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LOSS OF HUMAN CAPITAL: CORPORATE TRANSACTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE L-1 VISA FOR EMPLOYEES

Constanza Mundt*

I. INTRODUCTION

Today’s world economy is no longer based on the individual markets within one’s country.¹ Instead, global interaction is dominant, which requires cooperation between nations by means such as the Group of Twenty (“G-20”) summit.² Companies have expanded their business to different nations all over the world by trade, opening of subsidiaries, or acquisition of foreign entities.³ Today, mergers and acquisition (“M&A”) account for a high volume of transactions compared to traditional means of economic interactions such as trade.⁴

*Juris Doctor Candidate, May 2018; German attorney, graduated Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. To my parents, for all the support and opportunities that they have offered me to grow as a person and to making me believe I can achieve whatever I wish to. To my siblings, Bettina, Annette, and Benedikt, for always inspiring me and giving me moral support. To Sabine Paul for showing me the possibilities of an international law career. Finally, to Rhona Mae Armorado and Professor Meredith Miller for their insight in the topic, guidance during the drafting, and understanding of the importance of this Note to me.


An example of M&A are the failed 2017 merger negotiations between T-Mobile, a German-based telecommunications company, and Sprint, a United States (“US”) company.\(^5\) The merger would have created a very competitive US mobile telecommunications network.\(^6\) If T-Mobile had acquired Sprint, T-Mobile would have likely benefitted from Sprint’s employees who have specialized knowledge concerning wireless data networks.\(^7\) To benefit from employees with specialized knowledge, many countries assist corporations with their international endeavors by providing an intracompany visa,\(^8\) which eases the visa application process.\(^9\) Assisting entities with a simplified visa process allows entities to transfer employees within a corporate global group with fewer difficulties.\(^10\)

Facilitating global intracompany transfers of employees through a special visa type was adopted by the US in recognition of the trend toward globalized corporations.\(^11\) In 1970, Congress created the predecessor of today’s L-1 visa, which was introduced to assist in the transfer of key personnel with unique knowledge of the business of the US and/or foreign employer to the US for a limited amount of time.\(^12\) The L-1 visa, a non-immigrant visa for intracompany transfers, allows companies to ensure the uniformity of company policies and

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\(^6\) Id.

\(^7\) Id.


the application of proprietary knowledge to a foreign entity within its corporate group.\textsuperscript{13}

For example, Capital Air Survey Limited was a Canadian company that specialized in aerial survey photography. Capital Air Survey Inc., its US subsidiary,\textsuperscript{14} sought to classify its foreign employees as intracompany transferees based on their “specialized knowledge.” Thus, Capital Air Survey Inc. filed a petition with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) for the L-1 visa type as it was designed for employees that had essential knowledge of proprietary interests of the business or its management, who cannot easily be recruited in the local employment market.\textsuperscript{15}

Specialized knowledge, under the L-1 visa, covers employees required for work with a product developed within a company unique to the market such as the aerial photography equipment and system of Capital Air Survey Inc.\textsuperscript{16} This visa is also used by a broad group of companies such as Price Waterhouse Coopers and Tata Consultancy Services Limited as it provides a reliable means for international entities to ensure business success by using entity knowledge within a group worldwide.\textsuperscript{17} The L-visa is popular with large corporations because it provides a reliable option to transfer key employees to the US.\textsuperscript{18}

In 2015, 648,611 L-1 visas were issued to foreign nationals to allow them to take up employment in the United States.\textsuperscript{19} The Foreign Affairs Manual states, “A U.S. company, which is involved in business as an employer in the United States and in at least one foreign country, can utilize the L classification to transfer to the United States

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} A parent is a corporation, firm, or other legal entity that has subsidiaries. A subsidiary is a corporation that directly or indirectly is owned to more than fifty percent by another and this entity has control over the owned entity. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(I)-(L)(3) (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Colley, 18 I. & N. Dec. 117 (Dep’t of Justice June 19, 1981).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{18} L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 5.
\item \textsuperscript{19} U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVS., supra note 17.
\end{itemize}
employees abroad who are unattached to a foreign entity.”20 Although the L-1 visa was developed to simplify the visa application process for key employees,21 there are multiple requirements for an employee to be eligible for the L-1 Visa, including a qualifying pre-employment in a specialized knowledge, managerial, or executive capacity for a qualified entity and qualified employment in the US, subject to specific nuances.22 Thus, only a limited group of individuals are able to satisfy the multiple eligibility requirements for this visa category.

Employees petitioned for an L-1 Visa need a qualifying employment abroad as either executives, managers, or employees in possession of specialized knowledge, and they must subsequently function as a specialist or executive in the US.23 Further, employees must have prior employment in a qualifying position for one full year abroad, within the past three years, before applying for the L-1 status.24 Even though not explicitly stated in the regulations, it is necessary that the prior employment was full-time.25 The prior employment has to be within the corporate group of the US employer such as “by a parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary.”26 Finally, the petitioning US entity must have a qualifying intracompany relationship with the foreign entity that employed the foreigner abroad.27 The application requires voluminous evidence regarding the qualifying relationship as this is the purpose of the introduction of the visa type.28

The qualifying relationship between the US petitioner and the employer abroad is a key element in the visa eligibility to allow a foreign national to take up employment in the US under this simplified

21 Specialized Knowledge, supra note 11, at 4.
23 9 F.A.M. 402.12-4(A)(2) (2017); 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(I)(ii)(C)-(E) (Lexis Advance through the Mar. 14, 2018 issue of the Federal Register. Title 3 is current through Feb. 2, 2018). What position satisfies these requirements has been highly disputed in the past but is not within the scope of this article. L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 5; X, 2008 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 12131, *56-61.
26 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(I) (Lexis Advance through the July 12, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review. See Publisher’s Note under affected rules. Title 3 is current through July 7, 2017).
28 L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 4.
When this visa category was implemented in its current version in 1990, however, cross-border M&A transactions were not prevalent. Cross-border M&A only represented around USD 100 billion worldwide in the period from 1987 to 1994. By the year 2000, the number of cross-border M&A transactions had risen to approximately USD 800 billion worldwide and were driven by transactions in the service and telecommunication sector.

The increased relevance of corporate restructuring and transactions, as well as the impact of these proceedings on the corporate relationships, has challenged, and continues to challenge, the definition of a qualifying relationship under an L-1 visa. A changed corporate structure may sever the qualifying relationship. When an entity or a part of an entity is sold, there may no longer be a connection between the past employing entity and the current US employer. The employee may lose the required qualifying pre-employment by the severed connection between the foreign and US employing entity depending on the form of acquisition.

In 2016, the global M&A market accounted for USD 3.9 trillion, showing the economic importance of M&A and the possible scope of its impact despite political movements for more protected local markets. Of the USD 3.9 trillion M&A transactions, 36% were cross-border M&A transactions. Under US immigration law, such corporate restructuring can impact the qualifying relationship between...
the entities and, thus, result in the loss of L-1 visa status for current foreign employees in the US.40

Multiple entities that have international recognition such as Price Waterhouse Coopers and Tata Industries participate in the L-1 visa program and regularly expand their market access and success through acquisitions of foreign entities, which can impact the eligibility of employees for an L-1 visa.41 During these business-driven decisions, the impact on existing employee structures is generally disregarded, which leads to potentially undesired results such as termination of employees’ visas and loss of substantial human capital of a US entity upon conclusion of these transactions.42 Today, substantial investments such as the acquisition of internet start-ups are especially reliant on the employees of the acquired entity who have specialized knowledge of the products developed.43 In the start-up acquisitions, the possible loss of employees or ineligibility for the L-1 visa can be crucial.44 Given the economic significance of M&A and the inherent risk of loss of human capital due to immigration rules, M&A structuring must be well-planned to avoid the loss of employee expertise.

This Note takes the position that conventional M&A consulting does not examine immigration law impacts in corporate takeovers, which leads to a loss of employees, also referred to as human capital. Human capital is valued in the acquisition process and can be essential in M&A negotiations given proprietary knowledge of the employees. However, the L-1 visa, which is specifically targeted towards easing the visa application process for human capital, is vulnerable to corporate restructuring. Thus, structuring M&A transactions requires substantial care to avoid significantly impacting the international employee structure within the US entity employing L-1 visa holders.

42 Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at I.
44 Id.; X, 2008 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 12131, *49.
This Note will be divided into five parts. Part II will introduce the L-1 visa and define the requisite qualifying relationship. Part III will analyze the main M&A forms, the statutory merger, asset acquisition, and stock acquisition. Part III also includes a discussion of the impact of the different forms of transactions on the L-1 visa. Thereafter, Part IV will outline a recommendation on structuring transactions regarding a single entity as well as transactions in a corporate group. In Part V, the Note will conclude that, overall, the most preferable method of acquisition is a stock purchase as it does not impact the legal persona of the acquired entity.45 Finally, Part V will also discuss possible legislative changes to meet the modern transactional environment.

II. THE L-1 VISA

When an employer in the US files a visa application for an employee, the employer is called the petitioner because it is filing for the employment authorization of the employee through a visa (i.e., the petition) with the USCIS.46 The employee is called the beneficiary because he will be conferred the benefit of the employment authorization in the US.47 The employer must file an amended petition once there is a change in the employment relationship between the foreign employee and the employer.48 An amended petition provides USCIS with information such as a promotion of the employee, a change of the employer name, or if one US subsidiary switches to another US subsidiary of the corporate group in a similar position.49

The two generally available types of work visas for foreign nationals of all nationalities are the H-1B and the L-1 visa.50 The regular work visa for professionals, also known as H-1B visa, is a

45 1-5A ELEANOR FOX & BYRON FOX, CORPORATE ACQUISITIONS AND MERGERS § 5A.04 (Matthew Bender 2017) [hereinafter 1-5A FOX & FOX].


47 Instructions for Petition, supra note 46; 9 FAM 402.12-8(C).

48 9 FAM 402.12-16(C)(c).


50 L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 5.
lengthy process and does not provide an employer with the security of being able to employ foreign talent as it is limited to 65,000 regular H-1B visas per year.\footnote{USCIS Completes the H-1B Cap Random Selection Process for FY 2017, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SEVS., https://www.uscis.gov/news/alerts/uscis-completes-h-1b-cap-random-selection-process-fy-2017 (last visited Mar. 10, 2018).} In 2016, over 236,000 applications were filed for the 65,000 available H-1B visas.\footnote{Id.}

The immigration authorities draw the H-1B applications randomly. Once chosen, the application will be processed to determine if it fulfills several requirements such as a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, employment in a position that usually requires the minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and an approved Labor Conditions Application (“LCA”) from the Department of Labor.\footnote{H-1B Specialty Occupations, DOD Cooperative Research and Development Project Workers, and Fashion Models, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SEVS, https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-dod-cooperative-research-and-development-project-workers-and-fashion-models (last visited Mar. 16, 2018) [hereinafter H-1B Specialty Occupations].} The LCA certifies that the foreign national is employed—in a comparable form to local employees in this area—and no similarly qualified US national has previously applied to this specific position, which has been publicized in a good faith effort (i.e., two different forms of media such as an online job platforms and a national or local newspaper).\footnote{Id.; 9 FAM 402.10-4(B); Labor Condition Application for Nonimmigrant Workers, U.S. Dep’t Labor, https://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/eta_form_9035cp.pdf, (last visited: Mar. 16, 2018).}

By contrast, the L-1 visa process is easier for the employer.\footnote{L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 5.} The process exempts employers from completing an LCA and allows for a direct visa application with the USCIS.\footnote{U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SEVS., ADJUDICATOR’S FIELD MANUAL – REDACTED PUBLIC VERSION 32.6(e)(2)(C), https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/AFM/HTML/AFM/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-15111/0-0-0-15335.html (Last visited Mar. 16, 2018).} The regulatory intent of the L-1 visa was to ease the application process for international companies so these entities have an effective means to transfer employees between different global locations.\footnote{X, 2008 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 12131, *22; L-1 Visa Regulations, supra note 13, at 6-7.} However, the employees will only be granted an L-1 visa if the employee meets the eligibility criteria as follows:
• The employee has been employed continuously for one year within the past three years by the same employer or a company within the employer’s corporate group; 

• The employee possesses employment experience in a specialized knowledge, managerial, or executive capacity abroad; 

• The employee will work in the US in either a specialized knowledge, managerial, or executive role; and 

• The employer must be doing business in at least one other country.

Thus, while the L-1 visa process is simpler than the H-1B application, there are stricter requirements that employers and employees must satisfy. Specifically, petitioners for L-1 visa must satisfy the prerequisites of working within the corporate group, also known as the “qualifying relationship” and “doing business.”

58 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii) (Lexis Advance through the July 12, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 ("Regulatory Freeze Pending Review").

Intracompany transferee means an alien who, within three years preceding the time of his or her application for admission into the United States, has been employed abroad continuously for one year by a firm or corporation or other legal entity or parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary thereof, and who seeks to enter the United States temporarily in order to render his or her services to a branch of the same employer or a parent, affiliate, or subsidiary thereof in a capacity that is managerial, executive, or involves specialized knowledge. Periods spent in the United States in lawful status for a branch of the same employer or a parent, affiliate, or subsidiary thereof and brief trips to the United States for business or pleasure shall not be interruptive of the one year of continuous employment abroad but such periods shall not be counted toward fulfillment of that requirement.

59 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii) (Lexis Advance through the July 12, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 ("Regulatory Freeze Pending Review"), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).

60 Id.

61 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(G)(3) (Lexis Advance through the July 12, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 ("Regulatory Freeze Pending Review"), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).
A. Doing Business

As a prerequisite for the qualifying relationship, an employer must be “doing business” abroad. “Doing business” is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (“C.F.R.”) as the “regular, systematic, and continuous provision of goods and/or services by a qualifying organization and does not include the mere presence of an agent or office of the qualifying organization in the US and abroad.”

To satisfy the element of “doing business,” the employer is required to submit evidence such as annual reports, employee records, contracts, or invoices. The evidence must show that the US entity or organization’s activity exceeded “mere presence” and requires an active market participation, even if this may have been abroad. Thus, the activities must be targeted toward market expansion internationally with activities such as generating revenue through local clients and employing local work forces.

For a US entity, “doing business” does not require a specific form of incorporation. An employee working directly for a US entity abroad is eligible to file for an L-1 Visa without the necessity of an established foreign entity of the US business. The business abroad must undertake activities that benefit the corporation overall to meet this element.

In comparison, for a foreign entity sending an employee to the US, establishment of a legal entity in the US is an essential element to conform with the “doing business” requirement. Thus, opening a sales office will not be deemed sufficient for a foreign entity wishing to enter the US. On the other hand, a US entity may employ a foreign national, who was working for the US entity in a home office abroad,

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62 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(I)(ii)(H) (Lexis Advance through the July 12, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.


66 Id. at 286-88; 9 F.A.M.402.12-10(B).

67 Chartier, 16 I. & N. Dec. at 286-88; 9 F.A.M.402.12-10(B).

68 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(I)(ii)(H) (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.); 9 FAM 402.12-10(A).

69 9 F.A.M. 402.12-10(B).
on the basis of the L-1 visa. When the prerequisite element of “doing business” is met, the petitioner must also fulfill the requirement of a qualifying relationship between the US entity and the foreign entity.

### B. Corporate Structures that Meet the Standard of “Qualifying Relationship”

The qualifying relationships that suffice for application purposes include parent-subsidiary, branch, affiliate, and partnership relationships. To establish uniform decisions regarding the qualification of corporate structures, 8 C.F.R. § 214(2)(I)(ii)(I)–(L) contains definitions for qualifying relationships for pre-employment of the foreign national. While the regulations clearly define “parent” and “branch,” difficulties arise in determining the necessary relationship in a subsidiary, affiliate, and joint venture structure (See Illustration).

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70 Chartier, 16 I. & N. Dec. at 286-88.
71 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(I)-(L)(3) (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review).
72 Id.

(i) Parent means a firm, corporation, or other legal entity which has subsidiaries.

(j) Branch means an operating division or office of the same organization housed in a different location.

(k) Subsidiary means a firm, corporation, or other legal entity of which a parent owns, directly or indirectly, more than half of the entity and controls the entity; or owns, directly or indirectly, half of the entity and controls the entity; or owns, directly or indirectly, 50 percent of a 50-50 joint venture and has equal control and veto power over the entity; or owns, directly or indirectly, less than half of the entity, but in fact controls the entity.

(l) Affiliate means (1) One of two subsidiaries both of which are owned and controlled by the same parent or individual, or

(2) One of two legal entities owned and controlled by the same group of individuals, each individual owning and controlling approximately the same share or proportion of each entity, or

(3) In the case of a partnership that is organized in the United States to provide services and that markets its accounting services under an internationally recognized name under an agreement with a worldwide coordinating organization that is owned and controlled by the member accounting firms, a partnership (or similar organization) that is organized outside the United States to provide accounting services shall be considered to be an affiliate of the United States partnership if it markets its accounting services under the same internationally recognized name under the agreement accounting services along with managerial and/or consulting with the worldwide coordinating organization of which the United States partnership is also a member.

73 Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2004 Immigr. Rptr. LEXIS 897, at *3 (2004) (Even though this case refers to an immigrant petition, this petition has the same requirements in regard to the qualifying relationship between the entities).
A qualifying relationship exists in the context of a subsidiary or affiliate when the two entities meet the key element of a connection by ownership and control. 74 Ownership is the “direct or indirect legal right of possession of the assets of an entity with full power and authority to control.” 75 Thus, a form of common ownership must exist between the entities, whether through an individual, a group of individuals, a corporation, or the ownership of stock. 76 A subsidiary, in the immigration law context, is an entity which is held by another company directly, also referred to as the parent. 77 An affiliate relationship is the relationship between two or more entities that “have no direct linkage, but are directed, controlled, and at least partially owned by the same parent . . . .” 78 An affiliate relationship does not require majority ownership, but must exceed a marginal ownership of the related entities. 79

Control over a subsidiary or affiliate, for the purpose of applying for an L-1 visa, can be established either de jure, when the ownership exceeds 50%, or de facto, through voting or vetoing...

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75 Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2004 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 897 at *11.
77 9 FAM 402.12-9(A),
79 Hughes, 18 I. & N. Dec. at 293. A joint venture may be considered a subsidiary or an affiliate depending on whether the percentage of ownership exceeds fifty percent. Id. at 291.
powers. Control may be established when one party has a majority of concentrated ownership or the holding of the majority of voting proxies for other owners. The form in which control over an entity is established can be through any means, including contract, as long as the form allows common “power to direct or cause the direction of the management and policies.” The USCIS has clarified that proxy votes are only considered for control when they are irrevocable from the time of filing until the expiration of the requested visa validity. Thus, it is important to show within an application that there is a linkage between the entities by ownership and common management control to successfully apply and maintain L-1 visa status for employees. If the linkage can no longer be shown due to a corporate transaction, this will result in the loss of the L-1 visa status for the employee.

III. **Specific Corporate Transactions and Their Impact on the L-1 Visa**

In order to understand how different means of corporate acquisitions impact the requisite qualifying relationship of the L-1 visa, one must examine the different transaction forms and their impact on the corporate structure. Depending on relevant state law, to acquire another entity, three methods are prevailing: statutory merger in accordance to the relevant state law, asset acquisition, and stock purchase.

**A. Merger**

One method of acquisition of an entity is by merger. A “merger” describes the situation when two or more corporations are combined so that only one of the corporations survives. Upon merging, the surviving corporation absorbs the other prior existing

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81 Hughes, 18 I. & N. Dec. at *293.
82 Id. at 292
83 A proxy is the grant of ones voting power to another. U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SEVS., PM-602-0155, L-1 QUALIFYING RELATIONSHIPS AND PROXY VOTES, 3 (Dec. 2017)
84 Hughes, 18 I. & N. Dec. at *292-93.
85 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., §5A. syn.
86 Id.
87 1-5B ELEANOR FOX & BYRON FOX, CORPORATE ACQUISITIONS AND Mergers, at § 5B.01 [hereinafter 1-5B FOX & FOX].
corporation, which then ceases to exist. Mergers involve the acquisition of an entire entity by agreement in accordance to statutory law.

State laws of the entities generally govern the combination through a merger transaction. State laws generally require a plan and/or agreement regarding the merger of the two corporations, which will be submitted to the shareholders of the entity that will be consumed by the other for approval. Upon statutory merger, one entity is proverbially merged into the surviving entity; meaning, all rights, responsibilities, and liabilities are transferred, by statute, through the consumption of ownership. No rights or liabilities remain with the merging entity. The merged entity ceases to exist upon the conclusion of the merger, and only the surviving entity remains in existence.

However, the merged entity does not cease to exist in cases where the acquiring entity forms a new subsidiary solely for the purpose of merging the subsidiary with the acquired entity. In a merger called the Statutory Share Exchange, the acquired entity will survive within the newly formed subsidiary, meanwhile limiting the new parent company’s liabilities only to the newly formed subsidiary. The limitation does not usually apply in the employment benefit context, making the new parent company liable for any obligations of the newly acquired subsidiary. Merging the newly established subsidiary into another entity—the opposite of the aforementioned scenario—will not impact the legal status of the absorbing parent company. Generally, in the case of a merger, the surviving entity is a successor in interest to the consumed entity.

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88 Id.
89 Id.
90 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.02.
91 Id.
92 Id.
93 Id.
94 Id.
95 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.01.
96 Id. at §§ 5B.01-.02
97 Id. at § 5B.02.
98 Id.
99 Successor in interest means that the new corporation assumes the risks and liabilities from the merged entities. Id. § 5A.02.
100 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02.
1. One Subsidiary Merger

The difficulty of a merger is that one entity absorbs an already existing entity possibly employing foreign nationals.\textsuperscript{101} The merger can, thus, impact the prerequisite connection between the former qualifying organization abroad and the employing US entity as well as the necessary year of prior employment.\textsuperscript{102} Both requirements are indispensable for the continued employment of an L-1 visa holder for a related company of his former employer abroad.\textsuperscript{103} In any case, these prerequisites are impacted through the change in the approved qualifying relationship of the original petition, which requires the employer to file an amended petition upon completion of the merger.\textsuperscript{104} When the relationship is severed or the year of prior employment within the corporate group is no longer fulfilled, the L-1 visa of the employee can be revoked.\textsuperscript{105} Depending on the structure of the merger, however, the qualifying relationship may or may not be severed for all employees impacted by the transaction.\textsuperscript{106}

The qualifying relationship continues to exist if “[c]ommon ownership and/or control between the United States business entity and the foreign business entity” remains.\textsuperscript{107} The Administrative Appeals Office (“AAO”) clarified the existence of a continuous qualifying relationship in a case where a South African entity already had a US entity employing a foreign national as an executive.\textsuperscript{108} The US entity then proceeded to acquire another US entity, which it merged into its existing US entity that employed the foreign national. The application was initially denied because USCIS assumed that the qualifying relationship was severed by the merger. However, when the AAO reviewed the denial of the L-1 application, the AAO...

\textsuperscript{101} 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.02.
\textsuperscript{102} Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at IV. A. 3. B.
\textsuperscript{103} 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l) (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).
\textsuperscript{104} 8 C.F.R. § 214.2 (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).
\textsuperscript{105} 8 C.F.R. § 214.2 (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).
\textsuperscript{106} Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at IV. A. 3. B.
\textsuperscript{108} Id. at *6-9.
determined there was a continuously existing relationship and prior employment.\textsuperscript{109} The AAO reached this determination because the US subsidiary of the South African entity purchased another US entity and merged the other entity into its existing US subsidiary.\textsuperscript{110}

The AAO reasoned that the qualifying relationship was never destroyed despite the substantial change of the US subsidiary in its corporate form because the entities were still under the same ownership and control.\textsuperscript{111} The ownership and control remained with the same ultimate individuals as the prior US organization and the foreign entity as the newly merged corporation that employed the beneficiary, also known as the foreign employee.\textsuperscript{112} The prior qualifying relationship was never destroyed because the newly acquired US entity became part of the existing US employer of the foreign national.\textsuperscript{113} (See Illustration Scenario 1).

\begin{tikzpicture}
\node[draw] (pre) {Pre-Merger};
\node[draw, below right of=pre] (post) {Post-Merger};
\node[draw, below of=pre] (foreign) {Foreign entity};
\node[draw, below of=post] (foreign) {Foreign entity};
\node[draw, below of=foreign, xshift=-2cm] (foreign_sub) {Foreign subsidiary formerlly employing foreign national};
\node[draw, below of=foreign_sub, xshift=-2cm] (l1_holder) {U.S. entity employing L-1 Visa holder};
\node[draw, below of=foreign_sub, xshift=2cm] (l1_holder) {Foreign subsidiary Formerlly employing foreign national};
\node[draw, below of=l1_holder, xshift=2cm] (l1_holder) {Merged U.S. entity employing L-1 Visa holder};
\node[draw, below of=foreign_sub, xshift=-2cm] (l1_holder) {New U.S. entity bought};
\node[draw, below of=foreign_sub, xshift=-2cm] (l1_holder) {Foreign subsidiary Formerlly employing foreign national};
\node[draw, below of=l1_holder, xshift=2cm] (l1_holder) {Merged U.S. entity employing L-1 Visa holder};
\node[draw, below of=foreign_sub, xshift=-2cm] (l1_holder) {New U.S. entity bought};
\end{tikzpicture}

A different outcome emerges, however, when a US subsidiary, employing the foreign national, merges into another entity.\textsuperscript{114} When a US employer of the foreign national is absorbed by an acquiring entity, the qualifying relationship is severed.\textsuperscript{115} Generally, there is no longer

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} Id. at *6-9.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Id. at *6-9.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, 2003 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 1995 at *9.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Id. at *6-8.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Id. at *7-9.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, 2014 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 5020, *12 (2014).
\item \textsuperscript{115} Id.
\end{itemize}
actual control over the foreign and US entity when a US employer is merged with another entity. The severance of the qualifying relationship also applies if the foreign entity holds 50% of the merged US employer, but the foreign entity cannot show control over the surviving entity despite a signed partnership agreement between the two entities.

An example of the lack of control is when two US entities merge into each other, but the former, two parent companies abroad, do not. This was confirmed in another AAO case regarding the merger of two US entities both owned by two Indian businesses. The two US businesses merged while the Indian entities only signed a partnership agreement. The AAO found that the employee would only have the qualifying pre-employment with the former foreign parent in India of the merged entity, but there was no longer a qualifying pre-employment for the new entity. (See Illustration Scenario 2).

When the employing entity merges into a new entity, the qualifying relationship would generally break as there will no longer be common control and ownership of the US employer and the foreign

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Id.

Id. at *11-12.


Id. at *13-15, 18.

Id. at *13-15.

Id. at *18.
An exception, however, is a merger within the corporate group called the short-form merger that exists as a merger up or merger down.

2. Short-form Merger

Mergers can also be performed within a corporate group under short-form mergers such as a merger up or merger down. A merger up allows a subsidiary to be merged into the parent. For the short-form merger procedure, the merging subsidiary must generally be owned by the parent by at least ninety percent. In a merger down, on the other hand, the parent merges into the subsidiary, also called a “downstream” merger. Affiliates may also be merged in short-form mergers. In the short-form mergers, the entities are still within the same corporate group; thus, the entities remain under the same common control and ownership. (See Illustration Scenario 3).

In these situations, the qualifying relationship would not be severed as common ownership and control remains unchanged. Furthermore, the move of the employee would be comparable to

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123 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02.
124 This may differ from state to state. Id.
125 Id.
126 Id.
transferring an employee from one subsidiary to another, which would be permissible under an amended L-1 petition.\footnote{Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at 3.
}

3. Group Merger

An entire corporate group may also merge with another business. Group mergers happen when two separate corporate entities globally merge to form one new entity.\footnote{Id. at 3-7.}

An example of a group merger with relation to L-1 visas is the 1998 merger between the US Chrysler Corporation and the German Daimler AG to form DaimlerChrysler.\footnote{Id. at *22-24.}

For an L-1 visa to remain valid in a group merger the qualifying relationship must persist despite an alteration of its form.\footnote{Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 28226 at *22 (2006).}


In the DaimlerChrysler merger, the qualifying relationship and prior employment within the qualifying relationship no longer existed for L-1 visa holders of Chrysler employees despite the “sole” change of the form of the relationship; thus, not preserving their L-1 visas.\footnote{Id. at *22-24.}

(See Illustration Scenario 4).
The qualifying relationship would no longer exist when the common ownership and control is lost.\textsuperscript{133} Common ownership and control between the foreign employer and the current US employer would no longer exist upon conclusion of a merger because the foreign employer ceases to exist.\textsuperscript{134} Because the former foreign employer is absorbed into the new entity, the pre-employing entity has no relationship to the newly merged entities globally.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, there is no longer a full year of prior employment by the same employer within the same corporate group.\textsuperscript{136} The immigration authorities may consider whether the merged entities are entitled to retain the visas as a successor-in-interest through the assumption of all rights and liabilities of the merged entity.\textsuperscript{137}

However, the AAO has stated in other cases that a successor-in-interest claim does not apply in the L-1 context.\textsuperscript{138} The AAO clarified that the L-1 statute requires the US employer to show that it is a “parent, subsidiary, affiliate, or branch of the entity that employed the beneficiary during his . . . year of qualifying employment abroad.”\textsuperscript{139} When the former employer ceases to exist, which is the case in a statutory merger,\textsuperscript{140} the US employer would no longer have a relationship to this organization.

\textbf{B. Asset Acquisition.}

A business may also be acquired by asset acquisition.\textsuperscript{141} In an asset transaction, the entity itself is not acquired; only the entity’s assets.\textsuperscript{142} When assets are acquired in an asset acquisition, there is a separate transaction for any assets and liabilities.\textsuperscript{143} Assets as well as

\textsuperscript{134} 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.02, James J. Hogan, Guidelines for the Filing of Amend H and L Petitions, 69 INTERPRETER RELEASES 1448, 1448-50 (1992).
\textsuperscript{135} Id.
\textsuperscript{136} 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(I) (Lexis Advance through the July 19, 2017 issue of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 82 FR 8346 (“Regulatory Freeze Pending Review”), certain regulations will be delayed pending further review.).
\textsuperscript{137} 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02.
\textsuperscript{138} See, e.g., Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2009 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 7191, *56-57.
\textsuperscript{139} Id.
\textsuperscript{140} 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.02.
\textsuperscript{141} Id. at § 5A.03.
\textsuperscript{142} Id.
\textsuperscript{143} Id.
liabilities that are not explicitly transferred to the acquiring entity remain with the selling entity.\footnote{Id.}

1. Asset Acquisition

Ordinarily, the asset selling entity remains active after the asset acquisition and can have a different function such as a distributor of dividends or an investment company.\footnote{Id.} The asset-selling entity must be voluntarily liquidated in order to cease existing.\footnote{Id.} The asset acquisition allows the acquiring entity to decide which assets and liabilities it wishes to assume and, therefore, limit its possible liability.\footnote{Id.} Generally, the entity acquiring the assets is not liable for the selling entity’s obligations.\footnote{Id.}

Only the entity’s assets are acquired and not the entity’s liabilities;\footnote{Id.} thus, the entity is not integrated into the acquiring company’s corporate group and continues to exist as its own entity.\footnote{Id.} Consequently, the foreign or US employer of the L-1 visa holder remains active and independent from the acquiring entity. When the relevant entities coexist, meaning that the asset selling entity remains active without the assets,\footnote{Siemens Med. Inc., 19 I. & N. Dec. at 364-65.} there is no common ownership or control for the part of assets sold.\footnote{Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2009 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 7191 at *51; Church Scientology Int’l, 19 I & N. Dec. 593, 595 (1988).}

Under immigration law, ownership requires the “direct or indirect legal right of possession of the assets of an entity with full power to control.”\footnote{1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at § 5A.03 (2017).} Thus, any common right of possession does not exist in an asset acquisition as these assets have been transferred.\footnote{1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at § 5A.03.
The mere acquisition of assets does not impact the corporate structure; therefore, the L-1 visas of the acquiring entity remain valid. The assessment of whether there is continued ownership and control in the L-1 visa context may vary in asset transaction cases, which are considered a *de facto merger* or the transaction results in a continuation of the business by the acquiring entity.\(^{155}\)

### 2. De Facto Merger in Asset Acquisition

A *de facto merger* will result in the treatment of an asset acquisition as a statutory merger even though it was planned as an asset sale and did not comply with the statutory merger statute.\(^{156}\) Thus, it must be examined whether an L-1 visa can survive due to the nature of the merger because, in a merger, successor liability is applicable to the acquiring entity.\(^{157}\)

Asset acquisition is treated like a statutory merger,\(^{158}\) as such, the *de facto merger* would result in the absorption of the asset-selling entity by the acquiring entity.\(^{159}\) The treatment of the asset acquisition as a merger would mean that the asset-selling entity would automatically cease to exist upon completion of the merger.\(^{160}\) If the asset-selling entity ceases to exist, the requirements of pre-employment for one continuous year within a qualifying organization and an existing qualifying relationship between the foreign employer and employing US entity would not be satisfied.\(^{161}\) The result of the asset-sale by the US entity would be comparable to the circumstances in Illustration Scenario 2.\(^{162}\)

### 3. “Mere Continuation” Asset Acquisition

An asset acquisition is also treated differently under the “mere continuation” asset acquisition.\(^{163}\) When there is solely “a mere
change in form without significant change in substance” the transaction qualifies as a mere continuation of the business. In cases where a mere continuation of the business is determined by the courts, a successor liability is imposed on the asset acquiring entity. The courts assume that the acquiring entity would be the same entity as the selling entity, but the actual selling entity does not survive the sale. Taking this reasoning into account, the entity remains intact and the acquiring entity integrates with the selling entity. However, in a case where the entity only acquires the assets of the US employer, there is no common ownership and control between the former foreign employer and the continuously existing US employer.

If the purchasing entity acquires the assets of both the foreign and the US employer, leading to a mere continuation of business, the qualifying relationship should persevere. The AAO does not require the qualifying relationship to remain the same, but to continuously exist. In the mere continuation of business context, the qualifying relationship of common ownership and control exists during the year of prior employment. At the time the assets are acquired, the owner itself changes without destroying the commonality of control and ownership between the two entities; thus, the employer is the same as previously abroad and in the US (See Illustration Scenario 5).

Illustration Scenario 5: Acquisition of assets in mere business continuation

Pre-Acquisition | Post-Acquisition
---|---
Asset selling entity (U.S. or foreign) | Asset purchasing entity (U.S. or foreign)
Foreign subsidiary formerly employing foreign national | U.S. subsidiary employing L-1 Visa holder
Asset selling entity (U.S. or foreign) | Asset purchasing entity (U.S. or foreign)
Foreign subsidiary formerly employing foreign national | U.S. subsidiary employing L-1 Visa holder

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164 Id.
165 Id. at § 5C.07.
167 Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2009 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 7191 at *56-57.
The commonality of control and ownership are determining factors for a qualifying relationship under the L-1 Visa. In the context of a subsidiary to subsidiary transfer, the L-1 Visa holders would, thus, meet the requirement of commonality of control and ownership under their predecessor and the new entity, after the acquisition, even with a different ownership.

C. Stock Purchase

Businesses can also be acquired by a stock purchase. A stock purchase is generally the preferred mechanism for corporate transactions as it is subject to fewer statutory restrictions such as limitations of foreign entity mergers within the US. An exception to the regulation freedom applies to the cases of a tender offer, which are heavily regulated. Another option is the acquisition of the majority of the controlling shares of the desired entity. When there are multiple minority shareholders and the purchasing entity acquires the most concentrated shares and establishes a relationship with the existing board, the purchasing entity achieves working control as well. An advantage of this process is that the acquiring entity becomes a shareholder of the existing entity without having to negotiate agreements for each acquired asset or liability and the purchased entity continues to exist in its current corporate identity. Another advantage of stock acquisitions is that the purchase only affects the ownership of the corporation and the corporate status itself remains unchanged. Throughout this process, the acquiring entity limits its liabilities for the acquired entity and the liabilities remain limited within the purchased entity. Generally, the

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169 An exception to the regulation freedom applies to the cases of a tender offer, which are heavily regulated. 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
170 Id.
171 Id.
172 1-5D ELEANOR FOX & BYRON FOX, CORPORATE ACQUISITIONS AND Mergers at § 5D.04 [hereinafter 1-5D FOX & FOX].
173 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
174 Id.
175 Id. Exceptions apply in states that have a de facto merger doctrine which would transfer the liabilities to the purchasing entity. In these cases, a court will determine that the acquisition of stock or assets is in reality a merger. Thus, when such a transaction is approved the surviving corporation will be subject to liabilities it may not have explicitly assumed. 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02
purchased entity then becomes a subsidiary of the purchasing entity.  
Stock purchases can be used for the acquisition of a single entity as well as the acquisition of a corporate group.

1. Stock Purchase of One Entity

When a business wishes to acquire only one entity it can do so by purchasing shares of only that entity. In such a stock purchase, the corporation continues to exist in its current legal form; only the shareholder and, thus, the ownership, changes. Alternatively, to acquire the company, the purchasing entity may opt to only buy the controlling shares of the targeted entity. In this scenario, one must again focus on the common ownership and control of the foreigner’s employer abroad (“Foreign Employer”) and the US employer to determine whether a qualifying relationship exists. Through the continuous existence of the entity in the same legal forms, the scope of the sale is relevant to determine whether the qualifying relationship is preserved. It is crucial for the Foreign Employer and the US employer of the foreign national to retain common ownership and control when only select entities within a corporate group change ownership due to the sale of stocks. Therefore, if a foreign parent company only sells the stocks of the US subsidiary, the ownership of the US visa-petitioning entity would transfer to the purchaser. However, if the new owners are not the same individuals or group of individuals as the owners of the former Foreign Employer, the transaction would sever the qualifying relationship between the foreign employer and the US petitioning entity. (See Illustration Scenario 6).

176 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04; 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02 (2017).
177 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
178 Id.
179 Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2004 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 897 at *11 (discussing the same required qualifying relationship in an immigrant I-140 application process).
180 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
183 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04; 1-5B FOX & FOX, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02.
184 Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2005 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 45079 at *20-22.
In effect, the foreign employer and the US petitioner are no longer in common ownership or control. An exception to common ownership and control in a stock sale applies when the foreign entity retains partial ownership and control over the US entity. For the foreign entity to retain control it is sufficient to retain fifty percent of the stock and have a veto-power.

A different evaluation may be reached if the parent company is a US entity that later sells the stocks of its foreign entity at which an employee of the US entity was working prior to his relocation. In this case, the sale of the former Foreign Employer will not affect the employee. The different treatment is the result of the privilege for US businesses under the “doing business” element. The privilege allows US entities to transfer unattached foreign employees to their US offices on the L-1 visa category. Because of this privilege, the foreign employee is treated as if he was directly employed abroad by the US entity and, thus, would be eligible to apply for an L-1 Visa despite the former employment relationship with the Foreign Employer.

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186 Id. at 364-65.
189 Id.; 9 FAM 402.12-10(B); Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2014 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 1155, *9-10 (Jan. 16, 2014).
190 9 FAM 402.12-10(B).
Employer. Unattached foreign employees are those employees that the US entity directly employs and are subject to the US employer's control. For this exception to take effect, the US entity must still be "doing business" in at least one other foreign country outside of the US. (See Illustration Scenario 7).

Illustration Scenario 7: Stock purchase by entity with foreign subsidiary and U.S. employment agreement

In some cases, however, USCIS officers have discretion to decide that the dissolution of the foreign employer does not result in ineligibility of the visa holder when a qualifying relationship to another foreign entity exists. This "doing business" privilege exception would not take effect if the foreign employee is a direct employee of the foreign entity seconded to the US with a secondment agreement and the decision of granting a visa follows the wording of "doing business" in the Foreign Affairs Manual. Because of the secondment agreement, the main employment relationship remains

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191 Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 28225 at *23-24; Matter of Thompson, ALB-N-45.
193 A U.S. company, which is doing business as an employer in the United States and in at least one foreign country, can utilize the L classification to transfer to the United States employees abroad who are unattached to a foreign entity. The reverse of this situation, however, is not appropriate. A foreign organization must have, or be in the process of establishing, a legal entity in the United States which is, or will be, doing business as an employer in order to transfer an employee under INA 101(a)(15)(L)." 9 FAM 402.12-10(B), Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 28225 at *23-24., Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2014 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 1155, *9-10.
195 9 FAM 402.12-10(B).
with the Foreign Employer and the employee is subject to its control.\textsuperscript{196} (See Illustration Scenario 8).

The “doing business” privilege approach chosen by the USCIS officers conflicts with other areas of law.\textsuperscript{197} When determining the eligibility of the employee, the decision should regard which entity the employee has his employment relationship at the time of the stock sale based on the contractual employment relationship with the entities. The officers should inquire whether the employee has a local employment agreement with the US entity or is working under the control of a foreign entity through the means of a secondment agreement.\textsuperscript{198} Furthermore, the officers should also review which entity has the responsibility for the employee’s payroll to determine if the employee should be considered a direct foreign employee and not

\textsuperscript{196} 9 FAM 402.12-10(B).

\textsuperscript{197} The attribution of the employee to the U.S. entity would conflict with employment law as the seconding entity abroad is the legal employer and has control over the employee. Areas such as social security law that are related to the employment relationship will also conflict with the attribution of the employee to the U.S. entity. Such a decision also conflicts with accounting standards as the expenses for the employment of the employee are negatively credited to the foreign entity as an expense and not the U.S. employer.

\textsuperscript{198} “A secondment is a type of expatriate assignment in which the employee remains employed by the home country employer, but is loaned to, and renders services for, the host country employer affiliate for some period.” Donald C. Dowling, Jr., \textit{Secondment Agreements for Expatriates}, Thomson Reuters Practical Law, Practice Note 2-523-8982 (last visited Mar. 17, 2018).
a foreign employee attached to the US entity subject to the “doing business” privilege for US businesses.

The employee’s salary is a corporate expense of the employing entity, which, in the case of a secondment, is the foreign entity. The balance sheet lists the employee with said entities and accounts for the employee in its liabilities. The contracting parties consult these balance sheets during negotiations of the sale of an entity.

An example scenario would be the transfer of an employee of a German entity such as BMW Germany to a US subsidiary such as BMW Mini USA. The employee retains an active employment agreement with BMW Germany with a contract addendum assigning him to work for BMW Mini USA in the US (i.e., secondment agreement). The employee still receives his salary from the BMW Germany and, thus, is accounted for in BMW Germany’s bookkeeping. His employment can also only be terminated by BMW Germany and he is subject to the ultimate control of BMW Germany even though he may report to superiors at BMW Mini USA during his secondment to the USA.

As the L-1 visa does not require a local employment contract, it is possible that foreign employees are under the joint control of the foreign entity and the US entity by the means of a secondment agreement. Thus, if the USCIS privilege approach would be maintained, USCIS should implement a second determination, in case of stock sales, before maintaining an L-1 visa. This determination would focus on whether the foreign employees in the US of the sold foreign entity have received a US employment agreement with the petitioner or are working with the US entity based on a secondment agreement.

200 Id.
202 This example is fictional and was developed by the author of this Note.
204 Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. 28225 at *23-24; Matter of Thompson, ALB-N-45; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Servs., AAO Decision, LIN 06 189 52335 at 5 (Nov. 07, 2008).
agreement. The second determination is necessary because the employees would not be under the control of the US employer in a secondment scenario, which would allow the application of the “doing business” privilege for US entities and would, in fact, be a development of employee intracompany assignment to employee leasing from the former Foreign Employer.205

The L-1 intracompany transferee visa was specifically designed to not allow employee leasing based on contractual agreements and would, in this case, circumvent the legislative intent.206 Should a foreign employee of a US parent work in the US, based on an assignment agreement from the sold foreign entity, the employer-employee relationship within the corporate group would no longer exist;207 thus, the qualifying relationship would be destroyed.208 The direct and controlling relationship, which allows for the hiring and firing of the employee, is then with a different corporate group. Because the US entity is not the employee’s contractual employer, nor in a corporate group with the contractual employer, the US entity is excluded from any control over said employee as an employer.209 If the US company, where the employee is sent to under a secondment agreement, would like to take any action against the employee, the company must do so through a contractual relationship with the new corporate group employer, which is comparable to the situation of employee leasing.210 Overall, relying on an officer’s discretionary decision, which may be deemed discretionary abuse, is a very risky approach and should not be relied on to retain human capital.

206 Employee leasing is the temporary use of another employer’s employee force for a service fee. The employment relationship between the employee and his employer remains and the place or company of employment only has a service agreement with the employer. AILA InfoNet Doc. No. 12012560, p. 11.
207 See Illustration Scenario 8.
209 AAO Decision, LIN 06 189 52335 at 5 (Nov. 07, 2008).
210 A different treatment of a stock sale from an immigration perspective is necessary in a de facto merger as the courts treat this like a merger. In this case the foregoing regulations for a merger would be applicable. In essence, the stock purchase would not affect the acquiring entity’s employees, however the purchased entity’s employees may lose their visa eligibility. The exact repercussions depending on each jurisdiction cannot be examined in this article. I-5B Fox & Fox, supra note 87, at III. A., § 5B.02; Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 28225, *9.
2. Group Stock Purchase

A group stock purchase occurs when an entity decides to purchase not only one entity of a corporate group, but also the stocks for all companies of that entire group, such as in the case of the acquisition of the Wella Group by Procter and Gamble.\textsuperscript{211} In an acquisition of the stocks of an entire corporate group, the visas of the employees within the purchased group should survive the acquisition.\textsuperscript{212}

The reason for the survival is the preserved qualifying relationship of the entities.\textsuperscript{213} When an entity purchases both the foreign entity and the US entity’s stocks, the entity remains the same legal person as prior to the acquisition;\textsuperscript{214} only the ownership of the entities shifts.\textsuperscript{215} The difference in the cases of a group stock purchase and a single entity stock purchase is that, in a group stock purchase, the two acquired entities continuously meet the requirement of common ownership and control.\textsuperscript{216} The businesses will also meet the requirement of “doing business” abroad and within the US as they continue to exist in their current legal form.\textsuperscript{217} In the case of a group stock purchase, the previous holder of shares transfers ownership and control to the new holder of the shares. (See Illustration Scenario 9).

\textsuperscript{211} Parija Bhatnagar, \textit{P&G has a good hair day}, CNN Money, (Mar. 18, 2003), http://money.cnn.com/2003/03/18/news/companies/Procter/.
\textsuperscript{212} Immigration Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. 28225 at *23-24; \textit{Matter of Thompson}, ALB-N-45.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Hughes}, 18 I. & N. Dec. at 293; Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 28226, at *11-12.
\textsuperscript{214} 1-5A Fox & Fox, \textit{supra} note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Id.} at 32. 6 (c).
The regulations do not require that the ownership and control remains the same, but solely states:

[A]n alien who within the preceding three years has been employed abroad for one continuous year by a qualifying organization may be admitted temporarily to the United States to be employed by a parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary of that employer in a managerial or executive capacity, or in a position requiring specialized knowledge.218

Thus, one must only have a qualifying relationship between the entities and the same employer. The analysis requires differentiation between the qualifying relationship and the employer. The qualifying relationship is determined by common ownership and control. Ownership and control was common with the prior shareholder and remains common with the new shareholder who acquires ownership and control over both the foreign entity and the US employer.219 The qualifying relationship does not have to be identical as before so long as a qualifying relationship exists for the L-1 visa holder.220 The

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qualifying relationship is closely connected to the qualifying pre-employment as this needs to be within the corporate group.221

The question regarding whether the employee meets the required pre-employment of one year within the last three years can cause confusion.222 This confusion stems from the fact that the legal entity remains the same and, therefore, the contractual partner of the employment relationship remains the same.223 Thus, the business entity is still “that employer” with whom the employee acquired the prior work experience, which qualifies him for the L-1 visa.224 By contrast, in the case of a merger, the legal identity of the absorbed employer changes; thus, the corporation is not the “that [same] employer.”225 The concept of the new legal identity may apply even when a foreign jurisdiction requires the transfer of the employment relationship as the contractual partner is the new legal entity.226

IV. Structuring Mergers and Acquisitions to Maintain L-1 Visas

Corporate transactions have significant impacts, including the loss of employees in the US on L-1 visas; thus, it is apparent that M&As must be well structured to avoid the loss of important human capital.227 Mergers, stock, and asset acquisitions bear substantial risk of losing employees working in the US based on an L-1 visa due to the impact on the requisite qualifying relationship. Thus, the preferable method of structuring a corporate transaction would ensure that the

222 Id.
223 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.04.
225 1-5A FOX & FOX, supra note 45, at I., § 5A.02.
loss of knowledge and expertise is minimized or a plan can be developed to account for the potential loss of knowledge and expertise.

Corporate negotiations and pricing rarely account for employee potential (e.g., in the Research and Development departments), and immigration issues and their impact are disregarded in the structuring of these global transactions. The failure to consider vital immigration issues in these transactions can lead to the loss of knowledge and expertise, which can be detrimental to a corporation. The careful consideration of immigration law and its impact on the human capital of the entity prior to the transaction would enable the selling entity to adjust the immigration status of some employees or create a deal structure that would allow for a contingency plan in the transition phase of a corporate transaction.

The chosen form of a takeover will impact the employee structure. Thus, as the preceding sections have shown, the most advantageous proceeding is the method of stock purchase. This section will provide an analysis and recommendation on how to structure the takeover of a single entity and a group.

A. Preferable Structure of the Acquisition of Only One Entity

Structuring difficulties present themselves with greater complexity when only one entity is acquired in a corporate transaction. Currently, USCIS will adjudicate some L-1 visa cases as surviving in stock sales of a foreign entity, which was the qualifying employer of the foreign national abroad. If the US entity wishes to retain the employees of the sold foreign entity, it is recommended that, prior to the sale of the entity, the foreign employee switches to a US employment contract.228

To sever the ties to the foreign entity, the employee or foreign employer must terminate any possible dormancy agreement229 or contractual agreement with the foreign entity. With this proceeding,

228 Immigration Petition for Alien Worker, 2006 Immig. Rptr. 28225 at *23-24; Matter of Thompson, ALB-N-45.
229 A dormancy agreement is an agreement between the foreign (original) employer of an expatriate and the expatriate to put to rest all rights and duties from the original employment agreement during the time of the assignment and to reactivate this employment agreement upon return from the assignment abroad. Markulf Behrendt, What We Have Been Working On Posting Employees Abroad, ALLEN & OVERY: PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF EMPLOYMENT LAW, Edition 4/2013, at 7.
the foreign employee’s status evolves to a status analogous to the status of a foreign employee of the US entity assigned abroad.230

The application in the extension process would include the explanation that the employee, at the time of working for the foreign entity, was part of the same employer.231 The application must outline that, during that time, the US employer and the foreign employer were under common ownership and control, thus, within the corporate group of the same employer.232 Therefore, the employee was indirectly employed by the US entity.233

At the time of L-1 visa extension of the employee, the employee would be working directly for the US employer and have no more ties to the entity abroad, but still has the requisite foreign qualifying pre-employment.234 Thus, the employee’s situation is comparable to a former direct employee of the US entity abroad “doing business” directly for the US employer.235

Prior direct employment by a foreign entity should not be detrimental to the employee’s eligibility as the foreign entity may have required the direct employment for administrative purposes or local labor law regulations.236 The application must argue that, at the time of the extension filing, the employee is a direct employee of the US entity, unattached to a foreign entity abroad, which is in compliance with the wording of the Foreign Affairs Manual.237

In comparison, if the US entity is acquired, a similar structure of the employment would allow for the retention of the foreign employee under the L-1 visa.238 This would require that the employee’s ties with the foreign entity are severed as outlined in the example above.239 However, in both scenarios it is important that the entities are connected to other foreign businesses.240

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232 See discussion supra Section III.C.1.
233 Id.
235 See discussion supra Section III.C.1.
237 See discussion supra Section III.C.1.
238 Id.
239 See discussion supra Section III.C.2.
240 Id.
On the other hand, some employees may resist to relinquish their ties to their home entity and possible employment law benefits granted by their home country jurisdiction. For the acquiring company on the other hand, these employees’ knowledge may be indispensable in the transitions phase. A possible solution in this context is to structure the acquisition of the entity with initially only fifty percent through a stock purchase with a conditional full acquisition at the time the transition period is completed. An acquisition structure, as just outlined, allows the acquiring company to gain control by the means of veto powers while retaining the qualifying relationship of common ownership and control for the seconding foreign entity and the US entity where the employee is working.

For any visa adjudication process, future corporate changes are not relevant, only the factual basis at the time of the application filing is relevant. A future corporate takeover will not hurt the visa process as it may not be consulted within the adjudication process regardless of any contractual work. Therefore, through the conditional final acquisition, the prolonged time of shared control and ownership allows for a transition period and knowledge transfer from foreign talent to remaining staff. Such a deal structure is the only feasible approach for entities that rely on employee knowledge and expertise, such as start-ups, because—despite the reduced desirability from a business’s perspective—it will allow for an important transition period to retain knowledge or switch employees to another visa type to retain them in the US for a certain amount of time.

B. How to Preferably Structure a Group Acquisition to Maintain L-1 Visas

The most desirable approach in acquiring an entire corporate group or unit, from an immigration law perspective, would be to structure the transaction as a stock purchase. The M&A attorneys

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243 Deloitte M&A Institute, supra note 227, at 61.
245 Id.
247 Id.
248 See discussion supra Section III.C.1.
249 See discussion supra Section III.C.2.
working on the transaction should ensure that a *de facto* merger is avoided\(^{250}\) because, if the stock purchase is considered a *de facto merger*, this would create the undesired immigration effect of a merger and, in turn, the creation of a new legal entity.\(^{251}\)

The advantage of this transactional proceeding is that corporate relationship between the different acquired entities would remain largely the same.\(^{252}\) The only difference would be the change of the person holding ownership and control in common for the acquired entities.\(^{253}\) Thus, the qualifying relationship between the foreigner’s former employer abroad and the US entity would remain preserved despite the two entities not retaining the same owner.\(^{254}\)

Another advantage of this form of acquisition would be that the liabilities of the acquired entity are generally restricted to the entity itself.\(^{255}\) The restricted liability means limiting any prior immigration law violations to the acquired entity as well.\(^{256}\) Should the acquiring entity wish to have the acquired entity to match with its corporate identity, the acquiring entity can achieve this result with a corporate name change. The name change would not impact the qualifying relationship between the entities and easily allows for the amendment of the L-1 visa on the basis of a name change.\(^{257}\) Due to the nature of a stock purchase, the legal personas of the acquired entities remain the same and the foreign national continues to work for the “same employer.”\(^{258}\)

\section{Conclusion}

Corporate restructuring in the international employee context can result in the substantial loss of personnel if the impact of the restructuring remains disregarded prior to the corporate transaction.\(^{259}\) To ensure a minimal loss of human capital, an in-depth analysis of the employee structure is required. If the impact of corporate restructuring

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Id.; 1-5B Fox & Fox, supra note 87, at III. A. at § 5B.02.}\footnote{1-5B Fox & Fox, supra note 87, at III. A. at § 5B.02.}\footnote{See discussion supra Section III.C.2.}\footnote{Id.}\footnote{Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2011 Immig. Rptr. LEXIS 7962 at *4-5.}\footnote{1-5D Fox & Fox, supra note 172, at III. C. at § 5D.01.}\footnote{Id.}\footnote{Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at IV. A. 3. A.}\footnote{Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, 2005 Immig. Rptr.LEXIS 45079 at *20-22.}\footnote{Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at I.}
\end{footnotes}
does not consider the impact on the qualifying relationship of the US and foreign entity, the privileging element of an intracompany transfer or the requisite pre-employment is lost and the employee is no longer eligible for the L-1 visa.260

The most successful approach to structure a corporate acquisition concerning foreign employees in the US on the basis of a L-1 visa is by the means of a stock purchase agreement.261 When only one entity, and not an entire corporate group, is acquired, the stock purchase agreement should be conditional on a certain transitional period. During the transition period, the acquiring company holds fifty percent ownership and control and prior stock holder retains the remaining fifty percent.262 With this process, the entities can obtain control through veto power while retaining foreign talent in the critical transition period.263

However, given these limited opportunities to structure an acquisition, the difficulties arising during the mergers and acquisitions for the entities, and the importance of M&As for the economy, a political reform should be considered to accommodate economic needs in the time of growing international business transitions.

Currently, there are no visa types available that are specifically targeted to accommodate companies in periods of corporate restructuring. Considering the great economic impact that M&As represent, politicians should consider introducing a transition visa for the L-1 Visa (“Transition Visa”) category.264 A Transition Visa could ensure that companies can complete the transition of business and acquired human capital most effectively without delay by creating a transition period. Currently, corporate restructuring can be delayed in its final form solely for the purpose of creating a transition period to prevent loss of human capital.

The introduction of a Transition Visa, which currently is non-existent, would allow Human Resource departments to easily file for this type of visa and could allow the extension of a L-1 visa holder’s stay in the US for up to two years.265 One proposal for the

260 Id. at I. B. f.
261 See discussion supra Section IV.
262 See discussion supra Section VI.A.
263 Id.
264 Hader & Syfert, supra note 28, at I. B.1.f
requirements of a Transition Visa could include the incorporation of the current requirements for an L-1 New Office application.\footnote{266}{8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(M)(3)(v)-(vi) (Lexis Advance through the Mar. 14, 2018).}

The acquiring entity would have to provide a business plan outlining the business strategy after acquiring the entity and how the foreign employee will be retaining his position within the entity.\footnote{267}{8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(M)(3)(v)(C) (Lexis Advance through the Mar. 14, 2018).} The application should also outline why it is important to retain the employee within the US offices based on his executive or specialized knowledge role during the transition period.\footnote{268}{8 C.F.R. § 214.2(l)(ii)(M)(3)(v)-(vi) (Lexis Advance through the Mar. 14, 2018).} The Transition Visa could also include conditions such as the training of at least one US employee in the foreigner’s position during the transition period and providing a training plan prior to filing and a report on the training progress after one year to extend the transition visa for the full two years.

Such a visa would ensure that the economic success of the US business is not jeopardized through the change of corporate structure. If conditions such as training are implemented in the visa requirements this would also strengthen the professional knowledge of US employees and, overall, benefit local staffing. The Transition Visa would also be aligned with the current policy goal of growing US employment by securing the provision of adequate training of local staff to retain the transitory L-1 visa.\footnote{269}{Jeremy Diamond, *Trump Pushes “Buy American, Hire American” policy in Wisconsin*, CNN, (Apr. 18, 2017), https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/17/politics/trump-wisconsin-buy-american/index.html.}

Another possible option would be to remodel the intracompany transferee after the German intracompany transferee regulations. These regulations require proof of a qualifying relationship between the entities, at least university education of the employee, entity’s business abroad, and number of employees hired locally in Germany who are assigned abroad.\footnote{270}{Bundesagentur für Arbeit, *Weisung 201606018 vom 20.06.2016 – Fachliche Weisungen zur Beschäftigungsverordnung*, (June 20, 2016), https://www3.arbeitsagentur.de/web/wcm/idc/groups/public/documents/webdatei/mdaw/mtc2/-/cdisp/egov-content443255.pdf?_ba.sid=EGOV-CONTENT443258, § 10.} The numbers of foreign employees in Germany are limited by the number of German employees going abroad from the German entity.\footnote{271}{Id.} Thus, it is an exact numerical
exchange between the hosting entity and other entities within the corporate network.\textsuperscript{272}

This type of regulation would avoid the dilemma of losing the qualifying pre-employment within the corporate network and would only require proving that the acquiring entity is also hosting employees from the US entity to retain the existing visas.\textsuperscript{273} This policy would also ensure that US employees are benefitting from the intracompany relationship and the local employment market is not disadvantaged through the employment of foreign personnel within the US. The foreign employees would not be replacing local labor, but are solely swapping the location of employment with US colleagues.\textsuperscript{274} The German intracompany transferee concept would also cater to the concerns that the L-1 visa category may be used to substitute US labor with cheaper foreign employees.\textsuperscript{275}

Overall, it is important for the US economy that corporate transactions are well structured to ensure continuous success of the entity and, thus, employment opportunities within the US. Ideally, legislation would adopt new regulations to benefit the US economic interest by facilitating the retention process for L-1 visas in corporate transactions.

\textsuperscript{272} Id.
\textsuperscript{273} Id.
\textsuperscript{274} Bundesagentur für Arbeit, supra note 286.