Singapore.

Dalian's success relies on its willingness to engage in the new cyber-based and borderless economy. It has also benefited from being allowed to pursue its own path. It reacts directly with the rest of the world, not at the level of part of a nation-state, but instantaneously and directly, as a region. For many decades, Dalian, along with the People's Republic of China, turned its back on the world. The rest of the world was controlled by China's enemies. Now Dalian and other Chinese region-states have enthusiastically embraced the world economy. There are 13 other cities within the province of Liaoning alone whose population exceeds one million. They are all seeking to take their place on the global stage or, at a minimum, to become part of the Yellow Sea Economic Zone. They resemble a flock of flying geese headed by Dalian.

China is probably the country that is benefiting the most from the global economy. China now has the second-highest foreign exchange reserves ($432 billion) in the world (topped by Japan at $817 billion) and domestic savings of $2.5 trillion. More than any other country, it is setting the pace in the global economy. Its 2003 GDP was estimated at $1.3 trillion, and the communist state has been ranked number seven in the world (number two in terms of purchasing power).[3] Its economy grows at a rate seldom lower than 7 percent annually. Most recently, it has been in excess of 9 percent, a figure for the whole country that includes the richest and the poorest areas.

If we remember the theatrical metaphor, we can see China as being like a rented theater. It is an arena that is being used as a rehearsal studio, a testing ground for global economic realities. But a little disconcertingly, different parts of the stage are being used for varying types of performance. These differ in skill and expertise and, consequently, in audience approval.

As we shall see throughout this book, we must try to divest ourselves of old mindsets. One of the most oppressive is the notion of the nation-state. So when we think of China today, we should not think of the nation-state running from the Yellow Sea in the east to the depths of central Asia in the west, but rather an amalgam of prosperous, burgeoning regions, such as Dalian, set alongside others that might be light-years behind in economic development and prosperity. All these regions vary in size. They are theoretically under the same sovereign state, the People's Republic of China, but part of China's prosperity lies in its ability to forget about this in practice and to allow its region-states to plough their own furrows. In reality, all these regions are engaged in almost manic competition with each other for investment and resources, not as in the old days from the center, but for investment from the outside world.

### *Meanwhile in Ireland*

We started this chapter describing *Riverdance*. Let us now look at the country that inspired it: Ireland.

For many people, Ireland summons up visions of green, mist-covered fields and valleys. But outside the tourism industry, pleasant scenery does not produce wealth. Anyway, these visions belong only in the glossy pages of holiday brochures.

When Ireland became independent as a nation in 1922, it was overwhelmingly rural. Its rulers and citizens eyed covetously the northeastern quadrant of the island of Ireland, which had been kept by Great Britain. It was richer; it was the one area of Ireland that had seen extensive industrialization. So, the rest of the island seemed destined to remain perpetually green—and poor—with its major export people. This strengthened a lack of self-confidence. There was a sense of the country being a victim of forces beyond its control.

From the 1960s onward, attempts were made to attract manufacturing industry from abroad. The Industrial Development Authority (IDA), a government agency, constructed industrial infrastructure and facilities, while the government offered generous tax breaks such as a 10-year moratorium on corporation tax payments for foreign direct investments (FDI). These moves were only partly successful. Irish competitiveness was low. Infra-structure (despite the best efforts of the IDA) in many sectors was abysmal. A former director of the IDA told of how they had brought a prospective investor to view a site for a facility by helicopter so that he would not experience the dreadful state of the roads.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, physical geography still played a big role in the international economy, and Ireland's location on the far western periphery of Europe meant that it was just too far away from potential markets. Most of those located there were attracted by Ireland's position as a European Community member. The reliance of the country on external commercial operations made its industrial sector vulnerable to trends in the global business cycle.

Emigration from Ireland increased again in the 1980s, but unlike many of the earlier emigrants, these were often highly educated. Again unlike earlier emigrants, they often returned to Ireland after gaining experience and contacts outside the country. A new self-confidence began to take hold, and with it a new attitude toward the rest of the world. It was no longer a place of exile, but one of opportunity and a source of prosperity.

The fact that the country had missed out on industrialization was increasingly seen as a blessing. It meant that there was no rusting industrial plants and no unemployed workforce born and bred to heavy industry. It also meant that the country's economy could take advantage of new trends beyond its borders in the *global* economy. Ireland could begin from scratch. In the late 1980s, developments in cybertechnology made it clear that jobs and prosperity could come at the end of a telephone line. The potential of Ireland to play a major role in the information technology sector was realized. Greater computer literacy in all sectors of the population was encouraged, and telecommunications infrastructure was enhanced. In 1992, the vision of Ireland as the "e-hub of Europe" emerged. Europe was headed in the direction of a single market, so why could Ireland not find a very profitable niche as the base for telecommunications entry into that market? Ireland already had a large base of young, educated workers who could fulfill investors' labor demands.

The visionary and almost prophetic nature of the e-hub concept is apparent when it is remembered that it was developed in 1992; that is, before the Internet became embedded in the commercial world. In the following chapter, I explain how the global economy began in 1985, and how I date developments according to my own calendar as being either BG (before Gates) or AG (after Gates). So the development of the e-hub occurred relatively early in this chronology, in the year 8 AG!

In Dublin, an extensive section of redundant docklands had been redeveloped since 1987 as a financial services center. This attracted many financial service providers to establish back-room operations. Ireland also became an attractive location for American companies' call centers in Europe. This was accompanied by a significant growth in indigenous software companies.

As we will see, Ireland is lucky; it is a nation-state that is the same size as a *region-state*. It is, therefore, capable of tapping into the dynamism of such a region state. We will see that one of the keys to the success of a region-state is being able to brand itself successfully (such as an "e-hub") and to offer something different that sets it apart from the competition. Ireland has been able to do this very effectively in the customer response management and "back office" sectors. It has also been able to capitalize on its image as a fun place to work, with a vibrant social life and abundant cultural and recreational facilities. Phenomena such as *Riverdance* and the international success of Irish rock groups such as *U2* and *The Corrs* have also played a significant part in the nation's reinvention.

For decades, successive Irish governments expended resources on attempting to resuscitate the native Gaelic language. Although English remained the vernacular of the vast majority, it was felt that the country's right to nationhood was stillborn and defective without a language of its own. But in the new global economy, where English is *the* linguistic platform of communications, the possession of English as a first language is a major advantage for Irish citizens.

Ireland's call centers are able to employ many of Ireland's foreign language graduates, but there are not enough fluent speakers of German, Italian, or Swedish, for example, within Ireland. The country's openness means that native speakers of foreign languages are attracted to it and are welcomed. Greater prosperity has also attracted immigrants from all over the European Union, within which barriers to relocation have been all but cancelled. They have added their skills to Ireland's economy and helped to make Irish society more varied, colorful, and sensitive to the wider world. Given Ireland's readiness for and commitment to the global economy, it came as little surprise that the country was ranked first in both 2002 and 2003 in the A.T. Kearney/Foreign Policy Globalization Index.[4]

Ireland has many strengths. It has a relatively small but highly educated population. It is situated on the periphery of Europe, yet it is the closest part of Europe to North America. In the economic past, dominated by manufacturing industry and physical constraints on movement, its location was a liability. But in the age of the global economy, physical location is much less important. Without doubt, the greatest advantage it possesses has been its vision of how it can fit into the new and ever-changing economic realities of the twenty-first century. This has enabled Ireland to create more than 300,000 new jobs in the areas of cross-border BPO, CRM, and R&D in just over a decade. Along the way, its time-honored social malaise of unemployment has been eliminated.

A comparison between Ireland and another island nation, New Zealand (actually two separate islands), will be helpful. Both have economies that were traditionally based on farming and processing of agricultural products. Ireland, though, has transformed itself from a country with a largely agricultural basis into a country with a strong ICT base. New Zealand is still very much playing the old game. It believes that deregulation is enough. It isn't anymore. As a result, New Zealand has not been able to come up with new types of industries. Sitting on a base of agriculture and agriculture-related industries, and applying Ronald Reagan–style deregulation, especially under the banner of "Rogernomics," is not good enough. You have to do what the Irish, the Finns, and the Chinese are doing.

Now let us leave the Emerald Isle and fly northward to Scandinavia and to its northeastern extremity, Finland.

## *Finland: In from the Cold*

Finland has long been on the periphery of Europe, but the opposite periphery to Ireland. Where the latter looks out westward upon vast areas of ocean, the people of Finland have been able to look out upon a slightly drier landscape, but one equally hostile: mile after mile of impenetrable forest and frozen tundra broken only by icy lakes and endless, fast-flowing rivers. In fact, Finland was as far from the beaten track of commerce and trade as it was possible to be.

Finland sits on the northeastern shoulder of the Baltic, a sea by name, though almost one big lake. In the distant past, the Baltic was an avenue for primary products such as furs, timber, and amber, but Finland was really too far north to benefit from this. Its harbors have been kept open year-round only by icebreakers. Freezing temperatures bring one blessing. In the winter, some lakes and rivers freeze so hard that it is possible to drive trucks across them, thereby adding seasonally and nearly costless transport to the infrastructure.

Finnish industry has traditionally been based on processing natural resources, especially the abundant woodlands. There is also some high-quality mechanical engineering. But Finnish industry has never been static. Throughout the twentieth century, considerable amounts were spent on R&D, and production was accompanied by constant innovation.

In the last half of the century, the country was sandwiched between the spheres of influence of the rival superpowers: the United States and NATO to the north and west, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact to the east and south. Although its society and government were free and pluralist, everyone in the country (and outside world) recognized that this had to be paid for by a commitment to "neutrality." *Finlandization* entered the political vocabulary as a term of contempt. No one wanted to be like Finland.

It also developed a Scandinavian-style welfare state, paid for by heavy borrowing and by some of the highest levels of direct and indirect taxation in the world. This also paid for some very high-quality education.

In the midst of this, companies such as Nokia and Sonera (now called TeliaSonera after a merger with the Swedish operator Telia in 2002) developed global trail-blazers in telecommunications. Important developments in software engineering, such as data security specialist, SSH, and the Linux computer operating system (invented by the Finn Linus Torvalds) also emerged.

As a result, Finland has achieved levels of productivity and competitiveness that are the envy of more established economic players. The Geneva-based World Economic Forum declared Finland the most competitive country in the world in 2003, for the second year running.[5] It came in ahead of the United States and Singapore. It also scored top marks for network connectivity and compatibility, and was deemed the most responsive to IT and e-business opportunities.

How has an isolated high-tax country turned the economic tide? First, the country has always recognized that its prosperity lies in looking outward toward the rest of the world. This has been something of a curse in the manufacturing-dominated past. With few mineral resources, the country was vulnerable to oscillations in energy prices. Finland was also one of the few regions outside the old Soviet bloc to shed a tear, albeit perhaps a crocodile one, for the demise of the Soviet Union. The USSR was one of Finland's most important trading partners. Cross-border visits contributed to the Finnish tourism sector. The breakup of the communist giant meant that Finnish balance of payment figures suffered a considerable drop. Finland faced an international environment shorn of old certainties and a domestic economy that showed all the signs of being in terminal decline. The Finns are a resourceful nation, and with resolution they realized that salvation could come only through openness to the rest of the world.

In addition to being outward looking, the level of Finnish education is very high. As in other parts of Scandinavia, proficiency in English is extensive, but with the Finns such linguistic skill is a necessity. The Finns are proud of their vernacular Finnish, but they are wise enough to know that only Finns (and Estonians) can learn it. It is a very complex language, unrelated to Indo-European languages such as Swedish and Russian. Few foreigners are brave enough to acquire even a basic competence. The Finns have long been compelled to communicate with the rest of the world by means of the linguistic platform of English. Knowledge of English is necessary for advancing in education; after all, not many English and American high school and college textbooks are translated into Finnish. English is the language of top-level management meetings in companies such as Nokia (Finland's largest company). English is viewed not as a threat, but as an opportunity. English instruction starts early in Finnish schools, and, increasingly, many subjects are taught *through* English. This is one of the reasons Finnish universities have exceptionally large contingents of foreign students.

Outward looking and English speaking, Finnish leaders and managers acquire an international and global outlook almost by default. Top management in Finland's corporate sector is also broad-minded and seeks to acquire and use the best talents wherever they come from. For example, two of Nokia's top directors are Norwegian and American. The Finnish stock exchange is operated by a Swedish company, OM.

The final ingredient in the Finnish success story is an appetite for technology. The Internet was adopted with gusto in the mid-1990s. Every local government department and tourism office acquired a Web presence at an early stage. Most Web pages are in Finnish, but they nearly all have English translations on another part of the site. Browser terminals have been provided in all schools, public libraries, and many other public places. In 2002, Finland had one of the highest Internet connection rates in the world: 230 connections per 1,000 people. More people were online in percentage terms than in any other country—1.5 million people out of a 5 million population used the Web on at least five days in the week.

Finland has a propensity for being at the top of league tables (see Exhibit 1.1). It holds the number one spot for cell phone usage. At the end of 2002, more than 87 percent of Finns had a mobile phone. This far exceeded land lines, but this was not surprising in the home of Nokia, which currently holds a third of global market share. Although the company is proud of its Finnish roots and Finnish headquarters, it also knows that its domestic market accounts for less than 1 percent of its global sales.

Nokia did not attain its global position by accident. Nokia traces its origins back to a lumber firm set up in southwest Finland in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1970s, it provided communications systems for the state railways and Finnish armed forces. In the next decade, it switched to consumer electronics and suffered a severe beating from Japanese competition. Indeed, the company almost went bankrupt in the early 1990s. But through innovation and the pursuit of aggressive R&D strategies, it has come back from the brink. It does not rest on its laurels. In 1994, Nokia's CEO, Jorma Ollila, made a truly historical decision: Nokia's future was to be in mobile telecommunications. From that year, the company has unsentimentally pursued success in this market. It has divested itself of involvement in the many other areas in which it was involved.

Growth Competitiveness Ranking 2003

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Finland |
| 2 | United States |
| 3 | Sweden |
| 4 | Denmark |
| 5 | Taiwan |
| 6 | Singapore |
| 7 | Switzerland |
| 8 | Iceland |
| 9 | Norway |
| 10 | Australia |
| 11 | Japan |
| 12 | Canada |
| 13 | Netherlands |
| 14 | Germany |
| 15 | New Zealand |

Source: World Economic Forum.

IMD World Competitiveness Scoreboard 2004

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | United States |
| 2 | Singapore |
| 3 | Canada |
| 4 | Australia |
| 5 | Iceland |
| 6 | Hong Kong |
| 7 | Denmark |
| 8 | Finland |
| 9 | Luxembourg |
| 10 | Ireland |
| 11 | Sweden |
| ⋮ | |
| 22 | United Kingdom |
| 23 | Japan |
| 24 | China |

Source: IMD.

**Exhibit 1.1 Competitiveness rankings.**

Finland has realized the benefits of a knowledge-based economy. Much of this grew out of an existing commitment to innovation. When problems arise, they have to be solved. Solutions can then be marketed abroad.

Finns have always been realists. They know that they cannot hide in their forested country at the top of Europe: They have to be participants. They have shown that full-blooded participation in the global economy can change a nation's place in the world and prove that the rest of the world is not a place to be feared. This openness to the global economy has encouraged investors, such as American pension funds, to buy Finnish corporate stocks. Today, more than 60 percent of Finnish equity is held by foreigners. As Finnish companies aggressively master the global stage, students and tourists flock to the land of Suomi.

Finland is not alone in Scandinavia in embracing the global economy, especially through the conduit of technology. Neighboring Sweden is the home of Ericsson, also a leader in the provision of mobile technology and the development of many technical platforms.

## What Is the Global Economy?

What are the characteristics of this new global economy relished in places as diverse as Dalian, Dublin, and Helsinki? Terminology is always an inexact science. Every term is a linguistic sieve. So, before attempting to define it, let's just say at the outset what the global economy is not.

What can be said is that the global economy should be differentiated from the notion of the "new economy" that sprang up in the late 1990s. This trumpeted a brave new economic order based on the fantastic technological advances unleashed through the Internet. It was a model that mistakenly saw a parallel and unstoppable rise in productivity. The wheels fell off this conceptual wagon in April 2000 with the sudden decline in technology stocks.

Apart from its manifest intellectual weaknesses, this "new economy" has very little in common with what we will talk about. The global economy is based on a world in which borderlessness is no longer a dream or an option, but a reality. This has been helped by the cyber-revolution, but it is not the same phenomenon as the cyber-revolution itself. Multiples of stock values, as well as derivatives and financially engineered products, also matter far more in the global economy.

The global economy has its own dynamic and its own logic. It is no longer theory; it is reality. It is going to grow stronger rather than weaker. It will feed on its own strengths. It is irresistible, and it is destined to have an impact on everybody—businessmen, politicians, and bureaucrats, but, most important, ordinary citizens. There is no use complaining about it or wishing it to go away. People will have to learn to live with it.

The emphasis here is on learning because success and even survival depend on acquiring novel outlooks and relationships with the rest of the world. This book hopefully goes someway toward pointing a route toward these new outlooks and relationships.

Some people and countries might be determined to fight against the reality of the global economy, using the old mind maps and the old paradigms. However, the cost in economic and especially human terms will be enormous. Progress is as inevitable as death and taxes.

Traditional nation-states and national governments face a great challenge. Some seem to want to approach this new world with one foot stuck stubbornly in the shore of the past for support while they gingerly test the water with the toes on the other.

Some are better placed to take advantage of the global economy's opportunities. History favored the United States by providing it with a truly federal form of government. As a result, states such as North and South Carolina, known as the Carolinas, can pursue an innovative economic agenda without risk of being stymied by central government. The battles between state and center have been fought over and resolved. The constituent states are each well placed to take advantage of the global economy. This does not mean that all 50 states do so. Some still seem to be wedded to a past based on Canute-like protection of "strategic" economic sectors.

Other federal states in the world do not allow their constituent members anything like real autonomy, and the central government maintains a tight rein on regional developments. Examples include India and Brazil, two of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), according to Morgan-Stanley's new jargon of promising new economies. In terms of the global economy, these nations are still asleep as a whole nation. Nevertheless, some of their regions have begun to take their places on the global stage. China adopts a somewhat schizophrenic policy; in theory, it follows a rigid, centralized political formula. In practice, unprecedented economic autonomy has been allowed to regions and cities, particularly since Zhu Rongji's reform of 1998.

But at the opposite extreme, there are states such as Japan, Russia, and Indonesia, which maintain centrality of decision making in theory *and* practice. No region succeeds because no region is permitted to succeed independently of the rest of the state. Their central governments are jealous of allowing any directional role to escape the center. They are swimming against a tide that could yet inundate them. Of the BRICs, only China has the governance structure to help its regions to work interactively with the global economy. Others have a long way to go before their central government really wakes up to the calls of the rest of the world.

The task of describing what this new world *is* may be difficult. If all the news stories and clippings about globalization are assembled, the integrated picture that emerges is distorted. Not all the components fit neatly together; it is a wild, abstract mosaic rather than a jigsaw.

But let us forget the scare stories and the merchants of bad news, and instead try and see what we can say positively and with certainty about the characteristics of the global economy: It has innate characteristics, which I list in no order of importance.

### *Borderless*

First, as I have long argued, national borders are far less constrictive than they once were. Some of this has been thanks to technology, while some has been the result of international and bilateral agreements, especially in the area of trade. The world is an increasingly borderless place. Tariffs are evaporating as countries realize they need each other to survive economically.

It is not yet completely border free, as nation-states still have reasons to maintain controls on the movement of people and goods in the interest of security and public safety. But in terms of four key factors of business life, the world has already attained the position of being effectively without borders. These business factors I have labeled the four C's: communications, capital, corporations, and consumers.[6]

Effective **communications** always depend on the nonexistence of borders. It was one thing when communication was predominantly physical. If a person wanted to go from A to B or send something there, be it a letter or a product, the inert force of gravity often slowed the process down. Slowness of movement was further added to by border checkpoints, the need for visas, and passport control, not to mention custom and excise inspection. People viewed these as obstacles and deterrents. But technology spurred an improvement. Telephone lines allowed a person to speak with someone directly on the other side of the world, without having to go through a host of intermediate exchanges. Once such lines of telecommunication, existed they could be used for data transfer. Improvements also occurred in the production of cables using fiber-optic technology. A barrier to communications remained while the conduits of this communication still had to pass along wires, which, in turn, had to be laid across mountains or oceans. The latest technological advances do away with wires and their costly installation and maintenance. When data is carried by radio frequencies, it is absurd to believe that lines drawn on maps can have any impact on its movements.

Telecommunication benefited from a process of deregulation in the 1980s, and many former state monopolies were privatized, thereby increasing competition and lowering costs for consumers.

Domestic markets that had formerly been imprisoned in the clutches of national communications monopolies were opened up. Many communications companies co-operated and entered into alliances; others merged so that the telecommunications world was changed from a patchwork of state monopolies into a far more dynamic and colorful kaleidoscope that did not respect national borders. Many telecom operators, including TeliaSonera, Vodafone, and Telefonica, have become truly global.

Yet it was the development of the Internet from the mid-1990s onward that has probably had the greatest impact on making the world of communications truly borderless. This is a technology that is widely available, accessible from personal computers anywhere. Traffic passes through it oblivious of borders.

The second *C*, **capital**, is also a beneficiary of a borderless world. This, too, has been aided by deregulation of financial markets. It has also been assisted by the position of the U.S. dollar as a monetary platform. Not only is it the major trading and settlement currency, but it is also the currency of choice for many savers throughout the world. In most developed countries, the aging population save money for their retirement. The trouble is that no OECD member country offers adequate returns for an investment at home. This is one of the biggest reasons why a massive cross-border migration of capital, both short and long term, has occurred.

Some **corporations** have successfully responded to the borderless economy by shedding the trappings of the nation-state that hindered their self-awareness. It was far too common in the past for a successful corporation to identify closely with a "home base," a company headquarters, or a corporate "home town, where it all began." Some of this might have been sentimental, but it was outdated if the corporation saw the world as its marketplace. Improvements in telecommunications mean that companies do not feel tied down to a corporate headquarters in a certain city. If circumstances demand it, they might even dispense with legal ties to their home bases by reregistering in another, more favorable location.

The last two decades have seen a remarkable decomposition of corporate functions, ranging from R&D and manufacturing to sales/marketing and financing. It is now common within an individual company for these functions to be located across national borders—for example, R&D in Switzerland, engineering in India, manufacturing in China, financing in London, while the marketing function and HQ remain in the United States. More recently, indirect work has been outsourced: Witness the growth in call centers in India and elsewhere, and the outsourcing of logistics to specialists such as FedEx, DHL, and UPS.

It is in terms of the last C, **consumers**, that the borderless element of the global economy has made itself felt most keenly. Consumers have the ability to do what they have been urged to do many times: shop around. The Internet gives consumers the ability to compare products and prices and make a much more informed choice more easily. Platforms for paying by credit card then allow the purchase to be made, processed, and delivered. There might still be some who are emotionally tied to the ideal of the nation-state, who support demagogues seeking greater protection of domestic businesses and jobs, but when they are presented with a choice of two similar products, one (product A) available locally at a price considerably higher than product B, which originates elsewhere and still enjoys a price advantage when delivery charges are added on, only the most die-hard partisan of the nation-state will opt for the pricey product A. The reality is that it is almost impossible to buy a shirt that is genuinely "Made in America." Its fabric may come from Egypt, threads from Japan, and buttons from the Philippines. If only the sewing process takes place in the United States, how American does that make the finished shirt?

## *Invisible*

Observers might be forgiven for not fully realizing the potency and prevalence of the global economy. It is largely invisible. It might be better said that it is not totally visible to the naked eye. This should not be taken as implying that it is secretive or reclusive. It is because the actions that it performs often take place not on the streets or the debating chambers of national parliaments, but on computer terminals. One of the mechanisms whose development has enabled speedy cash transfer is a piece of plastic: the credit card. It is the preferred means of carrying and spending money for hundreds of millions of consumers. Yet the money that credit-card holders spend is never seen. Sometimes, payment occurs so quickly that not even the most sophisticated camera with an incredibly high shutter speed could record it.

Some of the most important developments are earth-shaking in their potential, but their implications are not fully understood outside of a small circle of players. As a result, they are not headline news; they are lucky to feature in the news at all. As for the print media, they may be buried rather inconspicuously in the business pages.

Consider a few aspects of this invisible world. Transactions and settlements of money now take place mostly on and through computers. Some products are also purchased in the plaza known as B2B and B2C trade exchanges, or as C2C auctions. Most ATMs around the world spit out local currency if you use your home country cash/credit card with Plus or Cirrus membership. There is no way for the government to know how much cash you have withdrawn abroad or how much you have spent with a credit card to purchase goods and services across national borders.

### *Cyber-Connected*

The global economy would not be possible, or even comprehensible, without cybertechnology allowing large amounts of data to be transferred incredibly quickly. It would not be possible without the corresponding drop in technology prices. The Internet is only the most public part of this. Today, the Internet protocol (IP) is capable of handling transmission of not only data, but also images, voice, music, and videos. Voice over IP (VoIP) is rapidly making inroads into the world of traditional telecom providers, but music and movies are also downloaded across national borders, as long as there is a line with IP routers. Everything and everyone connects.

Outsourcing, for example, rests on the capability to model new processes and instantly deliver critical software components, all within minutes of a conversation. The success of Indian software houses, such as Infosys, WiPro, HCL, Tata Information Services, and others, underscores the fact that 24x7 development is no longer a wish, but a reality.

### *Measured in Multiples*

Money makes the world go around. And so the role of money in a global economy must be important. Money is no longer seen only as a unit of value in the short term. The late 1990s and the first years of the new century have witnessed a number of corporate takeovers and restructurings that would have been viewed as surreal two decades earlier: In these, a company that had only recently emerged and maybe was not actually profitable successfully acquired a much larger, longer-established, and seemingly solid part of the corporate landscape. None of this was possible without those who assess corporate value looking at a far bigger picture, not one based on the here and now alone and the currently quoted price on whatever share index they chose, but on what the situation was likely to be in 10 or 20 years, and on how this was reflected in price/earnings ratios.

Multiples are signs given to the management by the shareholders to shoot at the business opportunities on the horizon. If the management does nothing other than business as usual, the multiple will come down, reflecting the disappointment of the ammunition givers. Multiples are fictitious, in that they often do not reflect corporate value, but they express an expectation. This can become reality if a company is bought or a new investment is made to fully utilize the multiples.

So the global economy is borderless, invisible, cyberconnected, and measured in multiples. Many of these elements are self-nurturing: They feed off one another. They all involve taking a leap, if only an intellectual leap at first, into uncharted waters.

This global economy is in its infancy. Unfortunately, this description contains an analogy with human development, from the state of the infant, the child, and the uninformed. It might be better to say that the global economy is in the early stages of development, but there is nothing childlike or uninformed about it. It has not emerged like an extraterrestrial from on board a meteorite. It has entered the world through the actions and intellect of human beings. It has not been foisted onto the world by some small, nefarious network intent on world domination. It has developed collectively. And, as we will see, it promises to be beneficial to the world at large.

The excessive capital in developed countries is looking for opportunities to breed. If you understand the logic of the global economy, you can attract companies, customers, and capital to your region or company from the rest of the world. You do not have to be born rich or be born in a wealthy country to prosper. All four C's can and will come to you if you have the right recipe. Alternatively, if your logic and systems are out of sync with the global economy, the four C's will evaporate, and you will not have an opportunity to perform on the global stage.

To reap the benefits of the global economy, join me to better understand how the plot unfolds. Let us begin with the opening night.

# Notes

[1] *Riverdance in China*, documentary broadcast by Raidio Telefis Eirinn channel 1, 9 April 2004.

[2] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7. 139–140.

[3] "China's GDP Expects to Exceed 11 Trillion Yuan," *People's Daily*, 27 November 2003, www.nationmaster.com.

[4] www.atkearney.com.

[5] www.weforum.org.

[6] The concept of the four *C*'s was first explored in my book, *The End of the Nation State* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).