

## HBR CASE STUDY

Should John choose  
country or  
company?

# Riding the Celtic Tiger

by Eileen Roche



*Ireland's booming economy lured John Dooley home six years ago. Is it strong enough to keep him there?*

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As he walked into work on a rainy Thursday morning, John Dooley felt cheerful despite the bleak weather. BioSol, the global biotechnology corporation he worked for, had recently made significant progress in its therapeutic antibody for the treatment of adult and juvenile asthma. If the momentum continued, it would mean great things not only for the company but also for the thousands of people who suffered from the illness. On a personal level, John's own career could get a real boost as well. Hadn't his boss, Niall Doyle, said as much yesterday, when he told John that corporate headquarters was impressed and suggested they meet today to talk about future plans?

Last night, after the children had gone to bed, John and his wife, Fiona, had conjectured what that might mean for their family. John was the vice president of strategic research now; maybe he'd be promoted to director of his division? Or perhaps the company wanted to

tap him for a new project altogether? John had always loved the start-up phase of a project—the feeling of endless possibility, the challenge of assembling the right team, the excitement of discovering something entirely new.

He was finishing off his cup of tea when Doyle knocked on his open office door. "Morning, John. Thought I'd find you in here early."

"Niall," he smiled. "What can I do for you?"

Doyle sat down and came right to the point. "Good news, John. As I mentioned yesterday, the people in California are impressed. Had to wait until this morning to talk to you officially, though. The eight-hour time difference can be a hassle, all right, but that's not your problem—at least, not yet," he grinned. "I talked to Carl last night, and he thinks, and I agree, that you're the right man for the job—the director of strategy job, that is, over at headquarters. It's a big jump, I know, but I've got full confidence in you. You're more than up for the challenge. I've al-

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*HBR's cases, which are fictional, present common managerial dilemmas.*

ways expected great things from you.” He beamed. “So, what do you think?”

Truthfully, John didn’t know what to think. He hadn’t even considered a promotion of that magnitude. He was feeling honored, excited, and overwhelmed, all at once. He cleared his throat, then said, “Niall, I’m floored. I’m not sure what to say.”

“Quite right. This is big news to digest. Take some time to think about it. I just want you to know you’ve got my full backing.”

“Thanks, I appreciate that. And I’m honored to be offered such a tremendous opportunity. It would mean big changes, though, and not just for me. I’ll have to talk it over with Fiona—”

“Of course, of course. It’s a big decision, you can’t go rushing in. But I hope you realize just what this could mean for your career. Not everyone gets a chance like this. Besides, you and Fiona have lived in the States before, so it won’t be a massive culture shock....Well, I won’t keep you any longer. If there’s anything you want to talk about, though, the door’s always open.” And, with a backward wave, he walked out.

### Follow the Rainbow

“What an opportunity,” John thought. “But America?” He hadn’t been prepared for that.

It’s true that he and his wife had lived there before—but on the other coast, in Boston. He had met Fiona at university in Dublin 20 years ago. After graduation, they’d taken a year off to travel. They’d backpacked through Europe and worked their way across Australia, tending bar and doing other odd jobs, but mostly just enjoying themselves. When they’d returned home to Ireland, John had gone back to school, earning a master’s degree in biology. He and Fiona married, and, when John was accepted to the doctoral program at MIT, they moved to Massachusetts.

The truth was, it had been difficult to make a good living in Ireland then. Jobs were scarce, unemployment was high, and it seemed the natural choice to set out for greener pastures. A lot of John’s and Fiona’s friends and siblings had moved abroad around that time, too. John had a brother in Canada and a sister in France, and two of Fiona’s brothers lived in England.

The couple had had a good life in Boston. John had worked at two leading-edge firms in the area over the course of six years, and Fiona

had established a name for herself as a children’s book illustrator. They had become involved with a large Irish expatriate community and started their family.

But by 1999, things were turning around at home: The Celtic Tiger was in full force. John and Fiona had attended three going-away parties in the past year for friends moving back to Ireland, and they began to wonder seriously if they should follow suit. Why not? They’d left to make a better life for themselves, but now it seemed they could make a fine living in Ireland. Business was booming, and the whole country seemed to be bursting with possibility. The Irish government was investing heavily in the economy; the country’s low corporate tax rate and large pool of educated workers were attracting companies from all over the globe. And there was even a burgeoning biotechnology industry, so John’s career wouldn’t suffer. Ultimately, the deciding factor had been their young son, Conor. They wanted him to grow up knowing his grandparents and other relatives, to learn Irish history, and to play hurling and Gaelic football rather than baseball—a sport neither of them understood. So, when John was offered a job at BioSol’s Dublin subsidiary, he and Fiona decided to pull up stakes and go home.

They had settled in the Ballsbridge neighborhood of Dublin, which was convenient to the office and only a short drive away from Fiona’s parents in Wicklow. John’s parents, on the north side of Dublin, were even closer. The following year, their daughter, Nicola, had been born; now she was starting school. In all, John felt himself a lucky man. He loved this city—loved the smell of barley by the Guinness factory, the bustle of Temple Bar, the bits of history around every corner. But what to do about this promotion?

He picked up the telephone and tapped in his wife’s mobile phone number. When she didn’t pick up, he left a brief message: “Fi, I’ve just gotten some big news at work—bigger than we imagined. Give me a call when you get this? Thanks.”

### Seeing Green

At 6:00 PM, John left the office and headed over to O’Neill’s. The pub had been their local since university days, and John and his friends still met up there at least once a month. He found Dave and Fergal already settled in a

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booth when he arrived. He ordered three pints of Guinness and walked over to join them.

“Cheers, John,” said Fergal as he picked up his glass. “What’s the story?”

John updated them on the day’s events.

“That’s brilliant! You’re taking it, right?!” urged Dave, in a voice that sounded more like a command than a question.

“What? And move to California?” Fergal interrupted. “You tried life in the States before, remember? And you came back home, I’m assuming, for good reasons—”

“John, if you say no, you can kiss any hopes of advancing in your company good-bye,” Dave jumped in again. “Besides, it’s a deadly offer,” he grinned. “You’ll be running the whole show in no time.”

“There are loads of biotech companies here,” retorted Fergal. “Couldn’t you do just as well in one of them?”

John felt a bit like he was watching a tennis match. “Actually,” he spoke before Dave could make his next point, “I’ve had a few conversations with a recruiter for a local company. GeneSys is looking to hire an executive vice president of R&D. It’s much smaller than BioSol, though, and it doesn’t have nearly the reputation.”

“Are you mad?” asked Dave. “You’re seriously considering turning down an offer at one of the world’s most respected companies in America—the land of opportunity—for a small operation in Ireland, best known as ‘a terrible beauty’? Think of the life you could give your children there. Think of your career. Hell, think of the sunshine.”

Fergal countered, “Think of the earthquakes!”

“Whatever I decide, it will not be due to the weather or tectonic plates,” John said, slightly frustrated. “I was hoping for some good advice from you two.”

“Well, I spent a year in New York, and two things stick out in my mind,” said Fergal. “One, the money there is terrible—all the same color and size. Can’t tell you how many times I lost track of what I had.” At John’s expression, he rushed on. “And two, Americans don’t know how to buy rounds—though some Irish, I’m ashamed to say,” he looked pointedly at Dave, “can be just as ignorant.”

“I’m going, ye muppet. But first I am trying to save my friend here from your ludicrous waffling. Money ‘all the same color,’” Dave muttered as he walked to the bar. A few minutes later, they were each sipping a fresh pint.

“The Guinness isn’t the same over there, I’ll give you that,” said John, looking at Fergal. “But I did take to their Thanksgiving holiday. So that’s a point in their favor,” he sighed. “The thing is, I know how it feels to be an expat. You’re always a bit of an outsider, you miss the cultural references, you’re far from family. That’s part of the reason we came home in the first place.

“But I’ve got to be realistic. How long is Ireland’s economy going to keep up like this? I read in the paper last week about another company that’s cutting hundreds of accounting jobs here and moving them to Poland. Who’s to say that’s not a sign of things to come? Remember what happened in Israel a few years ago? The economy took off in the 1990s, just like here. But then it crashed—hard. What if we’re next, and I’ve already turned down my big chance at BioSol?”

“Ah, go on then,” mocked Fergal, in an over-the-top accent. “Sure, you’re just like all the rest—happy enough to pull your chair up to the table when the feast is on, but not willing to roll up your sleeves and cook the meal.” He winked. “What kind of an Irishman are you?” Even though Fergal’s tone was light, John sensed he wasn’t entirely joking.

“Relax, Fergal, I’m not turning my back on Ireland.”

Fergal raised an eyebrow questioningly, then spoke. “All right, all messing aside, I see what you’re saying. But let me ask you this: Aren’t the reasons you came home still true? Aren’t you happy your children are learning Irish in school and Conor’s going to be a cracker of a hurler? Aren’t you glad they’ve grown so close to their grandparents, and you can drop the kids off with them for an hour or two with no worries? I’m not telling you to sacrifice your kids’ futures; I’m saying we’ve got one of the strongest economies in the world right now. Isn’t that enough?”

Without giving John a chance to reply, Dave spoke up. “Look, I’m all for Ireland—I live here myself, you might’ve noticed. But a chance like this doesn’t come along very often. This is a big step in your career—more money, more responsibility, more everything. I don’t want you to throw it away because Fergal here starts singing ‘The Fields of Athenry’ and you get all sentimental. What does Fiona have to say about all of this?”

“We only talked briefly on the phone today;

she was happy for me, of course, but she definitely hasn't started packing. We're going to have a serious conversation when I get home." John checked his watch. "Right, I should be off. Talk to you later." He stood, put on his coat, and waved as he left the pub.

### Opportunity Rings

John was stifling a yawn when the phone rang in his office Friday morning. He and Fiona had been up half the night talking about the pros and cons of relocating. As an illustrator, she wasn't tied to an office, but she did have definite attachments to their community. She was reluctant to give them up and was concerned about how Conor and Nicola would adjust to a new culture. John was concerned, too, but they agreed that exposing their children to a new country wouldn't be all bad. They'd widen their horizons, and some of the best schools in the world were located in the States.

He picked up the receiver, "Yes? John Dooley here."

"I'm glad I found you in, John. It's Suzanne White. I was wondering if you've given any more thought to the executive position at Ge-

neSys we talked about last week?"

"Suzanne, hello. Thanks for calling. I have been considering it, yes. I have to be honest, though, my circumstances have changed since last we spoke. I was offered a new position here at BioSol, which rather complicates things."

"Oh, I see. Of course, I understand, but before you make a final decision, could I persuade you to meet with Tim Clarke, the CEO? He's eager to speak with you. Talking with him about his vision for the company, and how you fit into it, might help you decide."

John agreed and arranged for a lunch meeting the following week. "It can't hurt to listen," he thought. "And I *would* like to stay in Ireland." But was that a good enough reason to turn down the promotion at BioSol?

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### Should John choose country or company?

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