

Essays on the Role of Credit Ratings in Corporate Finance (Finanzmanagement)

Markus Wiemann



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Essays on the Role of Credit Ratings in Corporate Finance (Finanzmanagement) Markus Wiemann "Doctoral Student Award from Midwest Finance Association (USA) 2011" Rating agencies are important players in today's financial markets. They have strong influence on companies' costs of debt and investors' decisions. However, rating agencies were and are not free of criticism. The conflict that emerges from the strong influence of credit ratings on firms, on the one hand, and the criticism against rating agencies, on the other hand, motivated this work. It consists of four articles which extend the research on credit ratings, contract theory, agency conflicts and the role of rating agencies in today's financial markets. The first article examines a large sample of loans from North-American lenders to most precisely estimate the impact of a rating downgrade on firms' costs of debt. Exploiting provisions that link borrowers' interest spreads to their ratings (so called rating-based performance pricing) the article provides an accurate estimate of the direct and pure impact of ratings on interest spreads. The second article focuses on the observation that some companies get loan contracts that include rating-based performance pricing while others get loan contracts containing provisions that define variable interest spreads based on performance measured by accounting ratios (so called accounting-based performance pricing). It shows that accounting-based performance pricing and rating-based performance pricing contracts fulfill different functions and are therefore used for specific types of borrowers. The third article scrutinizes the influence of rating downgrades on firms' investment behavior. Based on previous literature it argues that rating agencies implicitly exercise a controlling function in favor of the bondholders. The article reveals that agencies' monitoring compensates the lack of investment restrictions in public debt agreements and thereby successfully mitigates agency conflicts. ...

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