

**congstar**

# Building organization-wide coherence for rapid adaptation in a mobile operator

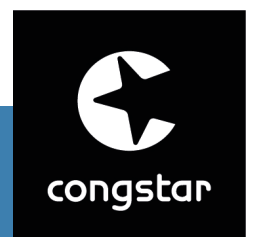


## The beginning: congstar sets ambitious goals for complexity

congstar is a German mobile operator. From its start-up beginnings in 2007, congstar has grown to an organization of more than 200 employees and their brand's association with flexibility and fairness gained them more than five million customers last year. Despite all that, congstar was not content to rest in its laurels. Setting ambitious growth targets for themselves and focusing ever more on responding to their customers' needs and expectations (true wow moments are the goal!) is crucial in order to gain more market shares, especially since the company is operating in a dynamic market that includes more than 60 competitors. In order to succeed, congstar is determined to focus on its own employees, and learn how to adapt quickly and flexibly to their complex environment.

### Company Facts

- Mobile operator
- Founded in 2007
- + 200 employees
- Designated as one of the best employers in Germany for 2019 by Great Place to Work®
- Selected as one of the brands of the year for 2019 by Handelsblatt and the market research institute YouGov
- Headquarter: Cologne, Germany



## Creating an agile culture of collaboration, autonomy and fast responses

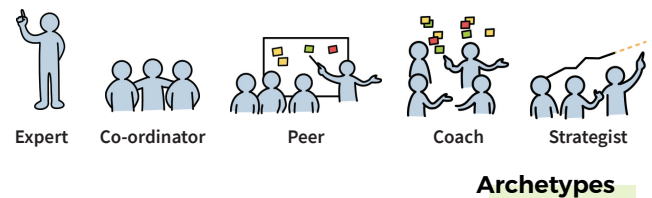
They sought the response to those challenges in a capability that already existed in their organization: agility. The company's IT department started working in an agile way 9 years ago. However, letting that agile mindset also grow in other departments within the organization took a while. Enter agile42, which coincidentally also started its operations in 2007. In 2018, the two companies' collaboration started with an assessment. agile42 wanted this assessment to serve as an accurate and responsive analysis that would lead to action, while congstar needed to know how they could get to scale their know-how to their entire company. This initial assessment revealed that incoherencies between teams working in different ways, their differing expectations, and the tendency of leaders to focus on their own groups at the expense of the big picture would be the main leverage points for achieving change.

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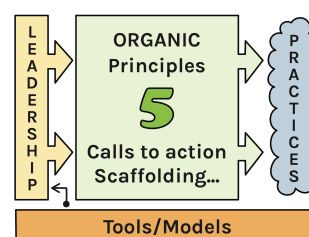
## Targeting leadership through the concept and method of archetypes

Both sides decided that leadership would be the best place to start from in order to create a deeper shift in culture and collaboration and not just the introduction of new tools and methods. Time was also a significant factor, so we focused on and worked with the concept of *archetypes* in detail while we introduced the entire leadership framework more on a theoretical level to give the full

context. Typically, an archetype is a concept that brings together an ideal type, a prototype, and a powerful trope. Think for example of the Self-sacrificing Hero, or the Wicked Witch.

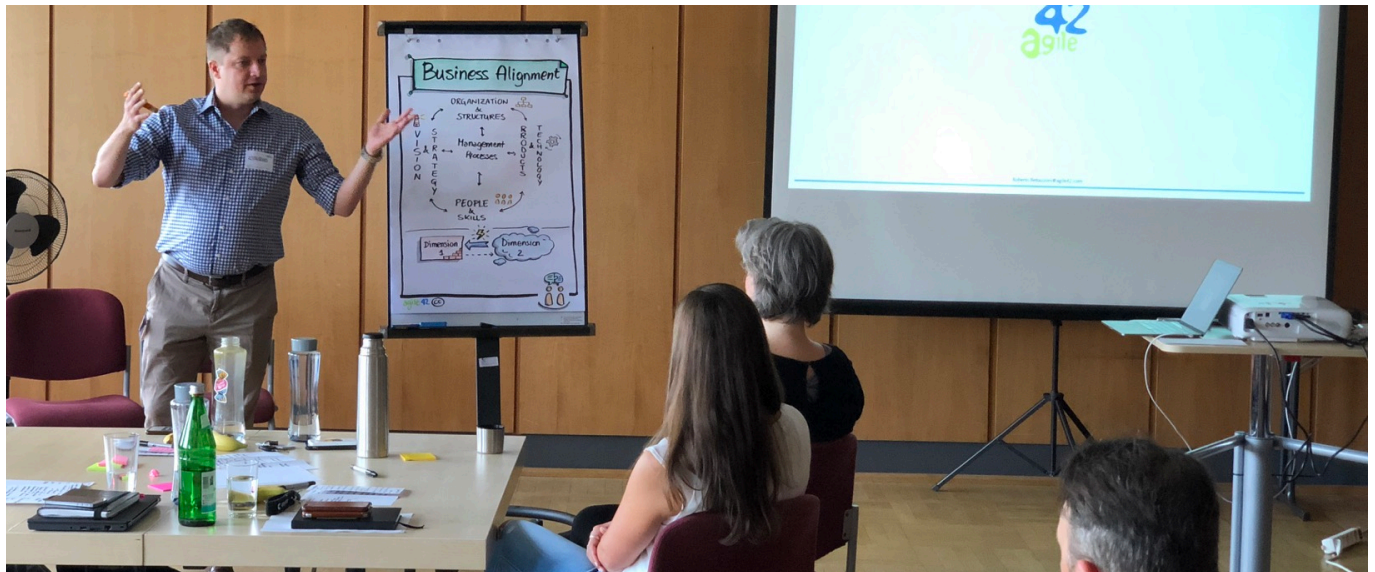


In the context of ORGANIC Leadership, which is one of the three pillars of ORGANIC agility, an archetype is a way to bring a leadership attitude and behavior together with organizational culture and structure. Each organization can discover its own specific archetypes, but ORGANIC Leadership also provides a series of high-level archetypes that are abstract enough that every organization can see aspects of itself in them and can adjust them to its unique environment. These archetypes also represent increasing levels of team autonomy, and they are not mutually exclusive, but different archetypes can be adopted depending on the situation.



**3 pillars of ORGANIC agility**

The agile42 coaches introduced those archetypes to congstar's people and taught them how to run an assessment within their teams, so that they could discover what archetype they felt most at ease with and how coherent the teams' own perception of themselves was. By combining the results, congstar could discover what the right level of autonomy was for them in that particular moment in time and how to build a shared language around culture. Through



agile42 coach in session

this processed they discovered that the *Peer archetype* would be coherent across groups and teams as well as offering significant team autonomy.

### **Working towards the congstar team goals: transparency, knowledge, decision-making**

A Peer archetype is characterized by a leader who considers themselves part of the group, and a group that is able to share feedback and decision-making processes. The role of the leader is to enable the growth of individuals and the team as a whole and support them through sharing goals and a sense of purpose. This was a great match for congstar's desires for their teams, which included greater transparency and focus, personal development, and focus on team decisions, and an identification of team members with the larger whole. Some teams were more autonomous, others less, but all could see and understand the benefits of this archetype and of having a shared basis. This last point is worth emphasizing, as when multiple teams come together to collaborate on larger projects, or new cross-functional teams are formed, their cultural differences will inevitably cause misunderstandings and unproductive conflicts.

As expected, team leaders reacted in different ways. Some carried out the assessment and run away with the results, while others hesitated, fearing loss of precious time and not feeling secure enough in the process. A follow-up workshop brought different kinds of leaders together again and helped them bring archetypes to life: an archetype implies specific characteristics as well as specific behaviors on the part of the leader, as much as on the group side. Through stories of their understanding of this archetype, congstar leaders and teams identified seven dimensions that were specific to them and would help them recognize it. Moreover, agile42 showed leaders how to do a behavioral self-assessment, not as a way of evaluating, but to help them build awareness of what they are currently practicing, and how they could modify their current behaviors simply by emphasizing some over others. Finally, in order to help them make behaviors as concrete as possible and facilitate congstar's goal of knowledge exchange in the organization, cohorts displaying similar behaviors were created and paired with one another so that they could learn by those who had different practices.





Participants working with cynefin

## Progress in 2019: Making gains

The initial hesitation and fear of lost time receded after everyone realized that building cross-functional teams that could truly communicate would make for a faster implementation. Fitting new elements into the current routines and daily business was definitely a challenge, but as change became more visible it reinforced commitment and motivation to continue the process. Nine months after the beginning of the program, most of the organization is now operating at a Peer Archetype, benefiting from sharing a language, being more open to feedback, and having leaders who are grounded in their teams and aware of their behaviors. Each team can define their own goals and focus on them in addition to the organizational ones, which gives a communal dimension to personal goals. An internal survey run by congstar in August 2019 demonstrated that 90% of the teams are almost where they wanted.

## A vision for the future

So what is next for congstar in their journey to support a culture built for complexity? In the coming months, the organization wants to further improve the sharing of open feedback and build even more conflict resolution capabilities. As they move in the direction of a true learning organization, a culture where people feel safe to try, fail, learn, and try again is going to be crucial. On the agile42 side, this was a case where, dealing with an organization that had already attained a level of maturity and knowledge, they could step back and offer tools and frameworks that the people of congstar could apply themselves. These tools will now always be in their repertoire and they can return to them and use them every time they need do, without relying on external presence and advice. In the end, this is a story of growing autonomy, for the congstar teams as well as for the organization as a whole.

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**Case study by congstar and agile42**

[congstar.de](https://congstar.de)  
[agile42.com](https://agile42.com)