Collaborate | Advocate | Standardise

Thinking through AI and XBRL

Integrated Reporting Committee of South Africa

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@xbrlint

What is XBRL?

A free, open standard that turns the facts in a report into data, with their meaning attached.

IN THE REPORT

Revenue for the year was **R12.4 billion**.

IN THE XBRL TAG

Concept	Revenue, from the IFRS Accounting Taxonomy
Value	12 400 000 000
Unit	ZAR
Period	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026
Entity	The company's Legal Entity Identifier

The concept brings its definition, labels and references with it.

1 Define

A taxonomy defines each concept once: its meaning, data type, and how it relates to other concepts. The IASB and ISSB taxonomies are examples.

2 Tag

Companies tag each fact in their report against the taxonomy. With Inline XBRL the tags sit inside the readable report itself: one document for both people and machines.

3 Use

Regulators, analysts, data providers and AI tools read the tagged facts directly, with their definitions attached, rather than re-keying them from a PDF.

Why it matters in a digital age

XBRL International is 25 years young this year!



Reports are increasingly read by software before, or instead of, a person.

Meaning travels with the number

Each fact carries its definition, period, unit and entity, so it can be compared across companies and years without re-keying or guesswork.

The report itself, not a reconstruction

Inline XBRL is the document the board approved. The digital version is management's own, rather than a third party's interpretation of it.

Ground Truth for AI

Defined, structured data gives AI tools a reliable source to work from, and a deterministic way to check what they produce.

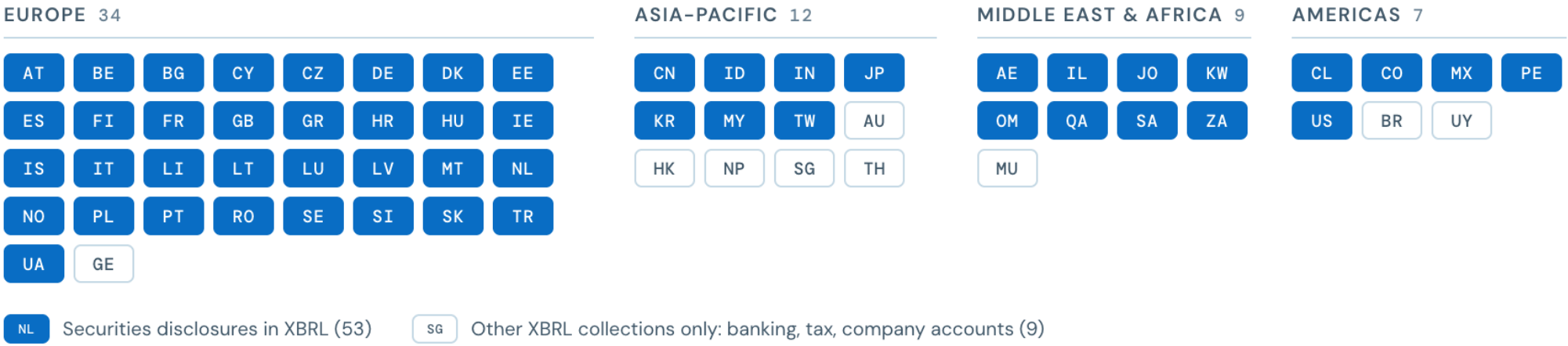
For integrated reporters: the ISSB's IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Taxonomy applies the same approach to sustainability information, so financial and sustainability disclosures can be connected as data rather than only on the page.

XBRL is required in 62 countries and jurisdictions

218
XBRL data collections

140
regulators and public authorities

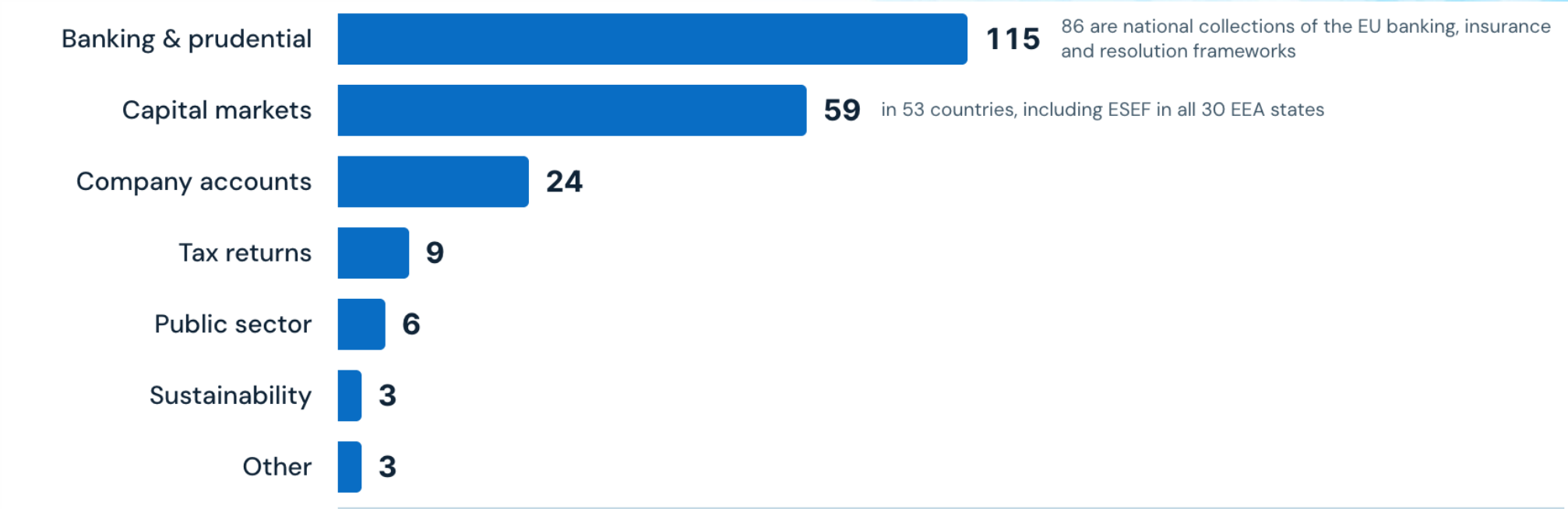
53
countries require XBRL for securities disclosures



Source: XBRL International, Mandates & Markets research, 23 October 2026. National and EU-level XBRL collections; 31 recently added pages are awaiting editorial review.

What regulators collect in XBRL

218 XBRL data collections run by 140 authorities, by type of reporting



Source: XBRL International, Mandates & Markets research, 23 October 2026. National and EU-level XBRL collections; 31 recently added pages are awaiting editorial review. A collection can count under more than one type.

High quality taxonomies are vital

The taxonomy is the dictionary: its quality sets the limit on the quality of the data.

Why quality matters

Definitions tied precisely to the standard, so a tag means the same thing in every report.

Clear structure and relationships, so software and AI can follow how disclosures connect.

Less need for company-specific extensions, so data stays comparable across companies and years.

Combining taxonomies is straightforward – *technically*, but there we really need the standards setters to agree *how* they combine.

Available today for sustainability

IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Taxonomy

From the ISSB, covering IFRS S1 and S2. An update for the greenhouse gas amendments was proposed in July 2026.

ESRS XBRL Taxonomy

From EFRAG, for the European Sustainability Reporting Standards. A draft for the revised ESRS has been published for consultation.

GRI Sustainability Taxonomy

From GRI, launched in 2025, for reporting against the GRI Standards, including impact disclosures.

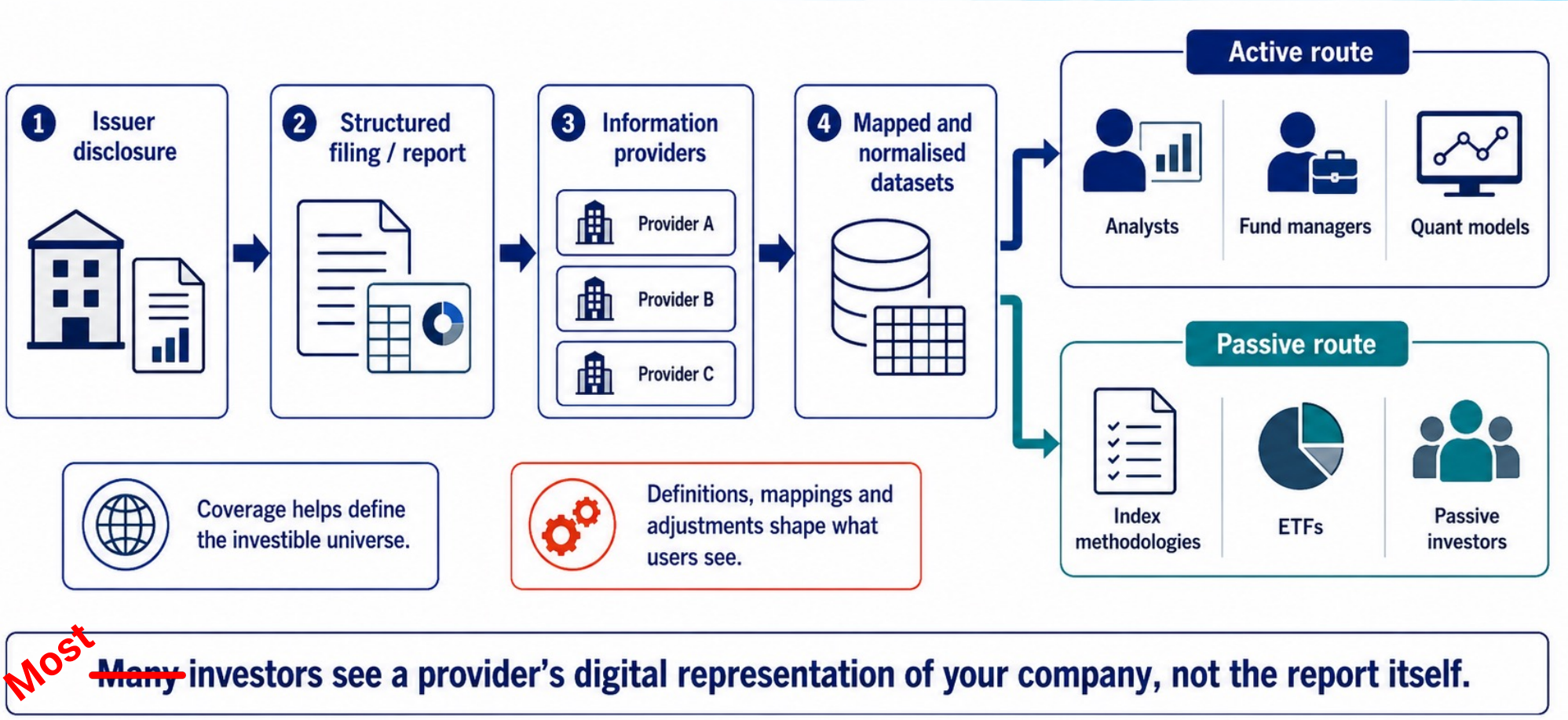
The investor you hope you have…

Who reads your reports?

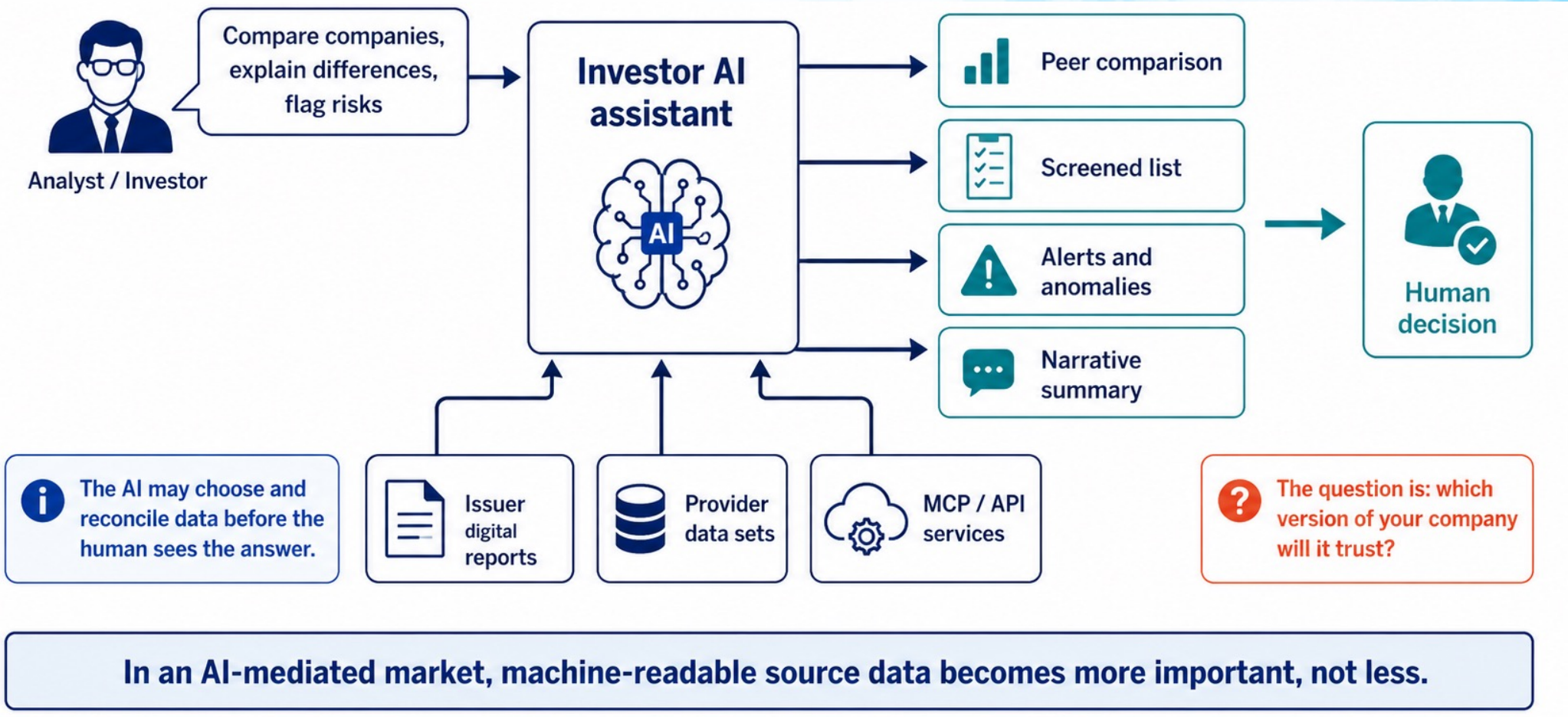


- Cover to cover analysis of reports?
- A careful, considered read?
- Fundamental analysis using well proven DCF measures?
- Long-only focus?

The investor you really have



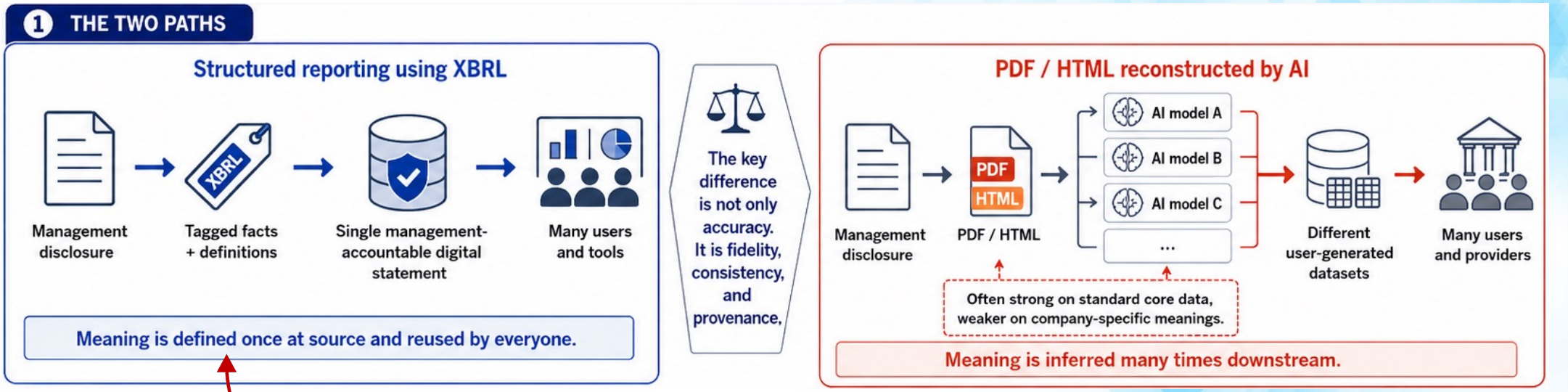
The investor you are about to have



In an AI-mediated market, machine-readable source data becomes more important, not less.

Wait… can’t AI just do this for me?

Well…. Yes and mostly No.



By the way… AI is enhancing, speeding up, simplifying and improving the process of “tagging” or marking up a document for companies. It’s an 80/20 story… a “co-pilot” process.

How should we approach AI analytics?

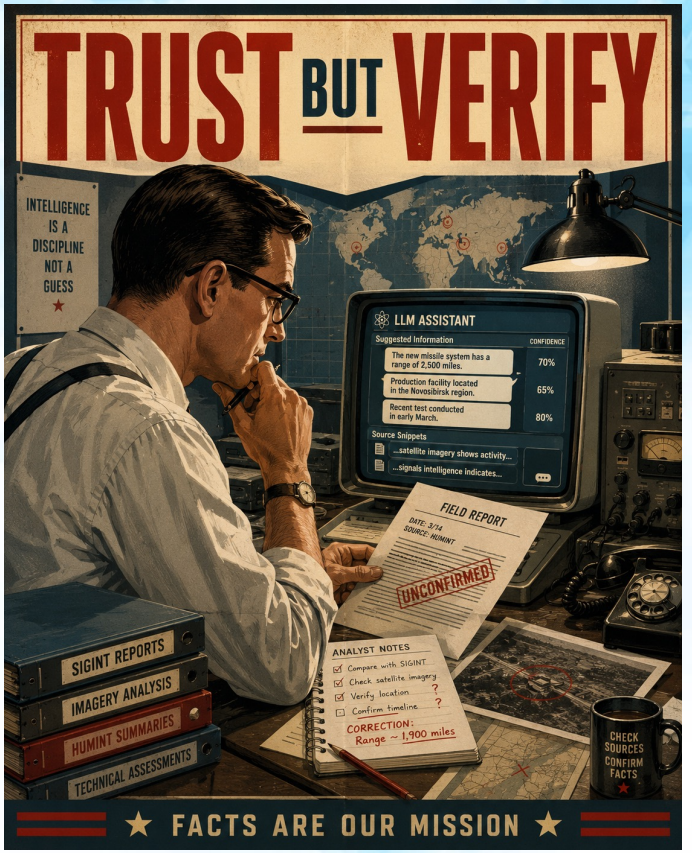
AI provides more insight, more easily, but with less rigour.

We already know:

- AI given structured *data* provides more comprehensive, more accurate answers.
- AI given structured *metadata* that accompanies that *data* works even better.

Therefore:

- We ABSOLUTELY should be using AI and structured data to identify anomalies, emerging issues, outliers and trends….
- BUT we should ALWAYS verify the results with deterministic systems.
- *Inline XBRL provides traceability/provenance feature that is exceptionally useful… but BI is your friend.*



Tell your own story

Inline XBRL gives you vastly greater control over your own report.

The single management-accountable digital version of *what you reported*.

vs.

Hundreds of machine-generated representations of *what others think you reported*.

Put another way

You can't control:

- How will investors value us?
- How will an AI assess our strategy?
- Will an analyst believe our adjusted measure is sensible?

You *can* control:

- What number did we report?
- What does it mean?
- What period and scope does it cover?
- How did we define this KPI?
- How does this year's measure relate to last year's?
- Can the recipient verify that this came from us?

Next Steps in South Africa

Getting the message across is vital for emerging economies.

- Focus on discovery.
- Focus on scope.
  Focus on content.
- Collaborate on the overlaps!
- And yes… the government reforms to reform access need to happen!

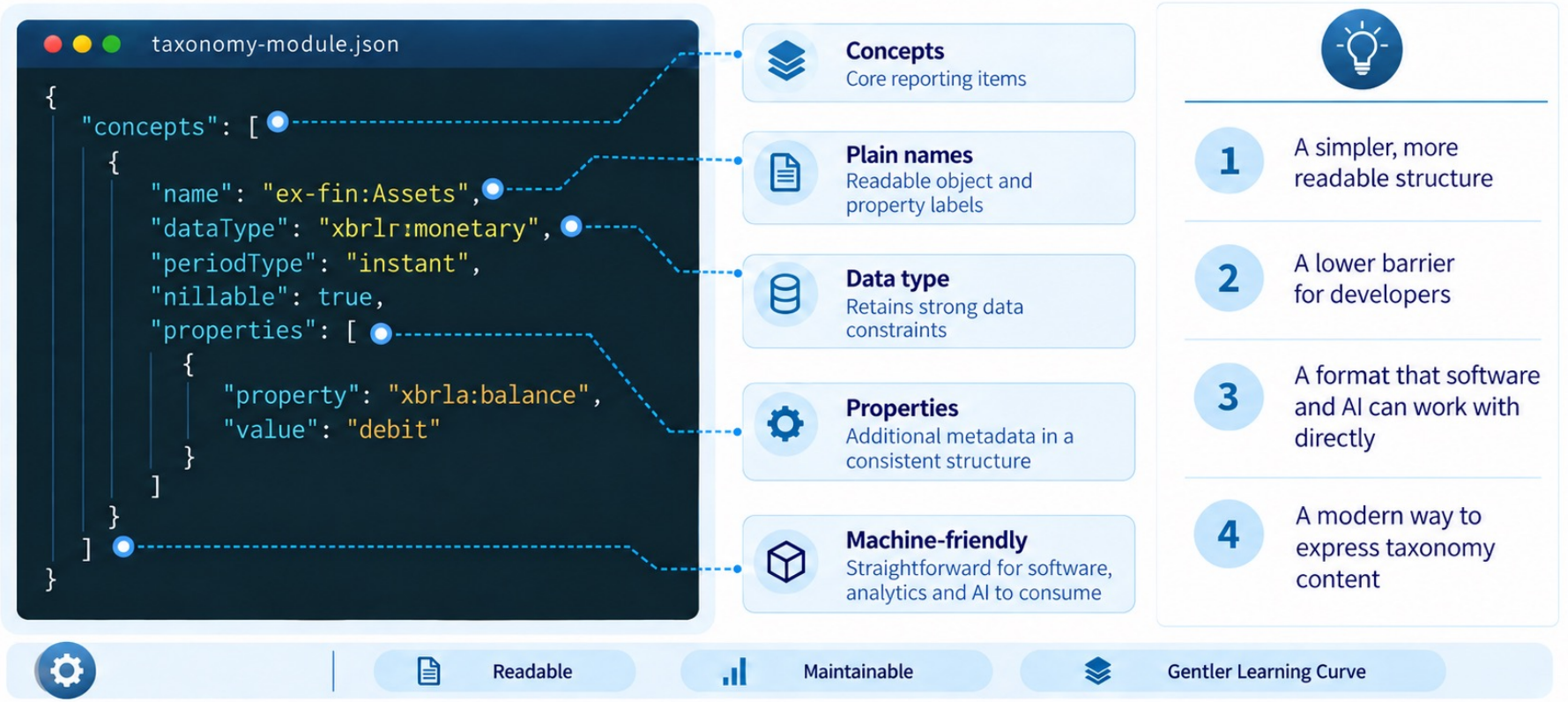


But wait there’s more…

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Next Generation XBRL is coming…

A JSON first* representation of a taxonomy – bake definitions into your analysis.



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* The initial work is not yet syntax neutral. The project will ensure that XBRL is syntax neutral… eventually!

xBRL

Our **purpose** is to improve the accountability and transparency of business performance globally, by providing the open data exchange standard for business reporting.

Our standards are freely licensed. We operate in the public interest as a not-for-profit standards development organisation.

Join Us!

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