

DMA Gatekeepers and Individual Career Development: Evidence from LinkedIn and PitchBook *

Ginger Zhe Jin Jorge Klinnert Mario Leccese Liad Wagman

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Abstract

Using mergers and employment data from PitchBook and LinkedIn, respectively, we analyze the post-acquisition careers of 3,610 senior leaders across 2,151 U.S. VC-backed target ventures acquired between January 2000-January 2025. We compare outcomes when leaders work for ventures bought by acquirers designated as so-called gatekeepers under the EU’s Digital Markets Act with those acquired by other large acquisitive firms, and between ventures in gatekeeper-linked sectors versus other sectors. Contrary to regulatory assumptions, we find broadly similar patterns of repeated acquisitions, mobility, and entrepreneurial founding across groups. These findings challenge the DMA’s core premises and underscore the importance of incorporating entrepreneurial ecosystem dynamics into merger policy formulation.

*Jin: University of Maryland, Department of Economics & NBER. Email: jin@econ.umd.edu. Klinnert: University of Maryland, Department of Economics. Email:klinnert@umd.edu. Leccese: Boston University, Questrom School of Business. Email: leccese@bu.edu. Wagman: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Lally School of Management. Email: wagman@rpi.edu. We are grateful to the Mehrotra Institute for Business, Markets, and Society for providing us access to Pitchbook and to the International Center for Law & Economics and our home institutions for financial support. Wagman is an academic affiliate at the International Center for Law & Economics (ICLE). Jin and Wagman worked full-time at the US Federal Trade Commission in 2015-2017 and 2020-2022, respectively. Jin was on academic leave to work full-time at Amazon from 2019 to 2020. Both Jin and Wagman have provided consulting services to a few companies covered by this article. All opinions and errors are our own.

1 Research Question

Effective November 1, 2022, the Digital Markets Act (DMA) regulates large technology platforms that function as digital “gatekeepers” in the European Union (EU). The rationale behind DMA rests on two assumptions: (1) the sectors that feature the large, digital, gatekeeping platforms are fundamentally different from other sectors, and (2) DMA-designated gatekeepers, mostly defined by user size and global revenue, are fundamentally different from other large firms in the same sectors. These assumed differences underpin the EU’s justification for putting in place an additional layer of government regulation and oversight—in the form of the DMA—with the objective of ensuring that firms designated as gatekeepers under the regulation do not stifle innovation or weaken market competition.

Among the various aspects of the DMA, some of which mandate what firms designated as gatekeepers may or may not do, the DMA’s Article 14 requires gatekeepers to inform the European Commission of any intended merger and acquisition (M&A) transaction, even those that would not typically require a merger review under the jurisdiction’s competition law thresholds. In theory, acquisitions made by large firms such as the seven DMA-designated gatekeepers,¹ could have a mixture of effects on the economy: in the short run, M&A deals can have anti- or pro-competitive effects on the relevant markets while the merging parties compete with other existing firms on price, quality, service, and product variety; in the long run, because acquisitions are the most common form of technology-related entrepreneurial “exit,” M&A deals may encourage or discourage founders and key employees of the target firms to found new startups, join other companies, and/or invest in startups. These subsequent activities can, in turn, reshape innovation and competition in and out of the initial market of the focal M&A transaction. While a growing academic literature attempts to identify the short-run competition-related effects of acquisitions in their focal markets (Kamepalli et al., 2020; Eisfeld, 2023; Jin et al., 2023, 2024; Berger et al., 2025; Ederer et al., 2025), there is a need to better understand how the ecosystem of individual career development functions in the long run following an M&A.

In this policy brief, we document some data patterns on how individuals in key leadership positions at a firm that is the target of a tech M&A continue their professional careers after their firm’s acquisition. Since the DMA assumes substantial differences between the sectors with and with these gatekeepers

¹As of this writing, these are Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook/Meta, Microsoft, ByteDance, and Booking.com.

and between DMA-designated gatekeepers and other acquisitive firms in the same sectors, we pay special attention to their respective comparisons as far as the target firm’s personnel career development following the initial acquisition. As our aims are to document data patterns and conduct mean comparisons between groups, none of the findings should be interpreted as causal effects associated with the M&A.

2 Data Sources and Sample Construction

We combine venture investment and M&A data recorded by PitchBook with individual career development data reported in LinkedIn.

In particular, we clean and organize the PitchBook data into two datasets: one at the deal level and the other at the company level. To construct company-level data, we focus on ventures headquartered in the U.S. and use identifiers such as LinkedIn company URLs and stock tickers to facilitate merging with other datasets. Because PitchBook focuses on ventures that receive investment from venture capitalists (VC), angels, and other external investors, the company-level data are more likely to cover VC-funded firms than firms that rely on self-financing or bank loans. To construct the deal-level data, we restrict attention to majority-control transactions on or after 2000. We focus on transactions involving target firms headquartered in the U.S. and associate each deal with a unique acquirer. In the raw Pitchbook data, most majority-control M&A deals involve a single acquirer; in the rare cases of multiple acquirers, we apply a systematic hierarchy that prioritizes operating firms over financial investors, publicly-listed firms over private firms, and older firms when otherwise indistinguishable. By definition, the deal-level data is much smaller than the company-level data because only a small percentage of firms covered by Pitchbook were acquired between January 2000 and January 2025.

For the LinkedIn data, we focus on professionals based in the U.S. with career histories that include leadership roles. We identify leadership roles through a combination of keyword filters on job titles (e.g., founder, co-founder, owner, entrepreneur, CEO, investor, president, or board member) and a LinkedIn-provided seniority score ranging from entry-level to top management. We extend our analysis of leadership roles beyond founders and cofounders, as individuals in other senior positions often possess voting rights on whether and how to sell the target firm, and may hold substantial financial interests in the M&A transaction. To limit noise from self-reported titles, we exclude profiles where the

highest position falls into the lowest seniority categories, and apply stricter filters to mid-level roles unless paired with leadership-specific keywords. From these curated profiles, we construct an individual-level panel by tracking the start and end dates of each reported job position. Employers are matched to the cleaned PitchBook company-level dataset primarily through LinkedIn company URLs or, when unavailable, stock tickers. Finally, we link the individual-level panel data to the cleaned deal-level data from PitchBook using firm identifiers and M&A transaction dates.

Overall, the above process yields 519,922 observations at the individual-job level, covering 3,997 unique individuals, 2,438 unique majority M&A deals, and 2,378 unique target firms. The count of deals is slightly higher because a firm can be acquired multiple times in our sample period.

3 Main Findings

In this section, we first report the extent to which individuals experience subsequent acquisitions after they experience an initial acquisition as key personnel of a target firm. We then zoom into the individuals' career mobility in terms of whether they move to a different company after each acquisition and the subsequent roles they have.

3.1 Frequency of Acquisition Experience

Column 1 of Table 1 summarizes our full sample by unique individuals (Panel A), M&A deals (Panel B), and unique target firms in these deals (Panel C). To follow the key personnel of a target firm since its M&A, we restrict the panel to individuals who held leadership positions in target firms as of the time when they experienced their first majority acquisition. As shown in Panel A, 3,610 of the 3,997 sampled individuals (90.31%) satisfy this criterion. Throughout the paper, we will refer to these 3,610 individuals as our "focal leaders" and focus on tracking their subsequent careers.

Panel B summarizes the deal value of our focal leaders' first M&A, and Panel C summarizes the attributes of the target firms in these M&A deals. The total count of these deals and targets (2,151) is fewer than the total count in the full sample (2,438 and 2,378), because we limit Panel B and Panel C to the initial deals in the career of our 3,610 focal leaders. To facilitate comparison, we classify both Panel B and Panel C by whether the target operates in a sector where any DMA-designated gatekeepers run their core business. In particular, we define a target firm as belonging to a gatekeeper-linked sector (GS)

if it shares the same 2-digit NAICS code (recorded by PitchBook) with any of the seven gatekeepers (namely 33, 45, 51, 54, and 56). In total, 776 (21.5%) of our 3,610 focal leaders experienced their first acquisition in a GS, while the remaining 78.5% had this experience in a non-gatekeeper-linked sector (NGS). Column 2 focuses on the deals and targets in GS; Column 3 focuses on the deals and targets in NGS. As Column 4 indicates, almost all deal attributes or target attributes have missing values; hence, we report their summary statistics conditional on non-missing values.

Table 1. Summary by Target Firms in Gatekeeper-linked Sectors (GS) and Non-Gatekeeper-linked Sectors (NGS)

	All	Targets in Gatekeeper- linked Sectors (GS)	Targets in Non-Gatekeeper- linked Sectors (NGS)	# of observations with missing values
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Individuals				
# Individuals	3997	880	3117	
# Focal leaders	3610	776	2834	
# Focal leaders with multiple acquisitions	482	105	377	
% Focal leaders with multiple acquisitions	13.35%	13.53%	13.30%	
Panel B: First M&A Deals of Focal Leaders				
# Deals		454	1697	
Deal size , mean (million USD)		982	1242	1183
Deal size, median (million USD)		106	111	1183
Panel C: Target Firms in the First M&A Deals				
# Firms		454	1697	
Employees, mean		1453	711	504
Employees, median		86	51	504
Revenue, mean (million USD)		689	666	1376
Revenue, median (million USD)		65	36	1376
Firm valuation prior to M&A, mean (million USD)		3903	4578	1986
Firm valuation prior to M&A, median (million USD)		285	333	1986
Total raised, mean (million USD)		134	170	252
Total raised, median (million USD)		27	16	252
Age, mean (year)		11	9	46
Age, median (year)		8	7	46

Notes: This table summarizes characteristics of individuals, firms, and deals in the first majority acquisitions of the individual between 2000 and 2025. Panel A reports the number of individuals linked to acquisitions, the subset holding leadership positions at the time of the initial acquisition in their career (“focal leaders”), and then the number participating in multiple acquisitions within the group of focal leaders. Panel B reports the number of the first M&A deals of the focal leaders and the deal size (in millions of dollars). Panel B presents firm-level characteristics in these initial M&A deals, including counts of target firms and measures of size—employees, revenues (in millions of dollars), firm valuation prior to acquisition (market capitalization plus debt, in millions of dollars), total capital raised (in millions of dollars), and age (in years). Column (2) corresponds to targets in gatekeeper-linked sectors (GS), column (3) to targets in non-gatekeeper-linked sectors (NGS), and column (4) to missing values in each row.

Comparing these M&A deals and target firms between GS and NGS, Table 1 suggests that most GS and NGS targets were less than 10 years old at the time of their acquisition, but on average, GS deals are

smaller in deal size, GS targets are slightly older, have similar revenues, smaller in total dollars raised and in venture valuation as of the last round of fundraising before their acquisition, and are larger in employment size at the time of M&A.

Among the 3,610 focal leaders who held a leadership role in the target firm when they experienced the first acquisition in their career, 482 (13.35%) went through a second acquisition afterwards, 70 (1.94%) experienced a third, 14 (0.39%) experienced a fourth, and 4 (0.11%) experienced a fifth. More interestingly, those that experienced their first acquisition in a GS target have almost the same probability to experience other acquisitions after that initial M&A (13.53% in GS vs. 13.30% in NGS). That is, in our sample, which focuses on the repeated experiences of acquisitions within a leader's career, repeated acquisitions are not disproportionately concentrated in gatekeeper-linked sectors. To the extent that acquisitions are a successful exit for startup entrepreneurs, gatekeeper-linked sectors are not necessarily more conducive to repeated acquisitions. We summarize this finding as follows:

Fact 1: In our sample, leaders who experience an acquisition of their firm for the first time in sectors linked or not linked to any DMA-designated gatekeepers have a similar probability of experiencing subsequent acquisitions in their careers.

To mitigate concerns arising from the presumed difference between DMA-designated gatekeepers and other large firms that are active in M&A and mainly operate in the same sectors as any gatekeepers, we define a group of “top 10 comparables.” Specifically, we first use Compustat to identify the top one percent of publicly-listed firms operating in one of the gatekeepers' 2-digit NAICS code (33, 45, 51, 54, and 56) by their average market value between 1990 and 2023. We then match these firms to our panel and select the 10 non-gatekeeper firms that have the largest number of observed acquisitions between January 2000 and January 2025. Ranked by average market value from high to low, these top 10 comparable firms are IBM, Cisco Systems, Broadcom, T-Mobile, Verizon Communications, Intel, Medtronic, Walt Disney, General Motors, and Comcast.

Comparing firms designated as gatekeepers with these Top 10, Table 2 shows that the seven gatekeeper firms have 119 acquisitions classified as the first acquisition of our focal leaders, whereas the Top 10 group of firms has 88 acquisitions. While these deals only reflect a fraction of all acquisitions made by gatekeepers or Top 10 (because Pitchbook tends to focus on VC-funded ventures but acquirers can acquire non-VC-funded firms), their comparison suggests that deals per firm are higher among

Table 2. Summary Statistics by Gatekeepers and Top 10 Comparable Firms

	First acquirer= Gatekeepers (1)	First acquirer= Top 10 (2)	# of observations with missing values (3)
<i>Panel A: Individuals</i>			
# Individuals	341	236	
# Focal leaders	291	200	
# Focal leaders with multiple acquisitions	44	32	
% Focal leaders with multiple acquisitions	15.12%	16.00%	
<i>Panel B: First M&A Deals of Focal Leaders</i>			
# Deals	117	85	
Deal size, mean	3385	4215	107
Deal size, median	300	539	107
<i>Panel C: Target Firms in the First M&A Deals</i>			
# Firms	117	85	
Employees, mean	2144	1799	52
Employees, median	40	73	52
Revenue, mean (million USD)	4483	1342	137
Revenue, median (million USD)	183	156	137
Firm valuation prior to M&A, mean (million USD)	17120	13069	185
Firm valuation prior to M&A, median (million USD)	4586	3103	185
Total raised, mean (million USD)	166	582	22
Total raised, median (million USD)	13	30	22
Age, mean (year)	6	9	5
Age, median (year)	5	7	5

Notes: This table summarizes characteristics of individuals, firms, and deals in the first majority acquisitions of the individual between 2000 and 2025. Panel A reports the number of individuals linked to acquisitions, the subset holding leadership positions at the time of an acquisition, and then the number participating in multiple acquisitions. Panel B presents firm-level characteristics, including counts of firms and measures of size—employees, revenues (in millions of dollars), firm value (market capitalization plus debt, in millions of dollars), total capital raised (in millions of dollars), and age (in years). For each size measure, the number of missing observations (out of 202) is shown in column (3). Panel C reports the number of deals and the deal size (in millions of dollars). Column (1) corresponds to Gatekeeper firms, column (2) to non-Gatekeeper firms, and column (3) to missing values.

the gatekeeper firms than Top 10, which supports the assumption that gatekeeper-designated firms are more acquisitive.

Compared to the top 10 comparables, in our sample, gatekeeper deals are smaller in deal value, and, on average, gatekeeper targets tend to be younger, more diverse in employment size, larger in revenue as well as in venture valuation, but not necessarily larger in dollars raised as of the time of their acquisition. This is consistent with [Jin et al. \(2023\)](#), who used a larger M&A dataset (by S&P Global Intelligence, including targets with and without VC-funding) to show that Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Apple, Meta/Facebook and Microsoft (or GAFAM) completed more tech acquisitions per firm than other groups of top acquirers, and acquired younger firms on average. It should be noted that Table 2

compares deals and targets by acquirer groups, not by the sectors to which the targets belong. Because gatekeepers and Top 10 comparable firms can acquire targets in and out of their own two-digit NAICS sectors, observations classified in the gatekeeper or Top 10 column of Table 2 are not necessarily a subset of the GS column in Table 1, although by definition gatekeepers and Top 10 comparable firms belong to GS themselves.

For both acquirer groups, the percentage of focal leaders experiencing other acquisitions after the initial acquisition—15.12% for gatekeepers and 16.00% for Top 10 firms—is higher than the average of targets in GS (13.53% in Table 1 Column 2) or NGS (13.30% in Table 1 Column 3), but these numbers do not differ significantly from each other. This suggests that startup acquisition dynamics may be moderately but not significantly more salient when the initial acquirer is large, irrespective of whether the acquirer falls under the DMA’s gatekeeper definition. In theory, being acquired by a large firm may send a positive signal to the market about the entrepreneur’s ability, and entrepreneurs perceived by investors as highly capable are more likely to succeed in founding, managing, and selling their subsequent venture. It is also possible that entrepreneurs from target firms acquired by a larger acquirer tend to accumulate more expertise and broaden their networks, which in turn helps them succeed in subsequent entrepreneurial pursuits. However, these theories, while plausible, do not lead to a statistical difference in the likelihood of being acquired after experiencing an initial acquisition. We summarize our second finding as:

Fact 2: In our sample, the pattern of repeated acquisitions in a focal leader’s career is similar when the initial acquirer is a gatekeeper or a Top 10 acquirer in the same 2-digit NAICS sectors as the gatekeepers.

3.2 Career Mobility Post Acquisition

To explore how the key personnel of a target firm continue their careers after their initial experience of being acquired, we classify a focal leader as a non-mover if their affiliation with the target firm is the last professional activity reported in their LinkedIn profile. This may occur if the individual stays with the target firm, joins the acquirer, retires, or chooses not to update their profile. In contrast, the focal leader can move to another firm as a founder, play a non-founder leadership role in that firm (e.g., investor, president, CEO, or board member), or take on a non-leadership role. After the individual

moves, the firm to which they move may be acquired. If that takes place, the individual can again be a mover or a non-mover.

Table 3. Job Outcomes by Number of Acquisitions Experienced

	% Non-Movers	% Movers	Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Acq. 1	82.5	17.4	3610
Acq. 2	83.6	16.3	482
Acq. 3	80.0	20.0	70
Acq. 4	71.4	28.5	14
Acq. 5	100.0	0.0	4

Notes: This table reports the distribution of worker job outcomes by the number of acquisitions experienced at their employer. Column (1) shows the percentage of workers who remain in the same position (non-movers), column (2) shows the percentage who transition to a different job (movers), and column (3) reports the total number of individuals in each acquisition group. Each row corresponds to the sequence number of acquisitions experienced, from the first (Acq. 1) to the fifth (Acq. 5).

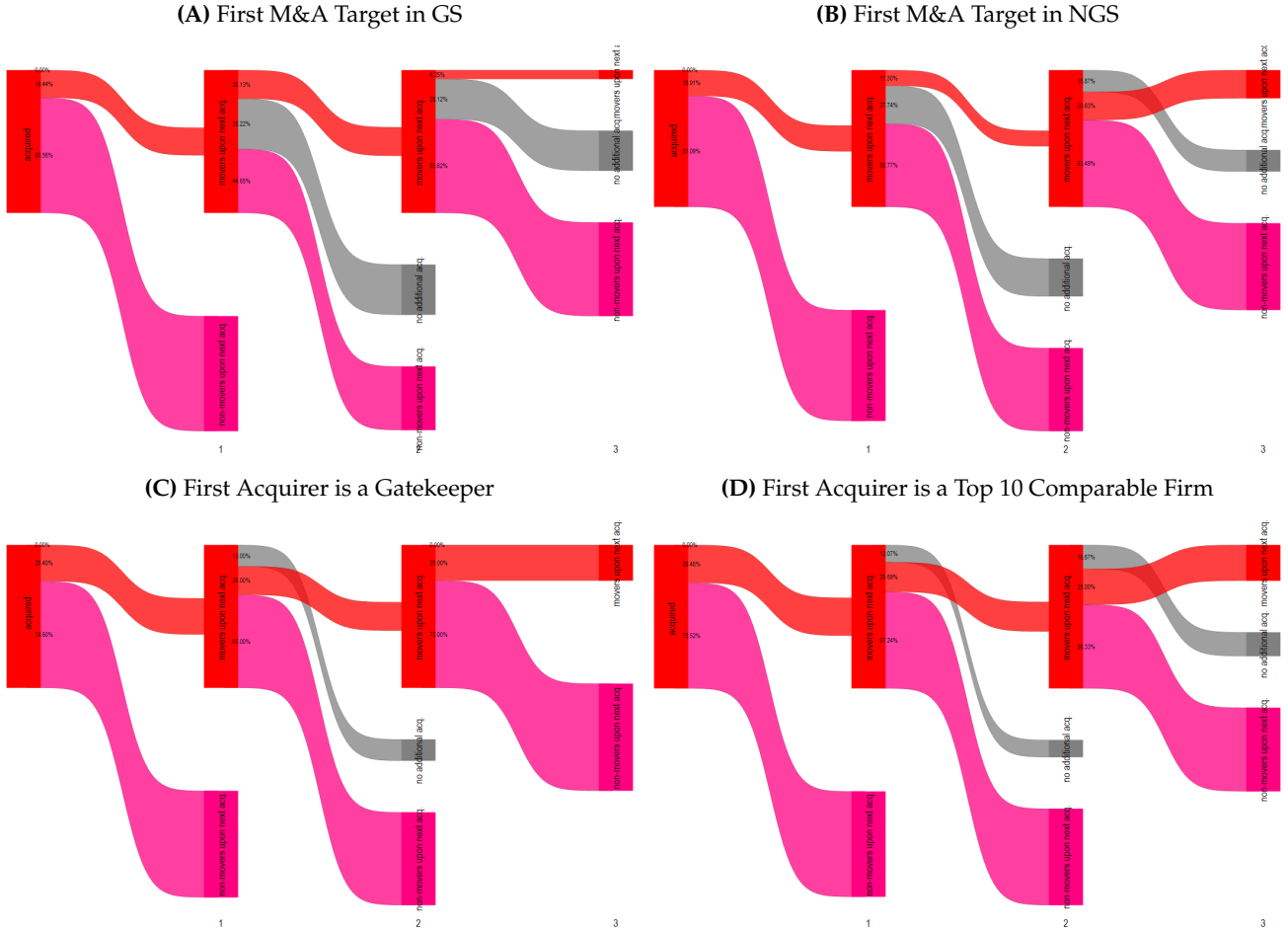
According to Table 3, after the first acquisition, 629 (17.4%) of the 3,610 focal leaders choose to move after first experiencing their firm being acquired. Conditional on the 482 movers that experience a second acquisition, 79 (16.3%) choose to move again. The percentage of movers is somewhat higher upon the third or fourth acquisition (20% and 28.5%), but the sample becomes very small.

Figure 1 plots the patterns of movers and non-movers upon the first, second, and third acquisition in a focal leader's career, as well as the probability of experiencing a subsequent acquisition episode if an individual moves. We omit the fourth and fifth acquisitions due to the small sample size. For comparison, we plot the Sankey graph by whether the initial acquisition is in a GS or NGS sector and by whether the initial acquirer is a gatekeeper or a Top 10 comparable firm as previously defined.

In particular, conditional on an individual having moved from the target firm in which they experienced an acquisition, there are three possible outcomes: not experiencing any subsequent acquisition (gray), experiencing the next acquisition and then moving (red), and experiencing the next acquisition but not moving (pink). Because we track focal leaders since their first acquisition experience, there is no gray outcome in the first round (everyone had acquisition #1), but all three outcomes are possible in the second and third rounds.

If we track the part of the Sankey graph from the first to the second acquisition, focal leaders that started their acquisition experience in GS have a lower probability of encountering their second acquisition than their counterparts that started from a NGS target (1-35.22%=64.78% in GS vs. 1-27.74%=72.26%

Figure 1. Career Mobility Outcomes of Focal Leaders



Notes: The dynamic Sankey graph plots the distribution of focal leaders by whether they experience subsequent acquisition. If the answer is no, we color the fraction as gray and label it as “no additional acquisition.” If they do experience the next acquisition, we use the color red to indicate the fraction that moves to another company after that acquisition (labeled as “movers upon next acquisition”) and the color pink to indicate the fraction that remains or retires with the acquiring company (labeled as “non-movers upon next acquisition”).

in NGS). But upon the second acquisition, those with the first acquisition in GS have a higher probability of moving on to another company ($20.13\% / (20.13\% + 44.65\%) = 31.07\%$) than those with the first acquisition in NGS ($11.50\% / (11.50\% + 60.77\%) = 15.91\%$, statistically different with 99% confidence). This suggests that gatekeeper-linked sectors have a lower retention rate and thus a more dynamic culture of job turnover upon the second acquisition than other sectors. However, if we repeat the exercise from the second to the third acquisition, the pattern is reversed (8.67% moving on to another company if the focal leader’s first M&A is in GS vs. 24.73% if the focal leader’s first M&A is in NGS), and not statistically different with 95% confidence due to the small sample size.

In comparison, the Sankey graphs following the initial targets acquired by gatekeepers and the Top 10 comparable firms are rather similar, and neither are statistically different from those focal leaders that experienced their initial M&A in GS or non-GS. We summarize our third finding as follow:

Fact 3: In our sample, the probability of moving on to another company after a focal leader experienced the first, second or third acquisition does not reliably depend on whether their initial acquisition experience was in a gatekeeper-linked sector or not. This probability is also similar when their initial acquirer is a DMA-designated gatekeeper or a Top 10 comparable firm.

Table 4. Job Outcomes by Number of Acquisitions Experienced

	Non-leader (1)	Non-Founder Leader (2)	Founder Leader (3)	% Founder if leader (4)
<i>Panel A: All</i>				
Movers after Acquisition 1	57	370	202	35.31%
Movers after Acquisition 2	6	51	22	30.14%
Movers after Acquisition 3	4	6	4	40.00%
<i>Panel B: First M&A Target in GS</i>				
Movers after Acquisition 1	13	90	56	40.41%
Movers after Acquisition 2	3	14	15	51.72%
Movers after Acquisition 3	0	1	1	50.00%
<i>Panel C: First M&A Target in NGS</i>				
Movers after Acquisition 1	52	321	175	35.28%
Movers after Acquisition 2	4	45	14	23.73%
Movers after Acquisition 3	3	7	3	33.33%
<i>Panel D: First Acquirer = Gatekeeper</i>				
Movers after Acquisition 1	17	35	28	44.44%
Movers after Acquisition 2	1	10	5	33.33%
Movers after Acquisition 3	1	1	2	66.67%
<i>Panel E: First Acquirer = Top-10 Comparable</i>				
Movers after Acquisition 1	8	34	16	32.00%
Movers after Acquisition 2	1	9	2	18.18%
Movers after Acquisition 3	0	1	2	66.67%

Notes: This table reports the number of individuals transitioning after an acquisition, broken down by whether they assume non-leader, leader, or founder positions. Results are shown separately for all firms, tech and non-tech firms, gatekeepers, and the top 10 firms.

Conditional on those who move upon the first, second, or third acquisition, Table 4 reports the type of job titles they subsequently have. Because we start with the 3,610 individuals that already held a

leadership position when they first experienced their firm being acquired, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of movers take a leadership position in the company to which they moved, independent of whether they initially came from a GS or NGS target firm, and of whether the initial acquirer is a gatekeeper or a Top 10 comparable firm.

More difference is observed in terms of whether individuals who move to a leadership position of another company take on a founder role in that company. In particular, comparing those with initial M&A experience in GS versus NGS, the percentage of individuals subsequently taking on a founder role is somewhat higher in GS vs. NGS, for movers after the first, second, and third acquisitions. However, the sample size is too small for any statistical significance.

The comparison between gatekeeper and Top 10 firms is similar: while the percentage of founders is higher in absolute magnitude after the first or second round of acquisition if the acquirer of the initial target is a gatekeeper firm rather than a Top 10 comparable firm, their difference is not statistically meaningful, probably because the sample size is too small. Summarizing, we have the following:

Fact 4: In our sample, the probability of a focal leader taking a founder role after they move upon the first, second, or third acquisition is statistically similar regardless of whether their initial acquisition experience was in a gatekeeper-linked sector or not, and regardless of whether their initial acquirer is a DMA-designated gatekeeper or a Top 10 comparable firm.

4 Summary of Key Findings and Potential Implications for DMA

To better understand the ecosystem of entrepreneurial leaders' career development following M&A events, we focus on 3,610 focal leaders who held leadership positions in target firms when they experienced their first (majority control) acquisition in their careers. In contrast to underlying assumptions that the sectors that the (currently seven) DMA-designated gatekeepers, belonging to gatekeeper-linked sectors are different from non-gatekeeper-linked sectors, and that these gatekeepers are different from other large, acquisitive firms in the same sectors, we find that the focal leaders demonstrate statistically similar experiences of subsequent career mobility and acquisitions across these comparisons. These findings challenge the key assumptions underlying the DMA and similar legislative efforts elsewhere, including in the United States. They further suggest that, if larger and more acquisitive firms merit

an added layer of oversight in merger reviews, one may need a more systematic way to identify large acquirers for such regulatory attention, above and beyond the few sectors linked with the two-digit NAICS codes covering the current DMA-designated gatekeepers, to encompass other large acquisitive firms operating in the same sectors as these gatekeepers.

Despite the similarity across the forementioned two sets of comparison groups, our overall sample of focal leaders reveals a fair amount of dynamics in their individual career development. Roughly 13% of the focal leaders experience subsequent acquisitions following their initial experience of having their firm acquired. This is driven by roughly 19% of focal leaders moving on to another company after first being acquired, and most of these movers experience a second acquisition. Naturally, the vast majority of the focal leaders in our sample who choose to move upon an acquisition event continue to hold leadership positions in the company to which they move, and a non-trivial fraction of them end up founding new companies. These dynamics highlight the importance of career mobility and entrepreneurship in an ecosystem where acquisition has become the most common form of entrepreneurial “exit.” In this sense, the added layer of regulatory oversight imposed on relevant sectors or relevant acquirers—in the form of more reporting responsibilities of merging parties or a closer look in merger reviews—should incorporate the potential effects of such oversight on the ecosystem dynamics and career development of focal leaders.

Several data caveats are worth highlighting. First, Pitchbook focuses more on VC-funded ventures, and therefore may not capture ventures that do not rely on VC or other external investors. As a result, our sample size tends to be small, especially after we follow the focal leaders beyond their subsequent experiences of initially being acquired. In addition, we rely on self-reported job titles in LinkedIn profiles. To the extent that some individuals may not own or maintain a LinkedIn profile, or may not use leadership titles in our keyword list, even if they played a leadership role in their initial M&A deal, we may miss them as a focal leader. Some statistical similarities we observe in the current sample may be due to the small sample size attributable to these data limitations. Finally, we organize our data cleaning around M&A events, not counting initial public offering (IPO) as another possible form of entrepreneurial exit. While acquisition is much more common than IPOs in venture exits, it is possible that the initial acquisition provides substantial cash to the founders and key employees of the initial target, which in turn offers them—either as a future founder or an employee-investor—a longer time horizon

for an IPO with a subsequent venture. Future research is warranted in this direction.

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