

Title

The relationship between team identification and organisational identification: the case of the Australian Rugby Union

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Abstract

The Wallabies is the brand name for the Australian rugby team and is considered one of the key sporting properties in the Australian market. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the employees of the Australian Rugby Union, the organisation responsible for the Wallabies, identify with the sport of rugby and the Wallabies. A survey was undertaken of ARU staff to determine whether their fan identification of the Wallabies was strengthened or weakened as a result of being employed by the ARU. The research found that ARU employee identification with the Wallabies was strengthened as a result of being employed by the ARU. By investing in the employment relationship, by genuinely recognising the value of ARU employees, the ARU can strive to satisfy both employee and consumer partnership. Such an investment in the employees by the ARU is likely to improve the longevity of both the employment and supporter relationship.

Introduction

The Australian rugby team, otherwise known as the Wallabies, is one of the key brands in professional sport within Australia. The governing federation for rugby in Australia is the Australian Rugby Union (ARU). The ARU is recognised by the International Rugby Board (IRB) as the organisation responsible for the governance, management and development of the sport in Australia (Arbib, 2012; Frawley & Cush, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to examine how the employees of the ARU identify with the Wallabies. To the authors knowledge this is the first research that has explored national team fan identification from the perspective of the governing organisation's employees. A survey was undertaken of ARU employees to determine whether fan identification of the Wallabies was strengthened or weakened as a result of being employed by the ARU. In light of a recently completed review into the corporate governance of the ARU this paper attempts to provide the ARU with guidance in striving towards best managing and maximising its employee engagement and affiliation with the Wallabies brand. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section examines the literature that explores fan and organisational identification. The second section outlines the study methodology. The third section discusses the results to emerge from the collected data. The final section presents the conclusion and the main outcomes to emerge from the study.

The Problem

As outlined above, the aim of this research was to examine how the ARU can leverage its profile in Australian sport through maximising supporter affiliation at an organisational level. Indeed, the sports environment in Australia whilst a relatively small market is "highly congested and highly contested," with the codes of Soccer (Association Football), Australian

Rules Football, Rugby League, Rugby Union and Cricket all competing for a share of the professional sport market (Lock et al., 2009, p. 17; Lynch & Frawley, 2013). As a result, the ARU must compete for elite athletes and grassroots participants, members and viewers, sponsors and broadcasters, volunteers and administrators, and government funding for programs, events and infrastructure (Arbib, 2012, p. 3).

As key internal stakeholders, individual employees within sports organisations are uniquely exposed to this highly competitive business environment, as they not only assist the delivery of the sport product to consumers and fans, but they are also likely to be themselves consumers of the sport (Frawley & Adair, 2013; Morgan & Frawley, 2011). Furthermore, as employees drive the brand image of their organisations, they are able to both positively and negatively influence how that image is managed and portrayed (Mangold & Miles, 2007, p. 423). Therefore, understanding fan identification at the internal organisational level can assist the ARU to develop a deeper understanding of its organisational behaviour and to use this knowledge secure and grow support across external organisational levels.

Fan Identification

The extent to which a sports fan has a psychological connection to a team and its performance has been termed “team identification” (Raney & Bryant, 2006, p. 359). A fan can be described as “an enthusiastic devotee of a sport in general, a specific league or team, or a personality” and which manifests attachment through specific consumer behaviour (Clemes et al., 2011, p. 5). Over the past four decades a great deal of research has been published that supports the notion that individuals who maintain strong team identification are more likely to develop a long-term affiliation which is more likely to withstand even

given poor on-field performances (Sloan, 1979; Funk & James, 2001; James et al., 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993).

Research on sport identification has mainly focused on the impact of this identification has on fan and consumer behaviour (Funk & James, 2001, 2006; Wann, 1995; Lock et al., 2009). According to Raney and Bryant (2006, p. 365) sport consumption can be divided into three main categories – game consumption, team merchandise consumption and sponsorship consumption. Game consumption involves both direct consumption through event attendance and indirect consumption through communications via media networks. Team merchandise consumption involves fans purchasing team-related products, whilst sponsorship consumption involves fans' perceptions and patronage of sponsors' products (Raney and Bryant, 2006). While the work of Funk and James (2001, 2006) argues that increased identification with a sports team drives the process of progression from initial awareness, through attraction and attachment, towards team allegiance where the relationship becomes durable and sustained. Beaton et al. (2011) has also found that this framework is also applicable to active sport participation, as the multi-dimensional nature of active involvement can be used to classify participants into various stages of engagement.

A study by Melnick and Wann (2010) examined within an Australian socio-cultural context the sport fan socialisation process, popular fan-related behaviours and identification with the sport fan role and a favourite team. Applying the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) (Wann, 2002) and the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) the study found that males consistently exhibited greater frequencies of engaging in sport fandom-related behaviours than females, through attending events, watching sports on television, listening to sport on the radio, consuming sport over the internet, and discussing sport with others (Melnick & Wann, 2010). Regarding the extent to which parents, friends, school and community impact the sport fan socialisation process, Melnick and Wann (2010)

found that friends ranked highest, suggesting the powerful role of peer influence, which may extend beyond recognition and acceptance within social networks, to also include interest in spectator sports and identification with a favourite team.

In another study focused on fans based in Australia, Lock et al. (2009) applied the SSIS to a new-team context in order to investigate fan-team identity in the first season of the new A-League Soccer competition. The study found that despite only a short history, members of the newly established Sydney Football Club (FC) appeared to identify strongly with their team, demonstrating that team identification can develop quickly in a new team context (Lock et al., 2009). Interestingly, their identification stemmed primarily from their support of soccer in Australia, rather than socialisation agents, such as family, friends and high profile players (Lock et al., 2009). Understandably, the study demonstrated a weakness in its inability to ascertain the degree to which the A-League and Sydney FC's fan base is stable and sustainable, as it was undertaken only after one season.

Interestingly, earlier research indicating that sport is uniquely consumed by strong emotional attachment and personal identification with a high degree of loyalty at both the product level and the brand level has since been revisited (Smith & Stewart, 1999; Smith & Stewart, 2010). Smith and Stewart (2010) argue that psychological, social and cultural needs and related factors are not peculiar to sport consumption but rather represent aspects of contemporary consumer behaviour. They concluded that "sport consumers are not all passionate and fanatical, and nor do they all live vicariously through their favourite team ... their loyalty can be variable, their attendance irregular, and their interest erratic" (p. 5).

Organisational Identification and Commitment

Organisational identification has been defined as a sense of oneness with an organisation (Mael & Ashforth, 2001). This concept appears akin to the notion of organisational commitment, that is, “a state in which an individual identifies with a particular organisation and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in the organisation,” the importance of which has been widely recognised in recent years (Lu et al., 2010, p. 162). Essentially, organisational commitment signifies the loyalty of each member in a firm to the organisation (Kim & Chang, 2007).

In recognising that organisations form part of an employee’s social-identity or self-concept, as employees often define themselves in terms of what their organisation represents, Highhouse et al. (2007) presented a social-identity consciousness measure demonstrating that a job seeker’s social-identity concerns interact with their symbolic inferences about an organisation, in order to influence their attraction to the organisation. These social-identity concerns included the job seeker’s concern for ‘social adjustment,’ which represented their desire to impress others through affiliation with impressive or high-status corporations and the concern for ‘value expression’ which represents their desire to express socially approved values exhibited by respectable employers (Highhouse, 2007, p. 143).

However, the employment relationship only commences once prospective job seekers are successful in obtaining employment. Jackson and Carter (2000, p. 158) for instance state that the typical employee is a “sodomasochistic Faustian altruistic child-like automaton prostitute with feelings of inferiority”. This is based upon employees being expected to punish others who misbehave (sadism), be disciplined (masochism), surrender moral responsibility to the organisation (Faust), and prioritise the organisation’s interests (altruism). Employees are also expected to allow their time to be organised for them (children), do what

they are told to do in a certain way (automaton), sell control of their bodies and labour to their employer (prostitute), and accept that they deserve less than their managers (inferiority) (Jackson & Carter, 2000, p. 158). Such a perspective appears (whilst slightly melodramatic) to exemplify the potentially extreme power imbalances that can develop in employment relationships. Indeed, Mael and Ashforth (2001) stipulate that adverse consequences of an unstable employment relationship include the lack of job security, reduced job satisfaction and involvement, which can cause employee disloyalty in terms of absenteeism, poor performance and staff turnover may create further organisational instability.

Moreover, Mangold and Miles (2007, p. 424) argue that organisations can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage through successfully developing their 'employee brand,' which is the image presented to an organisation's customers and other stakeholders through its employees. Their study argues that frequent and consistent communication reinforcing the desired brand image through the organisation's various message systems, develop and enhance employees' knowledge and understanding of the desired brand image. In particular, messages which are consistent with each other and with the organisation's missions and values, equip employees with an 'organisational purpose,' which underpins the desired brand image. While formal messages are communicated through advertising, performance management and compensation systems, informal messages are communicated through personal relationships and word-of-mouth with co-workers, managers and customers. Both formal and informal communication can potentially reinforce the organisation's values and desired brand image, or negate it. However, since informal communication is more difficult for organisations to control successful employee branding requires good management and therefore the development of a positive and strong organisational culture (Mangold & Miles, 2007).

Formal and informal messages exhibited from organisations and their representatives also construct 'psychological contracts,' which represent employees' perceptions regarding their relationship with the organisation (Mangold & Miles, 2007, p. 426). Whether or not these are upheld, determine employee motivation, trust, performance, organisational commitment, and satisfaction. Negative employee outcomes directly affect customer experiences, satisfaction and loyalty (Mangold & Miles, 2007). This notion of a psychological contract is also evident within a sporting context, albeit implicitly. Indeed, Fonte (2002, pp.18-19) suggests: "companies have profound effects on the lives of the people who work for them. If there is stress, fear and frustration at work, people might bring these feelings home at night. This can create problems at home, which people bring back to work in the morning ... and the cycle continues. If people are concerned about ... workplace frustrations, they're likely unable to concentrate on the customer". Therefore, in order to ultimately enhance customer loyalty, organisations must ensure employee loyalty, through effective management of psychological contracts with employees.

Through their research Mangold and Miles (2007) established a typology of employee branding depicting employee knowledge and understanding of the desired brand image, and the extent to which psychological contracts in the organisation have been upheld. Four quadrants represent different groups within organisations: strike-out kings, injured reserves, rookies, and all-stars. Strike-out king organisations have employees with low knowledge and low motivation. Injured reserve organisations have employees with high knowledge but low motivation. Rookie organisations typically have employees with a large number of new staff who maintain low knowledge but high motivation. All-star organisations are considered the most favourable with employees attributed with both high knowledge and high motivation, and therefore the best at building their brand (Mangold & Miles, 2007). Organisations that sit

with the all-star category produce enhanced customer satisfaction and greater customer loyalty, resulting in a sustainable competitive advantage (Mangold & Miles, 2007).

Whilst the research literature on sport consumption has grown in recent years, the research concerning a heterogeneous fan base within contemporary society is more limited (Quick, 2000). There is also considerable literature available on organisational behaviour, particularly in the general context of employment. However, research on employees within sporting organisations as both representatives and consumers of the sport product is lacking. While the research literature in this area continues to develop, further research, such as this study is required to gain a more comprehensive insight into the aforementioned themes.

Theoretical Framework

In order to explore the notion of employees within sporting organisations as both representatives and consumers of the sport product, the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) (Wann, 2002) and the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) were selected as theoretical frameworks deployed for the study. The SFQ is a reliable and valid one-dimensional scale assessing the degree of identification with the role of a sport fan (Melnick & Wann, 2010). Response options range from strongly disagree (number 1) to strongly agree (number 8). In addition to the five standard scale items a further item was added which asked “My family see me as a Rugby fan”. This question was incorporated as after friends, family is viewed as having the greatest impact on sport fan socialisation (Melnick & Wann, 2010). With the SFQ, higher ratings for the listed items indicate a greater level of sport fandom.

The SSIS is also regarded as a reliable and valid one-dimensional scale (Lock et al., 2009). It measures sport fan identity, that is, the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to an established favourite team (Melnick & Wann, 2010). It provides a measure to ascertain whether significant between-group differences exist based on age, gender, salary and current employment (Lock et al., 2009). The SSIS contains seven scaled items with response options ranging from low identification (number 1) to high identification (number 8). Higher ratings for each item signify a greater level of ARU employee identification with the Wallabies. For purposes of this study the SSIS was slightly modified as two questions that were also asked in SFQ were removed to avoid duplication. The removed items were “How important is being a fan to you?” and “How strongly do your friends see you as a fan?” Furthermore, the item involving the extent to which participants followed the Wallabies, was modified to include the internet, in consideration of technological advances allowing alternative sport news and entertainment programming to be accessed online. Online news, as for many sports today, is now a central feature of the commercialised corporate sport environment and how sports communicate with their fans (Horton, 2009; Fujak & Frawley, 2014).

In order to assess whether the identification of ARU employees with the Wallabies had been strengthened as a result of being employed by ARU, two modified versions of the SFQ and SSIS were completed by the participants.

Methodology

As stated above, employees at the ARU were surveyed with the purpose being to examine the level of identification the staff had with the Wallabies. At the time of this study, 190 people were employed by the ARU. Of these staff, 156 were based at the ARU headquarters in St

Leonards (a business district in Sydney) while 34 staff who were part of the community rugby functional area of the ARU were based at the Sydney Football Stadium. An online survey was deployed to collect the data. This type of approach has become a popular technique for the sport fan research over the past two decades (Kerr & Emery, 2011). Online surveys are very effective in terms of cost, reach and convenience (Beaton et al., 2011). The survey was distributed using an automated mail-out to employee email accounts. The correspondence included details of the research and a link directing staff to the survey which was hosted by online survey provider Survey Gizmo. The respondents were given one week to complete.

The survey consisted of 12 questions. Questions pertaining to demographic variables such as gender, age and nationality, were asked in order to establish the characteristics of the staff. Participants were also asked to specify their length of employment with the ARU, their current position and the functional area they work in at the ARU. The respondents were asked to rank various factors influencing their decision to commence employment with the ARU, from the most influential to the least. Participants then completed the SFQ and SSIS surveys, with the aim to determine the level of sport fandom and team identification they had with the Wallabies before and after commencing ARU employment. A final question asked participants to indicate which employee benefits they have most since becoming a staff member with the ARU.

A total of 57 fully completed surveys were returned and analysed, a response rate of 30 percent. This response rate is considered near average for online surveys distributed internally within organisations (Survey Gizmo, 2010). Responses for nationality and length of employment at the ARU were analysed manually from the comparison report produced by the survey program. To assist the analysis two tables were developed comparing the SFQ and SSIS results. The main limitation in conducting the survey related to matters of timing. The

survey was emailed to ARU employees just following the hosting of a large event, the IRB Sevens World Series. A number of ARU staff were involved with this event and this is likely to have impacted the response rate.

Results

Male respondents made up 61% of the sample compared to females at 39%. The majority of the respondents were employed on a full-time basis (86%) at the ARU. The largest age group in the sample was the 26 to 34 group (45%). The majority of the respondents were born in Australia (86%) and had been with the ARU for approximately three years.

In order from the most influential to least, the following factors influenced participants' decisions to commence employment at the ARU: work opportunity, being a fan of sport in general, being a rugby fan, personal network or contact, money, being a rugby player, and being a player of sport in general. From the total score representing the sum of all the weighted categories, the prospective work opportunity at the ARU offered the greatest appeal for the respondents as job seekers. However, fan identification was also influential: with fan identification with sport in general achieving a higher ranking position rank than fan identification with the sport of Rugby, in particular. An interesting observation is that while fan identification was influential, being a player of sport, either of sport in general, or Rugby, was ranked the lowest of all the categories.

With reference to employee benefits, overwhelmingly (93%) the respondents indicated that they had used the employee benefit of free tickets to attend Rugby matches involving the Wallabies. In order from most used employee benefit to the least are listed as follows: free match tickets (93%), discounted Wallabies merchandise (59%), Wallabies

merchandise give-aways (55%), engagement with players (54%) and discounted match tickets (34%). Notably, only 4% of the respondents did not state that they had used any of the listed employee benefits.

The resulting levels of sport fandom (SFQ scores) corresponded with levels of team identification (SSIS scores), suggesting that ARU employees have experienced significant increases in identification strength with both the sport of Rugby and the national team, the Wallabies, as a consequence of being employed by the ARU.

According to the SFQ, prior to employment at the ARU, 27% of employees did not consider themselves Rugby fans, but following employment, interestingly, more than half of these employees became Rugby fans. On the other end of the spectrum prior to employment at the ARU 73% of employees considered themselves to be Rugby fans however this increased to 88% post ARU employment. Furthermore, prior employment, 47% of employees agreed that being a Rugby fan was very important to them: this increased to 64% post ARU employment. More substantial changes were evident in how others perceived respondent identification. For instance, prior to employment 63% of family and friends were viewed the respondent as a Rugby fan. Post employment however, this figure increased to 91%.

According to the SSIS, 94% of the sample who were born in Australia and 88% of those not born in Australia identified strongly as a fan of the Wallabies. Not surprisingly, the one person in the sample who had a low identification of the Wallabies was born in New Zealand. The length of time employees had worked at the ARU was also compared to their fan identification of the Wallabies. Strong identification with the Wallabies was found in 86% of staff who had worked at the ARU for longer than 6 years. For staff with 4-6 years service 100% had strong fan identification; staff with 2-4 years service had 94%; staff with 1-2 years service had 100%; and for staff with less than one year, 80%. Interestingly, no one

employed for less than six months demonstrated lower fan identification with the Wallabies, suggesting that either staff became strong supporters within a short time of employment or alternatively they were already fans before they were hired by the ARU. While the length of time in which one has been working at the ARU does not seem to correspond to the strength of one's personal identification with the Wallabies, the results do suggest that regardless of the length of employment there was a high level of fan identification.

Prior employment at the ARU, 73% of employees attributed high importance to the Wallabies winning, which increased to 95% following employment. Further, it is interesting to observe the "I consider myself to be a Rugby fan" item on the SFQ, which corresponds to the "How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the Wallabies?" item on the SSIS. Prior to ARU employment, 70% of employees strongly identified themselves as fans of the Wallabies which increased to 93% post employment. These higher percentages in comparison to the results of the corresponding item on the SFQ, suggest that employees may identify more strongly with the Wallabies brand, as opposed to the Rugby brand. Prior employment 64% of employees followed the Wallabies closely through game attendance, television, newspapers, contact with other fans and/or the Internet, which increased to 95% post employment.

An interesting comparison can be made between the final two items on the SSIS. Prior to employment only 29% of respondents stated they displayed the Wallabies' brand name on clothing or within their homes. This category increased nearly three times to 82% post employment, constituting the most significant change amongst all the variables in the survey. In contrast, prior to starting work at the ARU, 41% of staff disliked the Wallabies' greatest rivals (most likely to be the New Zealand All Blacks) however this increased to 57% post employment, suggesting that Australian sport fans as well as Wallabies fans have a relatively similar dislike for a formidable and long-time rival.

Discussion

The study found that ARU employees exhibited a high level of identification with the Wallabies. This identification was demonstrated through following the Wallabies through both direct and indirect game consumption, displaying of the brand, and utilising team-related employee benefits (Clemes et al., 2011). In this way the employees are both representatives of the ARU and fans of its main product, the Wallabies. The Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) and the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) provided an appropriate framework to determine the strength of sport fandom and identification for the ARU employees.

The study found that most of the staff considered themselves fans of the sport and the Wallabies prior to commencing work at the ARU. However, the strength of this identification increased and was experienced by more employees following employment, suggesting that working for ARU has strengthened their identification with the sport. Therefore, if strong team identification is maintained with ongoing progress towards team attachment, as suggested by the work of Funk and James (2001, 2006) ARU employees are more likely to develop a long-term affiliation, one that is more likely to withstand poor performances (Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993; Lock et al., 2009). Given the importance but unpredictability of on-field success this is likely to be an important feature of managing ongoing support. Indeed, the present study found that 95% of employees attach high importance to the Wallabies winning. However, in the contemporary sports world it is now acknowledged that the wealthiest sport organisations are generally also the best on-field performers (Smith & Stewart, 2010). This indicates the importance of financial resources to ensure ongoing sustainability of the game at both the elite and grassroots level.

Before working at the ARU many employees were already strong fans of the sport of Rugby and the Wallabies. This is evident through fan identification with sport and Rugby

heavily influencing participants' decisions to commence employment. In making such a decision, it appears that Highhouse et al.'s (2007) notion of social adjustment and value expression can be considered as an explanation. Respondents may show their affiliation to the ARU and the Wallabies as both a desire to impress family and friends but also to express their attachment to their work and work-place. The results that emerged from the SFQ, with regard to the perceptions of family and friends, appears to be consistent with the work on sport fan socialisation by Melnick and Wann (2010). The results showed that friends (91%) viewed the respondents as slightly more likely to be regarded as rugby fans compared with family (86%). While this study did not examine family and friends as socialisation agents it suggests that they have a role in shaping the employee's sport fandom, particularly in observing the sport fan experience.

How ARU employees demonstrate their identification with the Wallabies is also relevant. This is most evident through participant responses to how often they display the Wallabies' name or insignia at their place of work, where they live or on their clothing. This three-fold increase following employment most probably captures the employees experience working at the ARU headquarters, which is covered in Wallabies and Rugby insignia, such as bunting across the ceiling, posters, memorabilia frames, wall décor, banners and even placed on items of stationary. Such insignia is evident not only in communal areas, such as the reception but also within individual offices. These may constitute formal messages upon which psychological contracts are formed (Mangold & Miles, 2007, p. 426). In particular, in promoting the Wallabies, such messages appear to be presented consistently, which are also consistent with the ARU's mission, values and desired brand image, that is, to represent 'One Team' across all areas of the business. Through implementing this internal strategy the ARU hopes to achieve its vision: "For Australia to be a real and respected world power in Rugby

on an ongoing basis, displaying innovation, integrity, professionalism and teamwork, through Australian Rugby” (ARU, 2011, p. 5).

While Mangold and Miles’ (2007) notion of psychological contracts are specific to the employee relationship with an organisation, the present study suggests that such psychological contracts can also be constructed between the employee and the dominant sport product attributed to the organisation, in this case, the Wallabies. The effective management of such an employee brand would not only be presented to the ARU’s ultimate customers, the Rugby community, but also through the individual’s personal networks, as the employee is a consumer of the core product. The effective management of the psychological contracts appears to be evident from the high levels of sport fandom and identification found in the SFQ and SSIS scores. Provided that formal and informal messages are delivered consistently to ARU employees by the organisation, the ARU can aim to become an ‘all-star’ organisation as outlined by Mangold and Miles (2007). For this to be truly achieved though the ARU will need to ensure that its organisational performance is exemplary not on off the field of play but also on it, something that has not occurred regularly for a few years now.

The main contribution to arrive from this research is the recognition that fan identification with the Wallabies was strengthened through employment at the ARU. This has potential managerial implications. As ARU employees are both representatives and consumers of the sport product, from an organisational perspective, having a detailed understanding of fan identification of staff to the core sport brand on offer can provide important insights. Particularly in reference to brand strategy and implementation i.e. by tracking internal fan identification overtime some questions can be answered to the overall effectiveness of the brand and consumer strategy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A central outcome from this study is for the ARU to continue to develop and refine employee engagement strategies. The ARU needs to consider what type of mix of staff it should hire to best fulfil its stated vision and objectives. Based on this study it would suggest that hiring individuals who are existing Rugby fans and already strongly identify with the Wallabies provides advantages for the ARU. That is not to say though that a fan of the New Zealand All Blacks is not capable of being a quality ARU staff member but rather the mix of staff, those that are Rugby fans as opposed to those who are not needs to be evaluated. In recruiting employees, the ARU should consider the need of prospective staff to become strongly identified with the Wallabies brand and how this may be expressed to others such as family and friends as suggested by Highhouse et al. (2007). This can assist cement organisational attraction to the ARU prior to the commencement of employment, ensuring that only genuine prospective employees undergo the recruitment process.

Once the employment relationship has commenced, the ARU should strive to retain and develop its employees, something it has not done that well over the past decade (Favaloro, 2013). Indeed, research indicates that employee retention can indirectly impact customer retention (Fonte, 2002). By investing in the employment relationship, by genuinely recognising the value of ARU employees, the ARU can strive to satisfy both employees and customers. As ARU employees are also viewed as consumers of the sport and the products that surround it, such investment can assist the longevity of employment and supporter relationship. This can occur through the ongoing provision of employee benefits and staff development programs.

Thirdly, the ARU should aspire to attaining all-star status (Mangold & Miles, 2007). This can occur through consistent communication and reinforcement of the ARU's mission,

values and desired brand image. The desired brand image should be integrated into both internal and external messages to allow employees to consistently reflect the desired brand image to others. However, a potential problem may arise regarding the ARU's desired brand image. Indeed, the ARU review into its governance performance argued that the brand of the Wallabies is possibly over-promoted to the extent it overshadows many of the other Rugby offerings (Arbib, 2012). As team members of the Wallabies are selected from Super Rugby teams, both are interrelated and dependent on each other for developing success (Arbib, 2012).

Ultimately, the focus also needs to be grassroots engagement and the community side of Rugby so that the sport can develop not only from the top down but also from the base upwards. An opportunity for the ARU is the inclusion of Rugby into the sport program of the upcoming 2016 Rio Olympic Games. This development provides the ARU with an additional opportunity to grow Rugby and broaden its appeal to the wider community. Furthermore, to address the challenges faced by the sport the ARU should adopt the recommendations outlined in the recent governance review including developing a national charter for Australian Rugby. The purpose of such a charter would be to clearly state the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders across all levels of Rugby in Australia (Arbib, 2012, p. 35). Such a consistent approach may assist the ARU to manage and maximise its brand image and subsequently for it to be communicated to the relevant Rugby publics

These strategies derive from the main outcomes to emerge from this project. The research argues that ARU employee identification with the Wallabies has been strengthened as a result of being employed by ARU. The findings are consistent with the available literature, affirming that ARU employees are also consumers of the brand that they produce. Essentially, the ARU needs to continue to develop and harness employee identification with the sport and the Wallabies brand by ensure continued organisational identification. Through

clear and consistent communication strategies both within the ARU and with external stakeholders the ARU will be in a better position to recruit and retain capable and motivated employees, who strongly identify with not only the Wallabies, but also importantly with the sport.

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