Where does leadership start and end? What does effective leadership entail? According to Paul Danczyk, Director of Executive Education at the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, leadership happens at all levels within the organization. Danczyk works extensively with executive leadership development, which he defines as a form of development that transforms organizational culture and impact.

California Special District asked Danczyk to explain what executive leadership is, what it entails, and how it can benefit organizations.

Tell us about the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy. What is its mission?

Our school’s mission is to “improve the quality of life for people and their communities, here and abroad.” We have two campuses and Los Angeles is our primary location. In 1971, USC opened a Sacramento campus to be a resource for the state policy-making community. This is my home base.

At the USC State Capital Center, we take three different approaches to meet the school’s mission. First is our intensive Master of Public Administration degree program. The applied coursework is specifically designed for working professionals, both within the Sacramento vicinity and from locations farther away. It’s not unusual to have students from the Los Angeles area or as far away as Washington, D.C.

Our second focus is on policy outreach which bridges the academic and professional communities. Public forums, which address a variety of contemporary topics, are hosted every few months.
The third focus is executive education. That’s my bailiwick. In partnership with sponsoring organizations, we design and deliver high-quality leadership programs that foster professional growth and shape organizational culture.

What is your role with the organization?
I am the director of executive education in Sacramento, overseeing non-degree professional development and training programs. Our team-based, collaborative approach impacts over 600 public-sector executives from across California with programs including the County of Los Angeles Executive Leadership Development Program, and, nationally, with our partnership with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

We have three flagship programs that meet over at least eight days. Other trainings range from a half-day session to multiple days. Experiential learning is at the heart of each program design.

What excites me most about our approach is that we are making tangible differences in individual lives and within organizations. Training programs do a good job transferring knowledge. Where we stand out is tackling how to shape behaviors and change attitudes.

What, exactly, is executive leadership development?
Quite simply, it’s professional development that transforms organizational culture and impact. As individual employees, we contribute to what our organization does and its reputation—for good or bad. Leadership development happens either at the individual level with coaching—not mentoring or counseling—or training programs. Both help participants identify their roles in shaping this culture and develop attitudes, awareness, and empathy to increase performance.

Although we typically default to identifying leaders based on title, leadership happens at all levels within the organization. Our experience has shown that trainings make a greater contribution when participants have complementary experiences either based on position or scope of responsibility. For example, a leadership program for senior executives would be designed differently than a leadership program for entry-level positions. It’s not to say that one level is superior to another. Instead, it is a matter of relating past experiences to shape future behavior.

Leadership programs have many components that are tailored towards the overall goal and are influenced by structural parameters like time and financial resources. When done properly, programs create a safe environment to test new ideas either through a large group setting with simulation exercises or individually with executive coaching.

Explain the importance of executive leadership development and its significance in transforming workplaces.
Fundamentally, organizations are people. The relationships fostered with internal and external stakeholders determine success. Yes, public organizations address a societal need. However, if they are not close to their customers, broadly defined, or lose an entrepreneurial spirit, the impact is compromised. Leadership development facilitates strategy between relationships and need.

Continued on page 16
In what ways do you advise special district leaders implement leadership development?

Planning is critical. Ask a few initial questions: what are you trying to accomplish and why? Having a specific goal supported by need allows programs to be tailored, including the possible use of executive coaching, as opposed to a stock program based on general leadership traits.

The second question is whether the program can be designed, delivered, and evaluated in whole or in part internally, and to what extent an external provider is required. In each consideration, the reputation, experience, and formal training backgrounds (degrees and certifications of the provider) are important. There is value, for example, in having an external evaluator measure the program’s impact.

The third line of questions focus on structure: what are the ideal timeframes? How much stakeholder support do we have? What are the financial parameters?

Once you have a starting point and some initial answers to these questions, bring others who have experience in individual and/or group trainings into the conversation—again, depending on your organization, it may either be internal or external experts, or a combination of both. This may be a current practice within your organization, for example, how you conduct the RFP process, or it may be new territory where you invite potential providers to help you think through different, viable approaches.

As you make any strategic decision within the organization, you base it off the best possible information with stakeholder participation. Tackling leadership development approaches takes similar tactics.
Special districts are seeing newer generations of workers coming in as other generations are retiring. How does this impact leaders and what do you recommend leaders do to adapt and address this change?

By most estimates, 75 percent of the workforce will be Millennials by 2025. This provides great opportunity to foster energies around innovation and societal contribution—something which may have become stagnant in recent years. It’s true that the only thing constant is change. Yet, the perception of technological, cultural and social change is accelerating. Along with our organizations, we must keep pace. It’s not that we must jump on the latest fad and dedicate huge financial and human capital to meet every demand. But, we must keep current with our environments and professional standards. The anticipation of greater numbers of newer generations joining our organizations necessitates a renewed focus.

You have said workplace challenges occur in one of two spheres: organizational and individual. What are some examples of each?

At the organizational level, challenges largely revolve around systems—organizational structures, resource acquisitions and allocations, community engagement, and formal and informal policies. Individual challenges fall more in line with attitudes and aptitudes. So, organizational challenges could be around program funding, whether there are enough staff members working on a specific project to respond in a timely fashion, or if a hierarchical or networked structure is best to meet a specific goal. Individual challenges could be whether your employees are trained to meet the formal job requirements or if they bring the right amount of know-how and enthusiasm to create positive impacts. In many cases, there is not one good solution, rather many reasonable ones. Perceived realities are important considerations.

How does executive leadership development address those challenges?

Leadership happens within five different levels: individual, group/team, organization, community and society.

Knowing yourself—your skills, attitudes, reactions to situations, emotional range—and the impact on others is core to professional growth. Leadership development typically starts here, either through group trainings exploring different personality or leadership types or through executive coaching. At this stage, critical reflection generates and deepens learning to challenge an individual’s perceived realities, biases, and perceptions and opens the door to see situations through alternative lenses.

Topics at the other levels vary depending on need. For example, the group/team level could address leading under stress, problem solving, decision-making, or group dynamics; at the organizational level—culture, quality improvement, diversity, internal stakeholder relationships; at the community level—

cultural awareness, strategic planning, collaboration, networks, external stakeholder relationships, political acumen; and at the society level, these are the “rules of the game”—laws and regulation, societal norms and values, and our role in shaping our society.

Then, there are topics that happen at each level, such as communication, influence, negotiation, and change leadership.

Most leadership development focuses on the here-and-now to shape future outcomes, expanding into the different levels based on where need is most identified. The quality of the applied impacts is dependent on the commitment of the individual, organizational support, and expertise of those designing, delivering, and evaluating the programs or coaching sessions.