Department-Level Conflict Management Education Strategy

The National Defense Strategy identifies diversity of thought/engagement as an asymmetric competitive advantage against our near-peer adversaries. And, conflict is inherent in reconciling diverse perspectives into winning strategies and tactics. Thus, effective conflict management skills are essential for accessing this advantage and preserving the morale and psychological safety required for an engaged force.

Diagnosis: What is the Challenge?

A. <u>Unfavorable Student Perception of Value</u>: Despite tacit agreement of the important role effective conflict management skills play in securing favorable outcomes and leveraging diverse perspectives, DAF students often have the power (institutional, positional, or otherwise) to demand the outcomes they desire. Decisiveness in leaders and deference in followers is rewarded/expected. Why build consensus when I can require compliance?

B. <u>Challenge of CM Skill-Building</u>: While CM skills and tools may feel familiar and straightforward, they are deceptively difficult to implement in practice. Even students who recognize the power of building consensus and commitment can default to traditional methods of securing outcomes when they are not supported in meeting resistance or receiving feedback to develop the skill. How do we secure the path from understanding to practice?

C. <u>Decentralized Education Lacks Unity of Intent & Effort</u>: Equipping just under 500k active duty and civilian students to effectively manage conflict currently depends on the work of the NDR program, the AFNC, and curriculum embedded by individual instructors in existing education/training courses (within the education community and functional stakeholder partners). The lack of unified intent/effort means repetitive instruction on foundational topics, likely aligned but potentially problematic CM subject matter expertise in the instructors, and material dependence on persuading instructors to value and then include CM content into their courses. How do we provide a consistent skill-development path for students when the instruction is inconsistent?

Guiding Policy: What is the method for grappling with these issues?

We rely on the experienced-based insight of our people to drive the agile, adaptive solutions that make up America's asymmetric advantage over our adversaries. Whether at the tip of the spear,

or driving it from the home front, Airmen and Guardians in all career fields must regularly reconcile the energy and ingenuity of multiple perspectives into effective courses of action. Whether strengthening internal trust and unit cohesion or successfully negotiating with contractors and allies for outcomes we could not achieve on our own, the process for building alignment and commitment relies on effective conflict management. To ignore the conflict inherent in collaboration is to risk the consequences of relying on power and authority in increasingly transparent, diverse, and interconnected domains. Thus, to align DAF's conflict management education and training to advance this critical asymmetric advantage, DAF's conflict management education strategy follows:

LEARNER FOCUS – Teach conflict management skills with leadership and functional content to make clear the value for the learner.

UNITY OF EFFORT – Align educators and trainers to ensure learners have access to increasingly advanced conflict management skills.

PRACTICAL FOCUS – Ensure learners have access to both education and training modalities to bridge the gap between learning and effective application.

AGILE DELIVERY – Deploy a multi-modal approach to skill delivery to serve learner preferences and ensure availability at the point of need.

Coherent Action: Strategy Implementation Ideas

1. Learner Focus
   a. Development of badges and/or skill codes for credit
2. Unity of Effort
   a. Conflict Management Competency Development
   b. Instructor partnership building (education, reference materials, value-statement)
3. Practical Focus
   a. AU/Education community: primary focus education, secondary training
   b. Stakeholder partner training elements: primary focus training, secondary education
   c. NDRP: instructor development, content continuity
4. Agile Delivery
   a. Quick refresh guides
   b. Video-based learning (case study, interviews)