

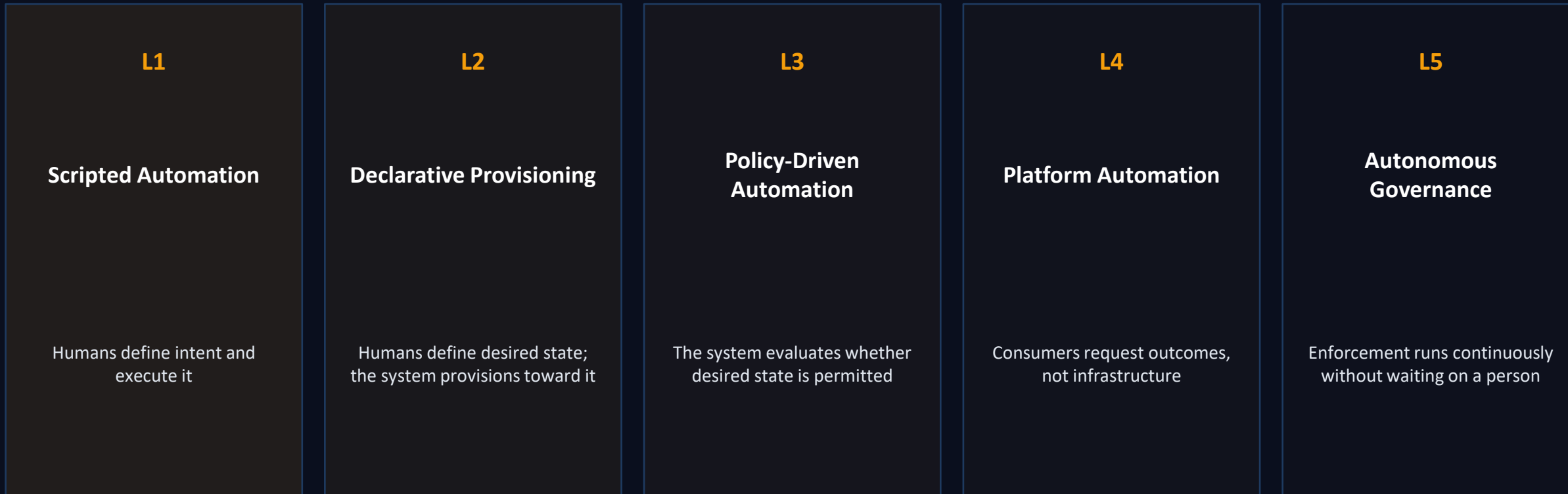
FRAMEWORK #138

The Infrastructure Automation Ladder

Why most organizations stall at Level 2

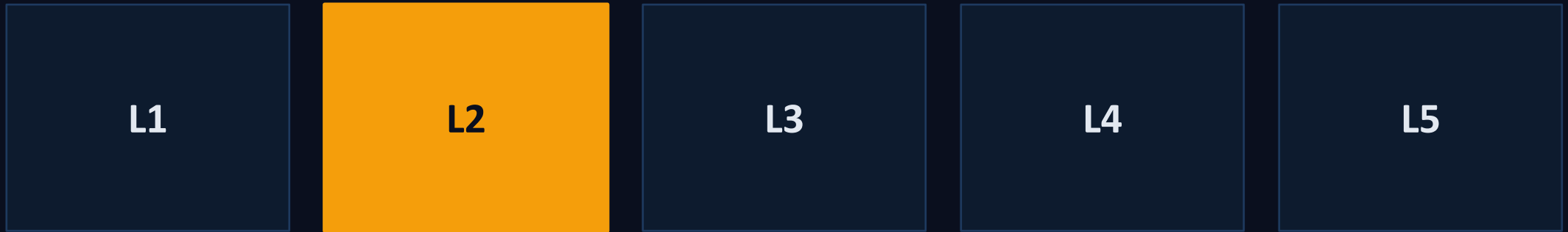
THE FRAMEWORK

The Five Levels



THE STALL POINT

Most Organizations Stop Here



MOST ORGANIZATIONS STOP HERE

Declarative provisioning — Level 2 of 5 — gives every visible signal of maturity: reviewable plans, versioned state, diffable changes.

THE TRAP

Why Declarative Feels Complete

Terraform answers one question:

“Did the system reach the state we described?”

It leaves a different question untouched:

“Was that state ever allowed to exist in the first place?”

Most Organizations Never Reach Level 3

L1 → L2

Tooling decision

Pick Terraform or OpenTofu, migrate the runbooks

L2 → L3

Governance decision

Requires someone to own enforcement — usually nobody does

Platform teams own the Terraform modules. Nobody owns enforcement.

The Three Gates

01

Intent Gate

What should exist?

The declarative state itself — the plan, the desired configuration.

02

Policy Gate

Is it allowed?

A policy engine evaluates the plan against organizational rules before apply.

03

Ownership Gate

Who resolves it?

A rejected plan needs a named owner responsible for remediation.

THE MISSING LAYER

Governance Debt

Three symptoms. One missing layer.



DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION

“If your Terraform plan can successfully provision infrastructure that violates organizational policy, what actually prevented the violation?”

If the answer is “code review” — you're still at Level 2.

Framework #138

Infrastructure Automation Ladder

The Infrastructure Automation Ladder measures how much governance responsibility has moved from humans into the operating model itself.

Not a measure of how much you've automated — a measure of how much enforcement no longer depends on a person remembering to do it.

Read the full breakdown

The Infrastructure Automation Ladder: Why Most Organizations Stall at Level 2

rack2cloud.com/infrastructure-automation-ladder/