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**Title of the Paper:**

Rapid Ramp Up - In the IT Context - PML as the Key Ingredient

**Theme:**

Project Management Leadership > In a Rapidly Changing World

**Keywords:**

Rapid Ramp Up, Project Management Leadership, Requirements

**Abstract:**

Changing business needs and the increased focus on skilled demand needs for complex projects coupled with the nature of skilled supply availability bring in unique challenges for fast paced ramp up needs. Within the IT sector, while focus continues on automation and AI, there is also a parallel business requirement of quick ramp up needs.

For one of the requirements, the team managed to align close to 1500 people in a period of around 9 months.

The paper presents a view into the grind, complexity and success factors within the journey. The paper also covers the multiple aspects which were involved:

- Internal alignment and buy in from stakeholders.
- Redefining the approach
- Joint partnership with the client teams
- Team complexity

Enroute delivery program management leadership played a very critical role to enable and support the dynamics. There was an emphasis on small quick wins along the journey to make it possible. The paper also highlights the importance of automation and innovation for the success of this journey and enables the tips and tricks around managing such quick ramp ups and enable repeatable success possibilities.

**Intent:**

In the changing context of the client specifics in the IT industry, managing a steep ramp up involves a lot of involvement in terms of Project Management leadership. The success is only by virtue of a collaborative alignment, not just internal to the organization across multiple groups but also in collaboration with the customer. The key take away is the approach that can be taken and how the challenges need to be surmounted to make this rapid and massive ramp up a reality.

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## Introduction

The nature of IT business continues to evolve for the Indian IT industry. From times of teams working closely at client site, to the Global Delivery Model to the captive concept, the evolution has come a full circle and at a pace which was not imaginable a couple of years ago. Thereby, the external environment for all enterprises is rapidly changing. [3]

The IT industry had the concept of a pyramid structure of teams for projects being directly run but with the growing maturity of the industry there is a more and more focus and demand for experienced team members who can work directly with the client on the client projects, specifically so in the captive world. The IT services industry thereby becomes an extension of the client teams in their entirety.

In parallel, the people specific aspects continue to be with the services industry. Like any other model, this has its own sets of positives and areas which need additional thought leadership within the industry.

Amidst this changing landscape, fulfilling the requirements of the client brings its unique set of challenges which warrant an innovative implementation approach, involving leadership at all levels, both for the client and the partner.

For one of the clients, we envisaged a very quick paced large volume ramp up. This was one of the fastest ramp ups ever experienced. The paper tries to share the journey and the events that made it a success inspite of multiple challenges.

## Key challenges

In this overall journey, requirements typically came in individually or as a set of openings. Over the last one year, close to 1500+ folks went through the process cycle to be a part of the journey. Each of the stages had its own set of innovative challenges, and positively each of the stage also paved the way to do it differently. This happened across various groups and various stakeholders.

Each stage in the lifecycle had its own set of challenges and strong leadership focus and involvement both in terms of strategy and in terms of execution was a key to the success.

Typical Process Stage	Summary of Challenges
<b>Sharing a request for an opening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Request from multiple stakeholders to multiple stakeholders</li><li>- Missing consolidated view of active requirements</li><li>- System report being obsolete</li></ul>
<b>Identifying the required candidate with matching skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Job description having varied set of skillsets</li><li>- Identifying the closest match</li><li>- Prioritizing one candidate alignment to the other</li></ul>

Typical Process Stage	Summary of Challenges
<b>Interview and clearance of the candidate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Setting up of the interviews</li> <li>- Keeping run-time track of the status</li> <li>- Quick closure of interview results</li> <li>- Varying expectations which is people dependent</li> </ul>
<b>Completion of mandatory pre-onboarding requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Background verification</li> <li>- Documentation details</li> <li>- Readiness of folks</li> </ul>
<b>Actual onboarding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Client specific onboarding process timelines of upto two weeks</li> <li>- Internal focus on utilizations and business needs</li> </ul>

Table 1 Challenges within ramp up stages (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

## The Ramp Up Cycle (Surmounting the challenges)

Ramp up is a term used in economics and business to describe an increase in firm production ahead of anticipated increases in product demand [2]

There are various project management models that are typically discussed in the IT world. These could be in the realm of managed services, consulting assignments, customer managed projects aligned to selection of candidates. The specific area where this paper delves deeper into is the customer managed projects aligned to selection of candidates.

The Typical Process Stages:

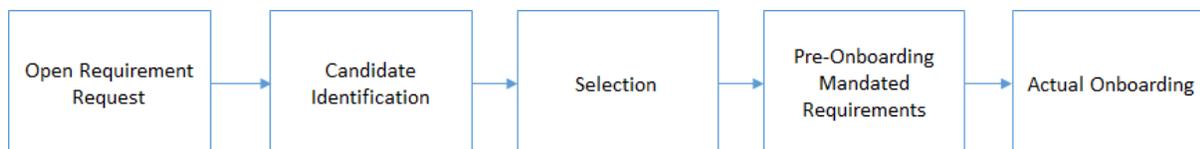


Figure 1 Process Stages for Ramp Up (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

## Sharing a request for an opening (Open Requirement Request)

- The first step in the overall process was the need for a specific skill set. This came in from various sources, either via discussions in person, via emails or via a centralized requirement roster. Spearheaded by a *leadership* team which was working in close collaboration with the client to understand each of these requirements, this became the focal point for the ramp up approach and plan. Also crucial was regular governance and reporting around the same across the leadership landscape.
- In addition, the ramp up requirements in a client location were different in comparison to the ramp up requirements in the company premises. This had challenges specific to people (hesitant to operate out of client location) and also in the overall cycle time (set up of access

for specific folks while ramping up in company premises). Upfront discussion with the client on location flexibility and options definitely helped.

**Tip:** Validate and understand the requirements in discussions

**Trick:** Packetize the requirement by area/stakeholder/skillset

## Identifying the required candidate with matching skills

- Across organizations, the concept of demand and supply remains the same. This is driven by business imperatives of profit and market dynamics, along with the strategy. Once a requirement was identified – the next step invariably was to identify a candidate with matching skillset. Speed was of utmost essence as this was directly linked to business needs on both sides. All possible sources from the IT industry view point needed to be explored. Leadership sponsorship to utilize all available resources once again played a very crucial role.

Inhouse Readily Available Pool	Planned future availability from existing projects
Recruitment from the market	Sub-contraction

*Figure 2 Supply Sources (Source: Internal Program Experiences)*

- In the process of having the discussions with the customer, it was also critical to break down the requirement into “Mandatory skills” and “Nice to have skills”. The identification was around 80% match of requirements and training was leveraged to bridge the remaining. This helped potentially reduce the lead time for resource identification.
- In-house tools related to skill database for employees played a very important role in identifying the candidates. An internal application specific to employee career helped employees across the organization apply for internal opportunities towards fulfilment of the requirement, meeting the needs of both the employee and the client projects.

**Tip:** Analyze the skill set pattern to forecast and plan

**Trick:** Enable cross training

## Selection of the candidate

- There are three kinds of models which had to be used for selection of the candidate

Type of Model	Cycle Time	Stakeholder Effort Involvement	Partnership Maturity
<b>Interview Based</b>	High	Extremely High	Low
<b>Non Interview Based</b>	Low	Extremely Low	High
<b>Combination</b>	Medium	High in the initial selections and then Low	Medium

Table 2 Staffing Interview Model (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

In the most optimal path, depending on the nature of work, one of these options were chosen, each with their own set of pros and cons for the client and the vendor partner. Depending on the availability of the interviewers and the availability of the candidate, this stage in the process added to the cycle time. Thereby making it optimal was the key to the success. *Leadership involvement* came in to manage stakeholders to set a plan in place to limit the interviews and reduce the number of cycles in the interview, and at the same time taking ownership of any associated risks.

- The candidates also internally went through “successful client interview” programs. For rapid ramp ups, this enabled the teams to be confident in their approach and close in on the interviews successfully in a short span of time. Additionally, mock interviews and enhancing skills using Question Bank added to the conversion. The aim was to go back and refresh the basics in preparation of an interview, like any other external readiness.

**Tip: Parallel Evaluation for the candidate across requirements**

**Trick: Ensure to focus on FIFO**

## Completion of mandatory pre-onboarding requirements

- This had been the most critical phases of the cycle along with the onboarding stage. For the specific ramp ups, there were multiple requirements which were mandatory before a selected candidate could come onboard. These included two stages of mandatory requirements.
  - Specific to the financial services like background verifications
  - Client specific onboarding process.
- The cycle time for background verification could vary from 2 weeks to 4 weeks depending on the details. *Leadership* strategy to effectively reduce this cycle time played a crucial role.
- Client specific onboarding process involved data submission in specific format, and also employee specific checks, again requiring associated documentation. Any error in any of the documentation added extensively to the cycle time.

This was optimized in discussions with the client, changing the process from a weekly process to a daily process, resulting in a faster turnaround.

**Tip:** Ensure an internal review mechanism to eliminate any errors

**Trick:** Trigger BGV at interview initialization

## Actual onboarding

- In this specific context, the client had their own set of onboarding life cycle. This had an initial cycle time of 1 week to 1.5 weeks depending on the location of the onboarding. Coupled with this, folks could only join in one day in a week. This also involved exchange of multiple data elements and documents for validations and implementations.

This was one area which required strategic discussions and decisions from leadership, to change the approach and reduce the cycle time. Each day was a crucial factor in the business and go-to-market context. The joint partnership not only increased this cycle time to 3 days in a week, but also reduced the overall cycle time to around 4 days.

**Tip:** Fast Track Model in collaboration

**Trick:** Utilities (automation) to plan for data elements and documents

Each of these stages was given the sample planning and execution treatment that is given to a full-fledged project. The question was –

“Can we focus on small individual components which in turn can ensure a smooth and successful project implementation?” – [1]

## Methodology/process followed

In summary, the team took a four step **PACT** (**P**rocess, **A**utomation, **C**lient Collaboration, **T**eam Collaboration and Enablement) methodology to manage the steep ramp up in the numbers anticipated for joining. For each

### Process Definition and Streamlining

- Define the process flow for the possible stages in the cycle
- Documentation and ready access of the process steps for all
- Optimize and simplification of the process

### Automation and Portal Usage (B-POD)

- Use of in-built tools, available systems to cater to the various needs
- Move away from emails and excel based tracking to SharePoint based lists
- Simple macros towards validations
- Use of customized portal for tracking specific aspects
- Utility to enable quick data checks

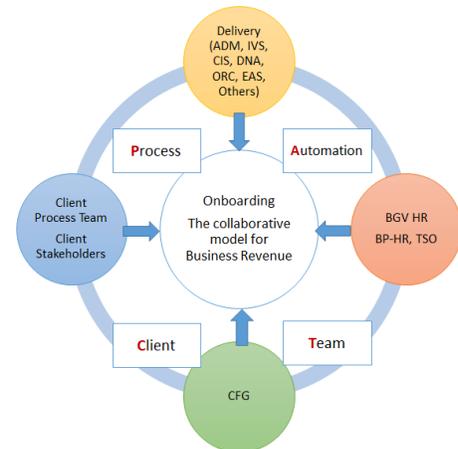


Figure 3 Collaborative Approach (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

### Client collaboration

- Resolve issues with the client, reduced cycle time for client specific process
- Brainstorming sessions with the client towards understanding their internal process steps to come up with optimal templates and process
- Client teams were a partner to the process, helped strategize to reduce the cycle time

### Team Collaboration and Enablement

- Celebrated quick wins to keep the team motivated
- Made the tasks person independent (movement out was managed without an impact)
- Share knowledge, look for doing it right the first time, incorporate utilities
- Setting up a strong governance mechanism for the teams
- Closely coordinated with HR and the account teams to resolve and ensure mitigations at run time and also strategic changes to the approach.

## Critical success factor(s):

### Project Management Leadership Involvement

- Sponsorship and senior leadership alignment to plan and execute the steps
- Take quick decisions wherever required to reduce the cycle time, change the process
- Resolve bottlenecks and ensure stakeholder focus and collaboration

### Partnered Collaborative approach with client

- Joint workshops with the client on areas of focus
- Process enhancements and improvements jointly addressed
- Governance model set up to identify and optimize, Fast Track approach defined

### Project Management Agile Approach

- Core-flexi teams formed to plan for interview sessions anchored by senior leadership members
- Each stage governed as a separate project in itself with a pseudo project manager anchoring the same
- Celebrate quick wins

### Automation and Innovation

- Leverage existing tools and development of utilities to optimize the requirements.
- Set up of a two in a box model (by business functions) to support the requirements
- Set up of a Hub and Spoke model for managing the process centrally as well as locally



Figure 4 PACT Approach (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

A workflow-help desk driven tool based BGV helps for tracking the background verification process, so that step by step process is captured and there is no manual intervention. This helps avoid delays and also helps provide an in-time status. This also ensures that none of the candidates are missed out with accurate, timely and systemic reporting as well. The BGV is typically done by a third party vendor and this close tracking through the tool also help ensure the right flags are raised with the third party to minimize any scope of delays. For rapid ramp ups, leveraging existing standard tools, or in some cases customized tools are very critical and crucial for the success.

## Quantified benefits to business

For both the client and for the company, this became a successful journey of growth. 1500+ people got added within a year's time. Each of these additions, involved 50+ transactions and a minimal wait time of 2-4 weeks. This not only paved the way for improved client confidence but also helped revisit the journey in its entirety.

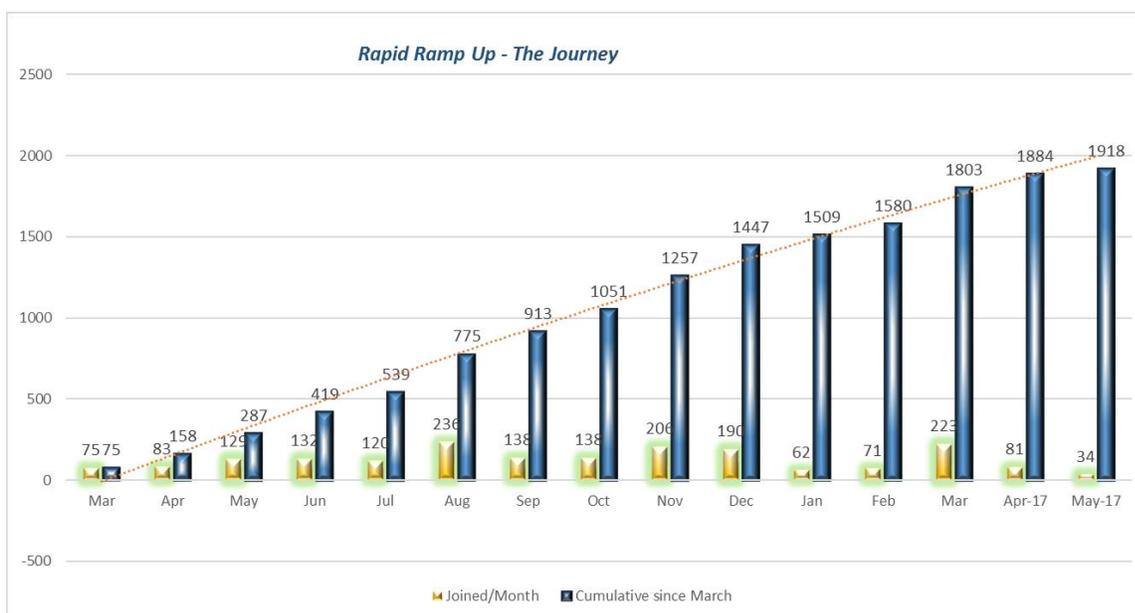


Figure 5 Ramp Up Journey (Source: Internal Program Experiences)

### Stakeholder Speak:

*Thanks to your team, today we made multiple last moment onboarding possible*

*Awesome progress. This is definitely a good progress and we have to get ready for a bigger volume.*

*Thanks ... for the support. You have indeed been very helpful by understanding and adhering to the process. Much appreciated!! – Client Team*

*Thank you for your support. With these best practices hope process will get streamlined – Client*

## Lessons learnt

- Senior leadership buy in and sponsorship is critical to the success
- Disciplined process adherence helps
- Partner with the client and be open to recommend changes, it's a success for both ends
- Resist the pressure that comes by, but optimize, and people will join the journey
- Be open to new ideas
- Adopt a structured approach
- Ask and Answer, when needed

## Conclusion

In the IT world, it's very critical and crucial to continue to reinvent. Team effort will definitely ensure that one sails through, however leadership involvement is the key. At the same time – for rapid ramp ups strategy and tactical journey goes hand in hand thereby there is very limited scope to do errors or fine tune the journey mid-way.

The journey was made successful with partnership from multiple stakeholders. Process plays a very critical role in this journey. To effectively change business strategy and culture to fit the rapidly changing business environment, agreements have to be made at the top [4]

Together the team made it happen!!!

## References

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