

Are your ducks in a row? External and internal stakeholder perceptions of the benefits of parks in New South Wales, Australia

Monica Torland¹, Betty Weiler¹, Brent Moyle^{1,2} and Isabelle Wolf^{3,4}

¹School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Southern Cross University, Southern Cross Drive, Bilinga, QLD 4225, Australia; ²Griffith Institute for Tourism, Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD 4222, Australia; ³Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hurstville, NSW 2220, Australia; ⁴Centre for Ecosystem Science, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia

This research examines the strategic alignment between external and internal stakeholders' perceptions of the benefits of parks. To achieve this objective, surveys were distributed to park agency staff, as well as a sample of residents in New South Wales, Australia. Findings revealed alignment between external and internal stakeholders, with executive managers' perceptions being generally more favourable than staff and community. The paper pays particular attention to the alignment of internal stakeholders' (staff) perceptions, which is important for establishing and defending the market position of parks. A high degree of strategic alignment was found between executive and staff for personal benefits. However, results revealed incongruence between perceptions of lower level and executive staff for community-wide benefits. Gender, age, frequency of interaction with visitors, and visitation to parks outside of work hours were found to influence staff perceptions of park benefits. This research provides valuable insights into how park management agencies can build strategic alignment among internal stakeholders, and in turn external stakeholders, critical for building support for parks and associated conservation.

Keywords: parks, benefit, staff, alignment, marketing

INTRODUCTION

National parks and reserves are human-made institutions that aim to protect and preserve natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of both current and future generations (Lockwood, Worboys, & Kothari, 2006). However, national parks are not just physical places, but political constructs under constant pressure from growing populations and resource demands (Isne, 2013). Competition for public funds has fuelled the need for park agencies to be proactive in courting stakeholder support, including internal (staff) and external (community) support, to ensure that

they can continue to perform the challenging role of conserving the environment (Fletcher & Fletcher, 2003; Fredman, Friberg, & Emmelin, 2007). Attracting visitors to national parks is viewed as one way of maintaining political and public support for parks, thereby sustaining funding into the future (Buckley, 2009). Gauging and managing the perceptions of both internal and external stakeholders regarding parks, and in particular the benefits of visiting national parks, are critical to public support and ultimately to the survival of parks.

This paper examines the strategic alignment between external and internal

stakeholders regarding perceptions of park benefits. However, the key focus of the paper is to assess the strategic alignment between specific internal stakeholder groups. The paper context and review of literature are therefore founded on strategic alignment and its place in integrated marketing communication (IMC), rather than on stakeholder literature. While there are subtle differences in the literature in regard to the meanings of the terms, strategic consensus and strategic alignment, this paper considers strategic consensus to be a shared understanding of strategy-relevant content by an organisation's internal stakeholders, including top, middle, and operating staff (Kellermanns, Walter, Floyd, Lechner, & Shaw, 2011). Strategic alignment, on the other hand, refers to a shared view between and among external and internal stakeholders about the brand identity of an organisation (de Chermatony, 1999). The study in this paper is conducted in the context of one Australian parks agency; the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The OEH includes NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), which is responsible for managing all national parks and reserves in the state and employs a large contingent of head office, regional, and field staff at a range of levels (Weiler, Moyle, & Torland, 2013). The methods and findings of this research have potential relevance to all agencies charged with the management of national parks in an increasingly competitive and fiscally challenging environment.

One method that can be used to assist the successful achievement of strategic alignment between stakeholders in an organisation is strategic management. Nag, Hambrick, and Chen (2007, p. 946) define strategic management as 'the process of building capabilities that allow a firm to create value for customers, shareholders and society while operating in competitive markets'. It is acknowledged that the OEH

as a public agency is an organisation without 'shareholders' and obvious competitors in a normal market context (see Meier & O'Toole, 2011 for an expanded discussion of the difference of strategic management in the public vs. private sectors). Yet, the OEH is an organisation that has a responsibility to generate value for its stakeholders, including (but not limited to) providing and managing visitor experiences in national parks that align with the desired and perceived benefits of its stakeholders. Organisations typically achieve these types of outcomes via a corporate strategy or plan that offers guidance in regard to the direction the organisation as a whole is going to take, and which includes important components such as a vision, objectives, and strategies (Hunger & Wheelen, 2011).

However, there are obstacles to strategy implementation that have been identified in the literature (Gebhardt & Eagles, 2014; Hrebiniak, 2006). A key obstacle identified in previous studies is a lack of strategic consensus between top-level management and other staff in the organisation (Rapert, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2002). While the literature supports the need for strategic consensus in an organisation, there is limited research that has identified specific differences in perceptions between top, middle, and lower levels of staff which, in turn, could create strategic misalignment for the organisation. One exception to this is Ardichvili, Jondle, and Kowske's (2012) study of more than 40,000 executive managers, mid-level managers, and non-managerial staff from business organisations in six different countries in which they examined perceptions of ethical business cultures. They found that the executives perceived the ethical business culture more positively than the non-managerial staff, while the perceptions of the mid-level managers fell in the middle. The authors proposed that one explanation for these differences could be an organisational culture, with a potential disconnect

185 between top-level management and other levels of staff (Ardichvili et al., 2012). For a national parks agency like the OEH, alignment between executive managers and staff regarding the prioritisation of benefits of visiting national parks could greatly assist successful implementation of the corporate strategy.

190 The crucial role of strategic communication and marketing to assist successful strategy implementation has also been highlighted in the literature (Slater, Hult, & Olson, 2010; Slater, Olson, & Hult, 2010). In particular, research on brand management has suggested that lower level staff serve as brand builders in corporations and that managers not only need to define the values relating to the corporate brand, but also work 'across the organisation to ensure commitment, enthusiasm and consistent staff behaviour delivering these values' (de Chermatony, 1999, p. 158). Concomitantly, it is essential that the attitudes, beliefs, and values of all levels of staff are aligned in an organisation so as to present a consistent and homogenous brand identity to customers who come in contact with different parts of the organisation (de Chermatony, 1999). Furthermore, Srivastava and Thomas (2010) propose that managers align staff within an organisation by creating a vision and corporate strategy, which they need to bring to life by building an organisational culture that embraces the essence of the strategy. The key point that can be derived from this is the importance of staff understanding the strategic vision of an organisation, in this case, the OEH. More specifically, it is essential that there is consensus among executive managers and staff regarding, among other things, the provision of visitor experiences in national parks and, in particular, the perceived benefits of these experiences.

225 A subfield of strategic communication and marketing that is particularly relevant in the context of this study is IMC. IMC can be defined as follows:

IMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences. (Shultz & Schultz, 1998, p. 18)

As the primary aim of this paper is to examine staff alignment with respect to the perceptions of benefits that parks provide, research relating to IMC and, in particular, how IMC relates to strategic consensus of internal stakeholders is examined in the subsequent literature review. First, however, a background to research on visitor, community, and park staff perceptions of the benefits of visiting parks is provided. Based on this context and underpinned by the literature on IMC and internal stakeholders, the aims, rationale, and significance of the study are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the Benefits of Providing Visitor Experiences in Parks

The benefits of parks have been a key area of scholarly attention since the 1970s (Manning, 2011). A majority of work on the benefits of parks has been conducted from the point of view of external stakeholder groups, such as park visitors and the broader community (Orsega-Smith, Mowen, Payne, & Godbey, 2004; Pierskalla, Lee, Stein, Anderson, & Nickerson, 2004; Weber & Anderson, 2010). Benefits Based Management (BBM) represents one approach to leisure and recreation management that has received substantial research interest in the literature due to its capability to help promote and manage potential benefits of partaking in leisure experiences (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991; Moyle, Weiler, & Moore, 2014). According to BBM, visitors who partake in particular activities in appropriate settings will not only acquire the

leisure experience they desire, but also accrue a number of higher order benefits as a result of doing so (Weber & Anderson, 2010). The literature on BBM is extensive and is captured in a number of books and papers published over the past three decades (Veal, Darcy, & Lynch, 2013).

Outcomes Focussed Management (OFM) is the most recent manifestation of BBM in the literature. A plethora of benefits relating to leisure or recreation experiences have been identified in studies applying the OFM framework. These include physical, psychological, socio-cultural, environmental, and economic benefits (Driver, 2008). However, Moyle et al. (2014) have recently provided an alternate conceptualisation of park benefits, arguing that the benefits of leisure and recreation in parks accrue at a personal (experiential) level, at a personal (higher order) level, and at a broader societal (community-wide) level. Personal experiential benefits are focused on the realisation of satisfying experiences in parks, with examples including challenging yourself, having fun, and learning about nature, culture and heritage (Moyle et al., 2014). Personal higher order benefits are focused on improvements to and the maintenance of desirable personal conditions, as well as the prevention of undesirable conditions. Personal higher order benefits may occur as a result of multiple visits to parks, with examples including physical and mental health benefits, improving quality of life, and strengthening family ties (Moyle et al., 2014). Community-wide benefits capture the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits conceptualised by Driver (2008), and as the name suggests, refer to benefits that accrue to the broader community. Some examples of community-wide benefits include conservation of culture and heritage, generation of employment, and reduction in the cost of health care.

As identified above, there is a notable body of literature on the perceptions of the

benefits of parks. However, most of this research has been conducted from the perspective of external stakeholders, such as visitors and communities (Heyes & Heyes, 1999; MacKenzie, 2012), rather than the perspective of internal stakeholders, namely park staff. As a result, there is limited understanding of how managers and employees of parks agencies perceive the benefits of parks. This omission seems unusual, as the alignment of vision among internal stakeholders is critical to building support for parks and associated conservation initiatives. However, there are some notable exceptions.

Among the few studies that have explored the perceptions of park staff in the context of tourist and recreational uses of parks and their potential benefits for the community (Archabald & Naughton-Treves 2001; Bruyere, Beh, & Lelengula, 2009; Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Ormsby & Mannle, 2006), none have been solely conducted from an employee perspective. For example, Bruyere et al. (2009) found that both community members and leadership/staff of a protected area in rural Kenya perceived tourism to the protected area as providing general economic benefits to local communities. However, while protected area leaders and staff perceived that there was regular, open dialogue between park staff and adjacent communities, this view was not shared by community members (Bruyere et al., 2009). Furthermore, community members had less favourable perceptions than protected area leaders/staff in regard to the amount of money received from park revenue-sharing programmes and the adequacy of local employment in the reserves (Bruyere et al., 2009). Tourism revenue sharing has also been examined in a study by Archabald and Naughton-Treves (2001) relating to three national parks in Western Uganda. This study reported that both beneficiaries (i.e. representatives of the local community) and implementers

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(i.e. national park staff) ranked tourism revenue sharing as being the key advantage of living close to a national park. At the same time, however, national park staff were concerned that funds within the park agencies were inadequate to cover costs which, in turn, could prevent revenue sharing with local communities (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001).

The perceptions of national park staff have also been explored in two studies relating to Masoala National Park in Madagascar (Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Ormsby & Mannle, 2006). The first of these studies (Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005) explored the perceptions of local residents and park staff regarding the history of park management, community benefits, community awareness of the park, and community awareness of park staff. However, detailed comparisons between the perceptions of staff and local residents were not reported, with the majority of the paper focusing on the perceptions of local residents. Similarly, Ormsby and Mannle (2006) conducted interviews with Masoala National Park staff. In this instance, this study concentrates mainly on the attitudes of local residents towards ecotourism in the national park rather than the attitudes of park staff. Given the importance of communicating the benefits for building and sustaining support for parks (Weiler, Moore, & Moyle, 2013), a lack of understanding surrounding staff perceptions of the benefits of parks seems a considerable oversight. The concept of IMCs provides a conceptual lens that can be applied to examine strategic alignment with respect to staff perceptions of the benefits of parks.

IMC and Internal Stakeholders in a Parks Agency Context

Since 1991, when the first study on IMC was published (Caywood, Schultz, & Wang, 1991), IMC has rapidly grown in popularity as a new approach to business and

marketing communications planning (Kliatchko, 2005). Indeed, some authors go as far as to say that ‘IMC is undoubtedly the major communications development of the last decade of the 20th century’ (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004, p. 20). While there are a variety of definitions of IMC, researchers (Low, 2000; Shimp, 2000) have been able to condense these definitions into five features that characterise IMC (Table 1).

The traditional emphasis of IMC has been on customers, specifically creating alignment between external and internal stakeholders of a company (Massey, 2010). In comparison, little attention has been dedicated in the IMC literature to the alignment of internal stakeholders within an organisation (Ferdous, 2008). A number of researchers have pointed out that in order for an organisation to become aligned with its external stakeholders, it must first achieve internal alignment, both vertically (i.e. between different levels of staff, such as managers and operational staff) and horizontally

Table 1. Characteristics of IMC

#	IMC characteristics
i	The main aim of IMC is to direct communication at customers so as to affect their behaviour
ii	IMC applies an outside-in approach where communication strategies are developed by starting with the customers and then working backwards to the brand communicators
iii	IMC requires relationship building between customers and brand communicators
iv	All forms and sources of communication and contact points between customers and brand communicators should be considered as message delivery channels
v	Alignment between customers and brand communicators is essential in order to obtain a strong brand image

Source: Kitchen et al. (2004), Low (2000), and Shimp (2000).

(i.e. between different divisions of the organisation, such as marketing and finance), through the means of internal marketing and communication (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Duncan & Mulhern, 2004; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010; Reid, Luxton, & Mavondo, 2005). Only one empirical study (the results of which are presented in three different technical reports – i.e. Reid, Croy, & Wearing, 2009a; 2009b; Reid, Wearing, & Croy, 2008) could be located that has examined internal stakeholder alignment in the context of parks management agencies in Australia. In their study, Reid et al. (2008) reported that the vertical and horizontal alignment of communication among internal stakeholders was relatively strong for the parks agencies examined, although one potential problem area was the lack of a clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of different staff members in regard to communication strategies and activities. Nevertheless, Reid et al.'s (2008) study is predominantly focused on shifting external customers' (visitors') expectations of parks through pre-visit and external communication, with minimal attention given to shifting internal stakeholders' perceptions of the benefits of parks.

Ferdous (2008) has explored the notion of strategic alignment of internal stakeholders as it relates to IMC in more detail. Although, Ferdous' (2008) study is theoretically rather than empirically based, and not conducted in a parks agency context, it introduces the concept of Integrated Internal Marketing Communication (IIMC). Ferdous (2008) suggests that, by extending the notion of IMC to a company's internal marketing, it is possible to achieve enhanced profitability as a result of staff buy-in, commitment, and trust. He goes on to propose a conceptual framework containing four elements that need to be considered in order to successfully implement IIMC in the internal market of an organisation (Table 2). Finally, Ferdous (2008) emphasises that in order for IIMC to be successful, staff at all levels of the organisation need to be involved in the process of creating a message internally which is consistent with the strategic vision of the organisation, and then communicated to external customers.

This study is informed by both OFM and IMC literature and fills an important gap in the literature on national parks and IIMC, particularly in regard to the perceptions of visiting parks. Limited research has assessed

Table 2. Key Elements of Successful IIMC Implementation

#	Key IIMC element	Examples	
485	i The creation of an appropriate atmosphere for communication	Ensure support and commitment from top management and apply multi-directional communication between different levels of staff	530
	ii IIMC tools	Use a variety of communication tools to foster internal branding such as personal selling, workshops, internal advertising, and suitable incentives and rewards	
490	iii Evaluation of the IIMC programme	Measure IIMC effectiveness through methods such as surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face meetings	535
	iv Feedback relating to the IIMC programme	Obtain feedback in regard to strategic questions such as whether the IIMC programme successfully managed to change staff behaviour to become more aligned with the vision and values of the organisation	
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Source: Ferdous (2008, pp. 227–230).

the alignment of perceptions of park benefits between different levels of staff in the context of parks management agencies, with comparisons made to potential and current visitors of parks. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the factors that may explain any differences in perceptions of staff in regard to park benefits. As such, the findings of this research provide a basis for the use of IMC in the future, especially with respect to communication with internal stakeholders of parks management agencies. Strategic alignment between different levels of internal stakeholders is critical for ensuring a shared vision with respect to park benefits.

As previously stated, the overall aim of this paper is to examine strategic alignment with respect to the personal and community-wide benefits that parks provide to residents of NSW, Australia. The primary focus of the paper is on perceptions of internal stakeholders, specifically park agency staff in the OEH at different levels. A secondary focus is the alignment of the perceptions of staff (internal stakeholders) and members of the NSW community (external stakeholders), along with the key variables associated with different internal (staff) perceptions of park benefits. The paper contributes to the literature on both BBM and ICM, with respect to the use of benefits measurement as a tool to enhance brand communication, strategic alignment, strategic management, and ultimately, organisational performance.

CONTEXT AND METHODS

Description of Study Context

In Australia, there are over 9000 national parks and other conservation reserves that protect a large variety of environments such as deserts, rain forests, coral reefs, and eucalypt woodlands (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012; NSW Government, 2013). While some parks and protected

areas are managed at a national level by the Australian Federal (Commonwealth) Government, most are under the jurisdiction of Australia's six state and two territory government parks agencies (NSW Government, 2013). The Australian government agency that is the focus of the present study is the OEH in NSW, which comprises eight functional areas including the NSW NPW) (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2012). The NPWS is responsible for managing more than 850 national parks and reserves in NSW, that is, more than 7 million hectares of protected areas or almost nine percent of NSW. In 2012, NPWS estate visitation was estimated at a total of 35.5 million visits (Roy Morgan Research, 2013). NSW is Australia's most populated state, with more than 1500 staff employed around NSW in the management of the state's national parks and reserves and the majority working from regional offices. Like many park management agencies, the OEH has a dual mandate to conserve nature and cultural heritage while providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy, experience, and appreciate parks (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2013). This is a statutory responsibility under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (Part 4, Division 2, Section 30E) which states the following:

The purpose of reserving land as a national park is to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment.

To fulfil this purpose, the OEH encourages the public and local communities to visit, enjoy, and value their national parks as part of its broader objective of increasing support for conservation and national parks (Moyle & Weiler, 2012). The NSW Government State Plan released in

2006 set as a priority to have 'more people using parks, sporting, and recreational facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity', which was reiterated in the State Plan *NSW 2021* (NSW Government, 2011). Increased visitation was recorded in subsequent years, although at a relatively modest level. Moreover, in its current Corporate Plan, the OEH commits to strategic state-wide goals that include, for example, to double tourism expenditure in NSW by 2020. The OEH, as the premier protector of nature, culture, and heritage in NSW, is at the forefront in meeting this State government commitment.

To meet *NSW 2021* goals, a customer experience division was created to manage park visitation, marketing, experience development, education and guided tours, visitor information, and events to create value for customers. Strategic alignment within OEH that may influence the agency's performance as a provider of recreation and tourism services has critical implications for reporting on progress and thus future budget allocations, especially in light of competition from other providers (Weiler et al., 2013). To address this challenge, the OEH needs to have a clear sense of the desired, perceived, and actual benefits that parks provide. Understanding both internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of these benefits is important in order to identify any gaps which, if left unmanaged, could lead to loss of support by these stakeholders and reduced organisational performance for the OEH.

Procedures and Sampling

A survey was administered to internal stakeholders, consisting of the population of 9 directors (who function as the 'executive managers' and are referred to as such in this paper) along with 3400 staff from different levels within the OEH. Executive managers and staff were invited to participate

in the study via an email, containing background information and a link to an online survey designed using SurveyMonkey®. This was a time and cost-effective method which took advantage of executive management endorsement and existing staff email lists (Wright, 2005). Following a survey reminder, a total of 9 executive managers (a census) and 457 staff completed the survey, equalling response rates of 100.0% and 13.4%, respectively.

A replication of the online survey administered to OEH executive managers and staff was used to survey external stakeholders, specifically members of the NSW community. Participants for the community survey were identified by soliciting the services of an online panel provider, Survey Sampling International, based in Sydney, Australia. A panel provider was selected to distribute the instrument by stratifying the sample by age, gender, and region as it provided an opportunity to gain a representative and therefore more robust sample of the NSW population (Baker et al. 2010; Braunsberger, Wybenga, & Gates, 2007). Potential bias in data has been a core criticism of adopting a panel approach; however, the sampling stratifications implemented in this research overcame this issue (Coolican, 2014). The panel provider distributed the instrument to their existing opt-in lists of residents based on post-codes, which aligned with the State Government Area boundary as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The data from the community survey were then weighted (scaled up) using sampling weights by age and sex to the resident population, aged 15 years and over (sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The weighting procedure further improves representativeness and thus generalisability of the results to the NSW community (McLennan, Moyle, Ritchie, & Ruhanen, 2013). A total of 524 community members completed the survey.

Measures and Analyses

The benefit items in the survey instrument came from a pool of items informed by the literature, a content analysis of corporate documents of the OEH and 2 other Australian parks agencies (Parks Victoria and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, Western Australia), and semi-structured interviews with 27 executive managers from these three agencies, including 9 OEH executive managers. As a result of this process, a final benefit pool containing 39 items was selected to be used as a measure in the survey upon which findings in this paper are based. Detailed information about the particular procedures used to develop the measure can be found in Moyle and Weiler (2012; 2013) and Moyle et al. (2014). The final 39 items were the same for both internal stakeholders (executive managers and staff) and external stakeholders (community members). However, the only notable difference was that executive managers were asked to rate them in terms of what they 'desired to project' to the community, while staff and community members were asked to rate their perceptions of visitor experiences in parks 'providing the benefit' (Moyle & Weiler, 2013). To mitigate the potential bias that could result from ambiguous terminology prior to surveying, a pilot testing procedure was undertaken (Moyle, Weiler, & Croy, 2013). The pilot test involved a structured interview with 10 community members and specifically sought to discern their cognitive understanding of the benefits drawn out of strategic plans, as well as the preceding stage of interviews with executive managers.

The present paper draws primarily on the results of the staff survey. Items were presented in three categories reflecting the multiple layers of park benefits conceptualised in extant literature, including: personal experiential benefits (12 items), personal higher order benefits (12 items), and societal

or community-wide benefits (15 items) (Driver, 2008; Manning, 2011). Consistent with measures of benefits used in previous studies (Manning, 2011), items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales from 'very strongly disagree' to 'very strongly agree'. In the case of the staff survey, other information such as employment and socio-demographic characteristics, park visitation habits and interaction with visitors were also solicited for comparative purposes. Data were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics 21 using descriptive statistics, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and *t*-tests. A critical alpha value of $p < .05$ was applied as this is considered to be appropriate for most social science research (Neuman, 2006). Tests of statistical significance were not conducted for the executive managers given the small sample size ($n = 9$).

RESULTS

Participants

Participants in the present study were 9 executive managers and 457 staff of the OEH, as well as 524 members of the NSW community. Demographic data were not collected from executive managers in order to ensure that they could not be personally identified, given the small sample size. Of the OEH staff, 47.5% were male and 52.5% were female. All staff respondents were over the age of 18, with 24.9% in the 30–39 category, 33.5% in the 40–49 category, and 31.6% in the 50–59 category. Regarding years worked in the organisation, the category with the highest representation was 11–20 years (36.1%). The majority (79.3%) of staff respondents were employed in a permanent/ongoing capacity, with most classified as senior officers/officers (64.6%), with 16.9% working as managers, and 20.0% as frontline/field staff. About 26.3% of OEH staff visited national parks (outside of work time) on a weekly or daily basis, 46.3% visited

815 parks more than five times a year, and 27.4% visited parks five times a year or less. Table 3 provides more details in regard to the gender, age, years worked, work status, level of position, and visitation habits of park staff. Of the NSW community members, 49.3% were male and 50.7% were female. All

were over 18, with all age groups represented and the majority (72.0%) of community members reported to visit parks at least once a year, meaning 28.0% of people captured did not visit parks at all. The standard error of all benefit items fell between 0.04 and 0.07 for both internal and external stakeholder groups. A more nuanced analysis of the NSW community survey and participants is beyond the scope of the current paper, but can be accessed via Moyle and Weiler (2013).

820 **Table 3.** Profile of OEH Staff (Internal Stakeholders)

		Staff (n = 457)	
Demographic variable	%	Frequency	
825 Gender			
Male	47.5	200	
Female	52.5	221	
Total	100.0	421	
830 Age (years)			
20–29	5.7	24	
30–39	24.9	105	
40–49	33.5	141	
50–59	31.6	133	
60–69	4.3	18	
Total	100.0	421	
835 Years worked			
2 years or less	12.4	54	
3–5 years	15.9	69	
6–10 years	21.4	93	
11–20 years	36.1	157	
21 years or over	14.3	62	
Total	100.0	435	
840 Work status			
Permanent/ongoing	79.3	341	
Casual/contract	8.8	38	
Temporary	11.9	51	
Total	100.0	430	
845 Level of position ^a			
Manager	16.9	71	
Senior officer	22.3	94	
Officer	42.3	178	
850 Frontline/field staff	20.0	84	
Total	101.5	427	
855 Park visitation			
Weekly or daily basis	26.3	111	
More than five times a year	46.3	195	
Five times a year or less	27.4	115	
Total	100.0	421	

^aMultiple responses permitted.

Differences Between Internal and External Stakeholders

870 Figures 1–3 provide a comparison of the perceptions of the two groups of internal stakeholders (OEH executive managers and OEH staff) together with the agency's external stakeholders (NSW community). When compared to staff, executive managers had more favourable perceptions of the benefits they desired to project for 6 out of the 12 personal experiential benefits (Figure 1), 6 out of the 12 personal higher order benefits (Figure 2), and 10 out of the 15 societal benefits (Figure 3). Moreover, executive managers had more favourable perceptions than the community for 6 out of the 12 personal experiential benefits (Figure 1), 9 out of the 12 personal higher order benefits (Figure 2), and 13 out of the 15 societal benefits (Figure 3). Staff, in turn, had more positive perceptions than the community for 10 out of the 12 personal experiential benefits (Figure 1), 9 out of the 12 personal higher order benefits (Figure 2), and 11 out of the 15 societal benefits (Figure 3).

890 A more detailed comparison of executive managers vs. staff and the NSW community regarding perceptions of personal experiential and personal higher order benefits shows that executive managers were more positive about the opportunity to learn about and connect with nature, culture, and heritage in particular. Moreover, executive managers generally had

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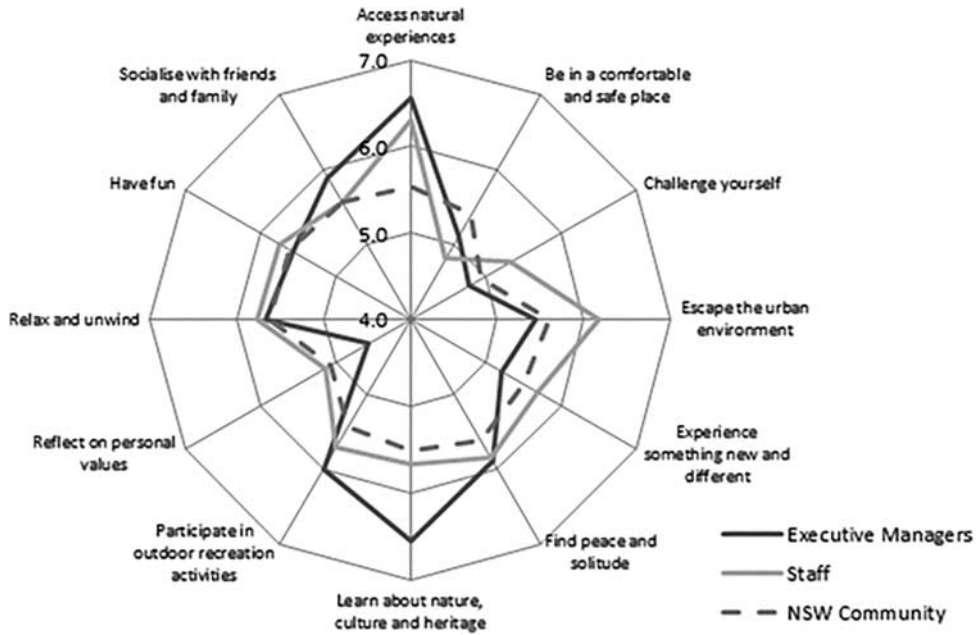


Fig. 1. Internal and External Stakeholder Perceptions of Personal Experiential Benefits

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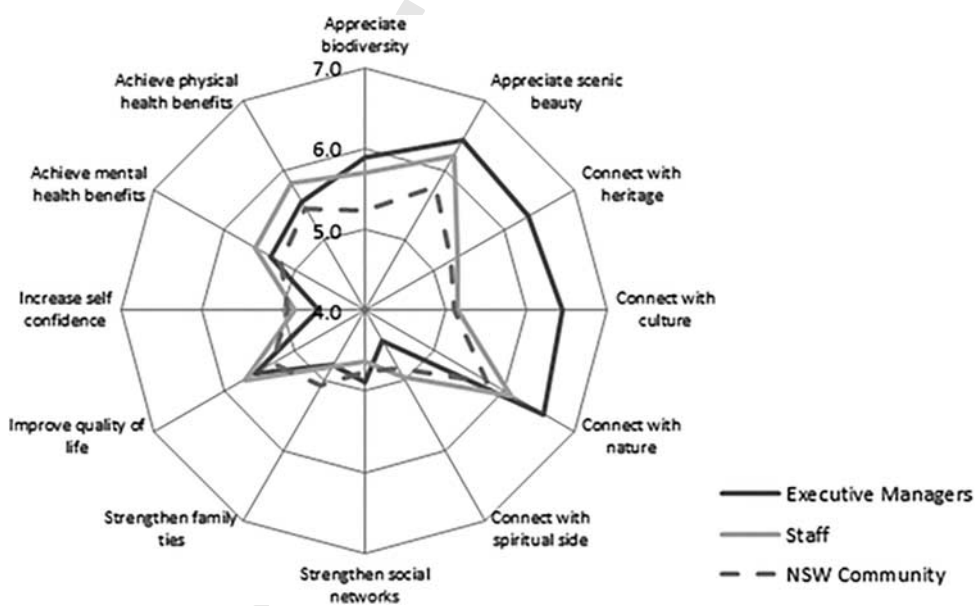


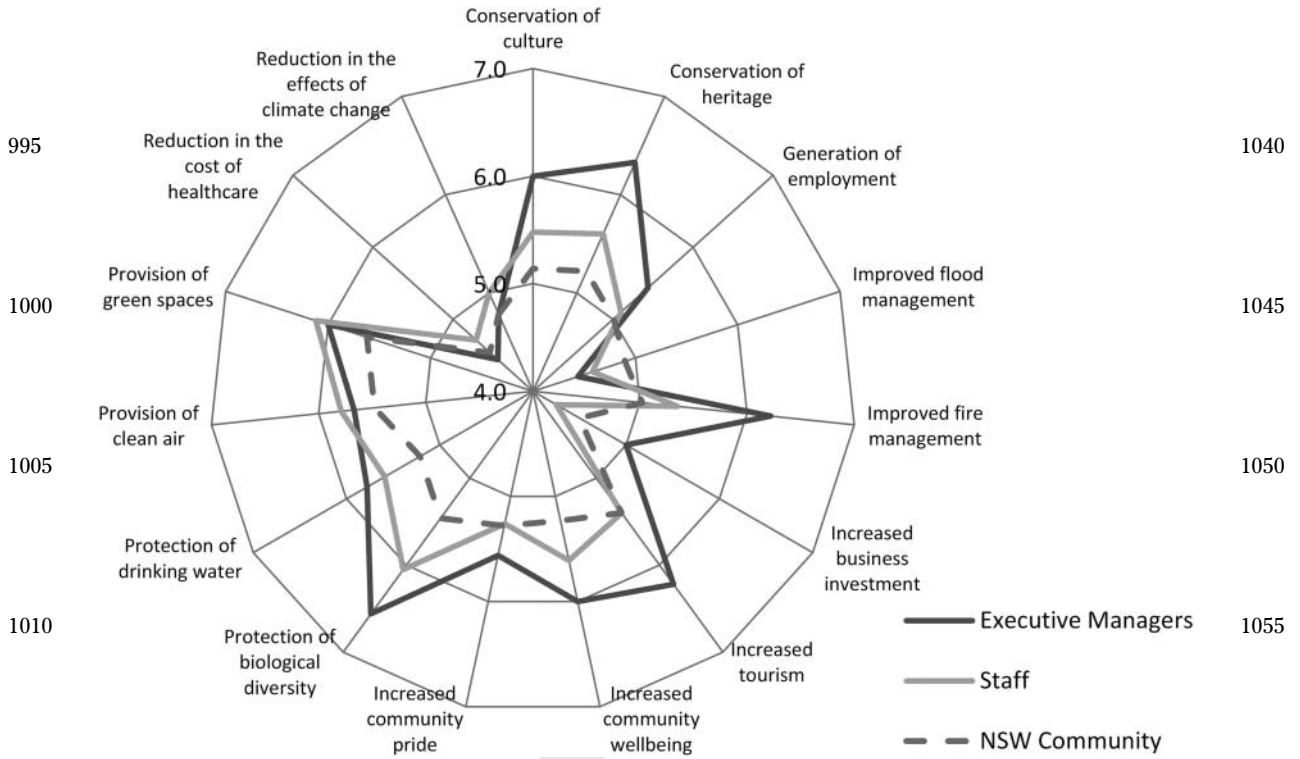
Fig. 2. Internal and External Stakeholder Perceptions of Personal Higher Order Benefits

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more favourable perceptions of societal/community-wide benefits than staff and the community. Overall, staff had generally

more favourable perceptions than the community in regard to all three types of benefits.

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1015 **Fig. 3.** Internal and External Stakeholder Perceptions of Societal/Community-Wide Benefits 1060

Differences Among Internal Stakeholders

1020 Analysis of differences in perceptions of benefits among staff was conducted using a number of employment and socio-demographic variables. Virtually no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) were found based on years working for the parks agency. There were 21 benefit items with statistically significant differences based on gender (invariably, female staff perceived park benefits more favourably than male staff), 18 based on age (again, invariably staff under 40 years perceived park benefits more favourably than staff 40 years or over), and 17 based on frequency of interaction with visitors during work time (staff who interacted with visitors perceived park benefits more favourably than staff who did not interact with visitors) (Table 4). Regarding the latter, all significant differences

1065 based on visitor interaction were perceptions of personal (as opposed to societal) benefits of visiting parks. There were only seven benefit items with statistically significant differences based on work status (casual staff perceived park benefits more favourably than permanent staff) (Table 4). In addition, there were only seven benefit items with statistically significant differences based on level of position (management vs. office and field staff) (Table 5). In this case, managers perceived park benefits more favourably than office (2 out of 39 benefit items) and field (5 out of 39 benefit items) staff. The majority of significant differences based on level of position were perceptions of societal benefits of visiting parks.

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1080 The variable with the greatest number of statistically significant differences in perceived benefits was frequency of park

Table 4. Comparison of Perceptions of Internal Stakeholders by Gender, Age, Frequency of Interaction with Visitors, and Work Status

Personal experiential, personal higher order and societal/community-wide benefit items	Male (n = 200)		Female (n = 221)		T-test gender Sig. (p = .05)		Under 40 years (n = 129)		40 Years or over (n = 292)		T-test age Sig. (p = .05)		Visitor interaction (n = 381)		No visitor interaction (n = 39)		T-test visitor interaction Sig. (p = .05)		Permanent (n = 341)		Casual (n = 89)		T-test work status Sig. (p = .05)				
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean		
Mean level of agreement (1-7 scale)	6.27	6.40	6.40	6.44	6.29	0.13	6.44	6.29	0.08	6.37	6.00	0.01	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	6.30	6.42	
Access natural experiences	4.93	4.76	4.76	5.15	4.70	0.23	5.15	4.70	0.00	4.82	4.95	0.61	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	4.76	5.17	
Be in a comfortable and safe place	5.35	5.42	5.42	5.45	5.36	0.47	5.45	5.36	0.41	5.43	4.95	0.01	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	5.34	5.44	
Challenge yourself	6.23	6.27	6.27	6.33	6.22	0.66	6.33	6.22	0.23	6.28	5.92	0.01	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	6.21	6.30	
Escape the urban environment	5.67	5.85	5.85	5.90	5.71	0.08	5.90	5.71	0.06	5.79	5.49	0.08	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	5.70	5.94	
Experience something new and different	5.95	5.87	5.87	6.00	5.86	0.50	6.00	5.86	0.27	5.94	5.49	0.02	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	5.84	6.06	
Find peace and solitude	5.58	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.67	0.01	5.86	5.67	0.09	5.76	5.38	0.04	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	5.67	5.85	
Learn about nature, culture, and heritage	5.67	5.87	5.87	5.96	5.70	0.04	5.96	5.70	0.01	5.82	5.36	0.01	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	5.72	5.89	
Participate in outdoor recreation activities	5.03	5.30	5.30	5.27	5.13	0.02	5.27	5.13	0.28	5.23	4.59	0.00	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	5.10	5.35	
Reflect on personal values	5.71	5.94	5.94	6.02	5.74	0.01	6.02	5.74	0.01	5.87	5.33	0.00	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	5.76	5.98	
Relax and unwind	5.68	5.89	5.89	6.02	5.68	0.02	6.02	5.68	0.00	5.83	5.36	0.00	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	5.74	5.91	
Have fun																											

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Table 4. Continued

Personal experiential, personal higher order and societal/ community-wide benefit items	Male (n = 200)		Female (n = 221)		T-test gender Sig. (p = .05)		Under 40 years (n = 129)		40 Years or over (n = 292)		T-test age Sig. (p = .05)		Visitor interaction (n = 381)		No visitor interaction (n = 39)		T-test visitor interaction Sig. (p = .05)		Permanent (n = 341)		Casual (n = 89)		T-test work status Sig. (p = .05)			
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Socialise with friends and family	5.47	5.71	5.71	5.79	5.79	0.01	5.51	5.64	5.64	5.23	5.23	0.02	5.54	5.80	5.80	0.04	5.54	5.80	5.54	5.80	5.54	5.80	5.54	5.80	5.54	5.80
Appreciate biodiversity	5.68	5.80	5.80	5.91	5.91	0.25	5.66	5.77	5.77	5.41	5.41	0.06	5.67	5.94	5.94	0.04	5.67	5.94	5.67	5.94	5.67	5.94	5.67	5.94	5.67	5.94
Appreciate scenic beauty	6.20	6.29	6.29	6.42	6.42	0.25	6.17	6.28	6.28	5.92	5.92	0.02	6.23	6.26	6.26	0.76	6.23	6.26	6.23	6.26	6.23	6.26	6.23	6.26	6.23	6.26
Connect with heritage	5.23	5.43	5.43	5.43	5.43	0.07	5.30	5.39	5.39	4.77	4.77	0.00	5.37	5.25	5.25	0.37	5.37	5.25	5.37	5.25	5.37	5.25	5.37	5.25	5.37	5.25
Connect with culture	5.07	5.27	5.27	5.23	5.23	0.08	5.14	5.23	5.23	4.62	4.62	0.00	5.16	5.21	5.21	0.73	5.16	5.21	5.16	5.21	5.16	5.21	5.16	5.21	5.16	5.21
Connect with nature	5.96	6.28	6.28	6.34	6.34	0.00	6.04	6.14	6.14	5.95	5.95	0.22	6.10	6.19	6.19	0.43	6.10	6.19	6.10	6.19	6.10	6.19	6.10	6.19	6.10	6.19
Connect with spiritual side	4.81	5.13	5.13	5.05	5.05	0.01	4.94	5.00	5.00	4.69	4.69	0.17	4.96	4.97	4.97	0.98	4.96	4.97	4.96	4.97	4.96	4.97	4.96	4.97	4.96	4.97
Strengthen social networks	4.51	4.76	4.76	4.76	4.76	0.03	4.59	4.67	4.67	4.41	4.41	0.20	4.60	4.78	4.78	0.21	4.60	4.78	4.60	4.78	4.60	4.78	4.60	4.78	4.60	4.78
Strengthen family ties	4.70	4.94	4.94	4.88	4.88	0.03	4.80	4.85	4.85	4.59	4.59	0.17	4.77	4.94	4.94	0.23	4.77	4.94	4.77	4.94	4.77	4.94	4.77	4.94	4.77	4.94
Improve quality of life	5.67	5.84	5.84	6.01	6.01	0.15	5.65	5.79	5.79	5.38	5.38	0.03	5.68	5.98	5.98	0.03	5.68	5.98	5.68	5.98	5.68	5.98	5.68	5.98	5.68	5.98
Increase self-confidence	4.90	4.89	4.89	4.91	4.91	0.91	4.88	4.95	4.95	4.33	4.33	0.00	4.89	4.87	4.87	0.84	4.89	4.87	4.89	4.87	4.89	4.87	4.89	4.87	4.89	4.87
Achieve mental health benefits	5.42	5.79	5.79	5.82	5.82	0.00	5.52	5.66	5.66	5.18	5.18	0.01	5.56	5.65	5.65	0.52	5.56	5.65	5.56	5.65	5.56	5.65	5.56	5.65	5.56	5.65

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Are your ducks in a row?

1305	Achieve physical health benefits	5.76	5.97	0.03	6.09	5.78	0.00	5.94	5.18	0.00	5.82	5.96	0.27	1265	5.96	0.27
1300	Conservation of culture	5.38	5.58	0.07	5.58	5.45	0.27	5.51	5.23	0.15	5.47	5.56	0.50	1270	5.56	0.50
1300	Conservation of heritage	5.54	5.67	0.22	5.64	5.60	0.74	5.64	5.28	0.06	5.60	5.63	0.84	1275	5.63	0.84
1300	Generation of employment	4.91	5.24	0.01	5.26	5.00	0.05	5.09	5.03	0.76	5.01	5.40	0.01	1280	5.40	0.01
1300	Improved flood management	4.36	4.76	0.00	4.80	4.47	0.01	4.56	4.64	0.68	4.50	4.90	0.00	1285	4.90	0.00
1300	Improved fire management	5.23	5.45	0.05	5.53	5.26	0.02	5.35	5.28	0.73	5.29	5.57	0.04	1290	5.57	0.04
1300	Increased business investment	4.20	4.29	0.41	4.35	4.20	0.26	4.27	4.08	0.36	4.23	4.37	0.36	1295	4.37	0.36
1300	Increased tourism	5.28	5.53	0.03	5.57	5.35	0.09	5.44	5.10	0.10	5.36	5.57	0.14	1300	5.57	0.14
1300	Increased community well-being	5.42	5.81	0.00	5.78	5.55	0.07	5.64	5.44	0.30	5.57	5.75	0.19	1305	5.75	0.19
1300	Increased community pride	5.06	5.47	0.00	5.50	5.17	0.01	5.29	5.10	0.37	5.22	5.47	0.10	1310	5.47	0.10
1300	Protection of biological diversity	5.96	6.13	0.12	6.20	5.98	0.07	6.05	6.00	0.78	6.05	6.02	0.86	1315	6.02	0.86
1300	Protection of drinking water	5.58	5.61	0.80	5.68	5.55	0.34	5.62	5.31	0.15	5.59	5.54	0.73	1320	5.54	0.73
1300	Provision of clean air	5.65	5.95	0.01	6.04	5.70	0.01	5.81	5.72	0.63	5.75	5.92	0.22	1325	5.92	0.22
1300	Provision of green spaces	5.98	6.30	0.00	6.33	6.07	0.01	6.16	6.03	0.40	6.10	6.20	0.40	1330	6.20	0.40
1300	Reduction in the cost of health care	4.54	4.89	0.01	4.87	4.66	0.15	4.75	4.46	0.20	4.67	4.78	0.52	1335	4.78	0.52
1300	Reduction in the effects of climate change	4.69	5.29	0.00	5.23	4.91	0.04	5.02	4.90	0.65	4.96	5.06	0.59	1340	5.06	0.59

Note: p-values of .00 in the table indicate that $p < .001$.

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Table 5. Comparison of Perceptions of Internal Stakeholders by Frequency of Visiting Parks in Non-Work Time and Level of Position

Personal experiential, personal higher order and societal/community-wide benefit items	Frequently (weekly or daily basis) a year) (n = 111)		Regularly (> 5 times a year) (n = 195)		Infrequently (5 times a year or less) (n = 115)		ANOVA frequently vs. frequently regularly		ANOVA frequently vs. infrequently		ANOVA frequently vs. infrequently		ANOVA office staff vs. field staff	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Mean	Mean	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)
Mean level of agreement (1-7 scale)	6.41	6.38	6.20	6.20	6.31	6.25	0.98	0.20	0.19	6.56	6.25	0.08	0.09	0.89
Access natural experiences	4.93	4.83	4.77	0.82	4.83	4.99	0.82	0.68	0.93	4.68	4.99	0.70	0.39	0.69
Be in a comfortable and safe place	5.57	5.50	5.02	0.84	5.35	5.38	0.84	0.00	0.00	5.54	5.38	0.38	0.65	0.97
Challenge yourself	6.39	6.33	5.97	0.86	6.24	6.14	0.86	0.00	0.00	6.39	6.14	0.40	0.17	0.62
Escape the urban environment	5.86	5.86	5.51	1.00	5.76	5.75	1.00	0.03	0.02	5.80	5.75	0.95	0.94	1.00
Experience something new and different	6.14	5.98	5.54	0.47	5.90	5.87	0.47	0.00	0.00	5.97	5.87	0.88	0.86	0.99
Find peace and solitude	5.86	5.83	5.43	0.97	5.70	5.63	0.97	0.01	0.01	5.92	5.63	0.32	0.25	0.86
Learn about nature, culture, and heritage	5.96	5.85	5.49	0.62	5.77	5.65	0.62	0.00	0.01	5.94	5.65	0.40	0.16	0.59
Participate in outdoor recreation activities	5.44	5.28	4.73	0.47	5.17	5.19	0.47	0.00	0.00	5.14	5.19	0.98	0.97	0.99
Reflect on personal values	5.99	5.89	5.56	0.65	5.85	5.75	0.65	0.00	0.01	5.85	5.75	1.00	0.81	0.70
Relax and unwind	5.90	5.86	5.57	0.92	5.79	5.73	0.92	0.02	0.02	5.86	5.73	0.83	0.70	0.91
Have fun	5.73	5.65	5.37	0.80	5.53	5.76	0.80	0.03	0.06	5.68	5.76	0.53	0.87	0.18
Socialise with friends and family														

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Are your ducks in a row?

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Appreciate biodiversity	5.89	5.88	5.37	0.99	0.00	5.77	5.59	1.00	0.59	0.42
Appreciate scenic beauty	6.36	6.32	6.01	0.93	0.01	6.45	6.11	0.15	0.05	0.55
Connect with heritage	5.57	5.38	5.05	0.33	0.00	5.51	5.28	0.28	0.75	0.78
Connect with culture	5.44	5.15	4.95	0.11	0.01	5.17	5.15	0.99	0.91	0.76
Connect with nature	6.31	6.17	5.89	0.43	0.00	6.21	6.14	0.86	0.36	0.46
Connect with spiritual side	5.31	4.99	4.62	0.11	0.00	5.01	4.98	0.98	0.91	0.95
Strengthen social networks	4.89	4.58	4.50	0.07	0.04	4.70	4.60	0.78	1.00	0.70
Strengthen family ties	5.12	4.75	4.68	0.02	0.01	4.79	4.80	0.99	0.71	0.64
Improve quality of life	6.12	5.81	5.33	0.06	0.00	5.79	5.76	0.99	0.93	0.96
Increase self-confidence	5.26	4.94	4.46	0.06	0.00	5.01	4.87	0.64	0.76	1.00
Achieve mental health benefits	5.89	5.71	5.18	0.34	0.00	5.62	5.63	1.00	0.94	0.88
Achieve physical health benefits	6.04	6.04	5.43	1.00	0.00	5.86	5.87	1.00	0.99	0.99
Conservation of culture	5.54	5.51	5.40	0.97	0.63	5.73	5.42	0.11	0.42	0.87
Conservation of heritage	5.59	5.68	5.50	0.82	0.83	5.92	5.54	0.04	0.14	1.00
Generation of employment	5.16	5.11	4.95	0.94	0.37	5.23	5.10	0.69	0.21	0.40
Improved flood management	4.66	4.65	4.35	1.00	0.12	4.54	4.65	0.76	0.53	0.09
Improved fire management	5.50	5.31	5.24	0.32	0.20	5.44	5.26	0.49	0.87	0.16
Increased business investment	4.36	4.18	4.25	0.43	0.79	4.55	4.17	0.05	0.30	0.84
Increased tourism	5.41	5.37	5.48	0.96	0.92	5.69	5.36	0.11	0.22	1.00

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Table 5. Continued

Personal experiential, order and societal/community-wide benefit items	Frequently (weekly or daily basis) a year)		Regularly (> 5 times a year)		Infrequently (5 times or less a year)		ANOVA frequently vs. infrequently		ANOVA frequently vs. regularly		ANOVA managers vs. office staff		ANOVA managers vs. field staff		ANOVA office staff vs. field staff		
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Mean	Mean	Sig. (p = .05)	Sig. (p = .05)	Mean	Mean	Sig. (p = .05)
Mean level of agreement (1-7 scale)	5.87	5.63	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	0.19	0.00	0.15	5.94	5.62	5.35	0.09	0.01	5.62	5.35	0.18
Increased community well-being	5.38	5.36	5.03	5.03	5.03	5.03	0.99	0.10	0.08	5.52	5.30	4.99	0.37	0.03	5.30	4.99	0.14
Increased community pride	6.12	6.09	5.92	5.92	5.92	5.92	0.97	0.40	0.43	6.27	6.08	5.76	0.42	0.02	6.08	5.76	0.07
Protection of biological diversity	5.77	5.67	5.29	5.29	5.29	5.29	0.81	0.01	0.03	5.68	5.60	5.48	0.90	0.62	5.60	5.48	0.74
Protection of drinking water	5.96	5.84	5.60	5.60	5.60	5.60	0.67	0.06	0.18	5.70	5.88	5.65	0.50	0.95	5.88	5.65	0.26
Provision of clean air	6.25	6.18	5.99	5.99	5.99	5.99	0.82	0.10	0.20	6.35	6.14	5.99	0.23	0.05	6.14	5.99	0.40
Provision of green spaces	4.98	4.83	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.30	0.61	0.00	0.00	4.76	4.73	4.66	0.99	0.89	4.73	4.66	0.90
Reduction in the cost of healthcare	5.21	5.12	4.62	4.62	4.62	4.62	0.89	0.01	0.01	4.90	5.09	4.81	0.62	0.93	5.09	4.81	0.32
Reduction in the effects of climate change																	

Note: p-values of .00 in the table indicate that $p < .001$. Frequently = weekly or daily basis; regularly = more than five times a year; and infrequently = five times a year or less.

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visitation in non-work time (Table 5). Staff who visited parks infrequently (five times a year or less) perceived park benefits less favourably than staff who visited parks regularly (more than five times a year) on 21 out of 39 benefit items, as well as less favourably than staff who visited parks frequently (weekly or daily basis) on 25 out of 39 benefit items. Generally, these were perceived to be personal (as opposed to societal) benefits.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the internal strategic alignment (i.e. between OEH executive managers and staff) is reasonably strong, particularly with respect to personal (experiential and higher order) benefits. Exceptions to this pattern involve the personal benefits of learning about and connecting with nature, culture, and heritage, which require a stronger strategic alignment. In addition, it is possible for OEH to improve the alignment for many societal or community-wide benefits, for example, perceptions of the park agency's role in conservation of heritage and culture, and protection of biological diversity, fire management, and increased tourism. In each of these instances, perceptions of executive managers were more aspirational than the perceptions of staff. These findings are consistent with research showing that the perceptions of middle-managers and non-managerial staff tend to be less positive than the perceptions of executive managers concerning strategic elements of the organisation (Ardichvili et al., 2012). Additionally, the findings are in line with the results of a recent organisational review conducted by the OEH, which indicated that there was a need for a greater strategic direction within the parks agency in promoting, managing, and providing nature, culture and heritage tourism experiences (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2014). Given that limited research has been conducted on the

alignment of perceptions of park benefits between different levels of staff in the context of park management agencies, these findings also fill an important gap in the park management literature.

The perceptions of the benefits of visiting parks were aligned in most areas between OEH executive managers and OEH staff. However, there were demographic and employment factors associated with misalignment perceptions among OEH staff. Key factors that influenced staff perceptions of benefits included gender, age, frequency of interaction with visitors, and frequency of visiting parks in non-work time. More specifically, male staff, older staff (40 years or over), staff who do not interact with visitors, and staff who visit parks infrequently in their non-work time all had less positive perceptions of the benefits of visiting parks. Of particular significance was the divergence of views from staff who are also regular visitors of the parks compared to those who do not visit during their own leisure time, as the former group would thus be playing a dual role. Regarding work status and level of position, there were few differences among staff. This is in contrast to the many differences in perceptions found between OEH executive managers and other OEH staff. The findings are also in contrast to previous research, which found that non-managerial staff members often have less positive perceptions than managers regarding strategic aspects of the organisation (Ardichvili et al., 2012). As such, the findings add to the literature by identifying the factors that potentially explain any differences in perceptions of staff in regard to park benefits.

Previous research has shown that if staff in an organisation are not aligned with the vision and strategy of the organisation (which in this case is, as noted earlier, to enhance perceived benefits of visiting parks and to get more people into parks), it could have a negative impact on staff satisfaction

levels as well as the organisation's reputation and performance (Davies & Chun, 2002; Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004). In the case of a parks agency, effective internal communication appears to be one way to facilitate strategic consensus between different levels of staff about, in this case, the benefits of visiting national parks. In a meta-analytical review of strategic consensus and organisational performance, Kellermanns et al. (2011) found support to previous research that proposed that strategic consensus positively affects organisational performance. Furthermore, Rapert et al. (2002) found that frequent vertical communication in an organisation resulted in enhanced strategic consensus which, in turn, led to higher levels of net operating income, gross revenues, and growth in net revenues. In addition, O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, and Self (2010) reported that organisational performance improved when lower level staff believed in the strategy and perceived that their leaders were committed to the strategy as well. For the OEH, this means that strategic consensus among internal stakeholders is important to achieve in order to optimise organisational performance of the parks agency.

Contemporary IMC literature argues that it is paramount for an organisation to achieve internal alignment between and among staff before it can achieve external alignment with other stakeholders such as visitors and the community (Ferdous, 2008). The findings of this research reveal that members of the NSW community had less favourable perceptions than both the OEH executive managers and staff regarding most benefit items. In particular, when it comes to community-wide benefits, there is considerable room for improving community perceptions of park benefits. In particular, it may be important to focus on the 28% of NSW community members who do not visit parks at all. Previous studies on non-visitors have focused on the barriers and constraints to participation in parks (Thapa, 2012), as well as on the strategies used to negotiate constraints (Zanon, Doucouliagos, Hall, & Lockstone-Binney, 2013). Engaging with the findings of this body of research may be important in persuading target populations to visit parks. Alternatively, communication interventions may assist in improving both visitor and non-visitor perceptions of park benefits, thereby building support for parks and associated conservation initiatives.

In order to improve alignment with both internal and external stakeholders, the OEH is currently developing a Tourism Masterplan (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2014). This process, conducted in accordance with the four elements of Ferdous' (2008) proposed conceptual framework (Table 2), could assist successful implementation of IIMC in the internal marketplace of the organisation, including the creation of a suitable atmosphere for communication, the application of various IIMC communication tools, and evaluation and feedback processes relating to IIMC. More specifically, the aims and objectives of the Tourism Masterplan are set to meet OEH values and connect them to specific work programmes with a clear structure to ensure communication across staff levels, mechanisms for benchmarking, monitoring, review, and evaluation (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2014). A strong focus is on the development of contemporary visitor products and promotion that conveys benefits effectively to the OEH's external stakeholders (Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2014). This, then, has the potential to help shift the perceptions of both the community and OEH staff to become more aligned with the perceptions of OEH executive managers when it comes to nature, culture, and heritage-related benefits, as well as societal benefits of visiting parks. It also supports IMC literature that has suggested that the main aim of IMC is to direct communication towards

consumers and other external stakeholders in order to influence their behaviour (Table 1).

1805 With respect to internal stakeholders, previous studies also suggest that internal alignment may be achieved by other staff engagement strategies that supplement effective IMC (de Chermatony, 1999; Ferdous, 2008). For example, the OEH could foster staff engagement, among each other and with parks. In this connection, certain subgroups of staff need to be targeted, specifically males, older staff members, those who do not have much contact with visitors, and especially those who do not visit parks much. The OEH could arrange park visits during work time which, in turn, will support the strategic direction of the organisation. Holding planning days or meetings at historic sites or scenic parks where staff may be taken on guided tours would provide opportunities and incentives for staff to experience parks more often and foster interaction between staff and visitors. Other ways to enhance staff engagement could be to arrange something social and fun for staff to take part in, such as company outings, events, 'bring your family' day, picnics, information days, cinema, and bushwalks (e.g. see Gruman & Saks, 2011; Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). Staff could also be provided with incentives by getting a day off work to participate in a trip to visit a site in a national park of significant natural or cultural value (e.g. see Deery & Jago, 2009; Lin, Wong, & Ho, 2013). Another way to foster interaction between staff in the organisation and with visitors could be to arrange a day of 'switch jobs for a day' similar to job rotation (Balaji & Balachandran, 2012), where office staff become field staff for a day (and vice versa).

To optimise strategic internal and external alignment, the OEH could also consider providing training and development opportunities to staff particularly relating to nature, culture, and heritage-related benefits and

societal benefits of visiting parks. In this regard, the OEH could apply the principle of 'train-the-trainer'. That is, the organisation could choose to provide training to a few talented individuals, who then would be strategically positioned throughout the organisation to train other staff as well as communicate with external stakeholders in regard to brand values and strategy (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). In this process, it is important to make sure that all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to communication of strategies and activities to other staff as well as external stakeholders (Reid et al., 2008).

Previous studies on the repositioning of parks and leisure service provide further insights into how the key findings of this research can be operationalised with regard to external stakeholders (Crompton, 2008, 2009; Kaczynski, Havitz, & McCarville, 2005). Positioning has come relatively late to public sector organisations, but is now acknowledged as one of several tools potentially useful for building community support for parks (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002). However, its application to park management has received little attention outside of the USA, partly due to the complexity of positioning locations as opposed to products and services (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). Despite the emergence of the importance of the concept of repositioning in parks, there are still few practical examples published which demonstrate how repositioning is operationalised, with knowledge primarily conceptual (Crompton, 2000). At the same time, research has demonstrated that it is possible to influence public perceptions of the benefits of parks, effectively aligning external and internal stakeholder groups (Crompton, 2009). A key strategy to achieving external alignment is to apply the IMC approach of communicating a more targeted message to external stakeholders that is consistent with the internal brand identity (Kitchen et al., 2004; Low,

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2000; Shimp, 2000). In the case of the OEH, the findings of this research point to the use of messages about nature, culture, and heritage-related benefits, as well as societal benefits of visiting parks. Such interventions based on the principles of persuasive communication have the potential to improve perceptions of park benefits among members of the NSW community.

parks agency context. Moreover, this study offers a contribution to knowledge as it identifies a number of variables associated with misalignment among staff regarding perceptions of park benefits, including gender, age, frequency of interacting with visitors, and frequency of visiting parks in non-work time. These variables may be important to include in future studies of internal alignment and IIMC.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper examined the alignment between perceptions of different levels of park management agency staff with respect to the personal and societal benefits that parks provide to residents of NSW, Australia. Further to this aim, the alignment between park staff (internal stakeholders) and the NSW community (external stakeholders) was also identified, along with the key factors that influence perceptions of park benefits. Identifying the strategic alignment among park staff with respect to the benefits of visiting parks is important because staff at all levels of the organisation play a crucial role in regard to communicating a consistent message to external stakeholders such as visitors and the community. It is paramount that all levels of staff have a common understanding of the strategic direction of the organisation, including perceptions of the benefits of visiting parks. Such internal alignment between and among staff has the potential to create optimal alignment of the organisation as a whole through external alignment.

This study has practical implications for parks management agencies in Australia in regard to how strategic alignment could be optimised among internal and external stakeholders. One implication of the findings is that focus needs to be put on how to increase perceptions of park benefits among community members and, in particular, people who have little interest in actually visiting parks (i.e. non-visitors). Potentially, the use of interventions based on the principles of persuasive communication can provide important insights into how to build support among this group and encourage them to visit parks. Another major implication of the findings is that all levels and sectors of staff need to be involved during formulation and implementation of corporate strategy to foster staff buy-in and a feeling of ownership of the strategic direction of the organisation (Ferdous, 2008). In the case of the OEH, staff may need to be more involved so that they embrace and perceive the benefits of visiting parks at the levels that executive managers 'desire' parks to be. The OEH is already taking measures in this regard to unify the strategic direction within the organisation through the development of the Tourism Masterplan. This approach has the potential to increase internal alignment through effective internal communication that engages staff in corporate strategy and enhances their awareness of benefits that the OEH desires to project about visiting parks. It may be necessary, of course, to invoke management strategies that enhance the *actual* benefits of visiting

This paper represents the first empirical study that has applied the concept of IIMC to examine strategic alignment between and among staff, as well as strategic alignment with the community, in a parks management agency context. In addition, this paper is the first study to examine the perceptions of park benefits among internal and external stakeholders in an Australian

1985 parks. These are management challenges beyond the scope of this study.

1990 There are some limitations that need to be considered in regard to this study. The benefits that were examined in the study were perceived benefits, which may differ from actual benefits of visiting parks. Despite a large sample size for OEH staff ($n = 457$), the response rate for the staff members could have been higher (13.4%). In addition, a response rate for the community members was not possible to calculate due to the panel provider procedures. Furthermore, the study only examined one parks agency, at one point in time, and in an Australian context.

2000 The measurement instrument that was used in the study containing the 39 benefit items lends itself to replication, which means that other parks agencies in other Australian states/territories can apply the instrument with no changes needed. It is also possible for the OEH and other parks agencies to repeat the survey every year (or other time interval) in order to compare the results and check for progress in regard to alignment between different stakeholder groups. Benchmarking and analysis of trends over time are both increasingly used by public sector agencies to ensure relevance and achievement of strategic goals. The methods could also be replicated with other stakeholder groups not included in the present study, for example, specialist user groups (walking groups, horse riders, mountain bikers, and four-wheel drive clubs), tour operators and other licensee/concession holders, landowners, and residents living adjacent to parks including indigenous landowners, funding bodies, and other organisations that are strategically important to the parks agency. Future research should explore how parks agencies can improve strategic alignment. In particular, researchers could consider how internal communication can be harnessed to build support for the strategic vision of parks

with respect to benefits across all levels of staff. In this connection, it could be useful to measure the impact of internal communication on staff satisfaction. Finally, researchers are urged to find ways to measure the actual benefits that are accrued as a result of visiting parks, in order to ensure that park visitation benefits align with perceptions of the community (and even the high aspirations of executive managers). As such, management strategies that enhance the *actual* benefits of visiting parks may be developed to facilitate alignment with perceived park benefits, if significant differences are found in future studies.

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