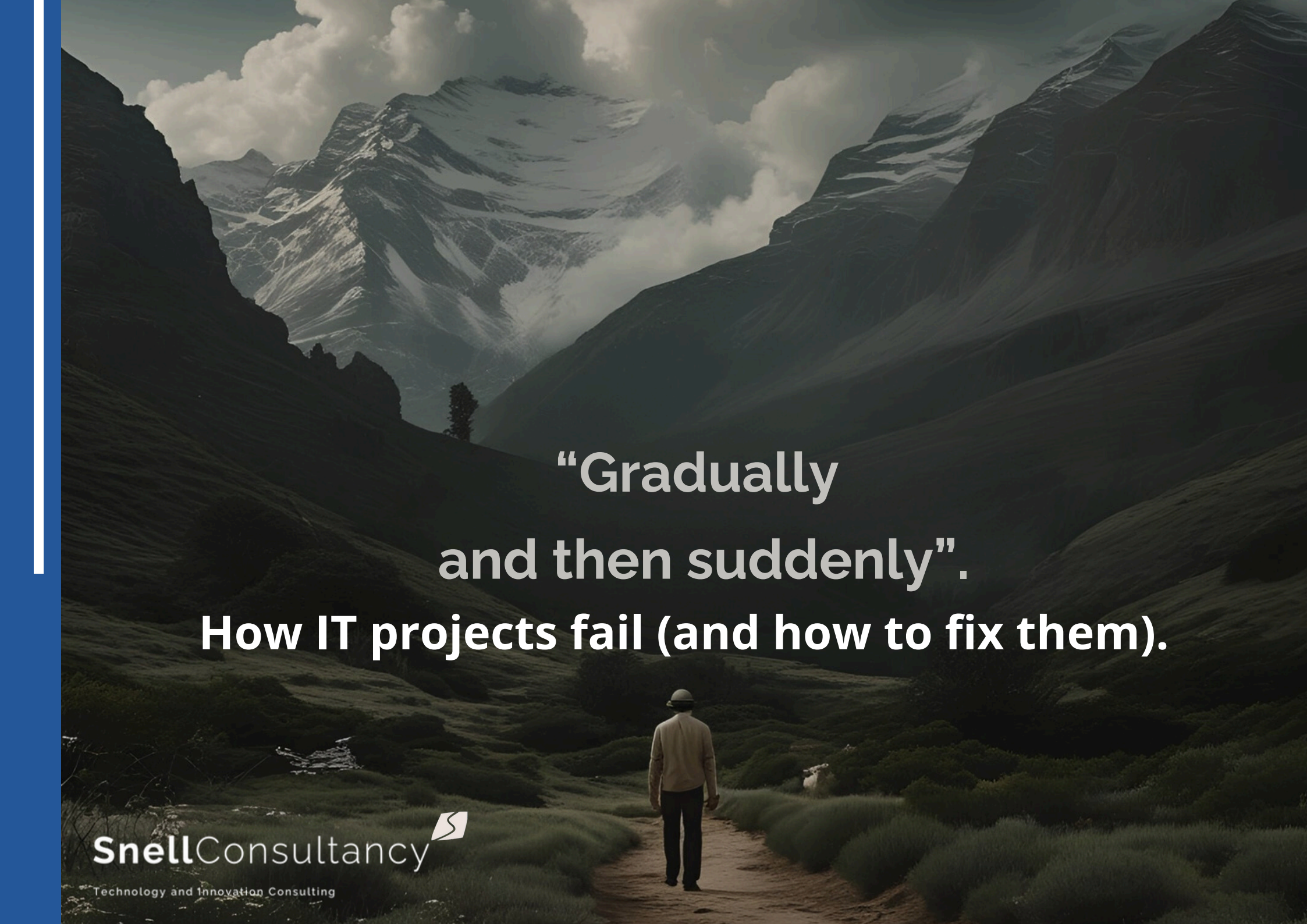


A person wearing a hat and jacket is walking away from the viewer on a dirt path that leads into a vast, mountainous landscape. The mountains are rugged and covered in patches of snow, with some peaks partially hidden by low-hanging clouds. The foreground consists of green, grassy slopes. The overall mood is one of a long, solitary journey.

**“Gradually
and then suddenly”.
How IT projects fail (and how to fix them).**

“Gradually and then suddenly”.

How IT projects fail (and how to fix them).

Like the drunk in Ernest Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, when asked how he went bankrupt, IT projects go wrong “Two Ways. Gradually then suddenly”. Trying to fix an IT project once it has started to go south rapidly is both difficult and expensive. Years of experience in IT project rescue tells me that the secret is to ensure that you notice the signs in the “gradually” phase and act with purpose and focus to rectify them before it is too late.

Although every organization, project environment and project team is unique, and no two initiatives are the same, they all face the same challenges; sometimes technical, often delivery related, always people driven. Over decades of rescuing IT projects, consistent patterns emerge and most distressed IT projects display warning signs well in advance of them being in the “suddenly” phase of failure.

But IT projects are inherently optimistic endeavours, born in periods of growth, change and investment and often led by managers with a “can do” attitude and emotionally invested in by people up and down the organization. Exactly these characteristics that can lead IT projects to succeed, when the going is good, are the same ones that cause them to fail when they start to hit the bumps in the road. Recognising the unique combination of distressed delivery, technical challenge and strained relationships and acting on them early is key to getting your IT project through inevitable challenges and to success.

With the right expertise, experience, structure and approach, these issues can be addressed decisively, allowing even the most “basket case” of IT projects and programmes to be stabilized and brought back on track.

How do I know my IT project might be in trouble?

Big Red Flags or Just a Nagging Gut Feeling?

You may already know something is wrong, or you may just have a growing unease that something is “off”. In either case, here are five key indicators that your IT project may be in trouble and you might need my help:

1. **The project team is delusional** - Beware when you hear “the plan can still be achieved” when milestones are being routinely missed, and critical scope is being deprioritized. I have yet to see an IT project get back on track by itself...
2. **Quality is lacking** – Ask yourself “if we can’t afford to do it right, can we afford to do it twice?”. When quality drops and defects go unresolved the problems, delays and costs start stacking up.
3. **The leaders and key stakeholders are missing in action** – When those who should be most invested in the project, because they are likely to benefit most either personally or corporately, drift away it isn’t long before things start to go south.
4. **No one can remember how this IT project links to value** - Why did we start this in the first place? How did we get here? Can everyone still explain the rationale behind why we are doing this? Does investment still match value?
5. **The project chatter has died down** - Team members retreat behind email, feedback has gone quiet, the energy has gone, the flame has died, this feels like a death march. Projects get tired and lose their spark, when the energy and morale of the team goes failure is not far behind.

Do any of these sound familiar? If they do, then you may have a problem. **Snell Consultancy** has a successful track record in helping companies rescue IT projects and programmes, however complex, in crisis. Our five-step approach is based on that experience and explains what I and my colleagues would do to help you.

My Five-Step Approach to IT Project Recovery

Step 1 : Conduct a Rapid Review with You

I will help you ask the obvious and not so obvious questions. We will perform a structured health check with you to establish the project's current state and understand how it has drifted from time, scope, cost, and quality expectations.

[Snell Consultancy successful independent IT Project Delivery Review client case study - Click here.](#)

Step 2 : Help everyone to be honest about the Project Challenges and Issues

Using both hard metrics and softer feedback from the team and other stakeholders we will help you assess the scale and root causes of your project issues and guide the conversation to a shared recognition of where the problems lie. This is the start of building alignment and clarity, using data and dialogue, about what needs to be fixed.

Step 3 : Redefine, Reset & Reprioritise

We will refocus everyone on what matters most. We will reconnect and realign your project's scope with the business goals and ensure that mechanisms and ways of working are in place to stop the drift and avoid further derailment.

Step 4 : Replan, Re-engage and Re-energise

Together we will use the inevitable replanning phase as a vehicle to re-engage the team and business and create a realistic, achievable 'path to green' for everyone involved. We will also use this opportunity to embed new ways of working, communicating and thinking, delivering a change to how the organisation tackles projects that is an asset for years to come.



A global SAP BI financial reporting programme's software releases were always late, continually evolving business requirements and dis-satisfied stakeholders. Ivan very quickly put a plan in place to get the programme back on track. He engaged with all parties to freeze the scope, contain the budget and deliver the final release within the timescales that he promised.

Darrell Stein, Technology Advisor/Interim CIO

Step 5 : Stay the Course

Recovery isn't a one-time fix, it requires courage, determination and a relentless focus on the detail. We will ensure we embed the project governance, progress monitoring and behaviours that make project delivery a habit and not a surprise.

Step 1:
Conduct a
Rapid Review

Step 2 : Help
everyone to be
honest about the
Project Challenges
and Issues

Step 3 : Redefine,
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Step 4 : Replan, Re-
engage and Re-
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Step 5 : Stay the
Course

“Gradually and then suddenly”.

How Distressed IT projects can succeed

Saying it is a 5 step process makes it sound easy, but if you’ve read this far you already know there is more to it than that. Recovering a troubled IT project requires experience, judgement, and the ability to navigate complexity with confidence and a smile. We’ve done it time and again at Snell Consultancy, it’s what we get out of bed for every day and weird though it might seem, we relish the challenge.

So, if you're ready to put this guide into action and want expert guidance tailored to your specific situation, why not explore your next steps with Snell Consultancy directly and let's get started turning around your IT project.

**Schedule an IT Project Recovery
Roadmapping Call with Ivan**



Meet Ivan

Hi, I'm Ivan Snell, founding Director of of Snell Consultancy. For over 30 years I have made a career helping senior IT and business executives like you take a pragmatic, human focused approach to recovering complex, highly technical IT projects that have failed or are heading that way.

Trusted by UK Top 100 CIO leadership teams, I'm called in when IT projects and programmes are significantly off-track, costs are rising and the organisation is losing faith. Time and again I've been able to rapidly assess the situation, rebuild confidence and then deliver a clear path to success.

Drawing on a career built across multiple industries, technology platforms (including all the big ones like SAP, Microsoft, and cloud-based platforms) and delivery environments, I know what it takes to rescue your IT project. More than that though, I love it! When you are at your wits' end, I take great pride in coming in and supporting executives, guiding project leaders and developing teams to succeed where before they saw only disaster.

With an industry reputation for working on some of the most challenging transformation initiatives, the Snell Consultancy is able to bring a structured, best-practice approach that helps executive teams regain control, de-risk delivery, and achieve the business outcomes they initially set out for. I look forward to working with you.

All the best,

Ivan

