



Build It Right. Then Add AI.

The Responsible AI Framework.

A free guide from marybehindthesystems.com.

AI is not the problem.

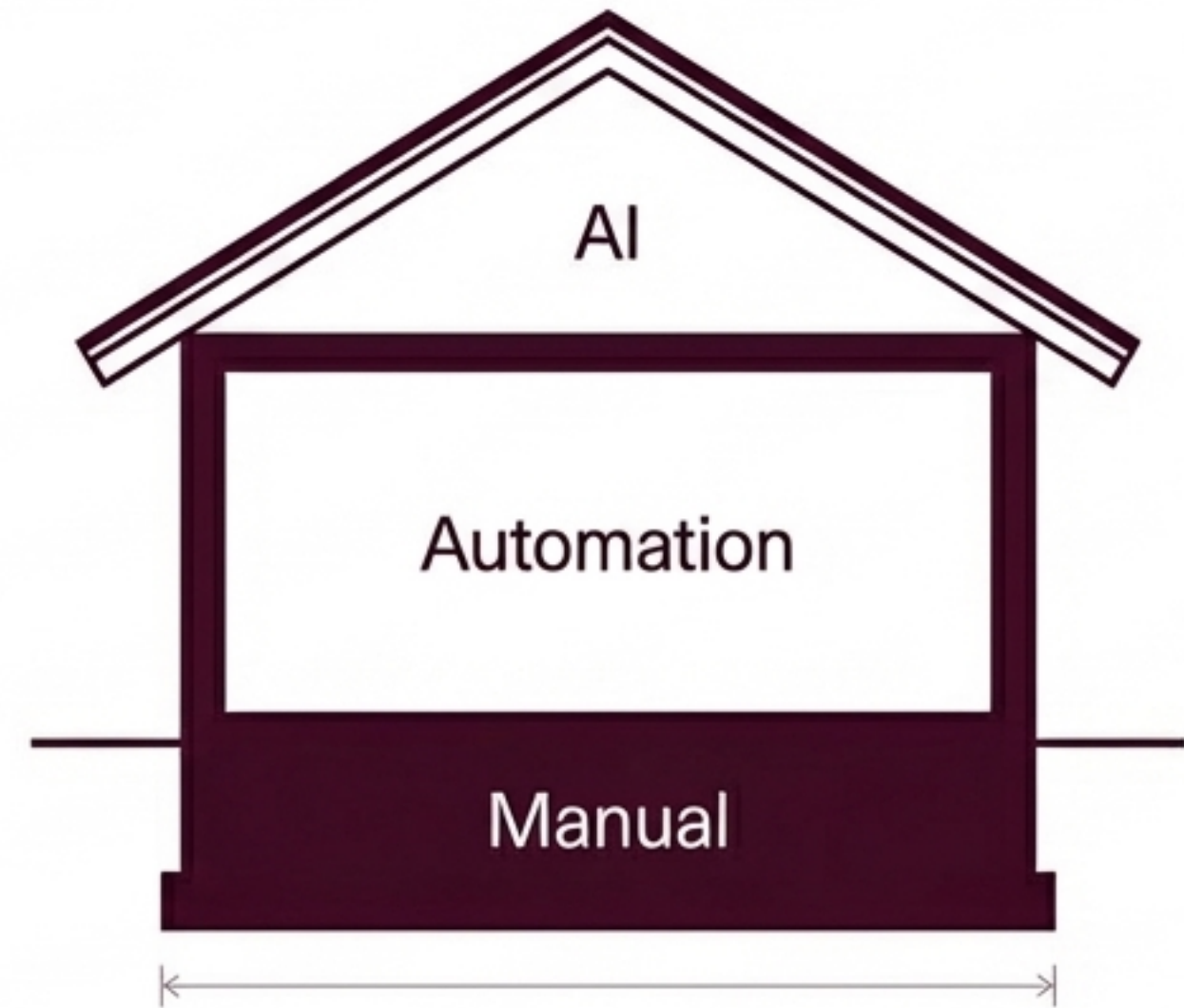
Using AI on top of broken, undefined processes and calling it a system is the problem.

Skipping a level does not save time. It creates expensive problems downstream that someone—usually you—has to fix manually.

You would never start with the roof.



Most people are trying to put the roof on dirt, and then wondering why everything keeps falling apart.



Lay the foundation first.
Then the walls. Then the roof.

The invisible cost of skipped steps.

There is a direct connection between this framework and the environment. Data centers running large AI models consume millions of gallons of water daily in areas already facing scarcity.

The higher the system level, the more energy and water it uses.

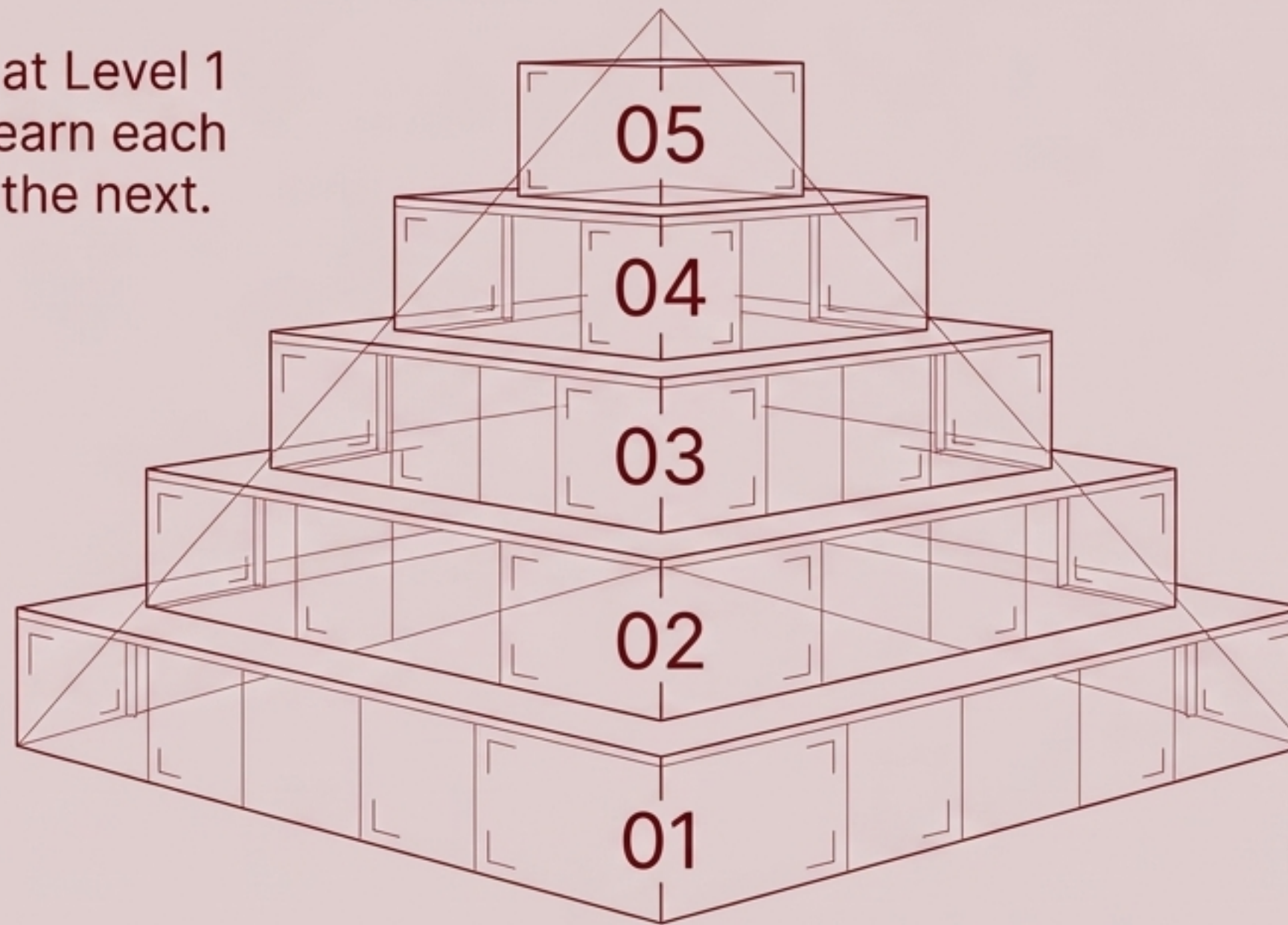
Every time you solve something at a lower level, you make a more responsible choice for your business and the planet.

Resource Gradient



The 5-Level Workflow Maturity Model.

The goal is not to stay at Level 1 forever. The goal is to earn each level before moving to the next.



Level 01 | Manual

Friction Matrix

Most People

Doing everything by hand with no documented process. Improvising every time.

The Intentional Approach

Do it manually first, but document every step. If you cannot write down the process, you are not ready to improve it.

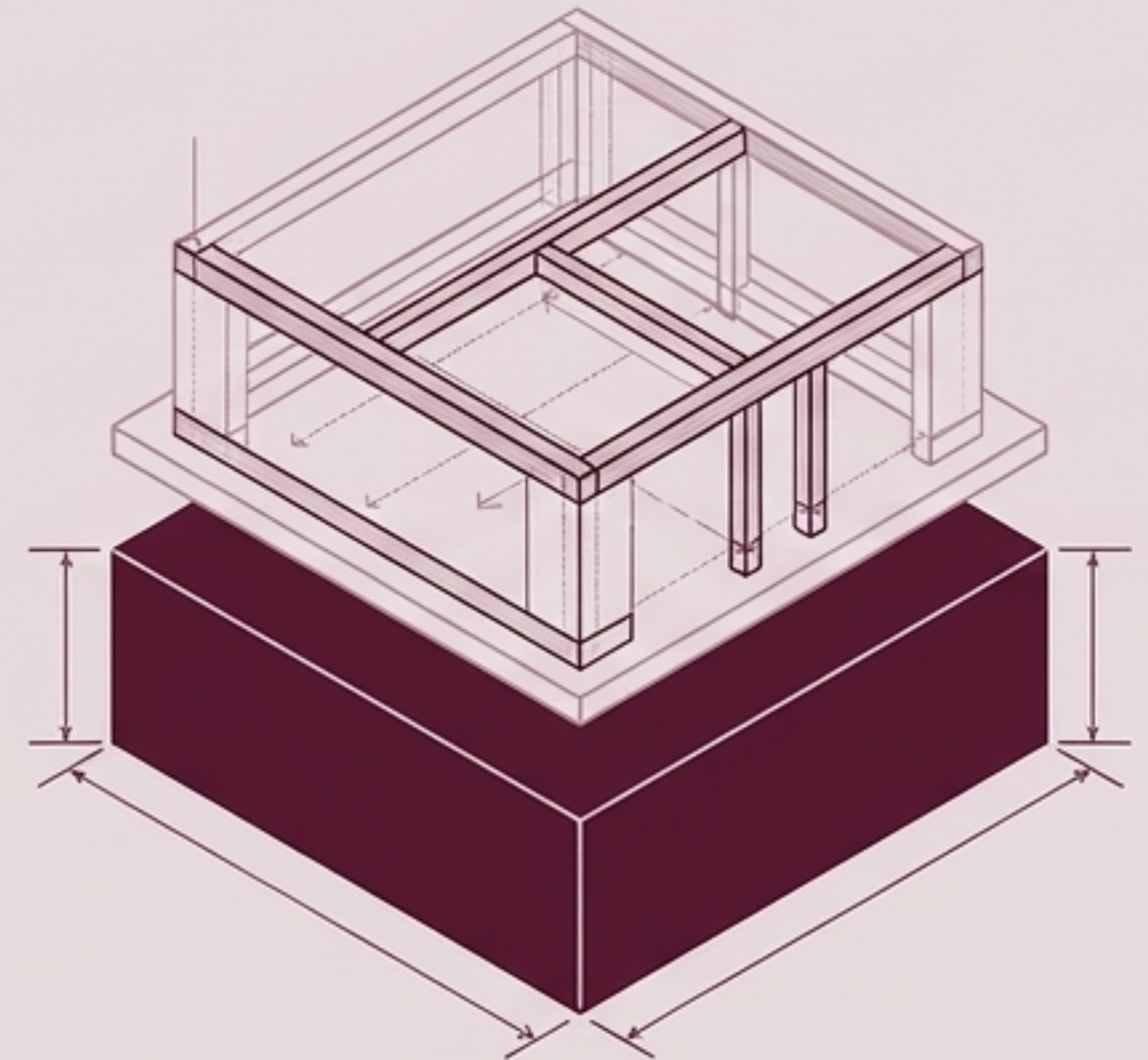
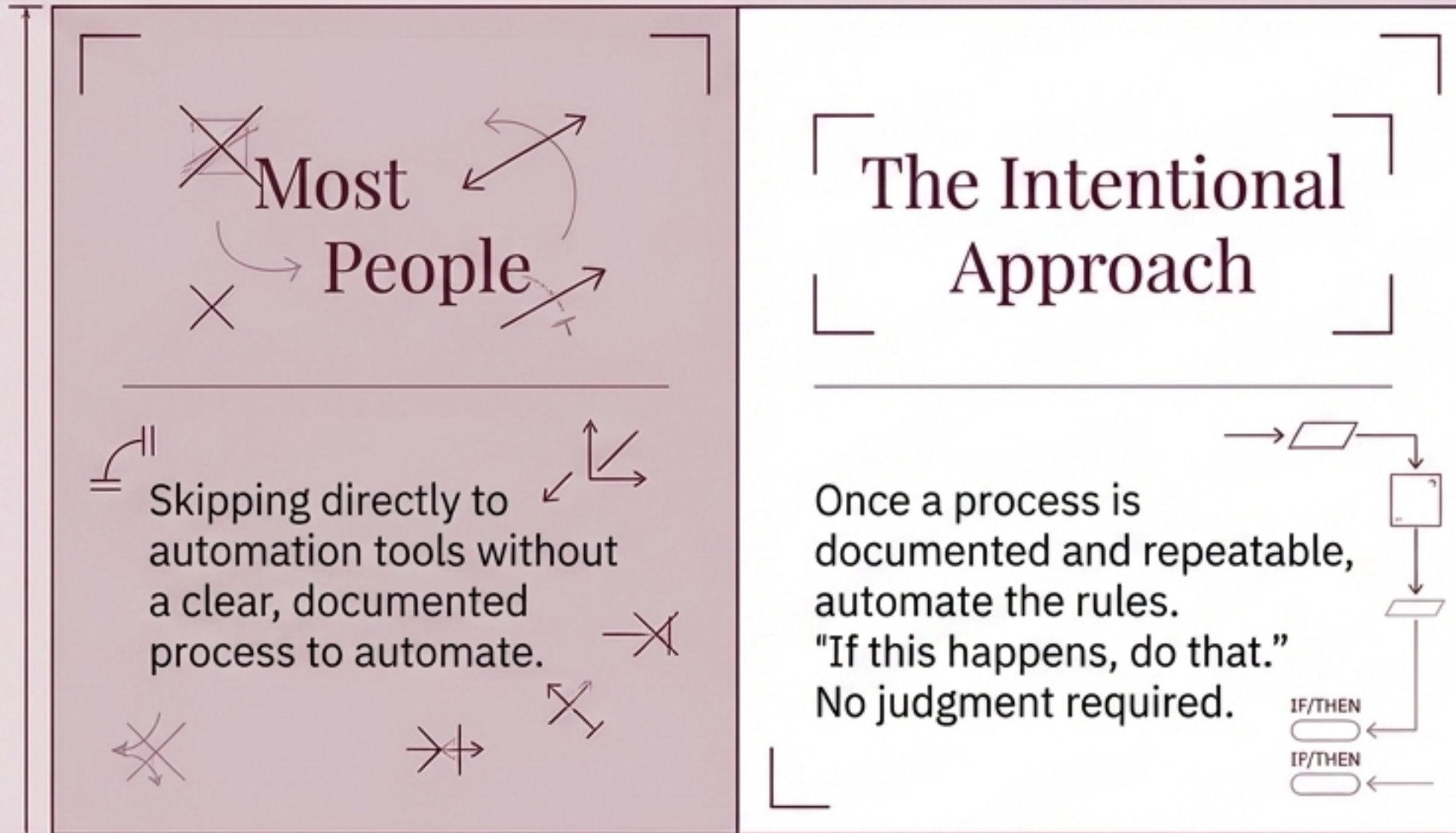
Resource Gradient

20%

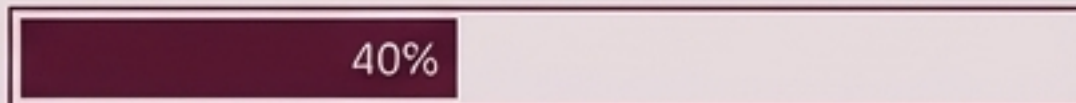
Lowest energy use. The foundation everything else is built on.

Level 02 | Automation

Friction Matrix



Resource Gradient

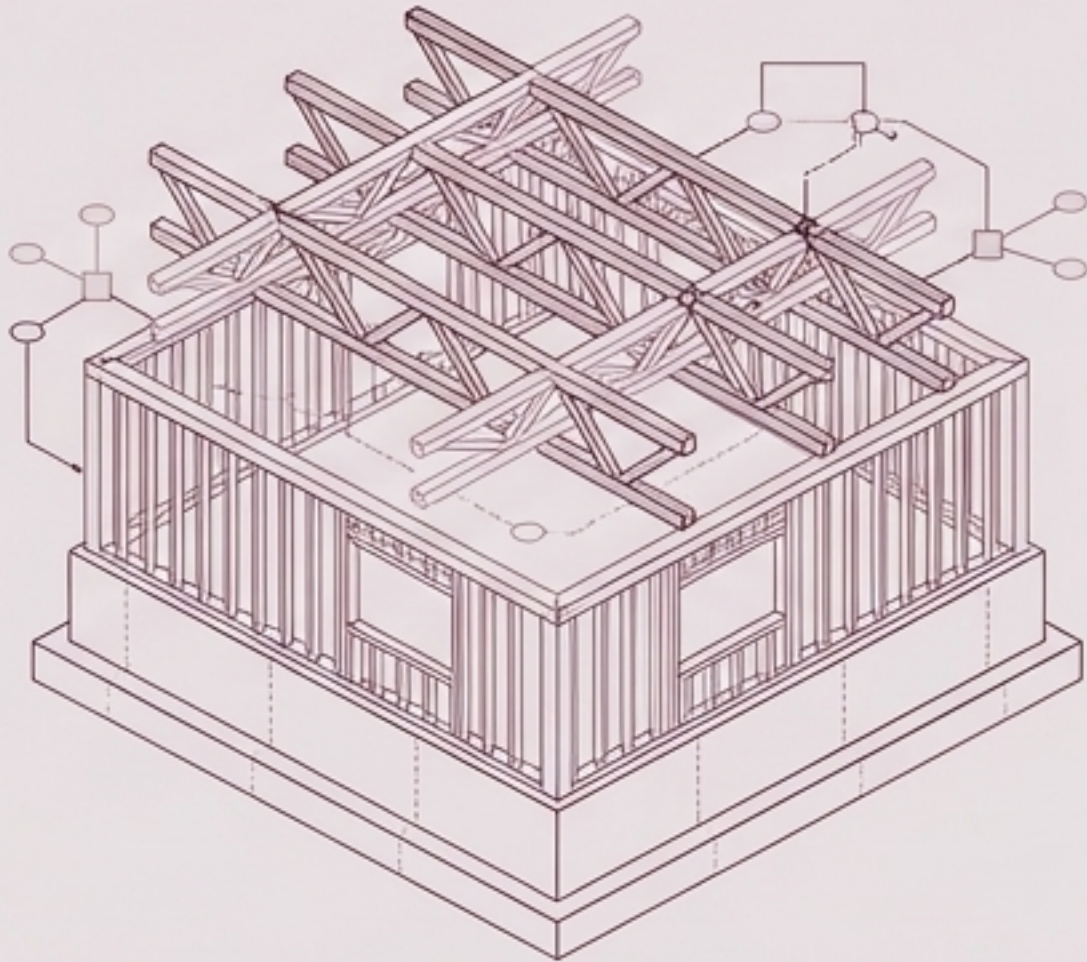


Low energy. Automation runs on logic, not inference. Most creators should spend more time here.

Level 03 | AI-Assisted Workflow

Most People

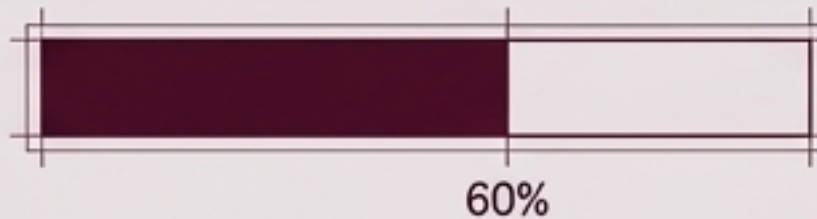
~~Using AI for everything, including tasks that are actually just rule-based and could be automated.~~



The Intentional Approach

Use AI only where human judgment is genuinely required: nuanced decisions, creative work, novel situations.

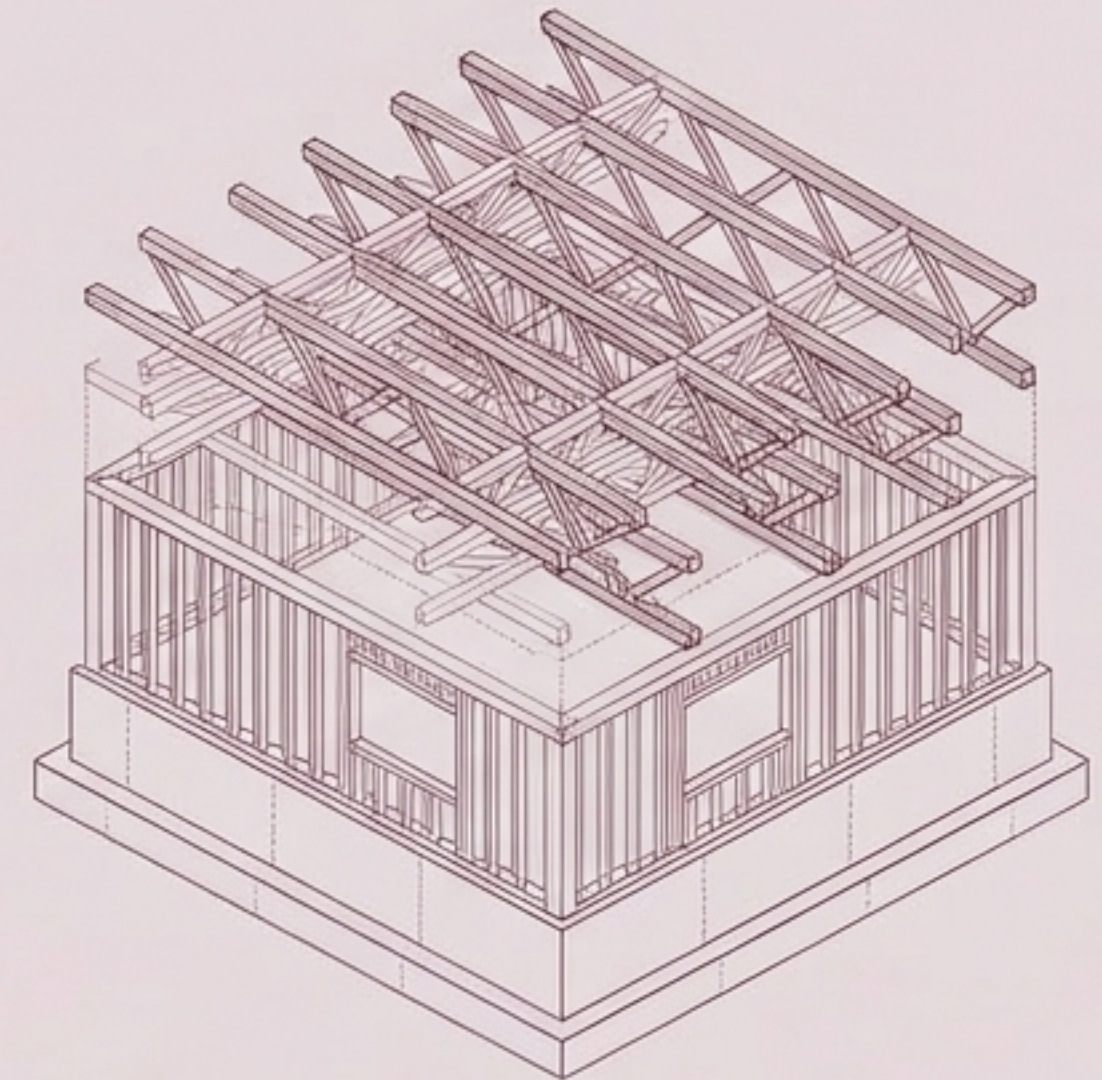
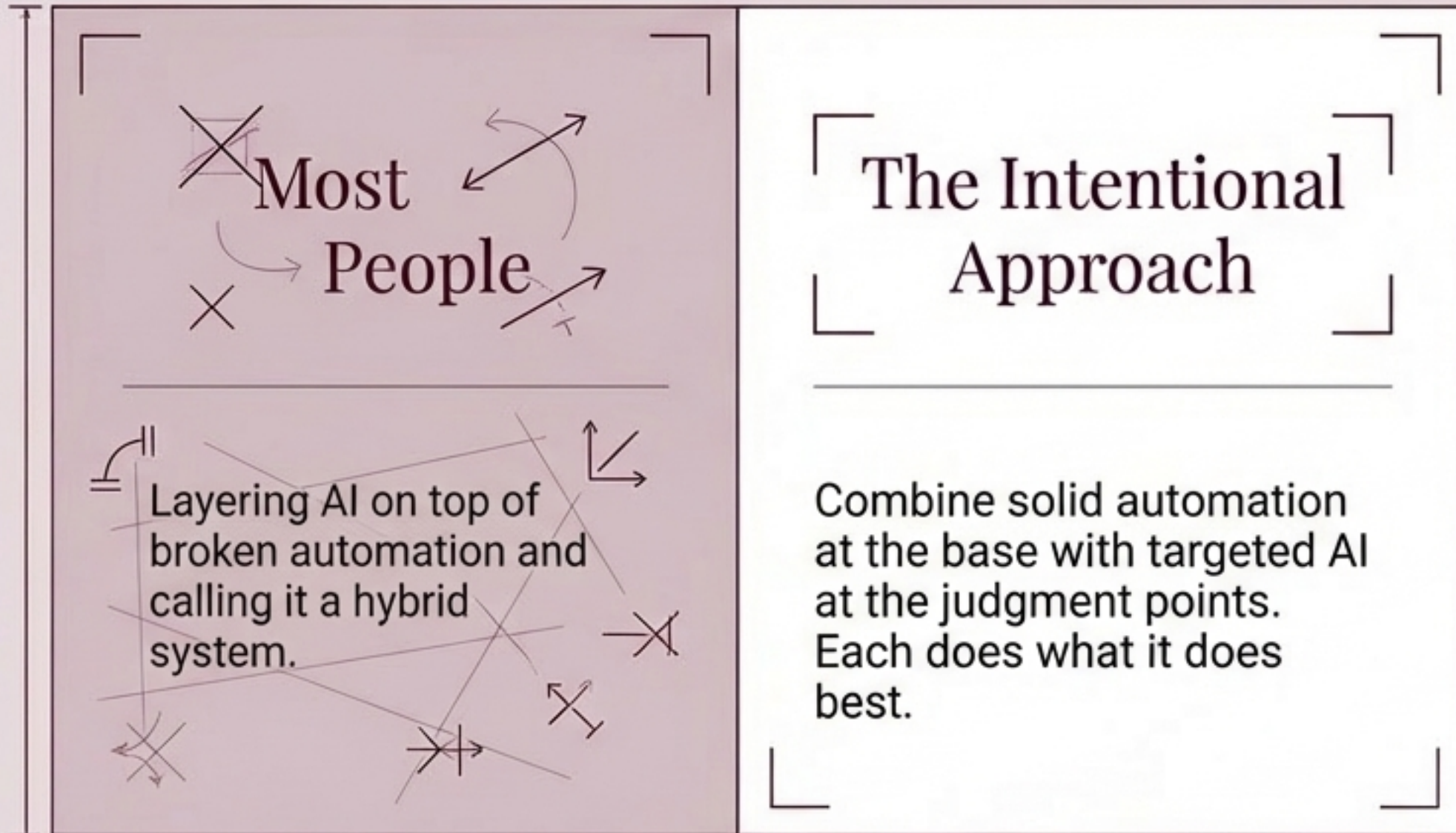
Resource Gradient



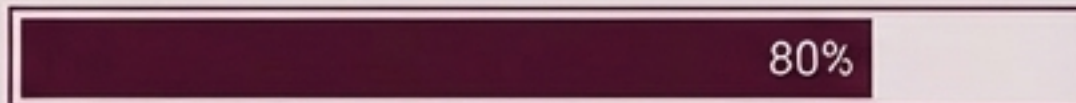
Moderate energy. Reserve this level for tasks that actually need inference.

Level 04 | Hybrid

Friction Matrix



Resource Gradient



Moderate to high energy. Only justified when automation alone cannot handle the complexity.

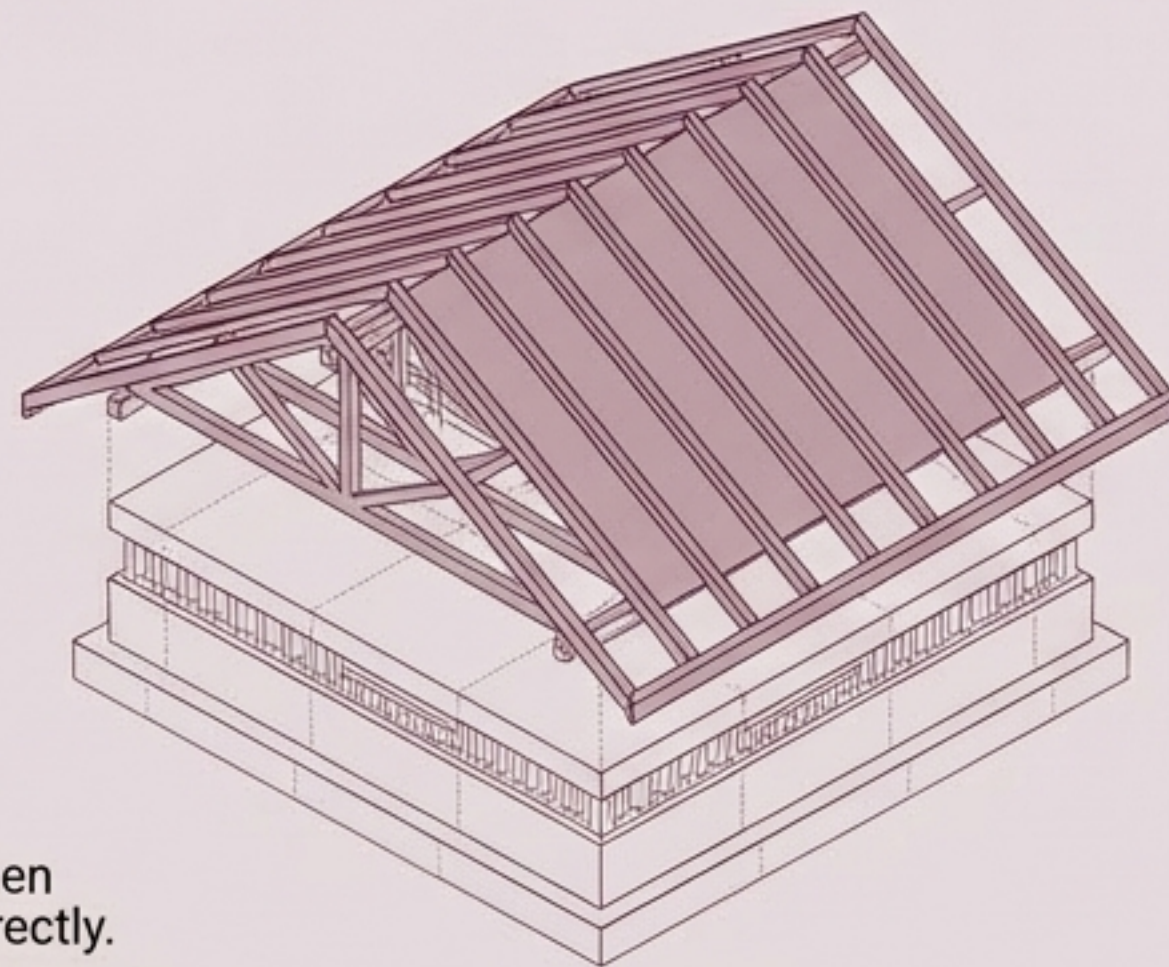
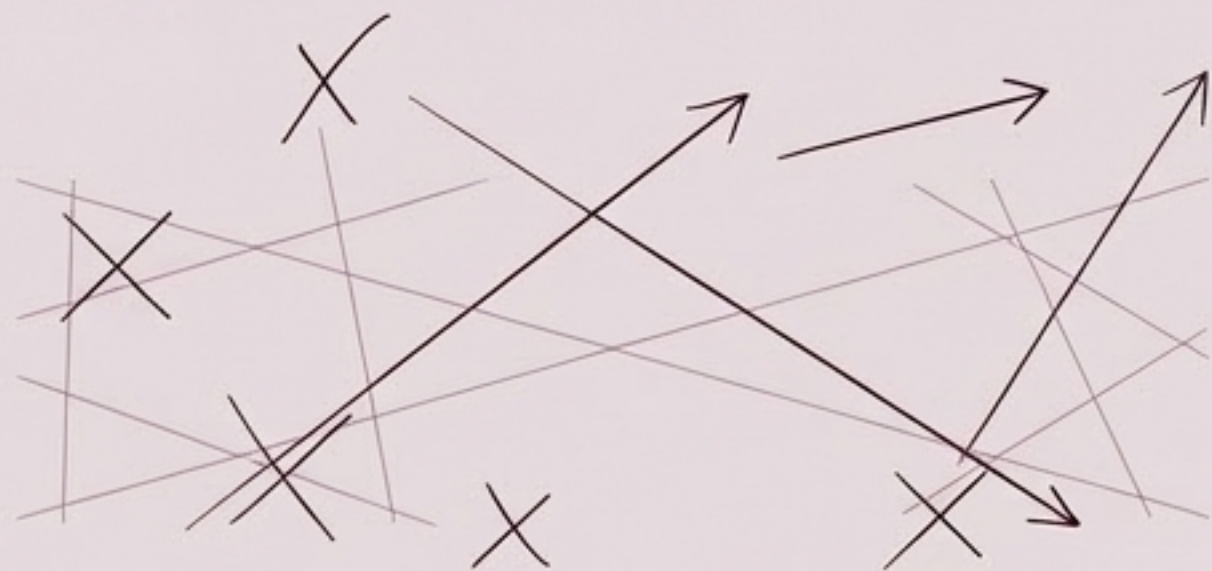
Level 05 | Agentic AI

Most People

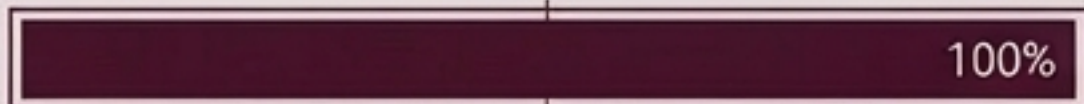
Deploying agents with vague goals and no guardrails. Letting AI run without defined triggers or stopping conditions.

The Intentional Approach

Agentic AI done right is triggered, bounded, and backed by solid automation. Each agent has a defined scope and a clear stopping condition.



Resource Gradient



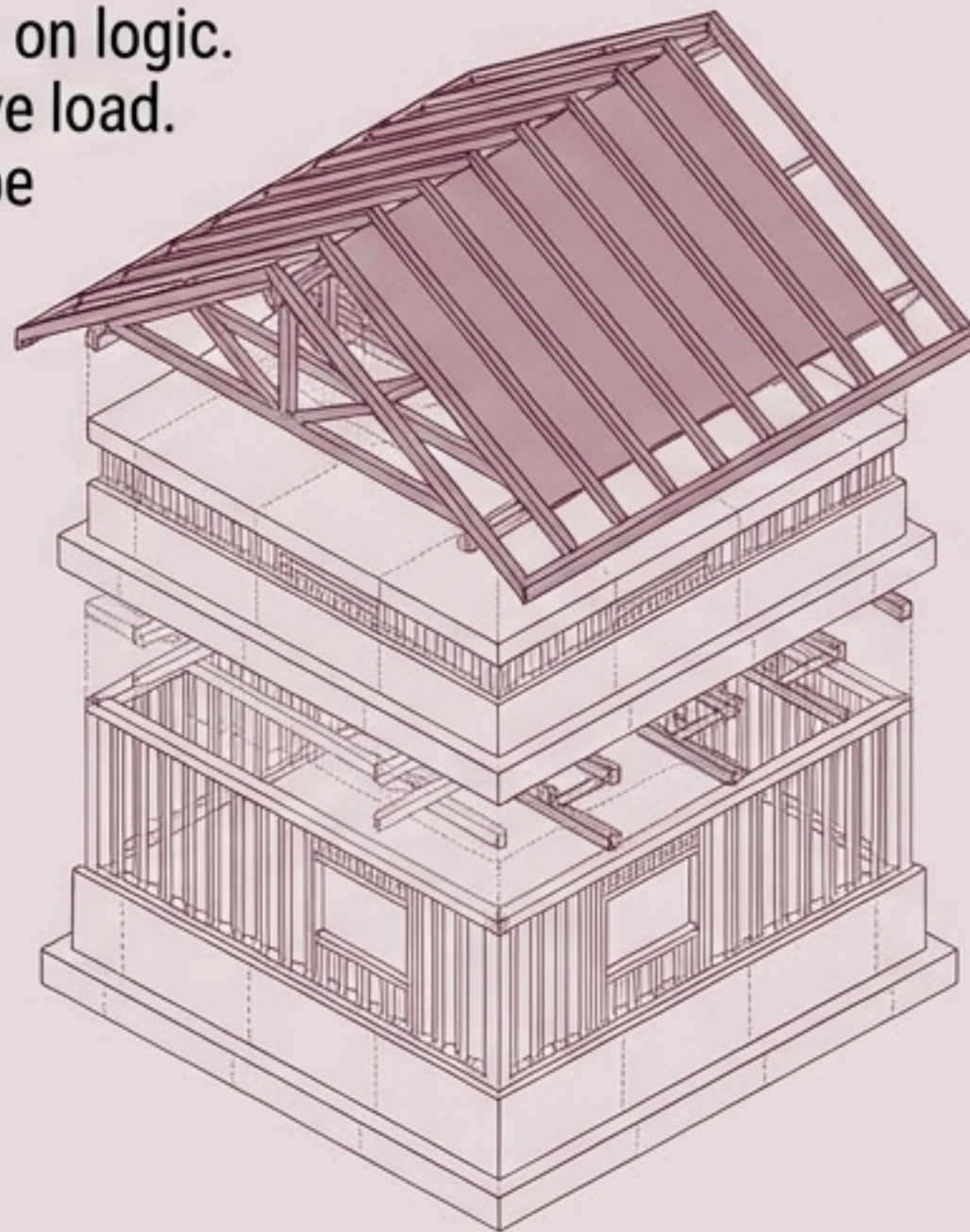
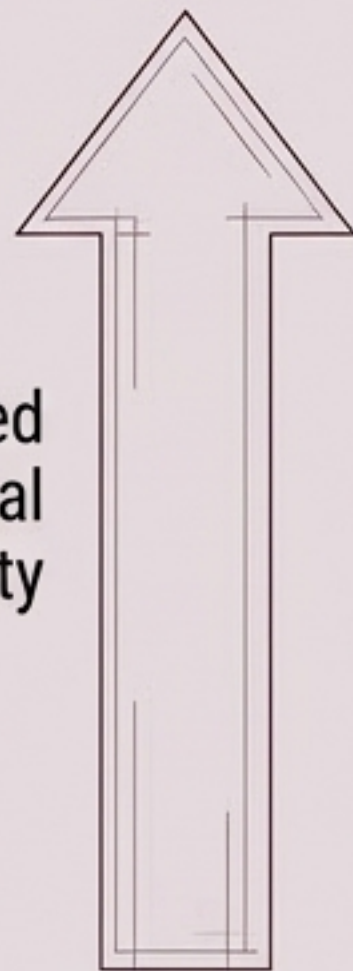
100%

Highest energy use. Only deploy when every lower level has been built correctly.

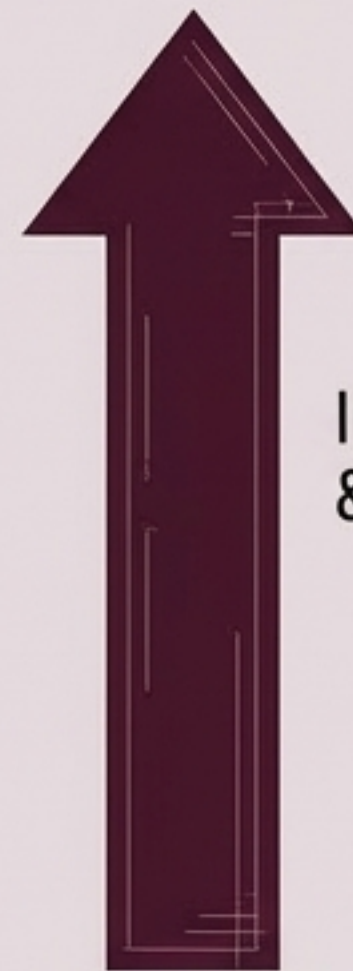
The Blueprint Reality

Automation uses minimal energy and runs on logic. It creates capacity without adding cognitive load. AI uses significant resources and should be reserved for moments requiring genuine judgment.

Increased
Operational
Capability



Increased Energy
& Compute Use



Key Takeaway:

Solving something at a lower level is almost always the smarter and more responsible choice.

Where are you actually operating?

Workflow Reality Check

The Symptom	The Reality	The Fix
You just “figure it out each time” without written steps.	Level 1 is missing.	Stop building. Document the steps.
You ask AI to do the exact same repetitive steps every time.	Wasting Level 3 resources.	Downshift to Level 2 (Automate).
Something breaks, and you just start over because you can’t trace it.	No foundation exists.	Rebuild Level 1.
You deploy an agent, but end up manually cleaning up its mistakes.	You skipped the base layers.	Audit the skipped levels beneath it.
You use AI for absolutely everything.	Your tools are running you.	Separate rules from judgment.

AI is not the enemy. But skipping the foundation is.

Most people are not failing because they are using bad tools. They are failing because they are using the right tools in the wrong order, on top of processes they never took the time to understand. The fix is almost always upstream.

