

Leading in the Digital Age

27 April 2026

Corporate Research Forum

Jennifer Jordan

Professor of Leadership & Organizational Behavior

IMD / Real learning
Real impact



What is unique about leadership in
the current time?

What's Unique?
Job reduction & societal impact
Holding polarities & self-awareness
Next Generation & older generations / PURPOSE
Pace
Model of Leaders → more diverse
& unique

geopolitical shifts
hybrid working

- The leader was looked to for their technical expertise.
- The leader held the power.
- The leader was valued for their intuition.
- We thought the world was moving fast...
- We had a reasonable idea about who our serious competitors were.
- Consistency in direction and messaging was key.
- The leader's job was to mentor younger colleagues.
- Teamwork was F2F.
- We had a clear idea of what was the domain of humans and what was the domain of machine.

Digital

Pre-digital

- The leader *looks to others* (including the network) for *their* technical expertise.
- The leader empowers others.
- The leader is valued for their use and analysis of data.
- The world is moving fast. (And only moving faster!)
- Disruptors are the new competitors.
- Adaptability in direction and messaging is key.
- Reverse mentoring is all the rage.
- Teamwork (and a lot more!) is virtual.
- We are figuring out what is the domain of humans and what is the domain of machines.

What unique competencies or skills do leaders need to be successful in this new world?

- The leader *looks to others* (including the network) for *their* technical expertise.
- The leader empowers others.
- The leader is valued for their use and analysis of data.
- The world is moving fast. (And only moving faster!)
- Disruptors are the new competitors.
- Adaptability in direction and messaging is key.
- Reverse mentoring is all the rage.
- Teamwork (and a lot more!) is virtual.
- We are figuring out what is the domain of humans and what is the domain of machines.

"people skills"

↳ loneliness

Sense-making

↳ radical

Simplicity

Learning Agility

Humility
(intellectual)

FUTURE VISION

Curiosity


↳ Distancing

Moral compass

& Courage

Risk management

↳ Adaptable & Resilient



Quantitative survey of more than 1,000 senior business leaders globally

Semi-structured interviews with dozens executives affected by digital disruption

DIGITAL WORLD

Leadership Behaviors of the DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD



Leadership Behaviors of the TRADITIONAL WORLD

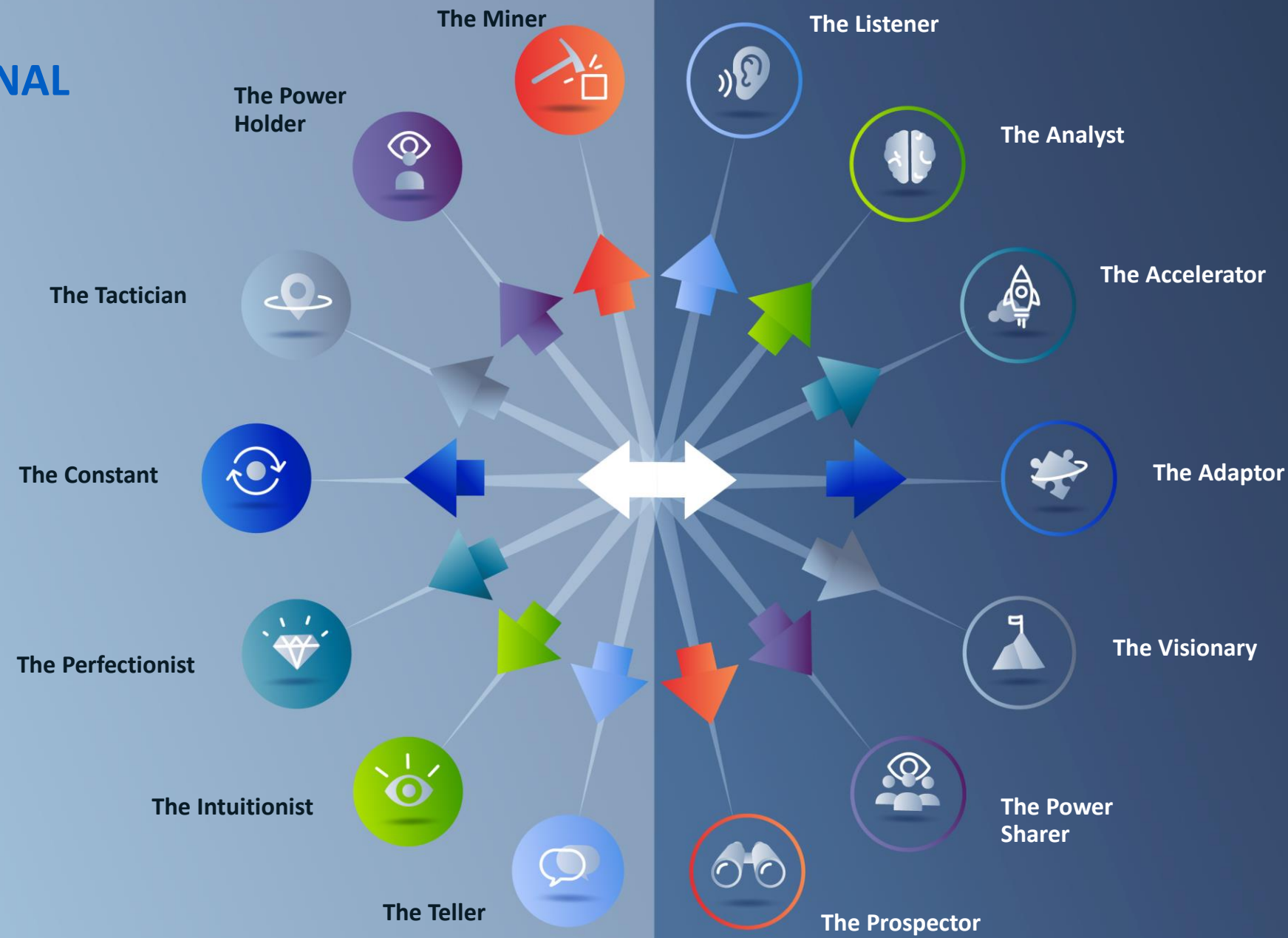
DIGITAL WORLD

Leadership Behaviors of the DIGITAL WORLD



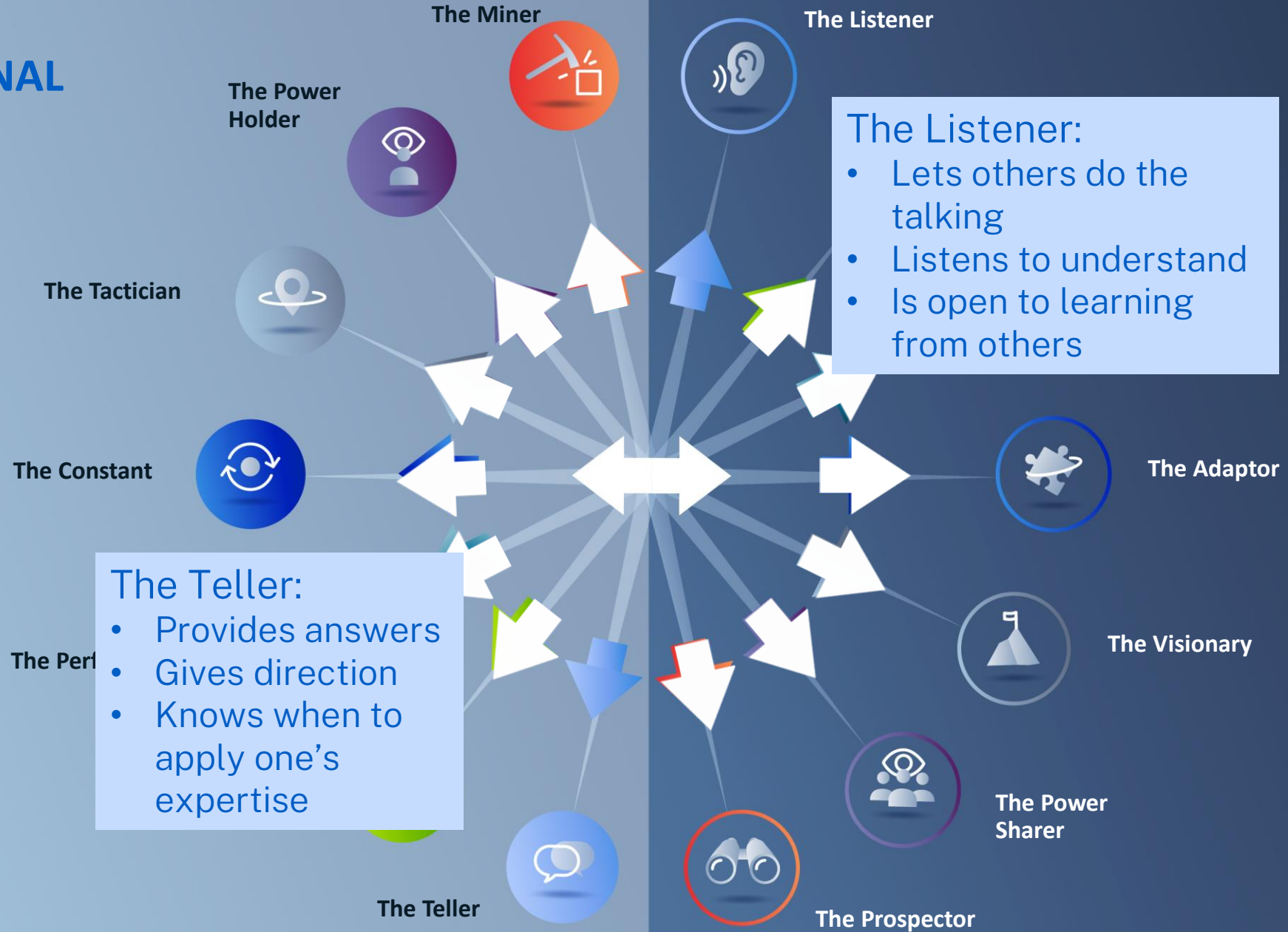
TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD

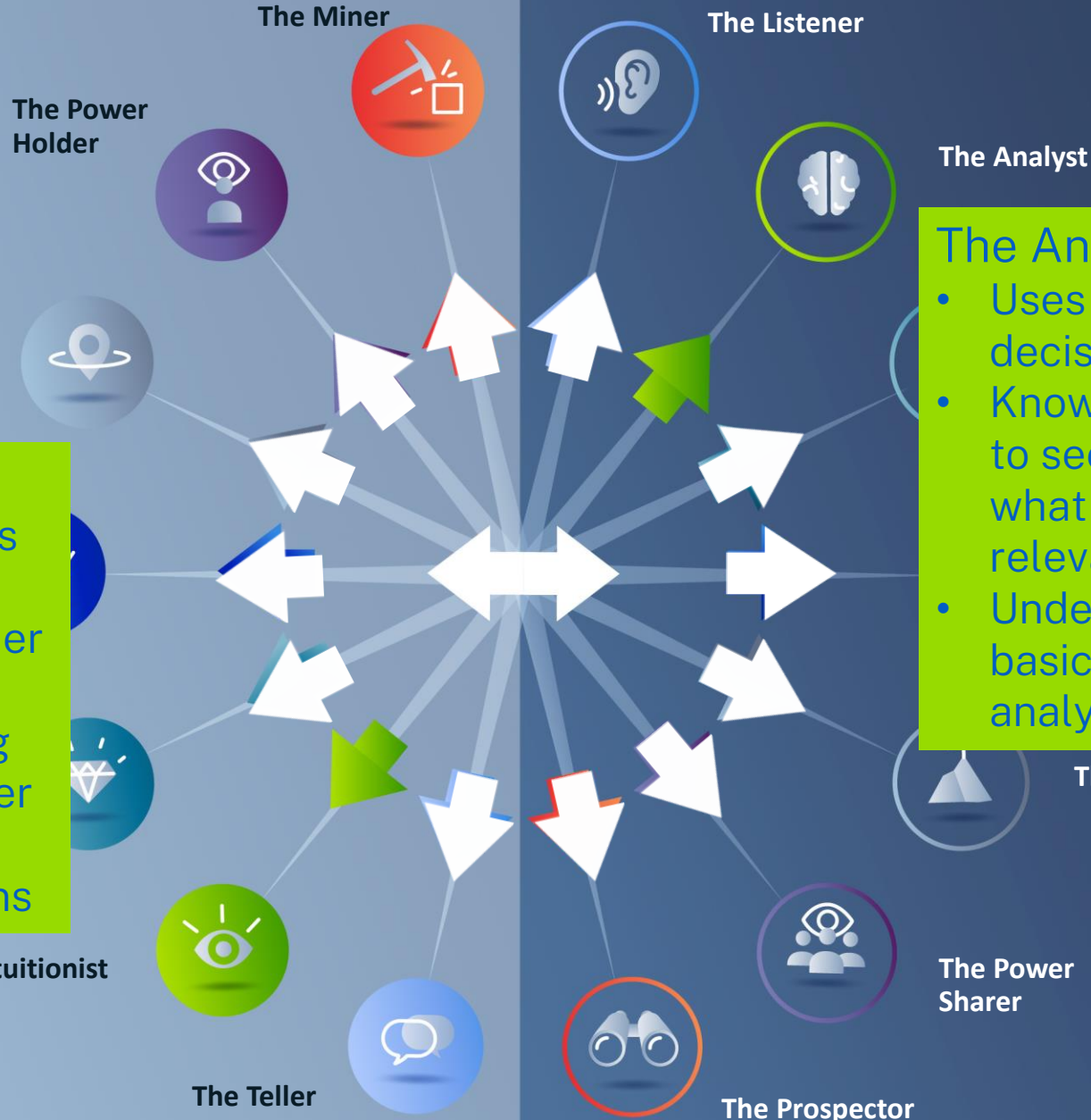
DIGITAL WORLD

The Intuitionist:

- Makes decisions from the gut
- Integrates his/her experience into decision making
- Listens to his/her intuition when making decisions

The Analyst:

- Uses data to make decisions
- Knows what data to seek out and what data is not relevant
- Understands the basics of data analysis



TRADITIONAL WORLD

The Perfectionist:

- Emphasizes perfection over speed
- Ensures that a perfect finished product is delivered to the customer/market

The Perfectionist

The Intuitionist

The Teller

The Miner

The Power Holder

The Listener

The Analyst

The Accelerator

The Accelerator:

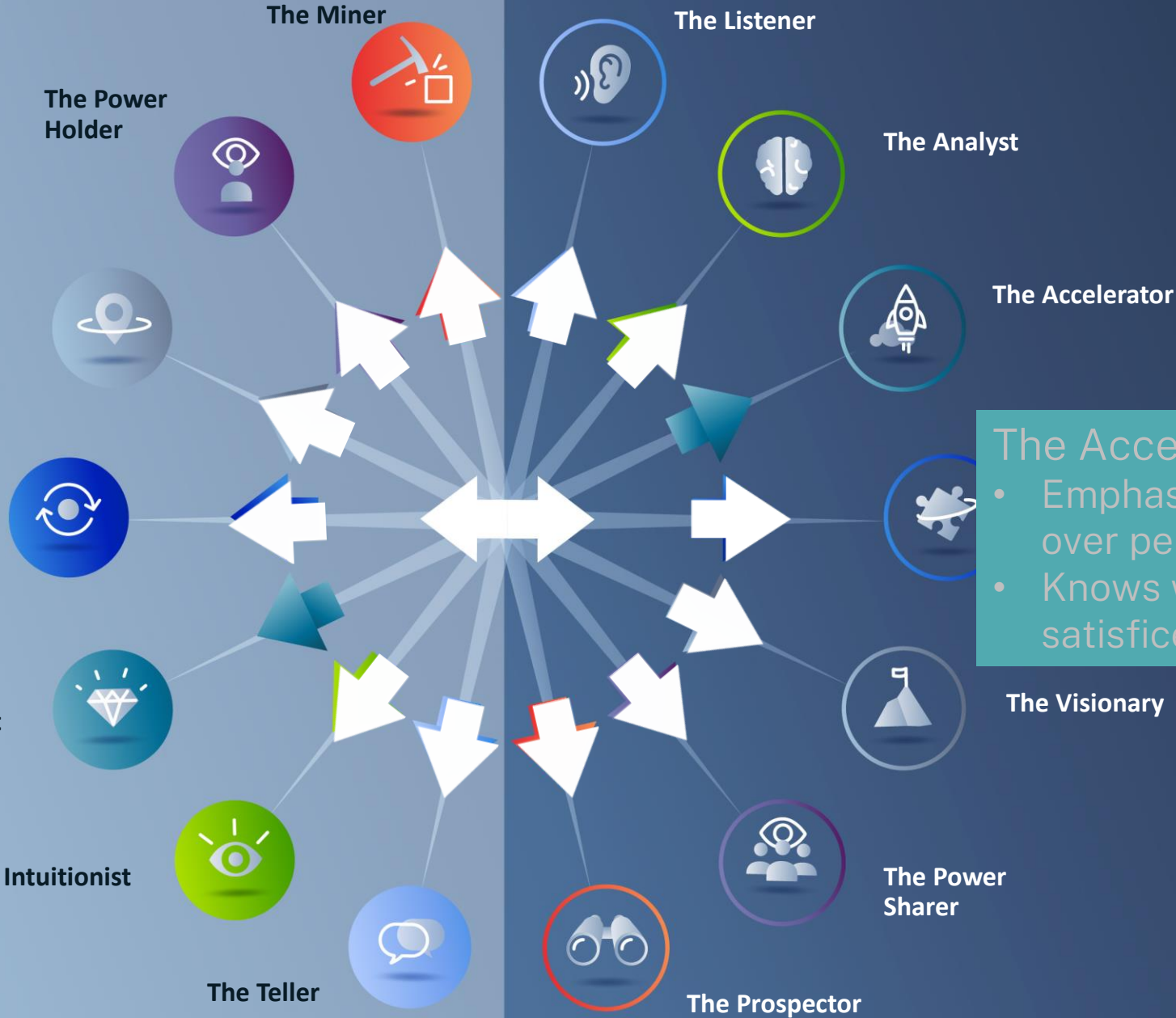
- Emphasizes speed over perfection
- Knows when to satisfice

The Visionary

The Power Sharer

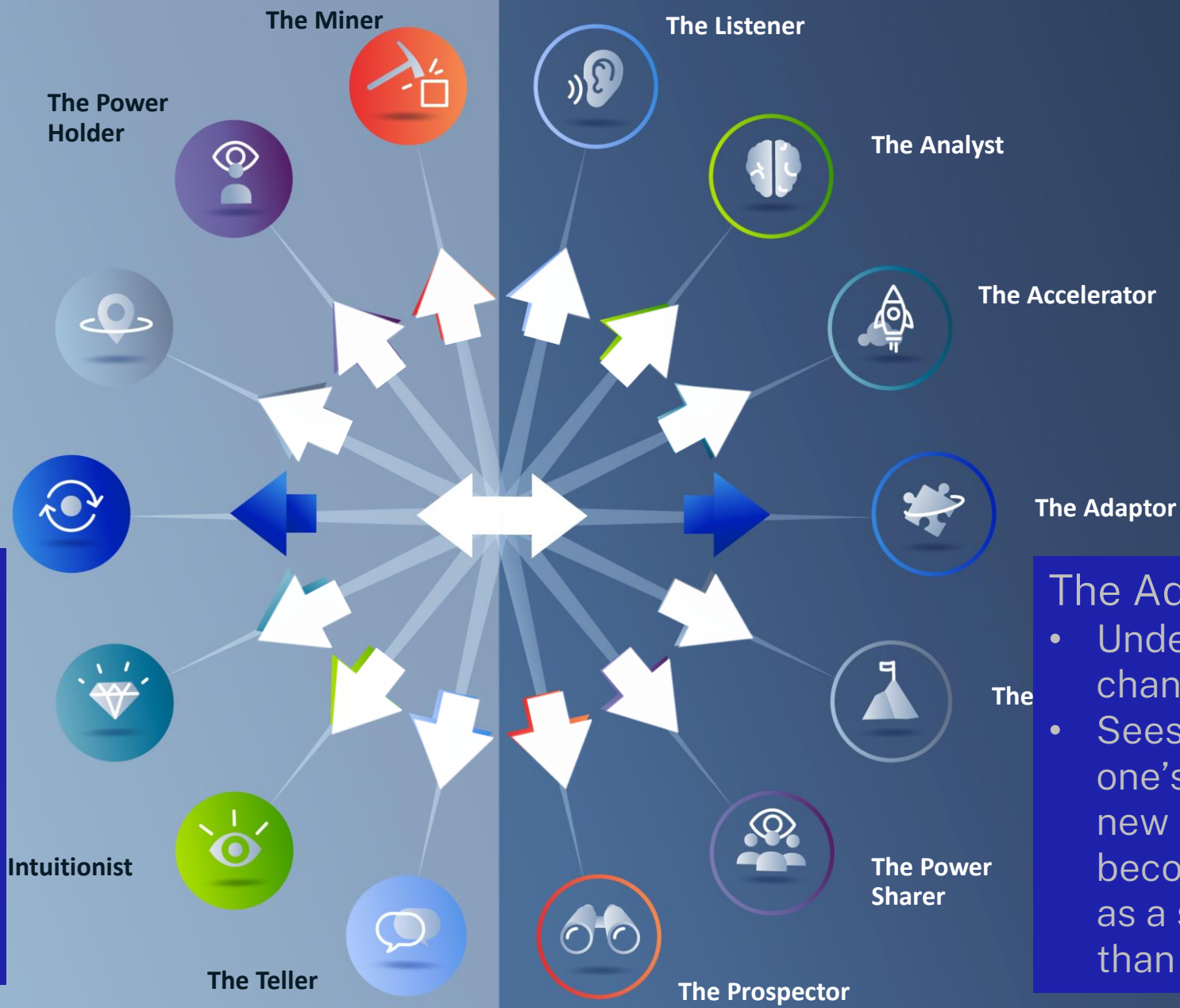
The Prospector

DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



The Constant:

- Provides a consistent message to his/her constituents
- Provides comfort and security via sticking with a steady path forward

The Adaptor:

- Understands that change is constant
- Sees changing one's mind when new information becomes available as a strength rather than a weakness

TRADITIONAL WORLD

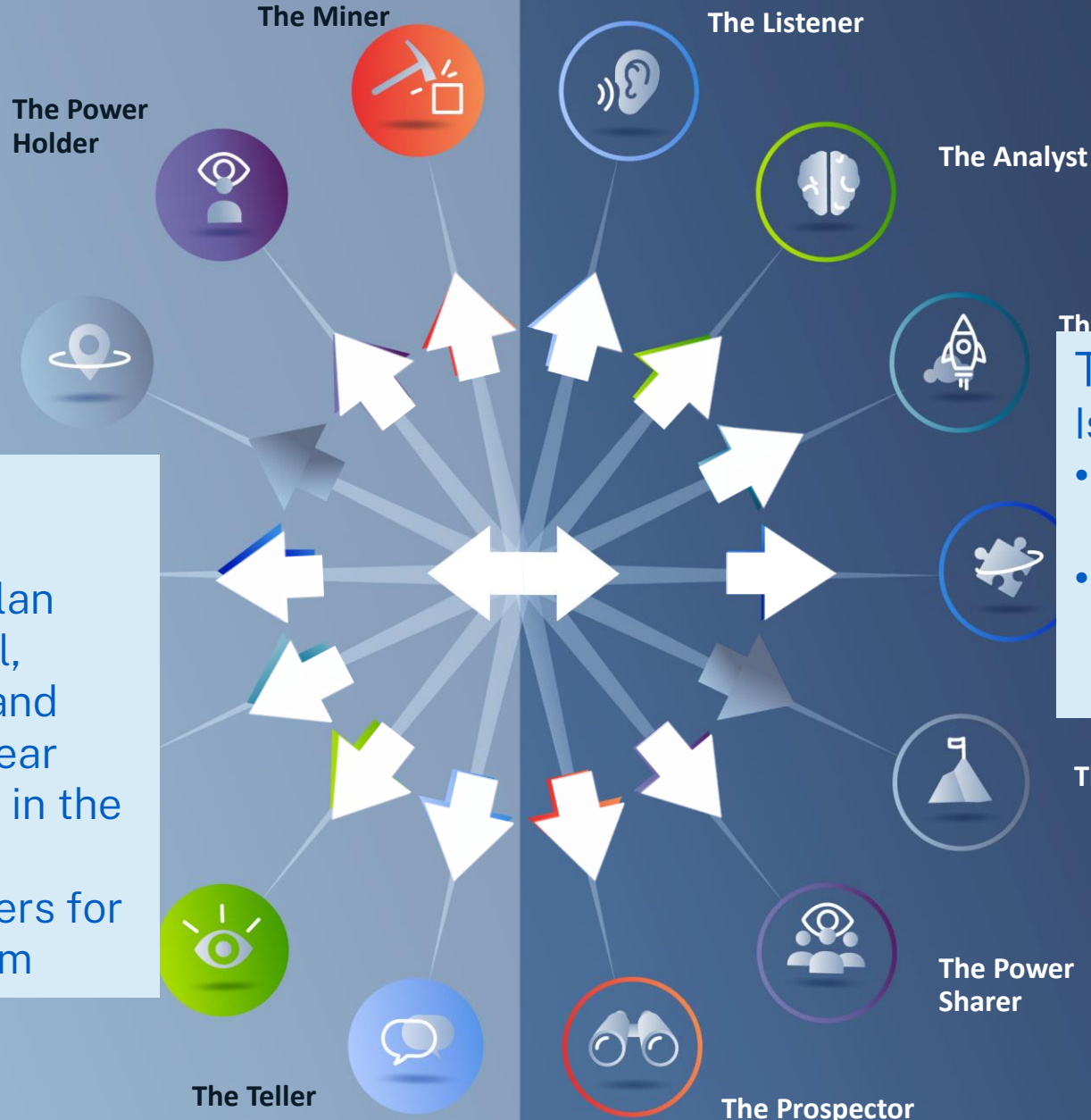
DIGITAL WORLD

The Tactician:
Is able to

- generate a plan that is logical, reasonable, and provides a clear path forward in the short-term
- motivate others for the short-term

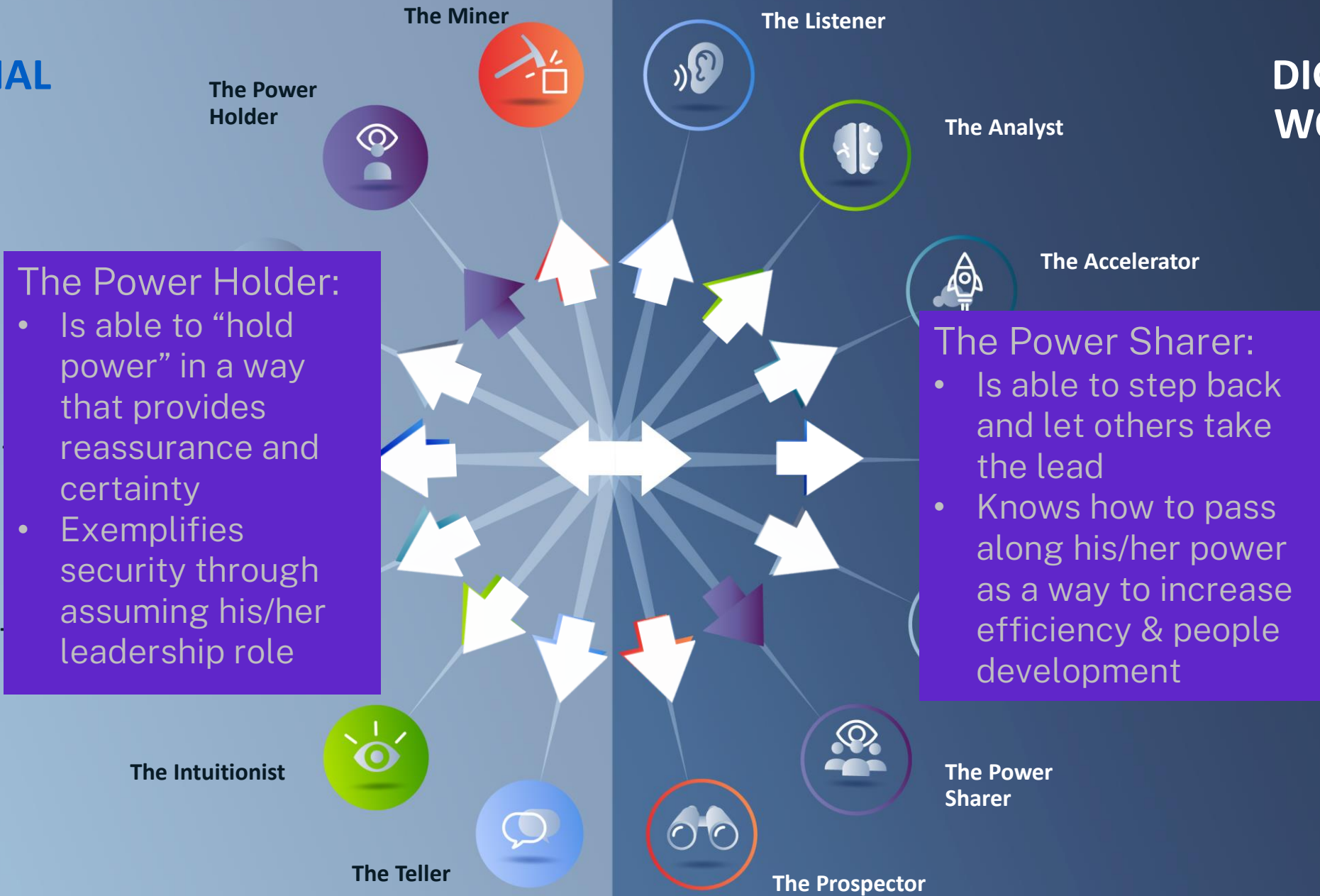
The Accelerator
The Visionary:
Is able to

- generate a long-term vision
- inspire and influence others to adopt this vision



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD

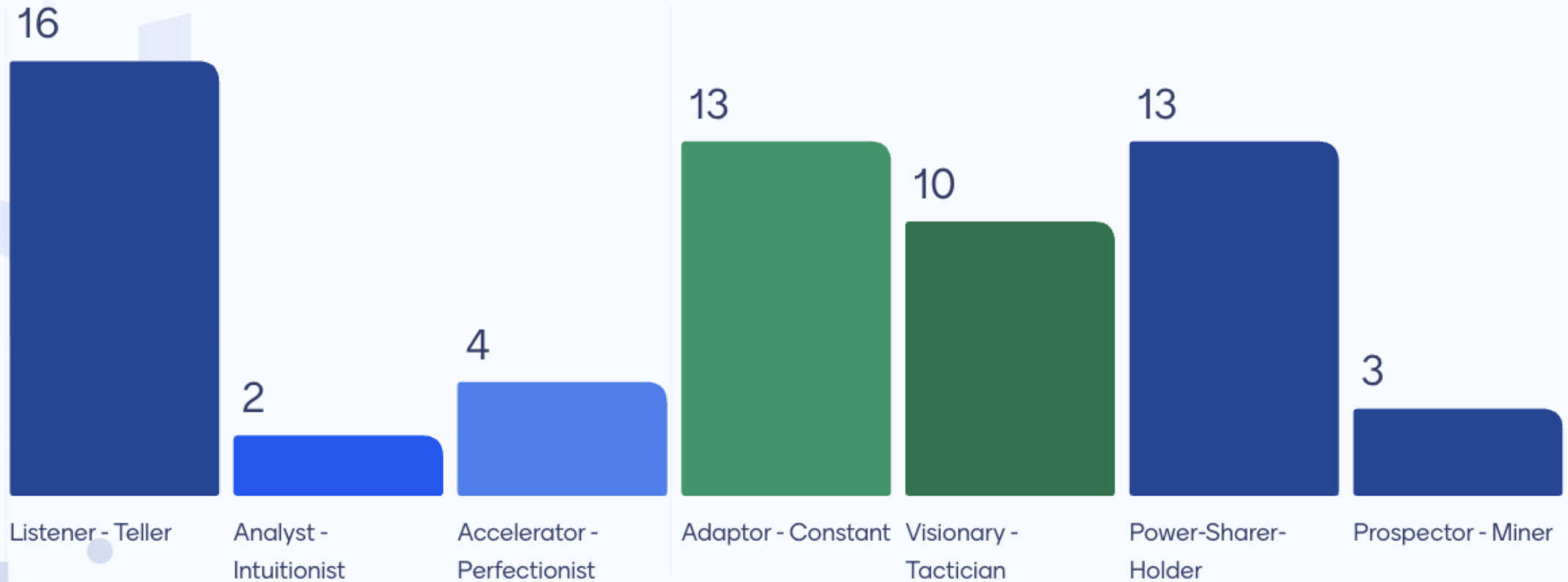




360 assessment with 300
leaders in the largest (by
market cap) company in
Europe.

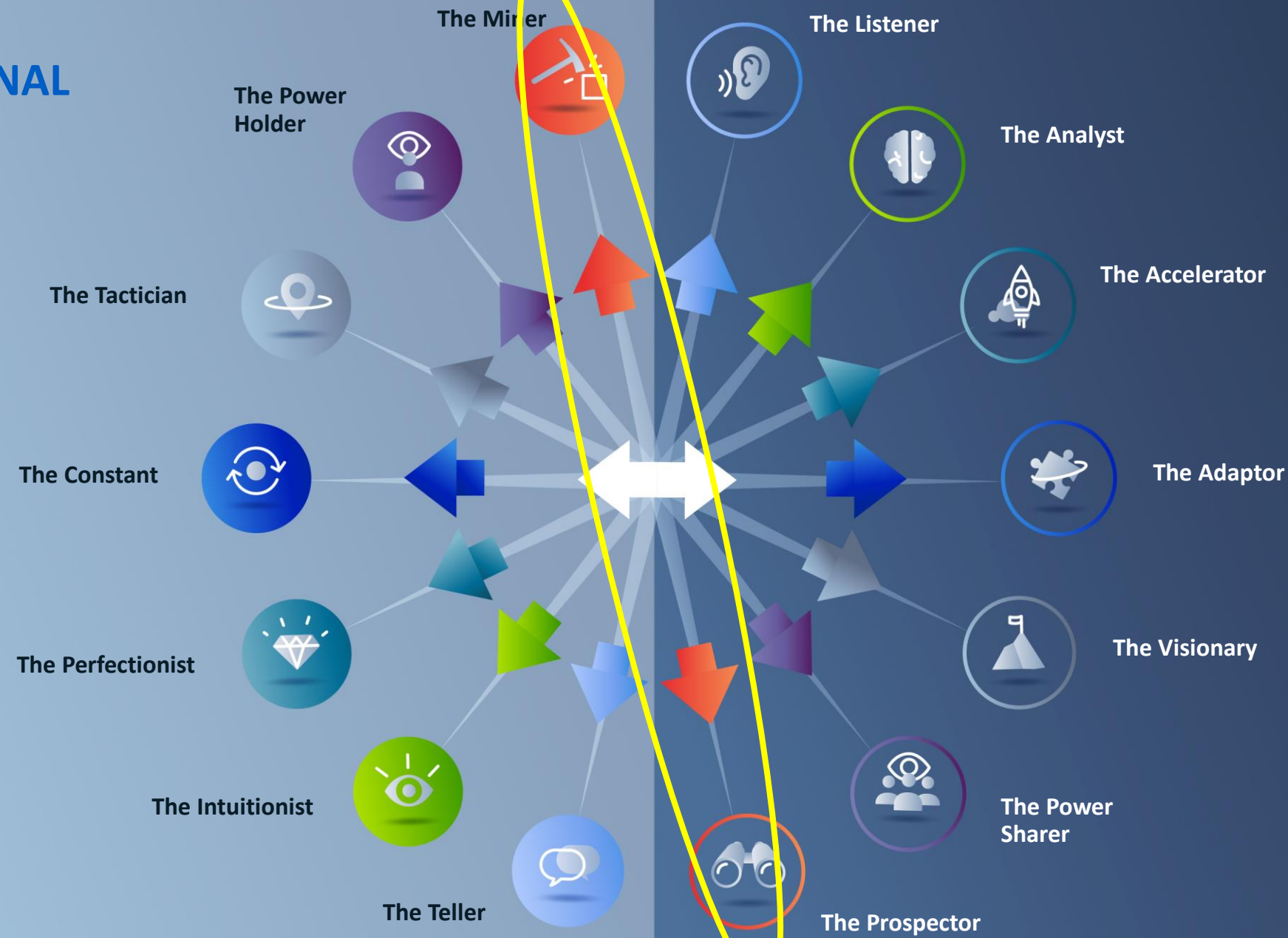
Looked at which tensions
best predicted their digital
acumen.

Which tension was most predictive?



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD





nVIDIA®

IMD / Real learning
Real impact



IMD / Real learning
Real impact



SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

The 84-Year-Old Man Who Saved Nvidia

It's a \$2 trillion company today. It wouldn't exist without someone known as Irimajiri-san.



IMD / Real learning
Real impact

How Huang balances *Miner* & *Prospector*

Uses the unofficial motto of, "Our company is 30 days from going out of business."

"We're focused on inventing things that the world doesn't need yet." He "looks for the future"

He's a workaholic who rarely takes vacations.

T5T emails

'Top 5 Things' Emails

“It’s really important that I understand what everybody is doing.”

“I’m looking to detect the weak signals.”

“He’s looking for the next zero billion dollar market - a frontier that hasn’t been explored because it barely exists but could one day be, well, a thing.”

If we realized the pain and suffering and how vulnerable you're going to feel, the challenges that you're going to endure, the embarrassment and the shame and the list of all the things that go wrong, nobody in their right mind would do it.

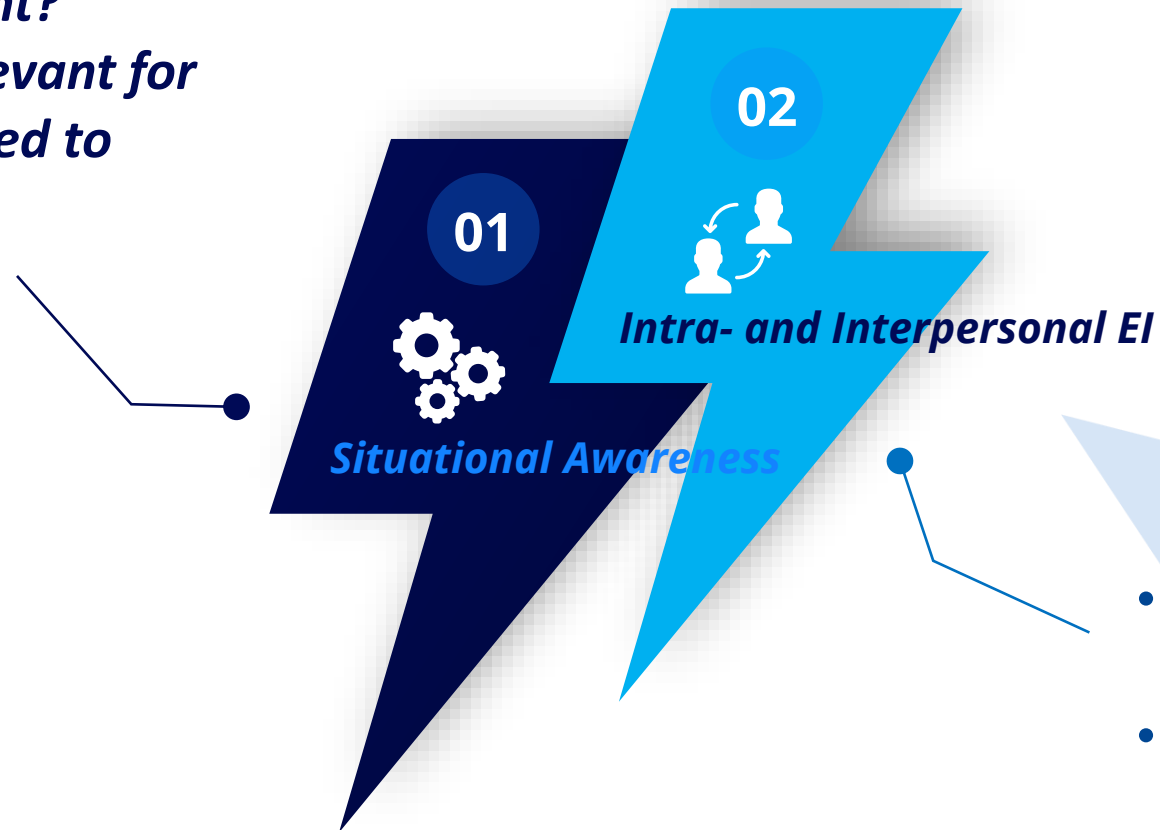
-Jensen Huang, 2023

Methods to Enhance Prospecting

1. Have a meeting with one expert outside of your field every month.
2. Put together a personal expertise board that you can regularly consult.
3. Subscribe to a professional publication that has nothing to do with your field of work (e.g., read Wired)
4. What are some *strategic inflection points* that you notice? Keep a running notebook of anomalies that you observe and review at the end of each month.
5. In what “strange” context could you immerse yourself for a day or an afternoon?

How do leaders decide on which side of the tension to be?

- *What features are present in my environment?*
- *How are they relevant for the task that I need to perform?*



- *How am I feeling?*
- *How are others feeling?*

What keeps leaders from moving to the other side of the tension – even when they know it is needed?

- Feeling unskilled in how to exercise that side of the tension.
- Having a fear of the downside of that competency.

TRADITIONAL WORLD

DIGITAL WORLD



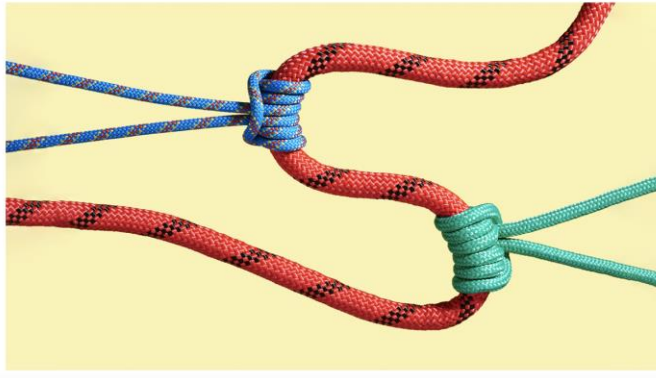
Some important considerations for the 7 tensions

- Leaders need to think in pairs (meaning *and* rather than *or*)
- No one side is better than the other. **It is all about context.**
- Balancing 3-4 is sufficient
- If leaders rely too much on one side of the tension, and are not able to gracefully move to the other when needed, they will start to unnecessarily reveal the negatives of that side.
- To become "balanced" as a leader on any one pole, leaders have to first practice each pole separately and get to a moderate level of mastery on both.

Every Leader Needs to Navigate These 7 Tensions

by Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade, and Elizabeth Teracino

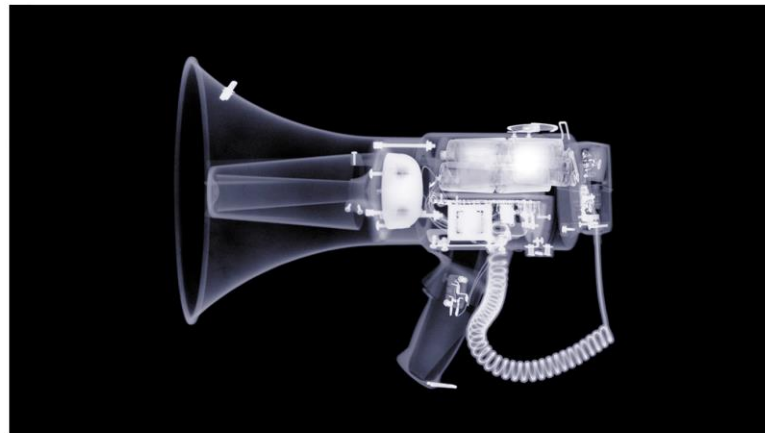
February 20, 2020



Finding the Right Balance — and Flexibility — in Your Leadership Style

by Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade, and Tomoko Yokoi

January 11, 2022



What It Takes to Lead Through Digital Disruption

Research suggests you need a balance of broad curiosity and focused discipline. by Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade, and Shih-han Huang

Published on HBR.org / September 11, 2025 / Reprint [H08VUX](#)

