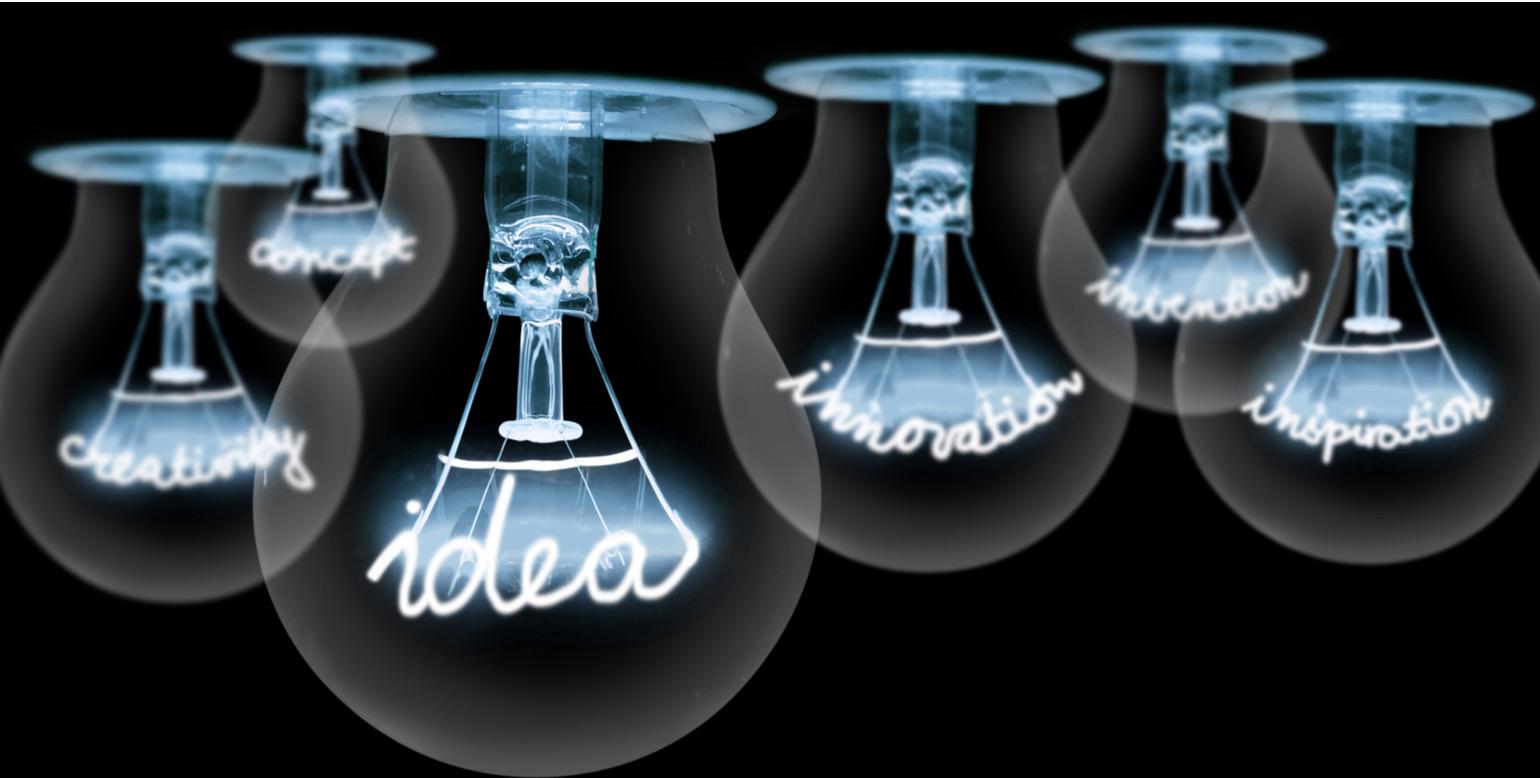


# Creating a *Multipliers* Culture

By Jim Perry, Vice President of Leadership Programs at **BTS**



Liz Wiseman's research revealed how **people's intelligence can be multiplied or diminished by their leaders**, with some leaders getting nearly twice as much intelligence from their teams as others. This variance means that some leaders are able to get more ideas, broader perspectives, and keener insights from their teams, while other leaders simply drive their teams to work harder.

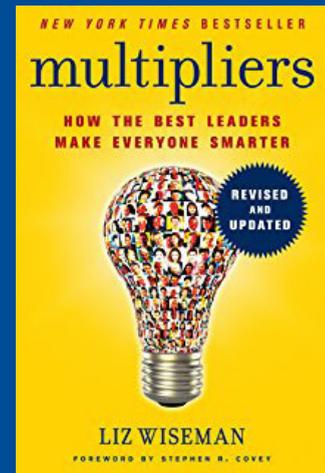
In an economy driven by the speed of turning consumer insights into market-disrupting innovation, simply working harder will be an increasingly ineffective approach. I believe this explains the enthusiasm with which our customers at BTS, across industries and global cultures, have embraced *Multipliers* as **a leadership philosophy** and a practical approach to training leadership skills.

# The BTS-Wiseman Group Partnership

BTS and the Wiseman Group found each other through our mutual customers. At an engagement with a large Silicon Valley software company, we were exposed to Liz's thought leadership through the *Multipliers* book and her keynote address to their senior staff. At the same event, Liz was exposed to BTS's powerful learning approach—teaching leadership concepts in deeply contextual business simulations.

In 2016 we collaborated with Liz to create the *Multipliers Simulation*, a 1- or 2-day simulation that explores all aspects of *Multipliers* in an exciting and highly applicable simulation.

In addition to the *Multipliers Simulation*, BTS also embeds *Multipliers* concepts into our fully custom simulations, connecting *Multipliers* leadership to the deepest context of our customers' business transformations. As of early 2018, BTS has taught *Multipliers* to 13,000 participants across 78 client organizations.



But there are factors beyond the individual leader that can have a profound impact on whether people in your organization contribute all of their smarts. Three factors that help build a *Multipliers* culture in the companies we work with are:

- The integration and uptake of **the *Multipliers* vocabulary** in the organization.
- The capabilities that leaders and teams have for **allowing smart risk** and for creating space for people to stretch, experiment, and learn by doing.
- Identifying and eliminating **diminishing factors** in policy, procedure, and practice.

## Go Viral with *Multipliers* Vocabulary

One of the things I loved about *Multipliers* when I first encountered it was the playful and provocative language. Leaders could function as “Multipliers” or “Diminishers.” Multipliers did things like “magnetize” themselves to attract talent, and “liberate” people to do their best work. Diminishers, on the other hand, acted as “talent hoarders” and “tyrants.” And even great, multiplying leaders might fall into “accidentally diminishing” by being “rescuers” or “idea guys.”

These were new words for ideas and concepts that companies have been trying to express in dry, unread competency frameworks for decades. In some cases, the *Multipliers* vocabulary captured brand-new thinking about how leaders positively impact their people. The language was catchy and viral—I found myself using it immediately and naturally.

The effect of these new words is new and better conversations between leaders and those they lead, and between leaders themselves. When people have new words, they can have new conversations and even new thoughts. Employees who feel unable to work across department or project lines finally have the words to help their bosses realize that they are hoarding and controlling talent. The supervisor who wants to help a team member work more autonomously can give a stretch challenge.

An executive customer of ours at LG, the Korean manufacturing giant, now always carries invisible “chips” to help her moderate her contribution in meetings. At a project kickoff meeting that we attended, she opened by

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sharing with her team, “We’ve had quite a few back-to-back meetings, and I’ve played too many chips. So, I’m going to let you all run this meeting, and I will contribute only as needed.”

As you incorporate *Multipliers* into your organization, here are three powerful strategies for amplifying the power of the vocabulary:

- **Go for critical mass:** Concentrate your rollout of *Multipliers* to “get everyone talking” quickly. This means rolling out to intact teams rather than open-enrollment, or concentrating a company-wide rollout into a short timeframe. *Multipliers* is proven to work well with all levels of leadership, from executives to floor supervisors. There is even a *Multipliers Simulation* for individual contributors. We’ve all experienced going to a seminar and coming back with a great idea, only to feel like the kid with one walkie-talkie. By achieving critical mass in your rollout strategy, you greatly increase the likelihood of people having multipliers conversations with their boss and with each other.
- **Make it a journey:** Don’t rely just on the simulation learning session itself to drive behavior change. Simple activities can drive adoption of the vocabulary and the behaviors. Three easy-to-implement suggestions include: a conversation planner for a follow-up meeting with one’s manager after the simulation, a peer-to-peer check-in call with fellow participants a few weeks after the session, and the use of your company’s social network to share success stories.

- **Incorporate the *Multipliers* vocabulary into your performance management systems and leadership communications:** In many cases this will mean a simple re-wording of existing tools; sometimes it will be better to re-write and simplify them. For some reason, leadership as a discipline has often adopted an academic tone, which can be intimidating for laypeople. Incorporating *Multipliers* vocabulary can be an opportunity to adopt a more casual, approachable tone in your leadership programs and to get your senior leaders to use the new vocabulary in their company communication. Just a few words or phrases can send a strong signal.

## Get Smarter About Risk

Wiseman's research revealed that a key difference between chronic Diminishers and accomplished Multipliers was their beliefs about their people. Diminishers don't trust that their team can perform without their close supervision, and they aren't willing to risk much to let them try. Multipliers take measured risks in giving clear ownership, liberating people to experiment and stretch, and planning for mistakes. Helping your organization become smarter about risk can help all leaders function as more effective Multipliers.

Recently a study was done on the decisions of American Football teams to "go for it" on 4th down. For non-football fans, this means a team's choice on

whether, when they come up short, to punt the ball down the field into the other team's possession, or to keep it and try to advance a yard or two to retain possession. The study found that teams chose to forfeit possession far too often—if they were willing to risk the “keep” play, they would come out significantly ahead over time. This is just one illustration of how poor even professionals are at evaluating risk, especially the risk of “playing-it-safe.”

We know it intellectually—if you never risk your kid getting a scrape, you create the near-certainty of fostering fear and physical timidity. Diminisher leaders are making exactly this mistake. By never allowing their teams to risk failure, they create a certainty of mediocrity, cautious indecision, and loss of top talent.

Multipliers, either by predilection or discipline, figure out how to minimize and mitigate risk, allowing them to give their teams much greater freedom and autonomy. How can we help everyone become wiser about risk?

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Generally, risk management requires two things: assessment of risk, and risk-mitigation approaches. We'll take these in turn.

All risk can be categorized according to its likelihood and potential severity. This simple act of listing all of the risks we are concerned about, and grading each according to its likelihood and severity, can dramatically increase our risk tolerance.

What often results after a session of “riskstorming” is the realization that the risks are not so intimidating, and that most can be greatly minimized with a bit of pre-planning and communication to stakeholders. For the risks that rank high on both likelihood and severity, a mitigation plan can be developed. Risk mitigation in people-leadership is similar to risk mitigation in other fields. The strategies I teach are:

- **Low-cost testing:** Can you test key assumptions about the risk in a low-exposure way? Create a smaller scale deliverable, or a “minimally viable product” that the team can turn around quickly, to demonstrate their capabilities and validate the other assumptions of the project.
- **Hedging:** Can the team invest a bit in taking early steps on a safer strategy? This might mean letting the team run with their favored plan but having them do a bit of work toward “plan B” so that they can quickly recover should they need to.

- **Failbacks:** Do a dry run of what it would look like to roll back to the status quo anti. This is one to be careful with, as truly bold plans often involve some form of “burning the boats on the shore,” (Alexander the Great used this tactic to encourage boldness for his invading armies).
- **Informed awareness:** A lot of potential failures are not worth all of the above work. Sometimes it is enough just to make sure everyone who could be affected is aware that we are trying something new, that a promising employee is taking on a stretch challenge, and that these risks have been thought through.

By training leaders to be wiser about risk, and building good risk-taking practices into your organization, you can help all leaders put aside diminishing beliefs and liberate their teams to do their best work.

## Making Multiplying Automatic

One of the most intriguing things we see our customers doing is to make it easier to lead as a Multiplier, and harder to lead as a Diminisher, through changes in the work environment itself. Simple changes to things like meeting agendas, team roles, and empowerment policies can help employees experience clearer ownership and accountability, greater inclusion in debate and decision-making, and more frequent opportunities to contribute their thinking to the work at hand.

Many of our customers are implementing Agile concepts and principles, which at their best foster clear ownership and accountability, liberate people to try new things, and accelerate team members' understanding of their "native genius." Whether or not you are implementing Agile, you can focus on approaches such as:

- **Dividing large projects** into smaller, nearer-term deliverables that can be fully entrusted to team members.
- **Building greater accountability and feedback** into project checkpoints and milestones. Building a tool like [RACI](#) into your project kickoff template, for example, can ensure that responsibilities are clearly delegated and should not be micro-managed. Creating simple performance feedback tools into project checkpoints is another way to gently force the right conversations to happen.

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- **Creating policies to promote mobility** can foil attempts by diminishers to hoard and control talent. Job rotation, temporary reassignments, or even sabbatical policies can help employees shop for their best boss and keep employees challenged and growing despite the influence of their immediate leader.

Winning in today's market requires having everybody's head in the game. We are excited to see our customers embrace *Multipliers* as more than just another leadership catalog course and, rather, as a catalyst to transform their approach to leadership. And early results are fantastic. SAP, a 90k-employee global software company, has employed all three strategies and is seeing **significant improvements in employee engagement and leadership trust.**

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## Early Results of Cultural Transformation at SAP

BTS began a partnership with SAP in 2015 to help them in their transformation to become “The Cloud Company Powered by HANA.” For a 35-year old global enterprise software company, this was an enormous undertaking.

In addition to revolutionizing their technology, they also embarked on transforming their business model, touching every part of the company. SAP had BTS create highly contextual simulations with *Multipliers* embedded as the leadership philosophy to equip their leaders for this transformation. The results have been dramatic and measurable:

- SAP achieved critical mass by working with BTS to develop a business simulation/Multipliers approach for every level of leader—from the top 350 executives to team leaders—and even for individual contributors. To date, **over 70% of SAP leaders have participated** in a BTS program.

- From the beginning, SAP measured Employee Engagement and Leader Trust as key metrics for the programs. Employee Engagement is measured with a typical engagement survey similar to the Gallup Q12. Leadership Trust scores are similar to a Net Promotor Score (NPS), where people rate the question, “How likely are you to recommend your direct manager as a manager whom you trust?”
- First-level leaders who participated in the “Lead SAP Teams to Great Results” **increased their employee engagement by 3.4%** compared to leaders who have not yet attended. SAP estimates that a 1% increase in engagement results in a **€40-50 million increase in net income** for SAP overall.
- The same population **improved their Leadership Trust scores by 2.3%**.
- The BTS programs at SAP have achieved a global NPS of 77, evidence that participants see the content as highly relevant and practical.

## About the Author

Jim Perry, Head of Leadership Programs for BTS, leads BTS's partnership with *Multipliers* and has developed learning solutions for dozens of Fortune 100 clients. His experience includes a 17-year career with Kinko's (now FedEx Office) and extensive experience in operations management, global training development and delivery, and change management.



## About BTS

BTS is a global professional services firm headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, with some 500 professionals in 33 offices located on six continents. We focus on the people side of strategy working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results.