"The relevance and sustainability of Investors in People"

by

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Student Declaration

Concurrent registration for two or more academic awards

I declare that while registered for the research degree, I was with the University's specific permission, an enrolled student for the following award:

PG Dip Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (completed at UCLan in 2010).

_____

Material submitted for another award

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award and is solely my own work.

Signature of Candidate

Type of Award   **Doctor of Philosophy**_____

School   **Lancashire Business School**_____

Abstract

Title: The relevance and sustainability of Investors in People.

Purpose: The purpose of this research project is to explore and challenge the relevance and sustainability of Investors in People (IIP) involvement and recognition within seven case studies.

Research design: Seven in-depth case studies combining thirty-eight semi-structured interviews are used to gather the appropriate insights.

Findings: In essence, it is the studied organizations themselves that generate what the Leitch Report describes as the "untapped and vast" potential of their employees, not IIP involvement or recognition. The data collected challenges the direct relationship frequently proposed between IIP recognition and increases in business performance. The sample organizations have delivered performance improvements and success independently of IIP consideration, raising serious questions over the relevance and sustainability of the standard. These insights are supported by the lack of knowledge and understanding of the standard within the workforce. In addition, other quality improvement tools and techniques and industry standards are found to have a significant detrimental influence on the standing of IIP. Other influences are also found to impact negatively on the standing. Thus, this research project questions what contribution IIP can make towards national competitiveness when the standard is so withdrawn from the business performance improvements integrated. Even as a badge or plaque of external recognition, the assumptions surrounding the perceptual value of IIP are questioned when the impact of the standard's logo/ symbols is considered to be nominal. A theoretical framework and alternative definition for IIP are developed to represent the findings within the seven organizations studied.

Research limitations: Research is needed beyond the case samples studied to further explore and generalize the rhetoric and realities concerning the insights developed.

Practical implications: HR practitioners and managers need to exhibit caution before considering IIP involvement and recognition. Indeed, practitioners need to consider that the asserted benefits associated with IIP may not match their expectations and provide the impact they seek.

Originality/value: This research project provides HR practitioners and managers with a valuable and timely alternative discourse and perspective when considering employee development towards IIP recognition and the possibility of improved business performance and customer/employee perceptual value. In addition, the theoretical exemplars developed from the data set provide visual representations that can be used as pragmatic comparisons to develop the field of IIP further.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Christine Downes. Her zest and determination for life has inspired me to be the best that I can be.

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Chapter one –
Introduction and Outline

Introduction to the thesis

1.1. Setting the scene

Whilst recommending strategic guidelines for the future of UK government policy, Lord Leitch recognised that:

> "… our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential … [generating benefits through] … higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice …
>
> The alternative? Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all.
>
> The case for action is compelling and urgent." (Leitch Report, 2006: p.1).

The Leitch Report (2006) highlights the importance of people skills in the continuous challenge to survive and compete within the global marketplace. For organizations, the pursuit of improvements in skills and national competitiveness ultimately involves training and development excellence.

Investors in People (IIP), "the government initiative designed to enhance organisation training and development practices" (Collins and Smith, 2004: p.583), is one of the tools that is claimed to be able to exploit the potential of people (IIP UK, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e). Indeed, IIP recognition and usage is supported and promoted by Leitch (2006), who suggests it can contribute towards achieving increases in skills and productivity. Lloyd and Payne (2002) go one step further and suggest IIP has made a contribution to the development of a high skills society. Not everyone, however, shares this enthusiastic outlook. Hoque's (2008: p.57) research is particularly damning suggesting that "it is unlikely that they [the government] will achieve their aims of

either better workforce development across all levels of the organisational hierarchy or of greater equality of training provision, by offering support to IIP". Thus, the aim of the present study is to explore the context of IIP and examine its relevance, sustainability and contribution to the future prosperity and productivity of organizations in the UK. Relevance and sustainability within this context refers to any contribution, benefit and/or value to organizations provided by the standard in direct relation to the benefits IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) proposes.

"It's official – Investors in People can boost your performance and your profit" (IIP UK 2008e). This statement is based on a claim by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008) that suggests a causal link between organizations gaining IIP recognition and improved business performance and profitability. Consequently, IIP UK (2008e) views this as confirmation that its standard does indeed generate these claimed benefits. Another IES report (Cowling, 2008) argues an average non-IIP organization generates £176.35 less per year in gross profit per employee per year, compared to its IIP accredited counterpart.

Although there may appear to be an *a priori* causal link between an organization having IIP and increased business performance, the precise nature, direction and strength of this link remains unclear. The IES reports (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008) are less forthcoming concerning why the link exists and make the unwarranted assumption that IIP is in some way directly responsible for increased business performance. The literature review explores in greater depth these assumptions and claimed benefits relating to IIP involvement and recognition; they have continued to be a source of contention and contradiction.

The IIP standard has its advocates and skeptics. Since its conception in 1991, there have been many claims that IIP increases business performance (TQM International, 1994; Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; McLuskey, 1999; McAdam *et al.*, 2002; Tamkin *et al.*, 2008; Cowling, 2008; IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e; Bourne *et al.*, 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). A number of studies, however, have questioned the financial benefits associated with IIP recognition. Berry and Grieves (2003) suggest that making an objective assessment as to whether IIP increases business performance is difficult given the paucity of research on the standard. In

addition, Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) and Smith (2000) argue that evaluating and measuring the success of the standard is notoriously difficult due to the intangible nature of the related benefits. Furthermore, Smith *et al.* (2002) argue that the impact IIP has had on financial performance is seemingly ill-defined, whilst Robson *et al.* (2005) argue that the standard assumes that enhancing employee development would lead to greater business performance.

The potential increases in competitiveness and business performance ascribed to skill development in the UK, and the diversity of opinions concerning the actual benefits associated with IIP recognition, highlight the need to explore this matter much further. Indeed, the paucity of in-depth empirical research on IIP and sustainability (noted by *inter alia* Down and Smith, 1998; Berry and Grieves, 2003; Collins and Smith, 2004; Svensson, 2006), indicate a clear opportunity to develop a greater depth of insights and to explore the behavior associated with the asserted benefits. The potential contribution derived from improved insight and understanding should generate significant benefits for the approximately 38000 organizations currently involved with IIP (Zhou and Shipton, 2008) in different capacities (i.e. through IIP recognition or consideration), linking over 29% of the UK's workforce (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). The hypothetical predictions supported by practical investigation (e.g. Leitch Report, 2006) agree that IIP may have a major role to play in enhancing national competitiveness and productivity. Consequently, this present research can provide an essential contribution to determining the nature and extent of this IIP role.

1.2. Research aim

The aim of this research thesis is to explore and examine the role, relevance and sustainability associated with IIP involvement and recognition. The qualitative approach will generate a rich dataset of behaviours, processes and relationships deriving from IIP adoption relating to the achievement of claimed benefits of improved business performance and enhanced competitiveness.

1.3. Research objectives

1) The first objective is to conduct an in-depth critical review of the IIP and associated literature to explore the areas of significance for further intense study that will assist in fulfilling the research aim and answering the research questions posed below. These insights assist in creating the initial categories and codes that contribute towards the data analysis and the interview questionnaire.

2) The next objective is designed to provide practical evidence concerning the consideration, use, standing and perceptions of IIP. This is achieved through researching seven case studies spanning diverse organizational backgrounds: a high school, a university, a catering department, a defence organization, a transport company, a third sector organization, and an adult themed retailer. The evidence and insights are then translated into the context of the broader research questions to analyze and understand their impact within these diverse contexts.

3) The final objective is to build two new theoretical exemplars that represent the interpretation of the findings and data analysis presented relating to the research questions. These theories provide a visual outlook on organizational realities and the use of IIP. They are designed to be used by academics and human resource (HR) practitioners as an alternative perspective concerning the process of IIP consideration, recognition and maintenance.

1.4. Research questions

These questions have been chosen to tackle and fulfill the research aim and objectives of this project. In addition, these particular areas of enquiry assist in dictating and guiding the discussion built within the literature review.

1. How do experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance?
2. What influences the standing of IIP in organizations?

3. How do the IIP logo/symbols impact on the perceptions of managers and employees?

1.5. Key themes of discussion

➢ How do experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance?

This is an opportunity to engage in an ongoing debate that has existed since the genesis of IIP; whether or not the standard actually contributes towards increases in business performance. This is achieved by concentrating not solely on the claimed benefits directly derived from the standard (e.g. Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; IIP UK, 2008e) – which are difficult to measure (e.g. Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005) – but by additionally focusing on benefits that *cannot* be attributed to IIP. Importantly, this discussion moves away from the continuous difficulties associated with tangibly measuring IIP contributions. Instead, an in-depth qualitative analysis of opinions and feelings develops the insights considered necessary for furthering this particular debate. The general areas of discussion include: changes in training and development practice required and instigated for IIP implementation and maintenance; links between IIP and job satisfaction/empowerment; and the impact of IIP knowledge and learning on the recognition process.

➢ What influences the standing of IIP in organizations?

To understand what influences the standing of IIP, a number of potential factors are explored. These factors include critical perspectives that warn of fad interests in IIP (e.g. Quayle and Murphy, 1999), the use and integration of other quality improvement standards and industry standards (e.g. ISO 9001:2000 and Lloyds Register Quality Assurance), and various potential barriers regarding the implementation of IIP (e.g. Smith and Taylor, 2000; Reade, 2004; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). The opinions uncovered within the qualitative perspective examine the unique organizational contexts provided by the seven case study scenarios. The factors explored can potentially impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP in a positive or negative way, dependent on their importance and recognized influence.

➢ How do the IIP logo/symbols impact on the perceptions of managers and employees?

Perceptual value within this context tackles the benefit of public recognition, whereby it is assumed that IIP recognition attracts the best quality job applicants and provides customers an additional reason to choose that organization's product or service (IIP UK, 2008a). The research question is tackled through exploring the value of the logo/symbols associated with IIP recognition using the perceptions of managers and front-line employees. It is important to question managerial assumptions related to this perceptual value (e.g. Bell *et al.,* 2002b) when there is a paucity of research, especially with relation to front-line employees.

➢ Building theoretical exemplars:
   o A more fitting framework for the IIP journey
   o A practical alternative definition for IIP

The exploration and interpretation of the above themes subsequently leads to the development of two new theoretical outlooks. These are representative of the findings concerning the seven cases studied. The findings provide pragmatic insights that contribute uniquely to the body of knowledge surrounding IIP. Consequently, this study provides several suggestions for HR practitioners and ways to move beyond the ideas generated within this research project.

1.6. Methodology and research design overview

This research project studies a single phenomenon: the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This style of approach is *an instrumental case study*, whereby the examination of a particular case is to provide insight into the phenomenon researched (Stake, 2008). In essence, human experiences are explored to develop pragmatic insights into the reality within this research context. Thus, a methodology is required to understand an amalgam of interrelated factors that interact in complicated and often unanticipated ways (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). A multiple case study approach has been adopted to engage with this complexity. This is achieved through building multiple perspectives from those respondents involved within the research, i.e. managers and front-line employees. The existing literature generates initial categories and codes for further study and then

insights from data are explored to build patterns within the findings and 'constantly compare' the cases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

The epistemological position of this study is one of 'interpretivism' (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Hence, this study respects that all respondents are individuals and, as a consequence, accepts that there is a subjective meaning of social actions that needs to be understood. The ontological position of this study is one of 'constructivism', whereby social constructions are considered to be built up from perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2000, 2008). In this instance, the actors are managers and front-line employees within four organizations and senior managers within the remaining three organizations. The axiological position of this study keeps the researcher a constant part of the socially-constructed theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Thirty-eight semi-structured interviews gather the in-depth data required. The study involves diverse research samples spanning a high school, a university, a catering department within an NHS trust, a defence organization, a transport company, a third sector organization, and an adult themed retailer. Importantly, the interviews explore a respondent base consisting of managers and front-line employees, an approach rarely focused upon within other IIP studies. The literature review provides starting points for the collection of data to gather momentum and evolve throughout, as well as contributing essential comparison discourse for the discussion of findings.

1.7. The significance of this research project

Understanding the extent to which IIP recognition produces actual and measurable benefits, if any, has remained an ever-present debate since the standard's genesis. There is no easy answer. Nevertheless, this research assists in moving the discussion further through understanding and embracing the complexity involved. Instead of focusing on an individual area of IIP recognition and risking the production of shallow insights, this study explores a number of significant and relevant issues all at once. This means that insights within one area can be instantly compared and contrasted within an amalgam of other factors explored simultaneously to produce more meaningful evaluations. This in turn provides an opportunity to explore well-established assumptions within the

literature review and the findings gathered. Considering the immense number of organizational micro- and macro-factors that can affect IIP involvement and recognition, it is impractical for this research to explore every possible detail. Despite this, there is considerable progress and complexity to ensure a relevant and rich depth of analysis and exploration that yields significant insights into the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

The particular areas of focus within this research project are unique to this study. By combining and contrasting issues on related and relevant areas, this study presents findings that are contextualized and compared against each other leading to extensively constructed conclusions. With the support of seven case studies spanning diverse sectors, this helps to visualize the data analyzed beyond the confines of an individual case. In other words, many of the interpretations are found within more than one organizational context. This provides a basis and justification for additional studies beyond the confines of this research project to understand the extent of the findings uncovered. In addition, the data analyzed is not found to be limited to one specific sector, suggesting the findings are potentially important to all organizations considering or involved with and/or recognized by IIP.

A contribution is provided in terms of what influences the standing of IIP – an area lacking in-depth exploration within the literature. Specifically, IIP is compared in terms of importance and relevance to other quality improvement tools and techniques (including quality measuring inspectors) and industry awards. These include: ISO 9001:2000; Lloyds Register Quality Assurance; Higher Education Funding Council for England; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills; NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework; UK Bus Awards; and Erotic Trade Only Best Adult Retailer. In addition, the exploration of levels of interest in IIP (Quayle and Murphy, 1999; Ram, 2000; Bell *et al.,* 2002b; Reade, 2004) and particular barriers to the implementation of the standard (Atkinson, 1990; Drucker, 1992; Allen, 2000; Smith and Taylor, 2000; Collins and Smith, 2004; Lomas, 2004; Hughes, 2006; CIPD, 2008) add important viewpoints. These unique case study perspectives provide pragmatic insights that assist in understanding what influences the standing of IIP.
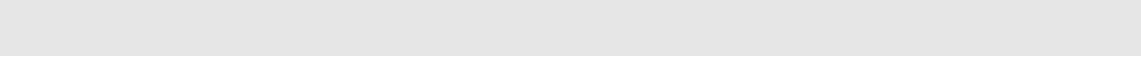
With this study focusing on the opinions of managers and front-line employees, there is an opportunity to explore the perceptual value of the IIP logo/ symbols. Importantly, this addresses assumptions made within the literature (e.g. IIP UK, 2008a) and management speak (e.g. Bell *et al.,* 2002b) that IIP recognition does indeed have perceptual value – a hypothesis not effectively explored within the literature. With the additional input of front-line employees, opinions can be explored to develop insights into whether IIP recognition does indeed contribute towards attracting the best job applicants and promote quality in the eyes of customers.

There are a number of significant gaps within the surrounding literature that this research highlights and focuses upon. Firstly, it is well recognized there is a paucity of qualitative research concerning IIP (e.g. Down and Smith, 1998; Collins and Smith, 2004). This research project retains an entirely qualitative perspective to assist in contributing towards this deficit. In addition, the qualitative approach enables the data gathering process to be flexible in following important insights uncovered. In other words, as areas of interest develop within the themes, the research approach can adapt and morph to follow significant paths of inquiry. In addition, this research focus contributes towards a gap in the literature concerning quality improvement and sustainability (Svensson, 2006). This is achieved primarily by focusing on sustainability as a constant theme throughout the research project whilst maintaining the specific context of IIP.

Within the profiles, findings, and data analysis and discussion chapter, this research project builds two theoretical exemplars to contribute towards the surrounding IIP discourse. These theories assist in providing a visual representation of the seven case study interpretations preceding them. They are designed as an alternative and practical discourse to assist academics and HR practitioners in studying and considering/ using IIP respectively. With the theories being socially constructed from seven diverse organizational sectors, they provide an individual perspective upon a standard and discourse that has evolved and developed over nearly a twenty year period.

In short, this research project provides a timely qualitative contribution concerning the domain surrounding IIP. There is a paucity of empirical studies and this research approach begins to contribute towards this deficit. The multiple case study approach

assists in providing practical insights concerning the attainment and maintenance of IIP within seven organizations. Ultimately, these findings hold significant connotations concerning the relevance and sustainability of the standard. The findings question a number of key assumptions within the literature and build theoretical exemplars to represent an alternative and practical discourse when considering or using IIP recognition. Consequently, conclusions are drawn as to the actual contribution of IIP towards the future prosperity and performance of the seven organizations studied. This discussion is finally reflected outwards to consider the potential contribution of IIP on delivering a brighter future for UK organizations through skill development whilst simultaneously increasing competitiveness and economic growth.

Thesis outline

1.8. Context outline

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce a contextual and general outlining of IIP, its history and workings. To do this, IIP is first defined to begin a logical progression leading to the understanding and analysis of the standard. There are also other definitions associated with the research question that are presented to further understand the context of this study. The chapter explains why and how IIP came about. This is followed by a discussion of how the standard works. A dialogue of how organizations attain IIP accreditation is probed to help build an understanding of the nature of achieving recognition with the standard. Significant IIP policy changes are highlighted and explored. This leads into a discussion of how the standard is promoted, who is responsible for it, and what their future ambitions are for the use and application of this quality improvement initiative. Throughout this chapter, every area is critiqued and reinforced with relevant examples from studies that both advocate and scrutinize the use of the standard. Consequently, this critique is converted into the contextual nature of the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

1.9. Literature review outline

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an up-to-date critique of IIP and its impact on organizations in the UK, while at the same time discussing the most relevant IIP studies conducted since the standard's inception. Relevant contributions are explored and connected to the specific context of this study – the relevance and sustainability of IIP – to provide areas and issues of interest for further research within the data collection process. Importantly, issues and knowledge gaps raised within the literature review provide tentative starting categories and codes for directed exploration within the data collection process. In addition, the literature establishes a knowledge grounding that is used for constant comparison within the data analysis chapter.

With regards to the first research question, specific knowledge gaps connected to IIP are first uncovered to help to justify the focus and approach of this research. Following this,

several strong assumptions relating to IIP are explored and evaluated in detail; these include assumptions relating to the existence of best practice, the alleged benefits surrounding IIP accreditation and business performance improvements made as result of engaging with quality improvement tools and techniques. This helps to unpack the complexities surrounding the standard. The next issue discusses the potential realities regarding day-to-day business activities compared with employee development. Limitations of the application of training are discussed during and subsequent to gaining IIP recognition. Finally, specific industry examples of problems relating to IIP are introduced.

For the second research question, numerous potential barriers regarding the implementation of IIP are introduced and explored. These include barriers concerning IIP policy, late feedback on training activities, organizational change and using IIP as the sole quality improvement tool or technique. Following on from this, a number of quality improvement tools and techniques and industry standards are briefly presented. These are specifically used or aspired to within the case study organizations within this research project and include: ISO 9001:2000; Lloyds Register Quality Assurance; Higher Education Funding Council for England; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills; NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework; UK Bus Awards; and Erotic Trade Only Best Adult Retailer. Finally, there is a discussion of issues concerning the maintaining of interest in IIP subsequent to the recognition process.

For the third research question, the IIP analogy of the 'plaque on the wall' is analyzed to uncover how this can affect the reasoning and motivations behind wanting to achieve recognition with the standard. A discussion on how IIP links to changing the perspective of customers and employees completes the literature review. This chapter finishes with some concluding remarks on the literature discussed and highlights significant areas for further study within this research project.

1.10. Methodology and research design outline

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and understand the underpinning methodological outlook adopted by this study, as well as exploring the specific methods

used for data collection. The methodology section first explores the multiple case study approach adopted by this research project. Next, the process of induction and the use of the literature review is explained and understood. Finally, the following areas explore the specific methodological position of this research project. This includes a discussion on the epistemology, ontology and axiological positions.

Each area within the research design section provides justification to appreciate and understand the research design choices made. The semi-structured interview design is explored within a framework established to explicate how the particular interview questions were constructed. The subsequent discussion helps to understand the respondents involved in the interview process, as well as highlighting specific access issues encountered. Lastly, the specific tools used and exploited to analyze the data within this multiple case study approach are introduced and understood. This includes a discussion on codes, categories, constant comparison, intensive data interrogation, theoretical saturation and deviant case analysis.

1.11. Profiles, findings, and data analysis and discussion outline

This chapter is split into three sections: Case study profiles; Data findings; and Data analysis and discussion. The case study profiles provide an overall understanding and feel for the sample organizations used. The main purpose is to help visualize and bring-to-life the individual cases involved. Ultimately, a sense can be gained for what working life is like for the managers and front-line employees within these organizations, as well as introducing and highlighting the individual IIP journeys traversed by each organization. This helps to stimulate a backdrop for the forthcoming data analysis discussion by initiating the construction and collaboration of interpretations from the data sets collected.

Within the data findings section, a general overview of relevant findings is presented in table format to epitomize the codes developed from the semi-structured interview process. The codes introduce particular areas of interest to be expanded upon within the data analysis and discussion section. In addition, the data presented is split into themes to coincide with the research question relevant to that data.

Finally, the data analysis and discussion explores and interprets the findings previously introduced within this chapter. Importantly, essential links to the literature review are revisited for support and clarification on the effect within the greater body of knowledge. This is achieved through the development of five themes of discussion. The first three address directly the three research questions posed at the start of this study. The subsequent two themes introduce: a framework that represents the IIP involvement and recognition journeys of the organizations studied; and a practical and alternative definition of IIP based on these organizational experiences. The overall purpose is to understand the findings uncovered and ultimately address the overall research context regarding the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

1.12. Conclusions and limitations

This final chapter draws together the interpretations portrayed within the data analysis and discussion. A brief overview of the five themes introduced and discussed within the previous chapter is presented, providing conclusions as to the impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. At the same time, the impact on HR practitioners is reiterated. Consequently, conclusions as to the contribution of IIP towards the future prosperity, competitiveness and performance of organizations in the UK are provided. Finally, the limitations and future developments of this research project are discussed. These provide some frank reflections on the study presented, as well as suggesting possible directions subsequent research studies could explore.

Chapter two –
Context

Investors in People – the background

2.1. Introduction

The context chapter provides an in-depth overview of the background to IIP's creation and evolution from 1991 to 2009. The operation of the standard and how it fits into organizational practice are examined. Initially, the standard is explained and defined as part of the logical progression to understanding and analyzing the role of IIP. Other definitions associated with the research question are presented to improve the comprehension of the context associated with this study. The reasons for the establishment of IIP and its early form and operation are explained. The process for an organization to attain IIP accreditation is presented to aid the understanding of the nature of the achievement and status associated with recognition with the standard. Significant IIP policy changes are highlighted and discussed. The discussion then leads into a review of the responsibility and promotion of IIP, followed by an overview of the future ambitions regarding the standard. The chapter finally discusses IIP within the context of other quality improvement tools and techniques. This background to IIP helps to set the scene for the following literature review, whereby particular issues highlighted for further study are explored in greater depth and detail.

2.2. Definitions

Before proceeding with the review of the creation and launch of the standard, it is constructive at this point to understand how this study uses common, almost tacit, terminology associated with the standard. This will help clarify what is meant throughout this literature review and the study in general.

- ➢ Investors in People (IIP)

This present study defines IIP as a quality improvement tool created and designed to contribute towards business improvement through training and development. This is a contentious position when the language used in this one basic definition can breed ambiguity. This definition, however, has been adopted for two clear reasons. Firstly, there is no clear and no widely shared or accepted definition within the literature. Secondly, this definition represents the best possible outcomes and contribution connected to IIP involvement and recognition. Ultimately, different author's have differing opinions as to the role and actual contribution of IIP, but this outlook remains open to the possibilities that advocates of the standard suggest. In addition, this links to what may be considered tacit terminology. In other words, the terminology surrounding the standard may often be used with the author's translation in mind, but, without a clear explanation, may give rise to a multitude of possible elucidations. This issue is exemplified by the following definitions of IIP:

"Investors in People … the government initiative designed to enhance organisation training and development practices…" (Collins and Smith, 2004: p.583);

"Investors in People … was introduced in 1991 with the purpose of creating a benchmark for training and development practice. It was one of a number of initiatives developed…" (Hoque *et al.,* 2005: p.135);

"…the Investors in People … Standard has been used by organisations around the world as a business improvement tool to raise their standards of quality and overall business performance." (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10).

The above shows three definitions of particular interest and insight that highlight the potential for ambiguity when defining IIP. Although they are arguably closely related, they could potentially lead to conceptual confusion if a more thorough explanation is not provided or does not exist. Does IIP enhance training and development practices? Is it simply a benchmark for comparing training and development practice? Or is it a standard that contributes significantly to improving business performance? Three questions with flexible degrees of scope for the connotations they imply. Nevertheless,

these questions set a theme for the entire chapter, as assumptions and debates are introduced and explored. The definition of IIP for this study clearly engages with the third example above, but this direct link to business performance may not be obvious, or even accepted by a number of critical authors – a very important theme to be explored and critiqued throughout this research project. The potential link to business performance is importantly highlighted by the next definition.

> ➢ Quality improvement initiative

Describing IIP as a 'quality initiative' has its problems, unless its meaning is stated explicitly. Dale (1994: p.11) is a recognized quality management author that avoids the ambiguous term 'quality initiative', instead preferring the terms 'quality management tool' or 'quality management technique'. This is to avoid the ambiguities of using such an open term. Thus, a quality improvement initiative, for the purposes of this study, is a tool or technique that is used in an attempt to improve business performance. This explanation serves two purposes: using quality initiatives may or may not bring about improvement, which is crucial later when critiquing the potential benefits of IIP within the literature review; and other common terminology often associated with quality improvement is accepted. From this point, IIP may be referred to as a 'quality improvement initiative', a 'quality improvement tool' or 'quality management tool', but their meanings are one and the same. By defining and explaining the surrounding discourse on IIP, the critique that follows increases in potency through a clearer understanding of the position of this research.

> ➢ Business performance

The impact on business performance is frequently referred to throughout this study. Thus, business performance is defined as the output of an individual manager or employee. This helps to focus the understanding of performance and can be directly related to the training and development aspects of IIP involvement and recognition.

> ➢ The relevance and sustainability of IIP

It is necessary to explain the terms 'relevance' and 'sustainability' to ensure understanding and avoidance of any ambiguity or misrepresentation within the research project. Firstly, the relevance of IIP refers to any contribution, benefit and/or value provided by the standard, whether tangible or intangible. Relevance in this context, for

example, may be considered in terms of the return on investment in training and development, or the differences made to business performance, or the perceptual value generated through public, employee and/or customer recognition. Ultimately, for the standard to be relevant to an organization, it has to reap rewards connected to those asserted by IIP UK (2008a, 2008e – listed on p.28). Secondly, for IIP to be sustainable there needs to be evidence of continued contribution, benefit and/or value from the standard *after* an organization is first recognized. This need has to be relative and comparable to the need previous to, during and after the initial IIP recognition process. In other words, even if the standard is found to instigate benefits in one instance – whether prior to, during or post recognition – there needs to be signs of continuous and extended benefit to be considered sustainable.

These definitions are essential to the context of the literature critique and how the analysis is approached. The data analysis and discussion chapter ultimately explores these definitions as they become more pertinent to the study. At this point, they act as guidance to help understand the position of the literature critique and provide potential areas for further exploration within the primary data collection.

2.3. Why and how IIP came about

The IIP standard was introduced in 1991 to help bridge skills gaps in the workforce highlighted by the UK's comparatively poor industrial performance (National Economic Development Office, 1984; Finegold and Soskice, 1988; Hoque *et al.,* 2005). An HM Treasury (2006: p.2) employment and productivity growth table (**Figure 1**) shows various declining periods of productivity in the late 1970s and 1980s, as well as difficult periods of employment during the early 1980s and 1990s. This is extended further by Broadberry and Crafts (1996), who suggest there was a continuous economic decline throughout the twentieth century as "British industrial labour productivity failed to keep pace with that of its continental competitors" (p.68). This decline was seen to be hampered by "Britain's slowness to develop a professional managerial class" (p.68) and a deskilled shopfloor workforce.

Figure 1: Employment and productivity growth table (source: HM Treasury, 2006: p.2)
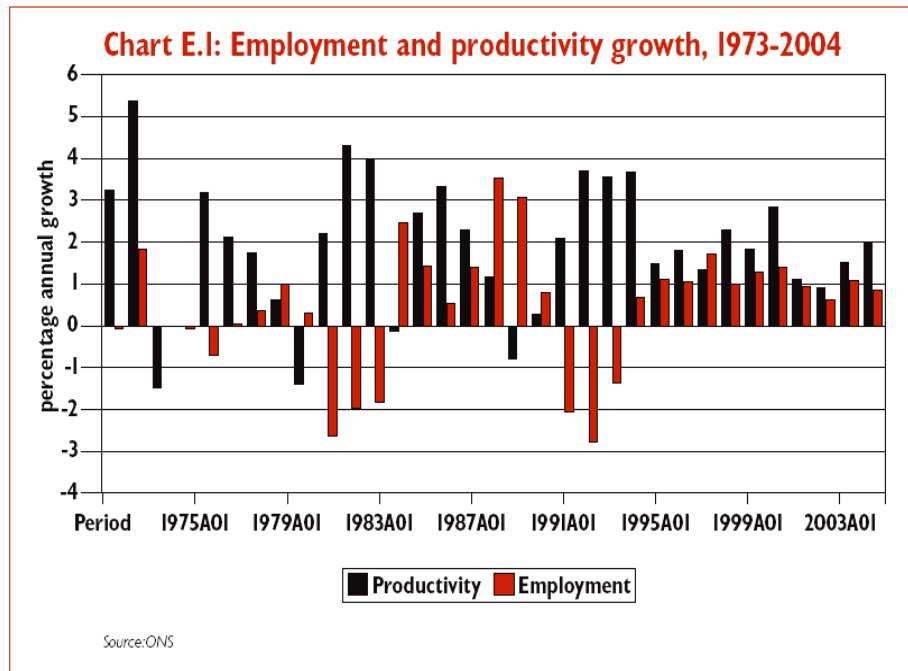
In response to the problems highlighted above, a growing consensus developed that highlighted the need for higher skills and greater investment in training to build international competitiveness (Ram, 2000). Indeed, a skilled and motivated workforce is argued to be a powerful source of strategic advantage (Pfeffer, 1994, 1998; Lawler, 1996). Therefore, in broad terms, the government developed the IIP standard in the face of growing concerns that relative economic failure was supported by the declining UK skills base (Smith and Taylor, 2000) – an issue still on the government agenda (Leitch, 2006). It is possible to suggest, however, that the government has put forward such a reason for failure to detract from other potential reasons for deficiencies in policies that have led to a decrease in economic development; examples include the decisions made on the year-to-year budget, or the steep rises in unemployment in 1990 following the steep declines in production throughout the 1980s (Cairncross, 1995). The UK skills deficit is exemplified by Hutton (1996), who argues that training in the early 1990s was a 'mess'. He goes on to suggest:

> "Permanently short of funds, training is the economic policy Cinderella to which ritual obeisance is paid but about which nothing effective is ever done." (p.188)

This may be a somewhat cynical view of the government's attempts to bridge the UK's skills gap, but the reality concerning the shortfalls in skills can not be ignored if the actual beginnings of IIP are to be explored and critiqued.

IIP was created as a result of the White Paper, *Employment for the 1990s* (DTI 1990). Its original purpose was to create a benchmark for training and development practice (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). The term 'original purpose' is coined here to reinforce the definition of IIP set earlier, which implies the standard attempts to go beyond these original intentions. The best example of this is the asserted link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance and profitability (IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). On the face of it, creating IIP appears to provide a pro-active approach from the government in response to its own discoveries of problems with the skill base in the UK. Cynically though, this could simply serve to increase the image of the government as they tackle difficulties within the economy. Recognizing the diversity of concerns relating to the national skills base, employment and economic growth combined with the diversity of political objectives suggests that the actual reasons behind the inauguration of IIP may be difficult to uncover and substantiate. Despite this, whether or not IIP does indeed deliver on the benefits it boasts could provide the most telling contribution towards improving the skills deficit within the UK – an issue this study intently concentrates on.

In essence, there is a government desire to increase skills within the UK workforce and this is still high on their agenda (Leitch, 2006). IIP is supposed to be a quality improvement tool that can allegedly focus on people specifically to increase business performance and competitiveness (IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). Indeed, a prosperous economy, as reflected within the nine year period between 1995 and 2004 in **Figure 1** (HM Treasury, 2006: p.2), could provide the desired growth climate for investment in skills. Therefore, studying the relevance and sustainability of IIP is extremely pertinent to the government's skills agenda. In addition, this is especially important and timely considering the subsequent changes in the economy and the application of the standard and its existence in the UK since 1991. Specific changes in IIP policy are discussed later, but the potential importance of IIP in achieving increased organizational competitive skills through the workforce is highlighted.

2.4. How the standard works

This section examines the essential elements within the operation of IIP. In essence, it provides the conceptual and theoretical underpinning behind the approach of IIP, as well as establishing the principles behind the standard and the process of gaining recognition. An overview of the potential benefits regarding the achievement of recognition is presented. These provide a vital platform for the subsequent development of the literature review where particular issues are critiqued in much greater depth.

The IIP standard works on three key principles (see **Figure 2**): plan, do and review (IIP UK, 2009a). The basis of these principles is to create commitment – interwoven with IIP's cornerstone ideal of continuous improvement – within a recognized company to support the ideals of IIP (Smith, 2000). The creation of commitment is considered to be top-down and standardized process (Bell *et al.,* 2001), with management being the crucial starting point within the introduction and maintaining of commitment to IIP ideologies (Bell *et al.,* 2002a). Bell *et al.'s* (2002a) interviews with managers and personnel, however, imply an almost tacit assumption that the awareness needed throughout the workforce concerning IIP to create initial commitment is actually proactively sought during initial recognition. This initial manager and employee knowledge and awareness of IIP is represented within the first stage of **Table 1** below – an idealistic framework for the IIP journey explored in more depth shortly. This assumption is worthy of further exploration within this study to uncover the reality concerning the level of understanding of, and commitment to, IIP throughout the workforce. If awareness, and thus commitment, is lacking, it could be detrimental to the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

Figure 2: IIP's three core principles (source: IIP UK, 2009a)
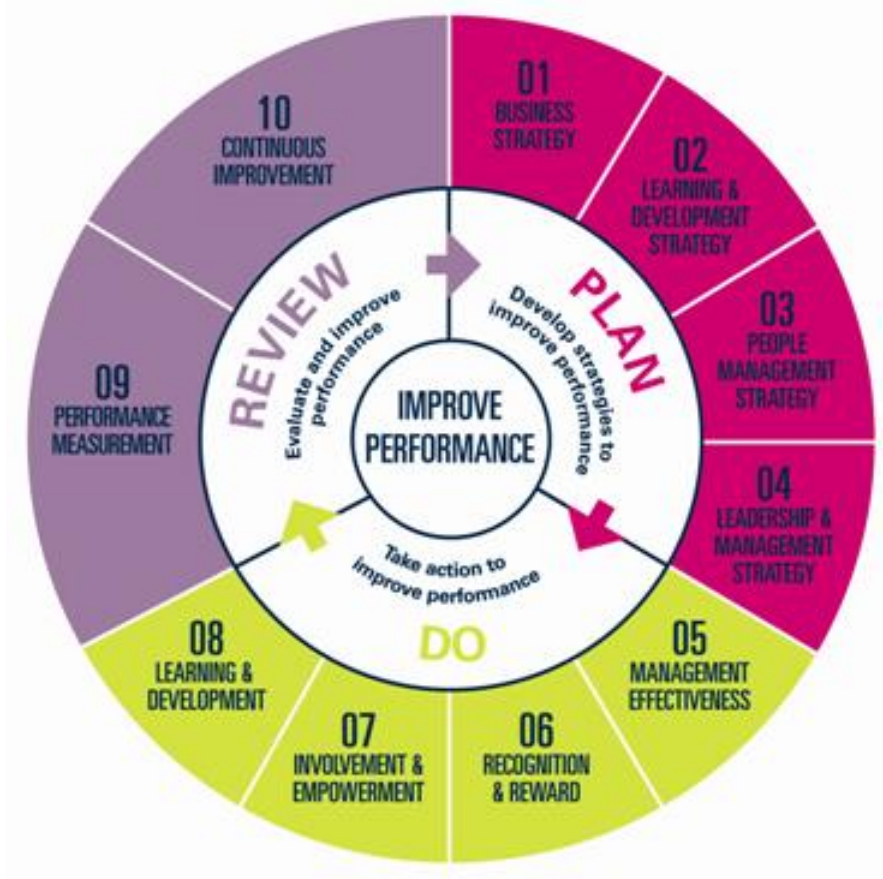
The intention of the three key principles within **Figure 2**, surrounded by ten indicators assessing employers, is to successfully plan how individuals will achieve the skills required to enhance the performance of the business. In addition, this plan highlights how individuals take sustained action over a long period of time to meet the needs of the staff and have an appropriate means of evaluating outcomes to generate what value has been gained and developing future needs. The following, based on IIP UK's (2009b, 2009c) framework guides, provides a greater depth of details with regards to the ten indicators used to assess employers.

> **01 Business Strategy**: A strategy for improving the performance of the organization is clearly defined and understood.
> **Summary of evidence required**: the organization has a vision/purpose, strategy and plan; people are involved in planning; and representative groups (where appropriate) are consulted when developing the plan.

02 Learning and Development Strategy: Learning and development is planned to achieve the organization's objectives.

Summary of evidence required: learning priorities are clear and linked to the plan; resources for learning and development are made available; and the impact will be evaluated.

03 People Management Strategy: Strategies for managing people are designed to promote equality of opportunity in the development of the organization's people.

Summary of evidence required: people are encouraged to contribute ideas; and there is equality of opportunity for development and support.

04 Leadership and Management Strategy: The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood.

Summary of evidence required: managers are clear about the capabilities they need to lead, manage and develop people; and people know what effective managers should be doing.

The first four employer assessment indicators represent the strategy development within an organization aiming to become IIP recognized and reap the rewards of business improvement. In other words, a commitment to learning and development is firmly established in principle. In addition, the organizational roles required for change (managers and front-line employees) are identified and understood.

05 Management Effectiveness: Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people.

Summary of evidence required: managers are effective and can describe how they lead, manager and develop their people.

06 Recognition and reward: People's contribution to the organization is recognized and valued.

Summary of evidence required: people believe they make a difference; and people believe their contribution is valued.

07 Involvement and empowerment: People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making.

Summary of evidence required: ownership and responsibility are encouraged; and people are involved in decision-making.

08 Learning and development: People learn and develop effectively.

Summary of evidence required: people's learning and development needs are met.

The above four indicators assessing employers represents the actual actions taken by an organization seeking to become IIP recognized. Ultimately, amendments identified within the learning and development strategic process are coming to fruition. These actions should importantly lead to business improvements.

09 Performance measurement: Investment in people improves the performance of the organization.

Summary of evidence required: investment in learning can be quantified; and impact can be demonstrated.

10 Continuous improvement: Improvements are continually made to the way people are managed and developed.

Summary of evidence required: evaluation results in improvements to people strategies and management.

The final two indicators represent the evaluation of actions taken to hopefully improve business performance, as well as ensuring a commitment to continuous improvement in the future. Thus, the cyclical nature of the IIP process is complete and returns to the beginning of the model presented in **Figure 2**.

Smith (2000) describes a process of gaining IIP recognition that can be intertwined with the assessment criteria above. Gaps are supposed to be diagnosed in current/ required practice to understand where business performance can be developed. An organization makes a commitment to IIP and this is communicated to all staff. Plans are devised and

action is taken which leads to recognition. Post recognition requires a commitment to continuous improvement. This process is represented in **Table 1** below, a framework that highlights seven stages within the process of attaining IIP recognition considered essential in leading to the maximum potential of the standard (Tickle and Mclean, 2004: p.10). Indeed, a glance at how IIP works highlights the importance of the research question. This is because it can be seen how relevance and sustainability is essential to IIP recognition when the process is intended to be a long-term development process.

Table 1: The stages of the IIP journey (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10):

STAGE	PROCESS
Raising awareness	Designed to inform and raise the level of understanding to both managers and staff of how IiP works, the benefits stakeholders can expect and what is involved in the process itself
Diagnostic stage	Staff interviews, surveys or questionnaires
	Observing meetings and training and development activities
	Documentary reviews
	Benchmarks the organisation against the Standard and highlights any gaps to be addressed. This stage is crucial in getting the organisation to acknowledge that there are gaps and make a commitment to plug those gaps
Action Planning	Identifying what action needs to be taken to achieve the Standard
Evaluation	Evaluation of action to ensure it is effective
Assessment	External verification by a qualified IiP assessor via interviews, document reviews and observation of good practice If the assessment is successful, the assessor makes a recommendation to the adjudication panel who base their final decision on whether the evidence submitted through the assessor is worthy of the IiP award
Celebration	An opportunity to celebrate the successful achievement of the award both internally and externally. Certificates and plaques are awarded through local award ceremonies
Continuous Review	Once organisations have achieved the award, they are encouraged to continuously improve and assess their position against the Standard and be externally assessed within three years of achieving the award.

Interestingly, in countries such as France and Germany, where IIP is consensus-led, there are penalties for not providing training provision to all staff. The UK is 'voluntarist' in contrast and this leads to a low compulsion to engage in training activity, because of reasons such as fear of having staff poached by 'free-riders' after a lot of time and cost is invested (Crouch *et al.,* 1999). As a result, consensus-led systems have a higher coverage for training programmes than market-led systems (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). It could be argued that by having a 'voluntarist' system the government is potentially contributing to the economic failure of the UK due to an insufficient skill base. The relevance and sustainability of IIP could be affected if there is little protection over investment in the workforce. In contrast, perhaps a consensus-led system could achieve the results in skills and recognition rates the government

desires. This in turn could make the UK more competitive on a global scale, as well as stimulating economic growth.

To continue with the critique of the IIP recognition process, diagnosing gaps in practice could be highly contentious; what one company would deem as a requirement/ gap, another could simply say that a certain level of variability in practice is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the business. IIP prescribes the required level of practice for people within an organization, but, for a standardized initiative, there is no concrete visual or formulaic benchmark to call upon in terms of training and development – **Table 1** and **Figure 2**, for example, only provide vague and ambiguous guidelines to follow. This seems strange for a quality improvement initiative earlier defined as a 'benchmarking' tool. On reflection, the generation of a generic benchmark would be incredibly difficult to achieve when organizations are so diverse and distinctive. This still potentially breeds ambiguity, however, as to the required levels of practice.

It is important to question assumptions surrounding IIP recognition. The standard is based on the premise that developing the skills of employees within an organization will lead to a measurable impact on organizational performance (Kidger *et al.,* 2004), i.e. investment in staff through training will lead to greater business competitiveness and profitability (Leitch, 2006; IIP UK, 2008e; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). This is a potentially misleading when confronted with a complicated amalgam of internal and external organizational factors, including organizational cultures, employee attitudes and motivations, and management styles. These factors can affect organizational performance in different and complex ways; importantly, this may be regardless of how well trained or skilled an employee is. The relevance and sustainability of IIP would be affected if these internal and external factors reduced the need and importance of training and development.

Another example of factors which can limit, frustrate or enhance the costs of achieving recognition involves individual, group or organizational resistance. An organization trying to achieve commitment through change by engaging with IIP could find resistance has an essential role to play. Resistance can include a lack of trust, poor approach, and an unsettling of already established personal equilibrium and habits

(Brassington and Pettitt, 1997). These potentially inhibit the implementation of IIP. Planning and action is a time consuming and costly series of activities, especially if IIP diagnoses training deficiencies as being large. There are affects on costs to be considered prior to, during and after IIP assessment, in terms of man-hours and the IIP assessors that visit the organization. There is also the cost for the privilege of IIP recognition and the continued commitment to monitoring and investing in employee development activities. If results are not seen to be achieved within a 12 month period, frustrations and reductions in confidence and motivation could have an adverse affect on what the initiative is supposed to achieve. To add to this potential frustration, evaluating the standard is notoriously difficult, because of how difficult it is to measure, and hard to prove benefits are created by the initiative (Smith, 2000). This leads to problems in assessing the success and impact, and, in turn, the relevance and sustainability of the standard. These difficulties within the principles of IIP develop the potential problems that can be met when engaging with the standard.

There is another point to consider relating to the intentions and motivations of IIP UK, the organization that ultimately controls the running of the IIP standard. IIP UK requires business participation and involvement to survive. This means the intentions and motivations of IIP UK are not solely to help organizations and serve the government, but also to ensure the success of the standard throughout as many businesses as possible. Therefore, diagnosing gaps in practice could potentially be for reasons to benefit IIP UK rather than helping to develop the UK's workforce to develop its skills base and overcome the perceived skills gaps. This is highlighted by Down and Smith (1999), who suggest organizations achieving recognition tend to be those with the least to change in terms of policies and procedures. Indeed, Spilsbury *et al.* (1995) suggest it had become clear IIP UK were 'cherry picking' these types of organizations. In other words, it could be suggested that organizations with the least to change when gaining recognition are actively sought by IIP UK to help increase financial turnover and maintain the survival of the business. This would definitely change the impact of the standard, but, without the empirical studies to support it, it is only a thought to consider at this stage.

Finally, there is a significant role for employers in the recognition process for IIP and this leads into the benefits associated with gaining IIP recognition listed below.

Employers are required by IIP UK to identify skills gaps to encourage them "to develop a more appropriately skilled workforce to enhance organizational performance" (Hoque *et al.,* 2005: p.136). Reward is achieved through gaining recognition from IIP UK, which leads to entitlement to the use of the logo/ symbols.

The resultant impact of the IIP recognition process leads to a number of claimed benefits. Here is a complete list taken from IIP UK (2008a) of the alleged benefits associated with IIP involvement and recognition – these are examined and critiqued within the literature review:

> ➢ Improved earnings, profitability and productivity
> ➢ Customer satisfaction
> ➢ Improved motivation
> ➢ Reduced costs and wastage
> ➢ Enhanced quality
> ➢ Competitive advantage through improved performance
> ➢ Public recognition

Additional benefits include:

> ➢ The opportunity to review current policies and practices against a recognized benchmark
> ➢ A framework for planning future strategy and action
> ➢ A structured way to improve the effectiveness of training and development activities

In practice, the IIP recognition process outlined above needs exploring within this study. This is because studies like Ram's (2000), for example, describe how organizations merely attain a badge for something they already do. Consequently, this can question the need to fully commit to IIP when ideals are already embedded into organizational practice – an issue discussed in more depth within the literature review. The examination of the level of commitment to and communication of IIP throughout an organization, however, highlights an interesting area to be explored within the data collection. This is because other studies have not explored this in any great depth; they tend to be heavily focused on what people, mainly managers, do know about the standard. This research project has the opportunity to develop pragmatic insights

utilizing the opinions and feelings of managers and front-line employees. If a lack of communication and commitment is found, this could reduce the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

2.5. Policy changes

By exploring the significant policy changes in IIP, the genesis and important subsequent developments of the standard become clearer. The introduction to these changes acts as a precursor to an extended analysis of IIP within the literature review, *Critiquing the IIP literature*. Since the introduction of IIP in the UK there have been many amendments in the actual delivery and marketing of the standard (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). These include the closure of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and Local Enterprise Councils, as well as the introduction of local LSCs and the national Small Business Service (SBS). These particular changes were very early in the lifespan of IIP; therefore, their importance to this study is minimal compared to more recent differences. Subsequent to this, there has been a series of changes which have served to attempt to increase the benefits to employers and employees. The discussion below addresses a number of changes that are particularly worthy of exploration.

When IIP was significantly overhauled in 2000, the number of indicators assessing employers was reduced from twenty-three indicators to twelve. These particular changes were made to tackle the language difficulties encountered when communicating objectives from employers to employees (Collins and Smith, 2004). The standard was significantly simplified and amended to focus on outcomes rather than processes (Hoque, 2008). In essence, evidence required for IIP recognition became more focused on the 'training culture' rather than the surrounding actions. Employers' are expected to demonstrate that IIP principles are embedded within both managers' and employees'. Thus, IIP assessors now go beyond the restricting and formal training processes to search for evidence that employees 'feel' trained, supported, listened and treated fairly (Hoque, 2008). Collins and Smith (2004) believe this has increased the flexibility of IIP by enabling the use of on-the-job informal training as evidence that a 'training culture' does exist. Indeed, Hoque (2008) argues that training and development opportunities previously may have been restricted by a narrow interpretation of 'business need'; but

now, the focus on informal training could prompt or force organizations into genuinely focusing on training activity.

At the same time as the above change, IIP reaccreditation can now occur more regularly instead of once every three years. Hoque (2008: p.45-46) argues this could potentially reduce the 'plaque on the wall' syndrome for those organizations taking this option of shorter assessment periods. In essence, this means that an organization may become more engaged with training activity if the assessment focus is intensified.

A third important change in 2000 relates to the introduction of a requirement for employers "to be committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in the development of their employees" (Hoque, 2008, p.46). Indeed, Hoque (2008) goes on to suggest the potential impact of such implications. Firstly, this equality of opportunity could address a number of disadvantaged employee groups, for example, women, ethnic minorities, and/or temporary/fixed termed or part-time contracts. And secondly, it could help to reduce the well established 'training apartheid', whereby training and development tends to be reserved for those employees that are better qualified or within more senior roles.

On the face of it, these particular changes in 2000 could assist with Leitch's (2006) call to exploit the untapped and vast potential of employees. But there are a number of problems with the changes suggested. Firstly, Collins and Smith (2004) highlight the difficulty of measuring the intangible nature of informal on-the-job training. They argue this has led to employers reverting back to more formalized procedures to find measurable training activity. Secondly, the ability to be IIP reaccredited on a more frequent basis is only optional; therefore, an organization can still choose to maintain IIP reassessments every three years. This means the 'plaque on the wall' syndrome can easily remain instead of reaping the potential benefit of intensifying training activity. Finally, Hoque's (2008) findings, within his comparison of WERS data from 1998 and 2004, suggest that IIP is not living up to the promise regarding equality of training opportunity. Thus, although the rhetoric surrounding these new changes sounds promising, the reality seemingly continues to question the ability of IIP UK to instill such policy developments.

Since the introduction of these significant differences in 2000, IIP was further changed, although less extensively, in 2004. Reade (2004) argues that the standard's structure was further simplified to aid the role of managers in the development of employees after consultation for a year with employers, business advisors and representative bodies. The resultant changes led to the indicators assessing employers being further reduced from twelve to ten. Collins and Smith (2007) suggest this was partly in response to the perceived bureaucracy, inflexibility and inappropriateness of the original standard within SMEs. They go on to argue that these changes still leave the standard requiring considerable resources to be invested to be able to meet the indicators laid out within the IIP accreditation process. Consequently, the importance of proving the existence of benefits is highlighted as essential in getting and keeping SMEs onboard.

All of the changes and improvements to IIP discussed above are perhaps representative of the standard trying to be cyclical in the context of continuous improvement, a primary objective for recognized organizations in achieving a culture of high quality training and development for employees. In essence, IIP UK could be seen to be 'practicing what it preaches' in terms of the ideologies it promotes. Importantly, Hoque (2008) argues it cannot be assumed that research previously conducted on IIP is still relevant today. Instead, an up-to-date exploration of IIP involvement is required to understand the impact of such policy changes in reality.

The changes above are important for a number of reasons. IIP UK may introduce change to enhance the relevance and sustainability of the standard within UK organizations. Like other businesses, change is endemic of survival for IIP UK. Ultimately, what this can mean is that a standardized benchmark that is appropriate for one organization at one temporal point can become inappropriate at another temporal point. This research project explores the relevance and sustainability of IIP in seven case studies at one particular temporal point to gain an in-depth understanding. This up-to-date research is essential in understanding the connotations of the most recent IIP policy changes in relation to an amalgam of external economic factors and the research context.

One final point to consider within this section is proposed by Alberga *et al.* (1997), who argues that IIP was intended to be compatible with all work organizations despite the

size or sector. As the standard progresses and looks to incorporate more and more diverse organizations, however, that argument may have become misleading within a modern day context. Therefore, although there might be a clear intention by IIP UK to be nationally compatible, perhaps constant changes to the standard reflect a continuing struggle to achieve this – for example, the research of Smith *et al.* (2002) highlight the lack of IIP awareness, trust and relevance in SMEs, especially in small organizations. Maybe this pursuit to introduce a standardized set of benchmarks and guidelines is unrealistic when organizations are so diverse. Scott (1986) supports this thinking by highlighting the dangers of assuming homogeneity within small firms when there are well established differences. Scase (2003) takes this line of reasoning further by arguing generalizations across small firm sectors are difficult. Further reasons for the shortfalls of recognition rates and organizational compatibility are discussed in the literature review when analyzing areas such as implementation problems. Nevertheless, the relevance and sustainability of IIP is clearly an essential issue worthy of further exploration as IIP UK continues to struggle with the growing diversification of potential and existing organizations through various policy changes and manifestations.

2.6. How responsibility and promotion of IIP has changed

Since IIP was first conceived, responsibility for the standard has changed. This is an important point as this section shall reveal. In addition, understanding this historical perspective helps to appreciate how IIP was created and promoted. Originally, the National Training Task Force developed the standard during 1990 in partnership with representatives from the government, employers, unions and professional bodies, including organizations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) (Tickle and Mclean, 2004; University of Aberdeen, 2008). This unification of bodies presented a good starting point to develop ideas on what levels of practice could make the UK more competitive on a global scale. Essentially, however, this was only the beginning; practice needs to be continuously developed and studied to discover improvements – an issue Hoque (2008) also addresses as important from a modern research perspective in the light of IIP policy changes. If this did not happen, it would contradict one of the essential tenets of IIP; continuous improvement.

The National Training Task Force had been originally given the task of establishing Training and Enterprising Councils (TECs) which promoted to employers the necessity of investing in the skills of the workforce (Taylor and Thackwray, 2001b; Taylor and McAdam, 2003; Kidger *et al.,* 2004). This included discussing the benefits that can be gained with recognition. Convincing employers that these IIP standards are productive and increase business performance, however, was a struggle in the beginning when these practices were untested and unproven. Although there are arguments that suggest IIP can bring about benefits (e.g. Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e), to describe it as a necessity to organizations could be misleading. This is because there is no guarantee that IIP can, and will, deliver on its proposed benefits.

In June 1993, IIP UK was established by the government to manage the operation of the standard (Kidger *et al.,* 2004). IIP UK is licensed and part funded by the DfES to monitor the promotion and development of the standard (Smith *et al.,* 2002; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). Following the abolition of the aforementioned TEC system in 2001, responsibility for the standard has since been passed onto the Business Link network and the Small Business Service, with a supporting role from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). The role of IIP UK is triple fold: to be the protector of the standard; to market and promote IIP nationally; and to provide a national assessment and quality assurance service (Hill and Stewart, 1999; Kidger *et al.,* 2004). Consequently, this means that IIP recognition is not simply a tool or service, but, through IIP UK, it becomes a marketable brand concept. The implications of this are that IIP is now a tangible product/ service that organizations can visualize as a potential strategy to be used in achieving greater competitiveness and productivity. There is clearly potential relating to the brand value of IIP. This is an issue, however, that lacks empirical evidence to substantiate; therefore, it is an important area for developing insight within this research project.

Despite this positive outlook, there is also another view to consider on the above, that IIP UK needs business to survive. The promotion and the delivery of the standard may change to fit their organizational needs and intentions, rather than solely to increase the UK skill base to make the country more competitive through its workforce. Down and Smith (1999) and Spilsbury *et al.* (1995), for example, imply that IIP UK intentionally

seeks companies whose internal processes require the least change within the recognition process. In effect, those organizations that may require greater assistance towards skills improvement are being potentially overlooked, or even avoided. Consequently, this can only contribute towards the apartheid highlighted by Leitch (2006) in terms of international competitiveness. This serves to realize that increasing the UK skill base is not the only priority of IIP UK. Indeed, Higgins and Cohen (2006: p.2) pose the question: "is the Standard [IIP] there to assist employer organizations or to subsidize the large associated network of independent IIP assessors?" The relevance and sustainability of IIP within this context is questioned if the standard has less to offer an organization that only requires minimal changes. Ultimately, there is a need for this research project to explore the depth of changes necessary to obtain IIP recognition to examine the uncertainties expressed.

IIP UK receives half of its funding through the government, but is expected to raise the remainder through commercial activities (Kidger *et al.,* 2004). The standard is marketed using several formats, including networks developed through local LSCs and business links (Ibid). Assessment, certification, and the recruitment of advisers/ assessors are completed within IIP Quality Centres (Ibid). Once again, the commercial activities could question the delivery of the standard and the intentions of IIP UK. If IIP UK requires accredited companies to survive as a business, for example, their motivations for helping organizations to achieve this may become distorted in the light of economic pressures. These motivations are further strained when considering that public funding for IIP UK significantly reduced between 2003 and 2005 (Higgins and Cohen, 2006, see **Figure 3**). In addition, the LSCs offer subsidized advice in some parts of the UK, generally to organizations that are not-for-profit (Kidger *et al.,* 2004). This subsidized advice may provide encouragement to not-for-profit organizations to gain recognition, but for other organizations it may deter them from the standard. Clearly, this could have a positive effect for not-for-profit organizations on the relevance and sustainability of the standard if advice continues to be available at a discounted price. A lack of subsidy may have the opposite effect on profit driven organizations.

Figure 3: IIP UK gross annual income (source: Higgins and Cohen, 2006: p.2)

Investors in People UK gross annual income

(Chart showing percentage breakdown from 1997 to 2005, with bars for Income and Public funding. Y-axis: 0% to 100%. Legend: ■ Income, ■ Public funding. X-axis years: 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005.)
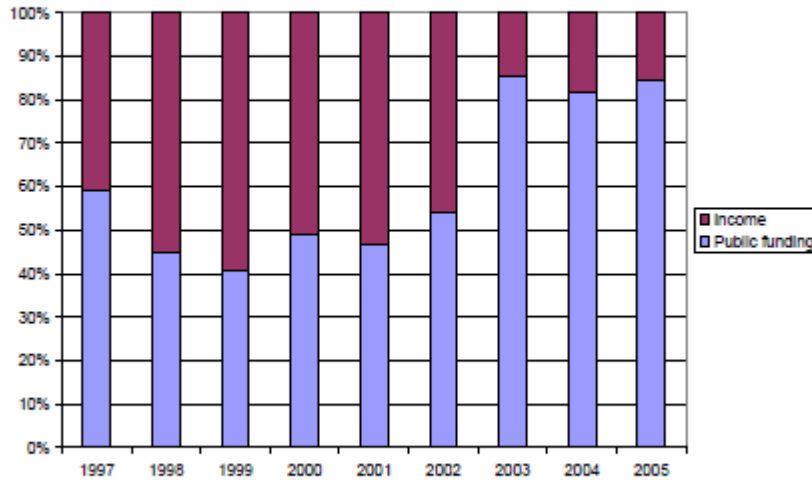
The responsibility and promotion of IIP reveals some interesting issues for consideration. Revealing how IIP began and who became responsible for its promotion demonstrates clearly that IIP UK is an organization seeking to survive and develop in the business world. This reveals possible conflicts of interest if the primary goal of such an organization is to survive as a business, rather than increase the UK's skill base. As the example with Down and Smith (1999) and Spilsbury *et al.* (1995) suggests above, IIP UK may at times be mismanaging their approach towards recruiting organizations for recognition when they actively seek those companies who only require the minimum of changes made to practice. This has a potentially negative bearing on the relevance and sustainability of the standard if IIP is integrated and maintained within an organization through values and ideals other than those actively promoted by IIP UK. Furthermore, if IIP UK survives as a business, but does not simultaneously contribute towards the government's agenda – i.e. to increase business competitiveness through the development of the UK's workforce – this could mean the standard is relatively successful as a business enterprise, but a failure as a government initiative. This is only a hypothetical situation, but it visualizes the potential conflict of interest that may exist. It would be interesting to see how the government would react if this was found to be the case.

2.7. Future ambition

Looking at the government's future intentions and ambitions for IIP helps to build on the above discussion of the responsibility for and promotion of the standard. First, it is important to introduce these ambitions and understand the progress of the government in attaining them. The aim by the end of 2007, through the support of the government, is to have 45% of the workforce within the UK involved in IIP's development, either in an organization that is already committed or working towards IIP status (DfES, 2003). In 2005, however, just 29% of the UK workforce was affected in some way by IIP (Hoque *et al.,* 2005), which still remains 16% short of the target to be reached by December 2007. Indeed, uptake for the standard has seen a dramatic downturn between 1993 and 2005 (Higgins and Cohen, 2006, see **Figure 4**). The government appears to have high expectations and desire for IIP, but organizational involvement is proving difficult to achieve. The example below highlights one of the reasons for this shortfall.

Figure 5: IIP annual change in take-up (source: Higgins and Cohen, 2006: p.4)
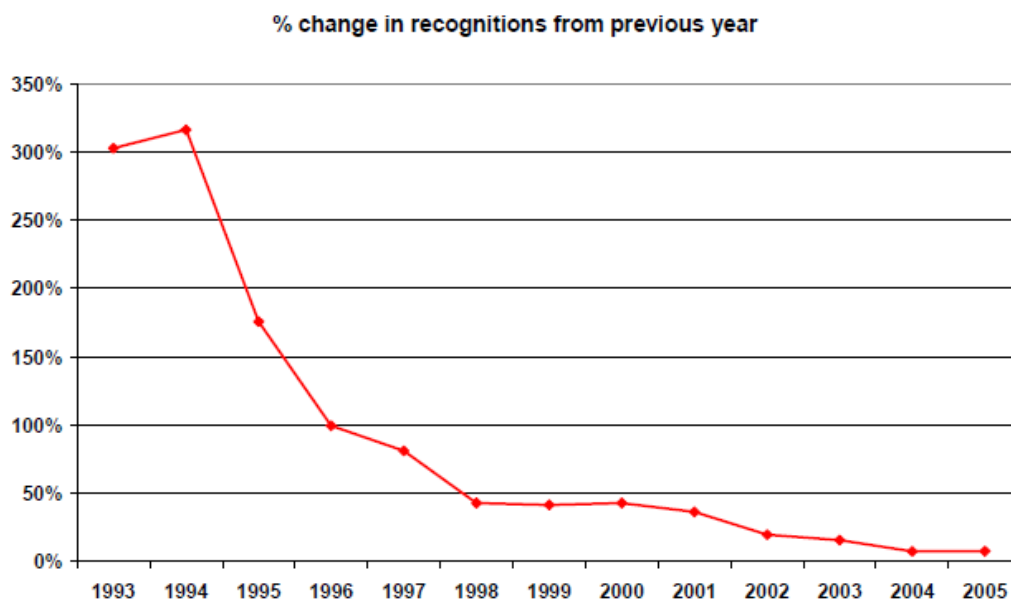
An example of the government trying to help in meeting the above target of 45% involvement of the UK's workforce is demonstrated by the decision in 2002 to allocate £30 million to small businesses in an attempt to increase recognition rates (Blythe,

2003). This investment is a reflection of the low awareness and uptake of IIP in small companies. SMEs are an essential target because academic studies suggest they play a critical role in assisting economic growth and contribute towards increasing the health of the economy (Smith *et al.,* 2002). **Figure 5** highlights the importance of this role within the private sector when there is such a high percentage of employment within SMEs. Indeed, this is taken even further when considering that SME employment within the UK as a whole accounted for 58.7% of the working population in 2005 (DTI, 2006). Nevertheless, competitiveness white papers (1994, 1995, 1996) and the Leitch report (2006) have long established the considerable importance of meeting training needs in small firms. The recruitment of SMEs into IIP involvement and recognition, however, remains a dilemma – reasons include the neglect of informal training, cost of attaining and maintenance of the standard, and fear of work intensification (Ram, 2000). The involvement of SMEs and their associated differences and concerns highlights one of several possible reasons as to why IIP involvement is not at the level the government desires.

Figure 5: Employment in small, medium and large organizations in 2005 (source: DTI, 2006)
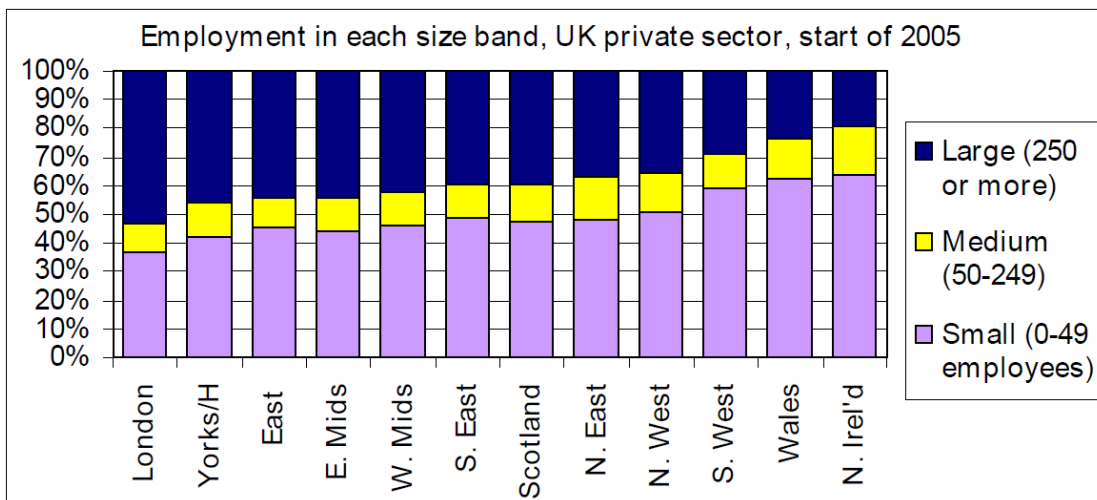
In short, despite the significant investment, belief and encouragement being put into IIP, there remains a deficit in terms of IIP UK's ambitions in terms of recognition rates. In terms of relevance and sustainability for IIP, this shows the government wants to continue its faith in the standard by building skills to increase UK business competitiveness with direct investment into training programmes – a sentiment shared by the Leitch report (2006). Nevertheless, the success of IIP is something that needs to

be vigilantly and constantly studied to understand its impact, if any, on increasing workforce skills within UK organizations. Indeed, a recent study by Hoque (2008: p.57) suggests "it is unlikely that they [the government] will achieve their aims of either better workforce development across all levels of the organisational hierarchy or of greater equality of training provision, by offering support to IIP". It is the intention of this study to understand the actual contribution of IIP recognition within the seven organizations studied. Furthermore, the reasons for ceasing accreditation with the standard can also be explored within one particular case study within this research project. This may help to develop insights into possible reasoning for the shortfall in IIP recognition rates.

Disclosing the government's and IIP UK's ambition is a straightforward enough task. When this future ambition is combined with the previous discussion concerning the problematic and dynamic context relating to the issues of responsibility and promotion, the perspective is potentially distorted further. Specifically, the survival of IIP UK as a business may provide conflicting motivations towards the recruitment of organizations for recognition. Furthermore, when studies question the ability of IIP in contributing towards the government agenda pertaining to national competitiveness (e.g. Hoque, 2008), the importance of further research is clear. If it is found within the case studies that IIP is indeed limited in terms of relevance and sustainability, this would build upon and contribute towards the opinions of Hoque (2003, 2008). IIP's failure to overcome the 'training apartheid' phenomenon (Hoque 2008), for example, already highlights potential questions over the relevance and sustainability of the standard, especially if it cannot deliver training equality throughout an organization. The in-depth approach within this research project can add significance and value to this area of contention.

2.8. The bigger world of quality improvement

Thus far, the discussion has remained roughly within the realms and confines of IIP. This would be a restricted critique, however, if this study was not to recognize the existence and importance of other quality improvement tools and techniques, and how they relate to IIP. Lloyd and Payne (2002) suggest IIP has made a *contribution* to the development of a high skills society. Despite this bold claim, IIP sits amongst a plethora of other initiatives – including the Business Excellence Model (BEM), the ISO series,

and Modern Apprenticeships, to name a few – and these are surrounded by a complicated and constantly changing 'jungle' (Keep, 2003; Hoque *et al.,* 2005). These other tools and techniques can work with, complement, or conflict with the nature of IIP leading to potential benefits and/or complications. Therefore, understanding how IIP and other similar and contrasting quality improvement tools and techniques fits into the government agenda helps to comprehend the relevance and sustainability of the standard holistically. This context can have a significant bearing on the discussion concerning the alleged benefits directly associated with IIP involvement and recognition.

Since its introduction, Hoque *et al.* (2005) highlight how IIP has remained central to the UK government's national training policy. This is reflected by the number of organizations involved, currently estimated at 38000 (Shipton and Zhou, 2008). The UK government, through the Cabinet Office (2001), identified IIP as one of the four main quality improvement schemes; the others being the Business Excellence Model (BEM), the Charter Mark and ISO 9000. The government encourages the use of these quality improvement tools and techniques on their own or in combination to achieve improved quality performance. Indeed, Robson *et al.* (2005) argues it is possible and useful to combine tools and techniques to some degree. The feasibility of achieving an effective collaboration within each organization, however, depends on ideologies matching with those of IIP to ensure minimal conflict or confusion of strategies adopted. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the world of quality improvement through training and development continues to exist beyond and outside the realms of the IIP standard. Indeed, IIP is one of several quality improvement tools and techniques that can be used to potentially contribute to the government's goal of achieving a more competitive and skilled workforce. This may be significant when determining the relevance and sustainability of the standard.

Lessons learned from the experience of quality improvement implementation difficulties across various initiatives may have seen UK organizations adapt and become more competitive within a global market using quality improvement tools and techniques. This could include the continued development and use of these tools and techniques over the past 15 to 20 years, including IIP. Extensive studies of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the UK (e.g. Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992), for example,

have highlighted substantial problems in integrating Japanese style quality improvement methods. For instance, resistance is very much a key factor with organisations underestimating the level of acceptance from workers to fundamental changes within the nature of their work. With UK and Japanese working cultures being so disparate, there is no wonder that impact in the UK has been completely different. Therefore, instead of trying to replicate the Japanese, the UK now has a number of quality improvement tools and techniques – like IIP and Charter Mark – to attempt to emulate TQM ideals in concentrated and manageable ways.

More recently, Andersen *et al.* (2006) argue that there is a trend of fewer 'cover-it-all' management approaches to developing quality improvement. They suggest organizations are tending to concentrate on certain areas of the business while engaging with several quality improvement tools and techniques simultaneously. The potential for a trend like this in the UK is quite high when considering attempts to utilize complete systems like TQM have, in the main, not been very successful. This is supported by the Cabinet Office (2001), who promotes such behaviour within UK organizations. Such a concentration of efforts may work towards developing an entire quality system. Andersen *et al.'s* (2006) study, however, is only of one organization within the service sector in Norway. This does restrict their arguments and this is not highlighted as a limitation of the case study. Nevertheless, it still stands that organizations can, and will, use more than one tool or technique to develop quality improvement (Cabinet Office, 2001). Perhaps this shows how the UK has adapted to the problems of quality improvement implementation of the 1980s and 1990s, by concentrating on small areas of a business and building quality improvement tools and techniques iteratively as an organization requires it. This may help to address the problems associated within the UK working culture and the markets they operate in. Leitch's report (2006), however, would still suggest there is a long way to go if UK organizations are to compete globally on quality. Furthermore, this localized approach towards quality improvements may also assist in explaining the popularity of IIP.

On the other hand, some quality improvement tools and techniques can potentially contradict each other, leading to a fragmented and distorted approach to the management and implementation of quality improvement (e.g. Pascale, 1990). This could confuse the objectives and intentions of a business. In addition, this may incur

organization-wide difficulties as strategic gaps appear that cannot be dealt with because an organization is unclear as to what the strategy is in the first place.

Despite any potential trends within the UK, IIP would need to fit with the strategic objectives of the business and any other quality improvement tool or technique utilized. If any fragmented or distorted approaches appear, it could question the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Nevertheless, it does reveal the potential for IIP to be supported and/or used with other quality improvement tools and techniques to develop a more complete quality improvement system. This research project explores, where relevant, how and where IIP fits into an organizational strategy that contains and utilizes other quality improvement tools and techniques.

There is a plethora of other tools and techniques that claim to improve quality performance (Six Sigma, Statistical Process Control, the ISO series, to name a few). But which is the best and most effective? This would be a question to ask when looking to adopt a quality improvement tool or technique into an organization. If they were easy to measure, and in a lot of cases tangible, the choice may become clearer. This would then just leave the equally difficult decision in finding the tool or technique with the best organizational fit. It is, however, not that easy. Berry and Grieves (2003) have highlighted problems within the measurement of IIP, for example, and suggest there needs to be further development to justify its use and, importantly, its cost. The following takes a closer look at two other quality improvement tools and techniques. These particular examples are not directly relevant to this study and the second research question, but they can be related to IIP in some capacity – other relevant quality improvement tools and techniques are introduced within the literature review. This helps to complete an external view of the standard within the wider world of quality improvement.

> ➢ *9-Factors Survey*

The 9-Factors model is a survey that is supposed to enable organizations to pinpoint key practices for improvement relating to employee commitment (Nine Factors International, 2005). Cartwright (1999) claims that a 9-Factors Survey can measure IIP specifically as a management tool that develops an organizations' culture and evaluates

key areas such as motivation, leadership and management. If such a claim is accurate, however, surely the IIP UK and IIP recognized organizations would be using it as a critical measurement of success and quality improvement. If it could really do what others have strived to do for decades, it would be a household name in the field of quality improvement. There could be various reasons for not using the survey, including its lack of proven track record, or maybe the standard struggles to deliver what it promises. Perhaps importantly, it shows that quality improvement tools and techniques are built upon an extent of faith by their makers and supporters. These people have argued their case using theory, literature, and, to a limited degree, practice. In well documented practice (especially during the 1980s with Just-In-Time production and Quality Circles), the results in the UK have tended to be limited and tentative at best. Although further evidence for all quality improvement tools and techniques would be required to substantiate this argument fully, there is clearly very little evidence supporting standards like the 9-Factors Survey.

> *BEM*

The Business Excellence Model (BEM) is another example of an initiative potentially used to measure quality improvement within an organization; this includes again the potential measurement of IIP. Taylor and McAdam (2003) argue that BEM is not a TQM standard, but it can broadly measure the TQM journey. If the standard is that effective, surely IIP UK and recognized organizations would have adapted the initiative on a much wider basis as a measurement tool. Reasons can be varied for not using BEM. These can include a lack of synergy of the two standards mixed together and the competitive environment they operate in. After all, these are services and standards that are paid for. Even realizing that advocates of particular quality improvement tools and techniques may concentrate on what they believe to be the key potential strengths, the measurement of effectiveness by the organization can lead to different translations which may be relevant, or not, depending on what is being assessed. The combination of standards or ideologies has become a popular theme within recent research; an action actively supported by the government (Cabinet Office 2001).

The contribution of quality improvement tools and techniques can very much depend on the requirements of the organization, i.e. determining what strategic gap currently exists
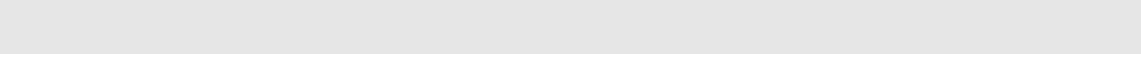
to realize how potentially necessary these tools and techniques are. A bigger gap may lead to a bigger dependence on these tools and techniques to reduce this gap and increase performance to a desired standard. Smith *et al.* (2002) suggest IIP has become a 'kitemark' in terms of training and development practices. This implies a certain level of success when compared to other quality tools and techniques – although arguably very difficult to quantify (Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005). Indeed, the expression 'kitemark' is extremely vague and lacks any tangible guidance as to what constitutes such a term. Despite this, the confidence in IIP appears to be reflected in the government funding that was confirmed and continued until at least the end of 2007 (DfES, 2003).

The encouragement of the combination of quality improvement tools and techniques could highlight limitations in the use of IIP on its own in the search for increased business performance. Using IIP on its own may only take an organization so far, but introducing further tools and/or techniques could take an organization even further in the development of quality improvement – a view shared by Lomas (2004). This potential need for additional assistance in the quest for quality improvement would question the relevance and sustainability of the standard, especially post recognition. Thus, the in-depth study of seven organizations explores potential relationships with, and impact of, other quality improvement tools and techniques.

2.9. Conclusion

This section has created an overview of IIP. Several assumptions and various areas have been introduced and discussed, including: defining IIP and the surrounding discourse; why and how the standard emerged; how the standard works; the key changes to the standard's policy; the responsibility and promotion of IIP; the future ambitions of IIP UK; and how IIP fits into the wider world of quality improvement. Insight into the background of IIP develops an initial understanding of the applications and limitations of the standard within the context of this research. This acts as an effective precursor to the specific issues that are explored and critiqued at length within the literature review. An understanding of the surrounding context in relation to IIP guides the literature critique on relevant issues specific to the focus of the study. Likewise, this provides direction to the subsequent data gathering process and analysis. Nevertheless, the

context of the relevance and sustainability of IIP has been connected to this initial overview to underpin and guide the focus of this research project. This introduction to the workings of IIP helps lead straight into the literature review.

Chapter three –
Literature Review

Critiquing the IIP literature

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an up-to-date critique of IIP and its impact on organizations in the UK. The most relevant IIP studies conducted since the standard's inception are discussed within the context of the research questions posed within the introduction chapter. The section immediately following is the only exception, because the gaps in knowledge highlighted are relevant to the entire research project. For the remaining structure, the literature review is separated and sub-headed into the context of the research question it is most relevant to. This structure and context mirrors that of the first three themes of expansive examination within the data analysis and discussion section. Research contributions are explored and connected to the specific context regarding the relevance and sustainability of IIP to provide areas and issues of interest for further research within the data collection process. Importantly, issues and knowledge gaps raised here provide tentative starting categories and codes for directed exploration within the gathering of primary research.

3.2. Bridging the gap

Identifying the relevant and contemporary gaps within the literature provides significant justifications for this research project. Therefore, the beginning of this literature review raises particular issues uncovered by other authors as being significant gaps in knowledge relating to IIP that are in need of being addressed. Before directly addressing the relevant gaps in question, a brief overview of IIP and its supporting literature is reestablished. These issues reiterate the discussion within the context chapter, with several precursors introduced for later discussions.

According to Appleby and Jackson (2000), IIP is a recognized initiative for the promotion and development of quality improvement through people. Kidger *et al.* (2004) would add to this by suggesting that, since its inception at the beginning of the 1990's, IIP is now seen as a relatively successful tool for promoting quality and increasing business performance through investment. Indeed, as discussed in the context chapter, Hoque *et al.* (2005) point out that it is still considered central to the UK government's national training policy. This is reflected by the number of companies involved, currently over 38000 (Shipton and Zhou, 2008), and the initiative's ability to remain a comprehensive 'kitemark' against which an organization can audit policies and practice in the development of people (Smith *et al.,* 2002). This is supported in a survey by McAdam *et al.* (2002) that showed 45% of just over 100 organizations found IIP improved performance slightly, and 35% improved performance significantly. Furthermore, recent reports by Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Cowling (2008), Bourne *et al.* (2008) and Martin and Elwes (2008) make strong claims that IIP has a direct impact on increases in business performance and profitability.

The above, however, is an extremely positive reflection of the literature and may be a somewhat premature evaluation of the standard. This is especially prudent when considering the very limited qualitative studies of IIP highlighted by Down and Smith (1998) and Collins and Smith (2004), and the lack of research from the employee's perspective highlighted by Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) – two matters this research project concentrates on directly. The assumptions made by Appleby and Jackson (2000) and Kidger *et al.* (2004) are not based on empirical study, instead relying on the suggestion that IIP *will* enhance business performance through investment. Even though there are supporting studies from a number of authors, like the aforementioned McAdam *et al.* (2002) and Tamkin *et al.* (2008), the reality remains that there is still a paucity of studies that can clearly and conclusively link the suggestions of improvements in business performance. The matter is not assisted by the intangible nature of IIP and the asserted surrounding benefits (e.g. Smith, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). This issue does not solely lie within the limited numbers of qualitative studies; indeed, Berry and Grieves (2003) suggest a paucity of studies on IIP in general. These knowledge gaps begin to show the potential contribution the qualitative nature of this research has to offer, but it can be taken even further.

While in terms of success, IIP does have its supporters (e.g. Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; Lentell and Morris, 2001; Lloyd and Payne, 2002; Malleson, 2007), some of these studies and opinions may be considered somewhat dated experiences. To build upon this issue even further, Hoque (2008) suggests that previous studies concerning IIP may be outdated due to the evolution of the standard, for example, the significant policy changes in 2000 (*see* Collins and Smith, 2004) and the further changes in 2004 (*see* Reade, 2004). In addition, they do not deliberate the standard within a relevance and sustainability context. Ultimately, this highlights an important gap in knowledge concerning the timeliness of this research project.

Essentially, there are the advocates that claim IIP is a 'huge success story' and of major benefit to employers, but Berry and Grieves (2003) highlight that producing an objective judgement is difficult with there being a paucity of academic research on the standard. Instead, the literature assumes a link with business performance, rather than demonstrating the existence of benefits through empirical study. These knowledge gaps have led to a call for the assessment of the actual impact of the initiative at various stages (Collins and Smith, 2004), and this includes the actual sustainability of IIP. In addition, Svensson (2006) suggests that further study into the complex area of sustainability and the management of quality improvement is required in general to examine the extent of these practices. Thus, IIP is a quality improvement tool that would fit the profile for extended research regarding this context.

Importantly, it has been shown there are significant knowledge gaps in the literature and these have been significantly developed through the insights of key authors in the field of IIP. The consequence of identifying such gaps is to develop a strong underpinning and justification for the approach of this study. These gaps are introduced here to provide a holistic indication of how the original ideas for this research were created and formed. In effect, these identified gaps provide a clearly marked foundation that can be continuously used to maintain direction throughout the research project. In addition, this ensures the data gathering retains significant meaning and originality. The seemingly untapped potential concerning the relevance and sustainability of IIP helps to justify the existence of this research. Other studies have a tendency to only indirectly impact on this research focus, leading to limited applications. Hence, this study has the ability to

address the above knowledge gaps through the pragmatic generation of insights, whilst sustaining a unique and original perspective throughout.

Literature relating to research question 1:

How do experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance?

3.3. The assumption of best practice

Taylor and McAdam's (2003) argue that for IIP to be successful, the assumption of 'best practice' has to exist. The term 'best practice', however, is not used within IIP UK literature; instead, it is a term accepted and utilized by several academics to explain how practice is developed when implementing IIP. This ethos is supposed to generate a benchmark for organizations to aim for when refining and changing practices and processes, which on the face on it could be deemed logical in the pursuit of quality performance improvement. Conversely though, within this assumption of 'best practice' rests a contradiction within the philosophy of IIP ideals. Specifically, one of the critical aspects to the sustainability of the standard is continuous improvement, but how can the expression 'best practice' exist or be assumed when an organization should always be striving to continuously improve cyclically? Hence, this seemingly creates a paradox.

This brief but important analysis relating to one of the standard's foundation philosophical underpinnings, continuous improvement, begins to explore potential communication problems that could exist between employers and front-line employees. Indeed, Harris (2000) suggests IIP presents a language barrier. This is shown by highlighting how complicated the standard is as a concept, before it is even introduced and absorbed into an organization. Although the above question posed on 'best practice' is a somewhat abstract suggestion pertaining towards a potential IIP limitation, it does show how easy it could be to become confused by what the standard is trying to achieve. This confusion is extended further by Ram (2000), who argues that even defining standards of 'best practice' is a considerable problem within itself. Ultimately, such limitations can reduce the relevance and sustainability of the IIP if stakeholders, managers and front-line employees are not, to quote the cliché, 'all singing from the same hymn sheet' in terms of what they are trying to accomplish and achieve through

the use of the standard. This inauguration of complication helps to set the tone for this literary debate as assumptions are addressed and explored. These assumptions associated with IIP may be easy to understand, but unraveling their meaning and impact uncovers some complex issues that require thorough explanation and understanding. The methodological approach of this study assists this analytical process through the effective exploration and development of these complex insights.

3.4. The assumption of benefits

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, a general overview of the benefits surrounding IIP involvement and recognition is introduced. Secondly, specific issues are raised and discussed that have a significant bearing on this research project. The extremely contentious theme of benefits is one of the major issues to be explored within this study. Below provides a reminder of the alleged benefits associated with IIP involvement and recognition (IIP UK, 2008a):

- ➢ Improved earnings, profitability and productivity
- ➢ Customer satisfaction
- ➢ Improved motivation
- ➢ Reduced costs and wastage
- ➢ Enhanced quality
- ➢ Competitive advantage through improved performance
- ➢ Public recognition

Additional benefits include:
- ➢ The opportunity to review current policies and practices against a recognized benchmark
- ➢ A framework for planning future strategy and action
- ➢ A structured way to improve the effectiveness of training and development activities

The advantage claimed to be *readily* associated with IIP recognition, according to IIP UK (2008a, 2008e), Martin and Elwes (2008), and the two Institute for Employment Studies (IES) reports (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008), is the difference it makes to the 'bottom-line' figure. Recently, IIP UK (2008e) boasted "it's official – Investors in

People can boost your performance and your profit". This was in response to the two IES reports (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008) that claim there is a causal link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance and profitability. In other words, the standard assumes the increase in development of employees – through employee training and development – will lead to improved financial performance, although several authors believe this assumption is questionable (e.g. Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Robson *et al.,* 2005).

There are a cluster of intangible benefits the standard claims to make, including increased motivation, reduction in staff turnover, better employee relations, more effective communications and higher customer satisfaction (IIP UK, 2008a). These benefits are naturally very difficult to measure and hard to prove any difference originates from IIP involvement and recognition. Being qualified to use the IIP logo is supposed to help an organization develop its image of providing a quality service now and in the future. Therefore, it could be said it is in the best interests of both IIP UK and a recognized company that the outside view of the standard remains positive. There is no evidence to empirically support such a view, but it means potentially that a recognized organization and IIP UK may be reluctant to admit problems associated with implementation and sustaining the standard in the hopes of keeping the brand image intact. An in-depth study of the seven research sample organizations could reveal any potential problems or weaknesses when implementing and sustaining the standard.

Figure 6 on the following page shows a longitudinal perspective of the alleged benefits of IIP as understanding of the standard develops over time. According to Bell *et al.* (2002a: p.163):

> "The initial stages of this interpretive process involves use of the standard as a structural mechanism for evaluating training policy and practice but eventually, they claim [Taylor and Thackwray, 1996], some managers will capitalize on the potential use of IIP as a cultural development tool that enables them to progress towards becoming a learning organization"

If indeed IIP involvement and recognition can contribute to the developmental levels laid out, this could have a considerable positive impact on the standard. Understanding

the operation and benefits associated with IIP, however, is in itself a complex, diverse and complicated paradigm. This is typified by the notion that improvements in training and development will automatically lead to various, yet very difficult to quantify, sources of business success. The potential benefits outlined above, however, are now contended and critiqued in greater depth. Consequently, the focus will be directed more specifically on the relevance and sustainability dimensions.

Figure 6: The evolutionary journey of IIP (source: Bell *et al.,* 2002a: p.163)
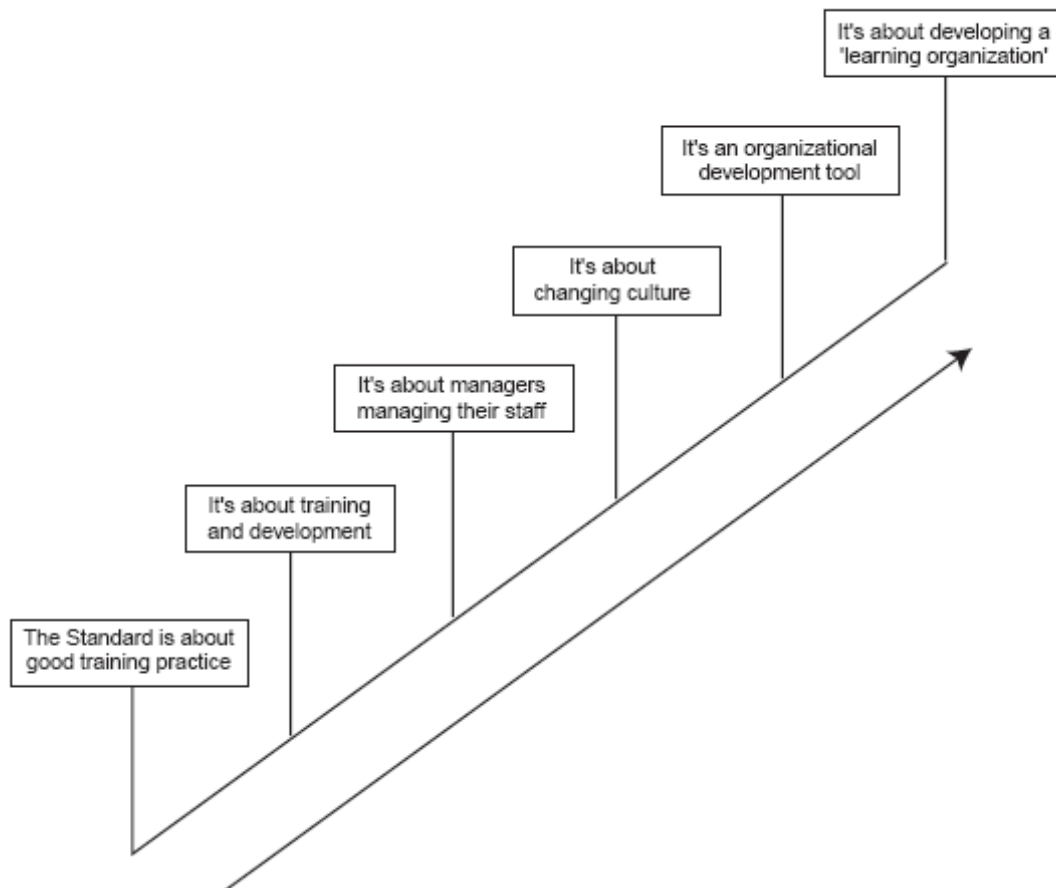
The issue of IIP involvement and recognition, and its potentially related benefits, is a contentious one. There is a contested assumption that investment in people leads to increased business performance and profitability – a later section on quality performance builds upon that specific debate. Nevertheless, with IIP ideologies completely built around this underpinning assumption, questions surrounding the asserted benefits connected with the standard will remain. Putting that aside for the moment, this section of the critique concentrates specifically on the links with business

performance and profitability by discussing the surrounding literature debates concerning IIP recognition and its asserted benefits. This includes debates surrounding: the recent claims for a causal link between IIP recognition and increases in performance and profitability; the traditional issues relating to the assumed benefits of IIP; the shortcomings of the standard's language and impact; and the ever present issue relating to financial gain.

There are two factors worth reiterating at this point before critiquing the literature relating to IIP and the asserted benefits. The first is the age of some the literature. This is because of significant IIP policy changes subsequent to these writings (2000 and 2004 in particular), making these original findings and opinions potentially irrelevant (Hoque, 2008). The second factor is the even greater paucity of research conducted at the time of these studies. The combination of these factors means that studies, especially through the 1990s, have different meanings and relevance compared to research conducted within a modern context. With these temporal issues taken into consideration, however, vigilance is exercised as to the limitations of their application.

With the above concerns taken into account, it is pertinent to concentrate firstly on the most recent and significant literature contributions. A recent report by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) has purportedly delivered the news IIP has been waiting and perhaps longing to hear. In short, the report by Tamkin *et al.* (2008) claims there is a causal link between organizations having IIP recognition and improved business performance. Indeed, a recent quantitative study by Bourne *et al.* (2008) of IIP and its impact on business performance goes even further and claims that "implementing the Investors in People Standard should improve the financial performance of your business" (p.7). These reports clearly strengthen the reasoning behind the asserted bottom-line benefits associated with the standard (IIP UK, 2008a) discussed throughout this section. IIP UK (2008e) has seen this causal link as confirmation that its standard does indeed deliver on suggested benefits of improved productivity and profitability. In addition, this is supported by another report by the IES (Cowling, 2008) that argues an average non-IIP organization is losing out on £176.35 in gross profit per employee per year. Thus, it appears there is strong recent evidence that positively reflects on the potential impact of IIP. However, although there may appear to be an *a priori* causal link between an organization having IIP and increased performance and profitability,

the precise nature of this link is equivocal. Crucially, the IES reports are less forthcoming concerning as to why the link exists; there seems to be a speculative assumption that IIP is in some way directly responsible for increased performance and profitability. A direct exploration of the reasons for this claimed causal link within this study would contribute significantly to the discussion of how relevant and sustainable IIP is.

The contemporary literature mentioned above importantly links to some of the traditional issues relating to IIP and its asserted benefits. These discussions have remained ever present and unresolved since the standard's conception in 1991. Hillage and Moralee (1996) suggested early within the lifespan of IIP that the standard can lead to benefits of increased employee commitment, increased productivity, and a better quality of service. Lentell and Morris (2001) argue that IIP does deliver some, or several, or all of these benefits to a percentage of organizations recognized; otherwise, the standard could surely not be sustained over such a long period of time. There is an element of logic within this pragmatic reflection, but the sentiments lack the empirical data to support them. Furthermore, Smith *et al.* (2002) add to this debate by suggesting IIP has become a 'kitemark' – surpassing the expectations associated with being a 'benchmark' – in terms of training and development practices. The language used implies a certain level of successful application, but the extent of these benefits is questionable when considering how difficult the standard is to quantify (e.g. Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). In other words, if benefits associated with IIP remain intangible, and therefore very difficult to measure, the surrounding assumptions clearly lack empirical integrity. Regardless of whether or not benefits previously existed, an exploration within a modern context is essential to understanding the actual benefits connected with IIP recognition and involvement.

To build on the discussion thus far, Taylor and Thackwray (2001a) argue the standard is generally regarded as a success, by suggesting that organizations between 1991 and 2001 have seen real bottom-line benefits from engaging with the standard every day – a very contentious and difficult to illustrate opinion. Indeed, Martin and Elwes (2008) suggest IIP has become 'the UK's premier business improvement tool'. The controversial link to bottom-line figures is tackled shortly. The expression 'general'

shows, unsurprisingly, there is not a 100% guarantee of success; thus, it is safe to say not all organizations are going to increase organizational performance and profitability through recognition. This consideration is crucial for one underpinning reason; IIP UK does not mention potential shortcomings within their literature. In reality, their literature does not warn that IIP recognition could have no impact at all. The importance of realizing this is that it is possible to assume that some businesses may even incur negative performance and productivity. Reasons can be as simple as the costs of installing and maintaining IIP recognition, or they can be more complex, for example, if the standard is incompatible within an organization's current structure. Indeed, Hoque *et al.* (2005) and Smith (2000) provide potent examples of incompatibility, whereby organizations in the health and education sectors had problems with employee opposition and conflicting/ confusing ideologies that stunted the impact of IIP considerably. If IIP is found to have limited, zero or negative impact within the organizations studied within this research project, there would obviously be questions raised over the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Furthermore, serious questions could be raised about the marketing language used by IIP UK in the promotion of their standard.

One area worthy of explicit in-depth exploration is the assumption of financial gain. It is of significance at this point to reaffirm that IIP is based on the premise that developing the skills of employees within an organization will lead to a measurable impact on organizational performance (Kidger *et al.,* 2004). In other words, it is assumed that speculation (investment in employees) will lead to accumulation (increased business performance). IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) literature goes one stage further and suggests that one of the advantages *easily* associated with the standard is the difference it makes to the 'bottom-line' figure. This is supported by Bourne *et al.* (2008) and Taylor and Thackwray (2001a), who suggest engagement with IIP leads to substantial bottom-line benefits. Although authors such as Smith *et al.* (2002) argues that the impact IIP has on turnover is ill-defined, advocating literature (Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a; McAdam *et al.,* 2002; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008) and IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) suggest that there *is* a direct link with financial gain.

Conversely, Westhead and Storey (1997), Cosh *et al.* (1998), Robson *et al.* (2005), and Higgins and Cohen (2006) all support Smith *et al.* (2002), arguing the assumption and connection with financial gain is questionable. As previously mentioned, the assumption is not founded upon empirical study. This includes the recent studies by the IES (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008), Bourne *et al.* (2008) and Martin and Elwes (2008), because the research does not expand beyond the initial alleged causal link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance and profitability. This issue is perpetuated by related arguments, whereby Smith (2000), Grugulis and Bevitt (2002), and Smith *et al.* (2002) all make suggestions that evaluating and measuring the success of IIP is notoriously difficult due to the intangible nature of nearly all its related benefits. Therefore, the assumption of financial gain is indeed questionable. This is not to say that IIP does not lead to the above asserted benefits; the problem lies within *verifying* such a link. Consequently, this leads to problems in assessing the success and impact of the standard. Ultimately, assuming a link with investment in people and increased business performance is made even more difficult by the intangibility of asserted benefits associated with the standard. Exploring the experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes and the mediated impressions relating to financial gain within this research project is clearly important, as well as being significant to the theme of relevance and sustainability.

So where does that leave us in terms of benefits and IIP? Put simply, it is an extremely complicated and contentious issue. It is an issue that clearly needs further study and clarity to uncover insights surrounding its assumed image. This research project does this by focusing on the socially constructed and intangible opinions and feelings of the workforce. These develop insights into whether benefits can be achieved through, or even be connected to, IIP involvement and recognition. As an extended example, if IIP's link to financial turnover is considered ill-defined, as Smith *et al.* (2002) suggest, this research studies the impact of IIP within training and development through the eyes of various managers and front-line employees in an attempt to determine pragmatically what connection there is with financial turnover. The questioning of core assumptions is essential to the data collection approach of this study, whereby categories are developed as a result of previous studies and assumptions (see the methodology chapter for more detail on category development); hence, the issue of related benefits is undoubtedly a

vital area for further exploration within the research organizations. Thus, the assumptions surrounding benefits remains prominent throughout the literature review.

3.5. *The assumption of performance quality improvement*

Questioning the asserted IIP benefits and their measurement is a complicated enough conundrum on its own. By going much further into the literature, however, there are some striking and important assumptions that can be uncovered and related to IIP. To do this, it is valuable to start with the implementation of quality improvement tools and techniques in general and question the very fabric of foundation beliefs that are easily assumed and accepted throughout many studies of quality management and HRM. To build on the above discussion of IIP asserted benefits, this section concentrates on the beliefs and assumptions concerning job empowerment, job satisfaction and learning capability in terms of performance quality improvement.

Assumptions concerning job empowerment and job satisfaction are a pertinent place to expand the previous discussion. These aspects are crucial when IIP UK (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) boasts it can increase job satisfaction and considers empowerment to be a crucial facet for improving performance. Malleson (2007) argues, for example, that IIP has increased job satisfaction and empowerment at Pauley Design. Importantly, connections are not that straightforward. Silvestro (2002) suggests American quality management 'gurus' are 'unanimous & unequivocal' in their belief that employee job empowerment and job satisfaction will develop returns in both quality performance improvement and productivity. These 'gurus' inevitably influence the literature. Their assumptions become readily accepted in the context of quality and academia because they are such respected 'minds' within this field. This suggests it is easy to assume there is a connection to quality improvement and productivity, but, importantly, it is challenged and questioned by a number of other authors. Rix (1994), for example, highlights how employees may be suspicious of additional training leading to multi-skilling in the fear it will lead to redundancies. In addition, McArdle *et al.* (1995) warns of empowerment acting as a mask for work intensification. Thus, the in-depth nature of this research project can explore the assumptions surrounding job empowerment and job satisfaction. Malleson's (2007) opinions above are restricted to a management perspective; hence, missing the direct and vital input of front-line employees. This study importantly

includes the perspectives of front-line employees; an approach advocated by Grugulis and Bevitt (2002), who are particularly critical of studies that rely on employer's opinions of employees. If positive and/or negative connotations are to be found, the impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP can be analyzed.

The discussion of assumptions relating to job satisfaction can be taken much further. Robson *et al.* (2005) and Silvestro (2002) question the acceptance of the assumption that there is a direct relationship between increases in employee satisfaction and increases in productivity and profitability. They do this by suggesting there is a lack of empirical data to support such claims suggested by earlier authors (such as Heskett *et al.,* 1994), hence, the assumption is unverified. Robson *et al.* (2005) argue the assumption had subsequently received widespread acceptance by a number of authors, including as Meyer *et al.* (1999) and Wirtz (2003). Their study of 21 Further Education (FE) colleges, however, eventually did find evidence to support a link to employee satisfaction and profitability, but at the same time, the results questioned the direct association of job satisfaction to organizational performance improvement and excellence. The study suggested that important additional measures to support employee satisfaction may contribute to improving organizational performance, but without them, the impact is potentially limited. This study is limited by its application into the FE area; therefore, subsequent research has an opportunity to explore this assumption further. Within this research project, insights connecting job satisfaction, IIP recognition and organizational performance can be developed.

The overriding assumptions surrounding quality management may exist to simplify explanations of why performance increases when quality improvement tools and techniques are introduced. This means other potential factors which may exist at the same time – such as economic and market fluxes – could be overlooked as an organization actively seeks to justify the investment of an integrated tool or technique. It is logical to assume that the effect these other factors have could contribute highly, and potentially critically, to performance changes, even with alterations made to job satisfaction levels. If this is the case, it is also logical to assume that the effects of IIP status could be over exaggerated in the face of a magnitude of external influences, which could potentially overstate the contribution of the standard in relation to performance. Questioning and understanding these core assumptions is essential when

exploring the relevance and sustainability of IIP to grasp the full complexities associated with business performance.

IIP UK (2004, 2008a, 2008e) literature provides a compelling case that implies recognition with the standard for any potential organization will ultimately lead to an increase in business performance. The reality, however, can result in no quality improvement and or even a negative impact on performance. Furthermore, although IIP UK does not express it directly, their literature also provides a strong implication that the greater the commitment to the standard's ideologies, the greater the reward (e.g. IIP UK, 2008i, 2008j). Yet their literature does not discuss the potential implementation barriers or difficulties. Although IIP UK may not want to advertise it does not, and cannot, have a 100% success rate, it could be misleading without a disclaimer to warn an organization considering the pursuit of IIP of the potential limitations relating to the standard. Therefore, IIP UK should not accept there is always a satisfaction and performance relationship. IIP UK does claim to be striving to engender continuous improvement by constantly updating and revising the standard, but by assuming performance increases with increased satisfaction levels, the standard could possibly be ignoring other crucial areas of the business where improvements could be made.

As the standard is fundamentally linked with the training and development of the workforce only, the link with overall business performance is tentative at best. Berry and Grieves (2003) also suggest IIP is limited to one aspect of Human Resource Development (HRD). This is specifically the career planning approach and, although they suggest the standard can contribute to organizational learning, they argue that learning capability is limited. This is because IIP is not designed as part of an organization-wide planned change programme – a theme considered essential in an organization's quest for 'total quality' (e.g. Feigenbaum, 1961; Xu, 1999; Dale *et al.,* 2007), i.e. quality improvements across all areas of an organization simultaneously. To engage with the standard does not require there to be a quality improvement strategy running simultaneously throughout an organization; it simply seeks to improve people through effective training and development. IIP UK achieves this through the assumption that developing employees will lead to a positive impact on performance, but quality performance improvement can be inhibited if the entire organization is not focused towards the same objectives. Focusing on workforce training and development

could be seen as an attempt to find a short and simple (and potentially restricting) route to achieving improved quality. In practice, however, the whole organization needs to be working towards quality improvement objectives to achieve the maximum benefit.

The debate surrounding performance quality improvement is an important one. A number of overriding assumptions have been highlighted and understood. This research project can address these surrounding issues related to job satisfaction, job empowerment and learning capability by analyzing the impact of the standard and its potential relationship with business performance. If these assumptions addressed are found to be overstated, there will be a clear impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

The issues and limitations highlighted within the literature review so far uncover a number of theoretical limitations within the delivery and implementation of IIP. Unsurprisingly, these are not reflected by the standard itself. In the face of what can be viewed as outside criticism, IIP UK (2008b) still maintains that its standard can be used by organizations 'no matter what the size and type'. This is potentially misleading if studies conducted have found implementation and compatibility difficulties, whereby the standard has had very little impact, if any. McAdam *et al.* (2002), for example, found that 29% of the 14 companies studied, who had IIP accreditation for less than a year, felt performance was unchanged. This shows within a relatively small survey of accredited organizations that quality performance improvement is by no means guaranteed when IIP recognition is achieved. IIP UK is unlikely to highlight any implementation and compatibility problems, because that would be detrimental for the brand image and potentially reduce the number of organizations involved in wanting to achieve recognition. Furthermore, a lack of increase in business performance could begin to question motivations behind wanting IIP; whether an organization is trying to achieve greater performance and competitiveness, or simply trying to increase the brand image through the use of the logo. This research project can build upon McAdam *et al.'s* (2002) findings to uncover what impact IIP recognition has upon business performance, if any, in relation to implementation and compatibility issues.

3.6. The reality of employee development

One of the main reasons for wanting IIP is supposed to be to increase organizational performance and competitiveness through the increased quality output of people (IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e). The empowerment and improvement of staff is recognized by several authors, as well as IIP UK (2008b), as an approach to developing business competitiveness outside of the traditional production and financial processes (Dale, 1994; Gadd and Oakland, 1995; and Karia and Asaari, 2006; to name a few). Importantly, these views are not universally accepted (e.g. Parnell and Crandell, 2001; Silvestro, 2005; Robson *et al.,* 2005). For this particular area of analysis, it is assumed that the empowerment and improvement of staff does lead to an increase in organizational performance and competitiveness. Even with this assumption accepted, not all organizations attain and/or maintain IIP for the same reasons.

A study conducted by Reade (2004) highlights further complexity behind the reasons and motivations for attaining and maintaining IIP recognition. The study showed 75% of 700 managers believed that employee development is still critical to future productivity. Therefore, it could be assumed that managers recognize the potential link between staff development and improved performance and competitiveness. At the same time, only 1 in 3 put this priority first in the light of technology, knowledge of competitors, and research and development. This highlights that despite recognizing the potential impact of developing staff, other priorities affect the attaining and maintenance of IIP. In other words, the reality of employee development compared to the rhetoric is different in the light of complex external issues affecting the organization. This in turn can affect the relevance and sustainability of the standard.

Reade's (2004) research concluded that employee commitment had become diluted in the face of day-to-day activities. This means that even though an organization may recognize the need and importance to develop its people to achieve long-term prosperity, the essential day-to-day running of the business may consume costs and time when short-term survival remains first priority. Put simply, the reality of business dilutes the application of rhetoric. IIP UK (2008b) attempts to provide a framework which focuses on planning a future strategy and set of actions that is intended to support the priority of employee development. Ultimately, however, the following of that

framework is not an essential feature of recognition with the standard; it is seemingly a loose guideline. Thus, its necessity can be disregarded. In addition, there is no empirical data that conclusively provides verification that IIP's framework can support the redirection of objectives to help an organization focus upon employee development that hopefully leads to improved business performance and profitability. Consequently, the reality surrounding the use of the IIP framework can potentially put a significant strain on the relevance and sustainability of the standard if its input is minimal.

IIP may well develop a platform to engage in what is seen as vital long-term competitiveness for an organization by providing a philosophy/ ideology to concentrate on employee development. Whether an organization can and does actually adhere to the standard's ideals, however, is a different matter altogether. With IIP status having 25% of recognized organizations failing to increase performance, using Reade's (2004) study as the baseline, it could be understandable that an organization may be apprehensive when it comes to fully implementing and committing to the standard's ideals. Ultimately, factors external to the importance of employee development can have a significant influence on the impact of the standard. This means that IIP can in theory be relevant to an organization, but sustainability could be a serious practical concern. The emphasis on employee development is explored within the cases of this research project to develop insights into the reality pertaining to the issues highlighted here.

3.7. Training

The actual training provided as a result of IIP involvement and recognition is an important issue within the context of this research. The most obvious reason for this is because training provides the most essential feature for achieving and sustaining quality improvement through the application of IIP. The standardizing nature of IIP (Bell *et al.,* 2001), however, can make it difficult to formulate and negotiate individualistic training programmes (Smith and Collins, 2007; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002). The correct assessment of training needs is arguably going to have a greater impact on the asserted benefits to be achieved through IIP.

With all organizations being unique in nature and having a collection of staff members each with their own unique personalities, perhaps a standardized approach inhibits the

implementation of IIP. Although after '15 years' of continuous change, IIP UK (2008k) does argue they have developed flexible training and development programmes to meet the needs of each organization; this consideration is especially extended to those organizations that had previously ceased IIP accreditation. Problems highlighted in the next section concerning compatibility within health and education (e.g. Smith, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Hoque *et al.,* 2005), however, could require a radically different approach to succeed in delivering the training and development programmes needed to increase quality performance. This would go beyond the service IIP currently delivers. Indeed, Hoque (2008: p.57) goes even further and indicates within his findings that IIP could be "failing to live up to its promise regarding equality of opportunity" for training and development. This is based on a comparison of WERS data from 1998 and 2004, whereby it is found that there is greater evidence of inequality of training provision within IIP recognized organizations compared to non-IIP recognized organizations. In addition, Hoque (2008) argues that IIP does not increase training levels for disadvantaged employees or decrease the 'training apartheid phenomenon', whereby staff lower in the organizational hierarchy and with less academic qualifications are less likely to receive training and development over more senior and qualified members of staff. This research project has an opportunity to explore in depth, in the light of changes in IIP policy, whether the standard is flexible and amenable through training, thus, more fitting with an organization's individual needs. The five large organization cases studied within this research all initially achieved IIP recognition before changes made to policy in 2004, making comparisons possible, where relevant, with previous versions of the standard.

The insights here begin to develop an understanding of how sustaining IIP ideologies is a potentially convoluted proposition. The problems highlighted above by Smith (2000) with the assessment of training needs develop even further the previously raised difficulties in measuring the standard's success. In effect, the intangible nature of IIP benefits is contentious enough, but made even more intricate by these complex socially constructed nuances. This research project engages with managers and front-line employees to uncover the realities behind training and development practices. Any limitations found can have an impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

3.8. The assumption of compatibility: industry specific examples

IIP UK reviews their standard roughly every three years in an attempt to ensure benefits, relevance and accessibility to organizations is sustained and continuously improved – two examples from 2000 and 2004 are covered in the context chapter. Even with the various changes, however, there have been suggestions of possible failures in the language and philosophy of the standard that make it inappropriate in sectors such as health and education (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). These recent failures still address significant compatibility issues within various sectors, while at the same time highlighting contradictions within IIP UK's statement of intent. These two particular sectors are discussed below in more detail.

In the health service, other organizational changes taking place at the same time during the 1990's potentially conflicted with the IIP agenda (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). In other words, there were change programmes already in existence being used to improve various processes and areas of the health system that did not conform to the changes and/or ideologies that were proposed by IIP. This led to confusion and frustration within the organization and its employees, because they did not understand clearly which philosophies were the correct ones to follow. Smith (2000) suggests that the process of IIP does not have the flexibility to reach a diverse workforce, which would conflict with the standard's suggestion that it is compatible with all organizations regardless of size or sector. This was demonstrated within a study of IIP in the NHS, whereby there was a lack of involvement of medical staff and the impact on key groups was limited. Indeed, Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) suggest within their study of an NHS trust that the standardizing nature of IIP cannot meet the focus required for individual training needs. There are significant questions raised in terms of relevance and sustainability when citing such conflicts, but the problems do not stop here.

In education, the assumption of compatibility is also questioned. IIP's 'commercially rooted language' and cynicism from university staff over performance appraisals stunted the development of the standard (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). Indeed, Harris's (2000) study of the University of Luton suggests IIP presents a language barrier. This implies that the standard's standardized approach to dealing with training and development (Bell *et al.,* 2001) can work as a hindrance to those organizations that require a more

flexible approach to their workforce. This is especially potent in organizations that are responsible to several key authorities and/or bodies that require certain key attributes from staff. These may or may not be compatible with, or relate to, the IIP philosophy, but are considered essential to have. This research project addresses this issue of external bodies within education and health through the study of a high school, a university and a catering department within an NHS trust. External influences across different sector backgrounds can then be compared and analyzed. The role of external bodies and the language used by IIP, especially if incompatibility is found, may have a significant impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

Literature relating to research question 2:
What influences the standing of IIP in organizations?

3.9. Barriers to the implementation of IIP

Arguably, most of the issues already highlighted within this literature review can act as barriers to the implementation of IIP. There are some relevant and specific additional examples, however, that are potentially relevant to the second research question. All these issues can have a particular impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. The first of these examples concerns an IIP policy change that was first introduced within in the context chapter.

  ➢ *The barrier of policy*

Collins and Smith (2004) highlight how in 2000 IIP UK made policy changes that attempted to tackle the language difficulties encountered when communicating IIP objectives from employers to employees. A primary aspect of this change was the attempt to use 'clear English' when sharing the details of the standard. Collins and Smith's (2004) study, however, suggested implementation language difficulty still existed even after changes were made to improve the situation. For a quality improvement tool that relies heavily on communication to ensure greater success in performance through people, the addressed problems and continued difficulty is a concern for achieving initial and sustained improved quality performance. This potential

barrier to IIP's impact could be before, during or after inception. Communication of IIP ideologies between managers and front-line employees is explored within this research project to uncover what impact and influence there is, if any, on the standing of IIP.

> ➢ *The barrier of late feedback*

There is another possible barrier to the success of IIP to consider when looking at an organization's re-assessment of the standard. UK newspaper, the Guardian (2005: p.2), highlights how some companies do feedback forms for training that is up to two years old when facing IIP reassessment. In other words, details of previous training schedules are left to delayed and vague interpretations, instead of constructing prompt analysis and evaluation at the time of completion. The article goes on to suggest that this is hardly evidence of commitment to the nurturing of staff. This would contradict IIP ideologies, when 'evaluation' is one of three core elements relating to involvement and recognition with the standard (IIP UK, 2004, 2008b).

Commitment to IIP is questionable if an organization is not fully exploiting the potential of the standard. In turn, this could lead to an adverse effect on the potential for performance quality improvement. This limitation can potentially restrict the standing of IIP, if the ideologies of the standard are not fully incorporated – the necessity and priority of other pressing short-term problems (CIPD, 2008), for example, could provide a plausible reason for this predicament occurring. These pressing short-term problems, i.e. day-to-day activities, can dilute the commitment to employee development when faced with the priorities of technology, knowledge of competitors, and research and development (Reade, 2004). The importance of implementing and sustaining a long-term quality improvement initiative can become a low priority compared to those tasks which are essential in keeping the business running smoothly, day-by-day. If issues similar to these exist within the cases researched, it could provide significant insights that question the standing of IIP.

There is another thought to consider. May be prompt evaluation and feedback is not even needed in the first place to achieve performance quality improvement success. Perhaps feedback forms are seen as a 'tick box' exercise that bears little importance and priority within the day-to-day running of an organization, hence the delay in

completion. Indeed, Smith and Taylor (2000) warn that IIP carries the potential danger of exacerbating bureaucratic dysfunction against current policies. This research project has the capacity to explore such bureaucratic issues if they are found.

> ➢ *The barrier of change*

The above predicament of pressing short-term problems leading to late feedback can exist despite any recognition of strategic gaps within the IIP assessment process. Simply recognizing these gaps does not provide a strategy to deal with them. If a change strategy is implemented to tackle a gap highlighted and it has little or no effect, an organization may find resistance to change increasing. If short-term gains, for example, are not apparent, confidence and motivation can reduce with the likelihood of employees returning to old and familiar practices. Atkinson (1990) and Allen (2000) underline such potential for resistance by arguing that long-established cultures are incredibly difficult to change. To make this issue more complicated, Drucker (1992) argues that changes to managers and employees behaviours cannot be made without supporting recognitions and rewards. Thus, simple barriers like these that lead to change resistance can potentially influence the standing of IIP if problems exist within the implementation and maintenance of the standard. The greater the resistance, the greater the potential negative impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

Drucker (1992) goes on to say, however, that focusing on changes to managers and employees behaviours is a fatal error, as he believes any prescribed changes can only be based on the existing cultures within an organization. He does not believe it is possible for a new culture to be founded to meet the requirements for any quality improvement tools or techniques. Thus, a warning is provided for any organization wanting to change their existing culture: "if you have to change [behavioural] habits, don't change culture. Change habits." (Drucker, 1992: p.152). Drucker's stance, according to three broad positions proposed by Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003), would link to a position whereby 'cultural manipulation' is possible. In other words, Drucker (1992) argues culture changes are a difficult prospect, but not unachievable. From this theoretical viewpoint, if an organization requires significant changes to its existing culture to cultivate quality improvement, IIP involvement and recognition may simply be ineffective.

The above example is importantly situated in the middle of two other dispositions proposed by Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003): at one extreme, a functionalist believes culture to be controllable; but at the other extreme, most critical researchers argue planned cultural change is practically impossible. IIP UK (2008h) literature clearly links to the functionalist perspective, whereby changes to culture are thought to be practical and achievable. With IIP UK not highlighting the potential limitations concerning involvement and recognition with the standard, Hughes (2006) argues such marketing prescriptions can potentially mislead organizations and further confuse the conceptual state of culture.

Atkinson (1990) goes on to suggest that cultures are in essence created by 'heroes' and 'anti-heroes'. Consequently, it is the amalgamation of individuals within a culture that potentially has the most effect upon it. To take things further, if people within an organizational culture are skewed into 'believing the worst' when change is initiated (Atkinson, 1990: p.61), this will have a negative impact despite any positive connotations, because employees only seek evidence to support their negative view and selectively ignore positive feedback. This perceptual state may be worsened by any member of management 'believing the worst', as they are the primary source of feedback within change implementation. Thus, as word spreads, negative thoughts and perceptions may impede the potential benefits to be gained from IIP involvement and recognition.

Atkinson (1990: p56) does, however, suggest a relatively simple method to initiate culture change, by 'changing the symbols'. In other words, an organization can use the power of aesthetics to begin the process of changing culture. This could be as simple as fresh paint in an office or a re-development of mission statements. The idea is to inaugurate altering perceptions through tangible means to inspire the journey of change. With IIP, perhaps the 'plaque' achieved with recognition can provide an aesthetic symbol to encourage change. The perceptual value associated with IIP logo/ symbols is discussed within the literature review based upon the third research question.

This section highlights the importance of understanding how involved or integrated IIP is within required changes towards quality and business performance improvement.

This research project explores this level of involvement and integration to evaluate the impact on the standing of IIP.

> ➢ *The barrier of going solo*

A potential IIP implementation barrier is highlighted by Lomas (2004), who suggests that one quality improvement tool or technique alone is unlikely to succeed in the pursuit of quality improvement success. In other words, using IIP as a strategy that singles out people to promote quality improvement may not be enough to attain the desired increases in business performance. This could be especially evident if problems and/or processes exist elsewhere within an organization that could potentially hinder the development of people and quality. Therefore, Lomas (2004) argues that quality improvement strategies need to be disseminated throughout an organization in order to achieve maximum effectiveness, as well as requiring an existing conducive culture to attain change. This means an IIP recognized organization needs to have support for the standard's ideals throughout the business to achieve the optimum performance and profitability output, as well as an existing culture that is geared towards, and accepting of, any changes proposed. Without this organization-wide support towards quality improvement, the impact of IIP could be limited considerably. This in turn can impact on the standing of IIP if it does not fulfill its potential.

> ➢ *The barrier of compatibility for SMEs*

The issue of compatibility between IIP and potentially/ already recognized organizations is a contentious one. Of particular interest is the lack of recognition within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a well established theme since the genesis of IIP (e.g. Hoque *et al.,* 2005). Indeed, the government made £30 million available from 2002 in an attempt to increase recognition rates amongst small firms (Blythe, 2003). Yet, Smith and Collins (2007) suggest there is sixteen years of research that consistently questions the value of IIP in SMEs. This includes their own findings which are uniquely taken from the perspective of IIP advisors that confirm previous problems with matching IIP requirements to individual requirements of SMEs. Despite the negative connotations, IIP UK (2008b) and Martin and Elwes (2008) remain adamant that the standard is compatible with all organizations irrespective of size or sector. This

assertion is shared by Alberga *et al.* (1997), although this paper is particularly dated considering the policy changes made to IIP in 1999 and 2004. Ram (2000), however, highlights a number of reasons why uptake for IIP recognition in small organizations is remarkably low, for example: the standard's requirements that seemingly contradict the small firm context; and the uneasy formalization of training and development practices into small organizations. Furthermore, Smith *et al.* (2002) highlight the lack of IIP awareness, trust and relevance in SMEs, especially within small organizations, as contributory factors to a lack of engagement with the standard. There are several potential reasons for this, including a lack of compatibility in the eyes of the SMEs and cost.

There is no guarantee that adhering to the ideals of the IIP training and development standard will achieve instant, or even long-term, success. Therefore, convincing organizations that IIP recognition is what they need for quality performance improvement is a difficult task. Even with backing and support from the government, the above examples show that the compatibility of standardizing IIP ideals remains a potent discouraging factor for SMEs. This can hinder the recognition rates targeted by IIP UK and the government. Clearly, the issue of compatibility can have a significant impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This research project can explore SMEs issues within two organizations and compare their experiences to those of the five large organizations.

3.10. Background to other quality standards

To build on the above section regarding the potential importance of other quality improvement tools and techniques, this section provides a brief background on quality standards that exist and are relevant to the case study organizations within this research project. These descriptions help to understand what these standards represent, as well as highlighting, where relevant, their importance to particular sectors. Understanding these standards in brief detail can help to shed light onto the standing of IIP when asking respondents to comment on the importance and influence of various quality approaches and how closely they are followed in day-to-day practice. It is realised that other quality improvement tools and techniques and industry standards not connected to the study may have a differing influence on the standing of IIP.

➢ *ISO 9001:2000*

ISO 9001:2000 is a standard that defines minimum requirements for a quality management system (van den Heuvel *et al.,* 2005). A quality management system directs and controls an organization with regards to quality (BS EN ISO 9000, 2000). The ISO 9000 and 14000 series are internationally acclaimed and recognition exists in over a million companies across 175 countries (ISO, 2010). ISO 9001:2000 is based on the following quality management principles (Zeng *et al.,* 2005):

1. Customer-focused organizations
2. Leadership
3. Involvement of people
4. Process approach
5. System approach to management
6. Continual improvement
7. Factual approach to decision-making
8. Mutually beneficial supplier relationships

Many of these core principles are comparable to those of IIP. Thus, there is the potential for overlap or duplication within an organization that has both. In addition, the international nature of ISO 9001:2000 suggests that the standard is potentially more relevant and rewarding within an international marketplace. These are issues to be considered when asking what influences the standing of IIP in organizations with ISO 9001:2000 – this relates to the defence organization and third sector organization in particular within this research project.

➢ *Lloyds Register Quality Assurance (LRQA)*

LRQA (2010a) is recognition following independent, impartial third party evaluation of a set of objectives or requirements an organization wishes to aspire towards. The external nature of its benchmarking process suggests some similarities with IIP. The standard has been long established across the sectors of shipping, energy, transportation and management systems (LRQA, 2010b) – this relates directly to one of the case study

organizations. Thus, it has a very unique application and is internationally renowned within these sectors. Accreditation can offer commercial value and potentially increase purchaser confidence (LRQA, 2010c). In addition, standards like ISO 9001:2000 can be used as part of the assessment process – LRQA, like ISO 9001:2000, relates directly to the defence organization in particular.

> *Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)*

HEFCE (2010) "distributes public money to universities and colleges in England that provide higher education". In short, HEFCE (2010):

- Distributes money to universities and colleges for higher education teaching, research and related activities
- Funds programmes to support the development of higher education
- Monitors the financial and managerial health of universities and colleges
- Ensures the quality of teaching is assessed
- Provides money to further education colleges for their higher education programmes
- Provides guidance on good practice

A university or college has to adhere very closely to the requirements of HEFCE and their funding process. The financial importance of this is clear when considering that this funding is potentially crucial to the survival and growth of an educational establishment. This could be a critical issue when exploring what influences the standing of IIP in organizations that are reliant on funding from this council. HEFCE is relevant and important to university case study in particular.

> *Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)*

OFSTED (2010) regulate and inspect schools with a view to achieving excellence with regards to the care and education of children. The purpose is to raise children's aspirations and contribute towards their long-term achievements, as well as creating

better life chances, hopefully leading towards the promotion of national success within England. OFSTED's (2010) intentions are:

- To promote service improvement
- To ensure services focus on the interests of their users
- To see that services are efficient, effective and promote value for money

The findings from inspection have an important impact on funding and reputation. Thus, it is absolutely crucial that schools *pass* inspections and avoid the negative connotations associated with failure. The importance of meeting the requirements set by OSTED could influence the standing of IIP for those organizations that are bound by such inspections and regulations – this is directly relevant to the high school case study organization in particular.

➤ *NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF)*

"The NHS KSF is a system for describing the knowledge and skills that NHS staff need to apply in their work" (UNISON, 2010). Quality and people development are critical areas of this framework (NHS Scotland, nd). The framework essentially links to one of three key strands within the Agenda for Change, whereby a new pay system seeks to create equal pay for work of equal value for all NHS staff (UNISON, nd). The NHS KSF very much leads the way in terms of directing training and development activities and this could have an important influence on the standing of IIP.

➤ *UK Bus Awards (UKBA)*

The UK Bus Awards scheme was founded in 1996 and is run by a not-for-dividend company supported by a management committee of industry stakeholders (UKBA, 2010a). It is argued to be the UK's premier public transport awards scheme (UKBA, 2010b). The objectives for UKBA (2010c) are as follows:

- To provide opportunity for positive coverage of bus transport in the media at local, regional and national level

- To provide incentives to bus company managements and staff, local authorities and industry suppliers to adopt good practice in their businesses
- To provide a forum in which best practice can receive wider coverage within the industry

This award is very unique to bus companies and is held in a very high regard in terms of reputation. Thus, this can potentially influence the standing of IIP for those organizations striving to achieve this award – this is directly relevant to the transport company in particular.

> *Erotic Trade Only (ETO) Best Adult Retailer*

"Since its launch in July 2003, ETO has become a tool and reference source for every company trading in the ... UK adult sector" (ETO, 2010). ETO is an independent magazine publication highly regarded throughout Europe. Their award for Best Adult Retailer is hotly contested year-on-year. The reasons surrounding the popularity of this award with the adult sector can be epitomised by the following quotation: "Over the last four years ETO has proven itself to be a completely trustworthy reporter of the industry, neither displaying preferences nor singling out individuals for unwarranted criticism" (ETO, 2010). The adult themed retailer studied within this research project has previously held this award on a number of occasions and see this title as the pinnacle of their industry. Thus, this can potentially influence the standing of IIP.

3.11. Maintaining interest in IIP

As this next example shows, maintaining interest in any quality improvement tool or technique is important. This provides a distinct separation from the other important issues discussed previously, such as the benefits associated with IIP and employee development, because problems with interest can arise before their consideration. The example in the following paragraph typifies the need to understand the reasons and motivations for attaining and maintaining IIP status as the routine of other day-to-day activities take priority. This importance and possible supremacy of short-term day-to-day problems and activities has been previously analyzed through the research of Reade

(2004); it was concluded that commitment to IIP can be detrimentally affected by these factors. As this area essentially highlights, the issue of maintaining interest in IIP post inception can have a bearing on its standing.

Quayle and Murphy (1999) discuss potential 'fad' periods of interest when attaining and maintaining IIP recognition. Their research showed that in higher and further education there was an initial 'boom' in interest for IIP as the potential benefits came to be understood and a course of action developed, but enthusiasm and effectiveness decreased over time. Potential 'fad' reasons expressed by Quayle and Murphy (1999) include the very little evidence of 'hard' benefits, and/or the philosophy clashes that can slow down and restrict progress – issues reflected by a number of other authors, for example, Ram (2000), Smith (2000), Smith and Taylor (2000), Smith *et al.* (2002), Collins and Smith (2004), and Robson *et al.* (2005). The issue of benefits may come as no surprise when taking into account the diffuse and often immeasurable impacts of employee development and the long-term nature of benefits associated with the standard – see earlier sections of the literature review for a full discussion of these issues.

Problems with 'fad' issues could possibly be associated with the reasons for wanting IIP. This is especially prudent if an organization does not appreciate the full commitment required in terms of resources and continuous effort, and does not give the full backing to the development of the workforce. This is reflected by Bell *et al.* (2002b), who warn of IIP recognition being a 'flavour of the month', a badge that simply reflects victory, valour or distinction. This is instead of fully committing to the standard's ideologies laid out within the IIP literature (IIP UK, 2008b). Consequently, competitiveness and business performance are potentially underdeveloped and untapped because the employees are not fully exposed to their possibilities. This is supported by Ram (2000), who warns of organizations using a minimalist approach towards the application of IIP procedures. In other words, organizations do just enough to earn and maintain IIP recognition. These are indeed concerning issues that can negatively impact on the standing of IIP, as well as the relevance and sustainability of the standard.

The above issues discussed highlight a significant need to explore organizational interests in IIP within the cases studied to uncover any impact on its standing. The reasons and motivations for maintaining IIP recognition can develop insights into what

extent organizations are committed to the standard's ideologies. The barriers to IIP implementation discussed earlier, along with the existence of other quality standards within organizations, highlight other relevant areas that may influence the standing of IIP to be explored within this research project.

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Research question 3:

How do the IIP logo/symbols impact on the perceptions of managers and employees?

</div>

3.12. Attaining the 'plaque on the wall'

Knowing the reasons for wanting to attain and maintain IIP recognition can, to some degree, help in developing an understanding of the motivations for using the standard. Furthermore, these reasons and motivations may potentially help or hinder the development and improvement of business performance within an organization through its people. The objectives of IIP recognition, according to IIP UK (2008b), are to increase organizational performance and competitiveness through empowering, training, and developing staff – the assumptions surrounding these objectives are scrutinized within part one of the literature review under *The assumption of benefits*, *The assumption of performance quality improvement*, and *Training*. As this section highlights, however, an organization's overriding objectives for using IIP are sometimes not that straightforward or transparent. This can potentially impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

The following examples are important issues within the context of this research project. They explore the overriding reasons and motivations behind the achievement and maintenance of IIP. Douglas *et al.'s* (1999) study provides an example of negativity derived from the reasons for wanting to achieve IIP recognition. They warn of the standard being just a 'plaque on the wall' (p.164). In other words, an organization maintains interest in the standard until recognition is achieved, only to revert back to previous (normal) practice until re-accreditation becomes due (Rana, 1999, 2000). Indeed, Hoque (2003) adds substance to Douglas *et al.'s* (1999) warning within an analysis of data from the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) (DTI,

1999). He argues that IIP recognition has "come to represent little more than a 'plaque on the wall'" (p.568). Furthermore, Higgins and Cohen (2006) suggest the value of this badge/ plaque has diminished as more and more organizations attain recognition from the standard. These are condemning words for a quality improvement tool that is supposed to significantly contribute towards increases in business performance.

It seems that the reasons and motivations for IIP recognition can play a significant role in whether or not an organization applies the standard's ideologies. If indeed IIP is only seen and used as a 'plaque on the wall', the relevance and sustainability of the standard reduces significantly. Consequently, the connections between IIP recognition and increases in business performance become seemingly exaggerated when the standard is not being used in the manner it was designed. This is emphasized by Hoque (2003), who suggests an organization could potentially be only using IIP recognition as confirmation they had already made quality improving changes prior to engagement with the standard. This research project explores this possibility to develop insights into the reality behind the application and use of IIP recognition.

Previous discussions of the pressing short-term (day-to-day) problems and activities an organization faces (e.g. CIPD, 2008; Reade, 2004) highlight how the long-term nature of IIP UK objectives may be overlooked – an issue returned to in the following section. But this is only one possible scenario. An organization may simply be more interested in the 'badge' to be achieved, a view epitomized by Ram (2000) within his study of SMEs. An organization could be using IIP status as a method of merely increasing the brand image perceived by those outside the organization – an asserted benefit of IIP recognition (IIP UK, 2008a), although contested (e.g. Smith, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005). Indeed, Bell *et al.* (2001) illustrate how IIP can become a 'flavour-of-the-month' 'badge-collecting' exercise, indicating significant limitations in terms of relevance and sustainability. The reality of this, however, means that when it comes to the actual sustained development of people, the motivation to improve could have dissipated, because the hard work of achieving IIP status is complete.

The difficulty in uncovering the actual reasons and motivations behind an organization wanting to achieve IIP status is where the ambiguity can really begin. This ambiguity can be illustrated within an example of a UK Newspaper article. The Nottingham

Evening Post (2005: p.5) describes how a local council had failed re-accreditation, but stated their most recent attempt to regain recognition as a "key moment for getting the plaque back on the wall". Although this statement could be simply viewed as an off-the-cuff remark, it serves to show how the actual reasons for wanting IIP could be easily disguised. The statement can hold a mixed and almost confused perspective as to the desire for wanting to retain recognition. It could be merely seen as an important symbol for all staff as to the intention and commitment of the organization to invest in people. It could also be said, however, the organization is consumed by how others view the business from the outside, questioning the intent to develop staff in their best interests. These two different perspectives are only designed to highlight the potential ambiguity that can be envisaged and the simplicity in developing such ambiguity. These different perspectives, served as two quite extreme examples of potential reasons for wanting IIP, can have potentially varying impacts on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. Importantly, this is dependent on the motivations for IIP recognition. It is therefore important that this research project explores the reasons and motivations for IIP recognition intently and cautiously. The interviewing of managers and front-line employees can help to combat any ambiguity by providing comparable in-depth opinions across an organization to uncover the realities behind the use of IIP.

For an organization to be completely committed to developing staff, whilst avoiding the attainment of IIP recognition merely for the plaque, there has to be a lot of time and costs invested. A failure to be completely committed arguably leads to limited sustainable quality performance improvement (e.g. Dale, 1994; Harte and Dale, 1995; Poksinska *et al.,* 2006), if any (e.g. Atkinson, 1990). A study by Smith and Taylor (2000) questions the impact of IIP as a training and development tool even with that commitment. If an organization knew there was an easier, shorter and more cost effective way to achieve IIP status, it is perhaps logical they would exploit those savings. It could also be highly questionable whether an organization would go beyond the minimum requirements to achieve IIP recognition. Thus, it is important to understand an organization's commitment to IIP.

In short, the actual reasons and motivations behind wanting to achieve and maintain IIP recognition could hold significant findings within the context of relevance and sustainability. Importantly, as previous research has suggested, the standard could

simply represent a 'plaque on the wall'/ 'badge'. Hence, the approach of this research project is twofold. First, it is clearly essential to understand the reasons and motivations for IIP recognition to comprehend and analyze the connotations on the research context. Second, it is important to explore the perceptual value of the IIP plaque/ badge to uncover if this value equates to or relates to increased business performance. In other words, *if* perceptual value is found to exist, it is important to compare this value to the context of relevance and sustainability. This becomes particularly crucial if an organization is found to be using IIP primarily as a plaque/ badge. The example explored using the Nottingham Post article exemplifies the importance of the in-depth methodological approach of this research project, which attempts to develop practical insights into the actual reasons and motivations behind an organization wanting IIP recognition. Arguably, these reasons and motivations could be a lot easier to disguise in a large sample sized research project. In-depth interviewing involving managers and front-line employees can constantly probe to uncover and question the reality behind the reasons and motivations for IIP status.

3.13. Changing the perspective of customers and employees

Within IIP involvement and recognition, a significant viewpoint that focuses on changing the perspective of the customer and employee is of particular interest. Indeed, IIP UK (2008a) suggests that the standard leads to a competitive edge that visually encourages customers to purchase a product or service from a recognized organization, as well as encouraging the best quality job applicants. Furthermore, Martin and Elwes (2008) argue IIP is *proven* to improve the competitive edge and reputation of a recognized organization. This perceptual value, however, significantly lacks empirical support. Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) do provide one example that questions the effects of the IIP 'badge' on employees within their single case study of a hospital trust, but also highlight a significant lack of research from the employees' perspective. In addition, much of the customer value surrounding the IIP logo/ symbols is based upon assumption. Personnel managers within the six cases studied by Bell *et al.* (2002b), for example, assume the IIP badge to be important and of value to those people that view it. Maxwell and MacRae (2001) do provide a rare example within Scottish tourism that focuses on the customer perspective. They find that customers have very little understanding of IIP, but still remain positive of the potential impact the standard can

have. Importantly, these opinions are grounded within the assumption that IIP does indeed deliver on the benefits proposed – a contentious standpoint in itself. With the paucity of research covering the perspective of customers and employees, an alternative slant on the issue can also be useful at this point. A number of Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) management respondents within their study assume that there could be a financial cost associated with losing IIP recognition. Ultimately, these assumptions need exploration. This is achieved through the perspectives of managers and front-line employees to develop insights into the impact on customers and employees, if any, IIP recognition brings.

The reason for focusing on this particular asserted benefit is that it is important to understand that IIP, and quality improvement tools and techniques generally, are not simply designed to increase the quality of performance and competitiveness. Changes in systems, thoughts, actions and perceptions may be required to adhere to the requirements for quality performance improvement. For now, the perspective of customers and employees is concentrated on to highlight the need for further study in this area. This can be importantly related to the previous discussions on the reasons and motivations for achieving and maintaining IIP, especially if an organization places a great deal of emphasis on developing their perceptual value through recognition with the standard.

The following example highlights a measurable aspect of IIP perceptual value concerning clients as customers, i.e. other organizations. Ram (2000) suggests within his study that an important trigger for gaining IIP recognition is the influence it can have on customers (major business clients). The suggestion is that in some cases (in the form of contracts, etc) business can be somewhat reliant on external/ recognized accreditation, like IIP, to secure and maintain business from important clients. Obviously, this does not affect all organizations, but the principle here adds real potential bottom-line value to recognition with the standard. This connection needs to be explored within this study to see if there is indeed value to be gained through prerequisites for gaining external work and contracts. All organizations studied within this research are of particular interest due to their significant government ties.

The following discussion focuses on customers in the more traditional sense, i.e. on an individual and not organizational basis. Williams and Visser (2002) describe how companies tend to only reward customer dissatisfaction; whereas the emphasis on rewarding satisfied customers is just as important in remaining competitive. In principle, IIP can potentially help to deliver quality improvement throughout the service process by increasing the quality through satisfied, as well as dissatisfied, customers. An organization may struggle to adapt and maintain this approach as regular practice; therefore, it can potentially use a quality improvement tool or technique, such as IIP, to deliver on these potentially rewarding increases in the quality of service. This can be achieved, IIP UK (2008b) would argue, through structured and assessed means – discussed in the context chapter – that exceed expectations, while at the same time increasing competitiveness. As previously suggested, there are those that support this suggestion (e.g. IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008), but the links are not fully explored, developed or completely agreeable (e.g. Smith, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005 – this discussion is first addressed within the context chapter and then expanded upon previously in the literature review under *The assumption of benefits*). Consequently, it is important to explore whether or not managers and employees believe customers' perceptions, including satisfaction levels, actually change as a result of an organization achieving IIP recognition.

In practice, the rhetoric can be very different to the reality. In theory, IIP potentially delivers relevance and sustainability in terms of exceeding customers' expectations to gain greater organizational competitiveness (IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e). Therefore, it is no surprise that the need to satisfy customers to the nth degree – which is incredibly difficult to quantify in the first instance (e.g. Smith, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005) – accompanies the previous discussion of understanding the reasons and motivations behind an organization achieving IIP status. In this instance, an organization may be particularly motivated towards the asserted benefits associated with customer perceptual value. A hypothetical example can further highlight the simplicity in complicating this situation. Some organizations may not see the need for an emphasis on continuing to reward satisfied customers when they have already achieved their needs and delivered on the objectives of the business in terms of market share and revenue. Thus, the position described by Williams and Visser (2002) can occur, whereby only dissatisfied customers are actively rewarded. Furthermore, the need to

satisfy customers may be completely dependent on the market conditions. The complex amalgam of external factors that affect an organization could potentially change the emphasis on investment in the training and development required to exceed customers' expectations. An organization seeking competitive advantage through cost leadership, for example, may significantly reduce the investment in training and development to accommodate this approach. Ultimately, the realities within the seven cases studied within this research project can explore the potential connotations on customer expectations compared to the changes, if any, on the perceptual value generated by IIP recognition.

The debate here is designed to build on the previous issues raised in terms of reasons and motivations behind for IIP status. The above issues are not to be considered as standalone perspectives, but instead, they create hypothetical situations that may exist. These have been developed due to the lack of research concerning the effects on customer and employee perceptual value. The research conducted for this study analyzes all the potential perspectives on the reasons and motivations for IIP status to develop insights into and understand the actual practice adopted and the subsequent benefits gained. These help to contribute towards the research context concerning the relevance and sustainability of IIP. Ultimately, there is a need to explore the perspectives of managers and front-line employees to uncover the considered impact on customer and employee perceptual value.

3.14. Conclusion

An in-depth analysis of the literature throughout the sections of this review has highlighted a number of particular areas and issues to explore within this research project. The implementation and maintenance of IIP is clearly riddled with assumptions which have been uncovered and scrutinized; the potential impact on the relevance and sustainability of the standard is immense. Ultimately, this review of literature contributes and influences significantly the questions developed within the interview questionnaire (Appendix one). Many of the questions are designed specifically to generate fresh insights and provide an original perspective that contributes to the issues raised.

The literature review started by understanding there is a paucity of research surrounding IIP, especially from a qualitative perspective. In addition, it is found that the subject area of sustainability lacks coverage within quality management studies in general. Consequently, the in-depth case studies within this research can contribute significantly to these knowledge gaps and provides significant initial justification for the particular approach adopted by this study.

The importance of this research, however, goes beyond the paucities revealed. Several long established assumptions have been highlighted and questioned throughout this review. Thus, a number of significant gaps and dichotomies of opinion have been drawn out of the literature that are in need of further study. This started by questioning the existence and assumption of the term 'best practice'. The term seems to conflict with one of IIP UK's core ideologies – continuous improvement – which should not allow for a 'glass-ceiling' mentality. The potential confusion generated surrounding this issue highlights a need to analyze managers and front-line employees opinions. Insights developed can assist in understanding to what extent confusion exists.

Contradiction and confusion in the literature helps to begin a more in-depth exploration of assumptions relating to IIP. The longstanding assumption of the standard's asserted benefits is a contentious and extremely important issue for this research project. This is because the asserted benefits associated with IIP involvement and recognition appears vague and hopeful when there is such a paucity of verification. The ideologies and rewards associated with IIP are built upon numerous overriding assumptions that simply cannot be ignored when assessing the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Dichotomies of opinion between authors are extensive in terms of what can be achieved through IIP involvement and recognition. Ultimately, the discussion concluded that further in-depth research is required to understand what actual benefits, if any, can be related to the standard. In particular, recent research alleges a causal link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance – this provides a significant focal point for the exploration of benefits within the cases studied.

The discussion led into quality performance improvement and the relationship of IIP in terms of job satisfaction, job empowerment, and learning capability. Despite plenty of

assumptions existing, it is found that there is no overriding agreement in the literature about the association of satisfaction, empowerment and learning in terms of creating an increase in quality/ business performance. This means there is an opportunity to explore these areas within this research paradigm. The findings would be intrinsically linked with the previous discussion surrounding IIP's asserted benefits relating to business performance.

The issue of employee development was introduced to illustrate the problems between rhetoric and reality. One particular example highlights how in practice organizations may become consumed with the short-term day-to-day running of the business instead of focusing on the need for employee development. Thus, this study can explore how IIP fits into the day-to-day operation of an organization to assess its impact.

The discussion that followed focused upon training. Successful IIP implementation and maintenance could be dependent on the quality and availability of training. Particular issues raised surrounded the assessment of training needs. This research project pragmatically explores the availability and effectiveness of training assessment.

IIP does not, and cannot, work for every organization. The discussion surrounding the assumption of compatibility helps to understand that. Particular issues discussed related to the industry sectors of health and education. Three of the cases within this research project relate to education and health providing an opportunity to compare the examples cited within this review. In addition, and with seven sectors being studied, this research project has a unique opportunity for comparison and contrast across various areas of business.

A number of potential barriers were highlighted that can affect the implementation of IIP into an organization. The barriers included: problems understanding IIP policy; providing late feedback forms on training events in the light of pressing short-term problems; resistance to change; limitations of using IIP recognition alone in the quest for quality improvement; and the potential incompatibility of IIP in SMEs. This study seeks to explore how these factors influence the standing of IIP.

Quality improvement tools and techniques and industry standards relevant to the case study organizations were briefly introduced. This included ISO 9001:2000, LRQA, HEFCE, OFSTED, KSF, UKBA and ETO Best Adult Retailer. To understand their influence on the standing of IIP, the combination of these tools, techniques and standards need to be explored and understood.

There is an exploration of research that highlights limitations within the interest of IIP post-inception. Importantly, practical examples signify how the standard may be viewed as a 'fad' or a 'flavour of the month'. In addition, there are warnings of how organizations may only do the minimum that is required for IIP reassessment and recognition. These examples have significant connotations for the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Consequently, an exploration of attitudes post-inception is needed to fully understand the impact on the standing of IIP and the research context.

An exploration of IIP as a 'plaque on the wall' began to illustrate how attitudes towards the standard can have a significant impact on its relevance and sustainability, as well as the perceptions of those that view it. Importantly, previous research highlights the limitations of organizations merely viewing IIP recognition as a plaque/ badge – although it is recognized that the perceptual value of the IIP plaque/ badge needs exploration to understand the potential contribution towards business performance. Thus, it is imperative to this research project that the views and opinions of managers and front-line employees towards IIP are explored as they hold significant connections to the research context.

The asserted benefit of increases in customer and employee perceptual value is analyzed to enhance complexities behind the reasons for attaining and maintaining recognition. If the benefits do indeed exist, this perceptual value could provide a strong motivation for organizations sustaining interest in the standard. It is highlighted, however, that there is a significant deficit of empirical data to support this assumption. This research project, through the perspective of managers and front-line employees, has an opportunity to contribute towards this gap in knowledge.

In short, this study has the opportunity to provide necessary empirical support to many of the issues that exist and persist in the literature. The research conducted is designed

specifically to understand the impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. All the issues above relate directly to this research paradigm. To create a significant and original contribution, the opinions, assumptions and barriers require in-depth exploration and scrutiny to develop pragmatic insights into how the seven cases studied relate to the research context.

Chapter four –
Methodology and Research Design

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The first half of this chapter discusses and explains the specific methodological implications of the qualitative approach employed in this research study. This begins by introducing and understanding the multiple case study approach adopted, which includes an introduction to the seven organizations involved. Next, the inductive nature of this study and the supporting use of the literature review is explained and examined. Finally, the philosophical orientation that underpins this research is elaborated; including the epistemological, ontological and axiological positions. The result of this exploration is a clearly illustrated and sound knowledge and understanding of the particular methodological stance employed within this research.

4.2. The multiple case study approach

A case study is an extensive examination of a single phenomenon (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Yin (2003: p.13) elaborates on this definition by describing case studies as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". Within this study, this single phenomenon is the context of the research project: the relevance and sustainability of IIP. More specifically, human experiences are explored to develop pragmatic insights into the reality within this research context. Thus, Stake (2008) would refer to this style of case as *an instrumental case study*, whereby the examination of a particular case is to provide insight into the phenomenon researched. This differs from *an intrinsic case study* where the case itself is of significant interest (ibid). A 'multiple' case study, therefore, is an *instrumental case study* extended to several cases (ibid). Hence, a total of seven organizations are used to explore this phenomenon; this covers a high school, a university, a catering department,

a defence organization, a transport company, a third sector organization, and an adult themed retailer.

The research cases cover seven organizational sectors: secondary education, higher education, catering within an NHS trust, defence systems, transport, third sector, and adult retail. Five of the organizations are large (i.e. greater than 500 employees) and the other two are small businesses (i.e. less than 50 employees). The catering department, however, has independent IIP status from the rest of the trust, i.e. although the trust is large, the actual department has less than 250 employees and is the only area of the organization to have attained IIP recognition. Six of the seven organizations are IIP recognized, with the defence organization ceasing accreditation in 2001. The unit of analysis within each case is a group of workers. For the large organizations, respondents are randomly selected employees from a cross-section of roles, including senior managers, line managers (when applicable), front-line employees, and any other staff who can potentially affect the socially constructed everyday working world. For the small businesses, two key informants (both senior managers) are interviewed in each.

Stake (2008: p.119) argues that "Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied". A connection can be made with this outlook when considering that this research project has been constructed around the researcher's original idea that few organizations will be studied in-depth. Heath and Cowley (2004) advocate this position by recommending that researchers should select the analysis approach that best suits their cognitive style; thus, providing a valuable contribution towards the achievement of the research aim – the exploration of the relevance and sustainability of IIP. Access constraints and a limit on resources (especially time) keep the research within the context of seven case studies. Nevertheless, these organizations enable the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews that develops in-depth data for analysis. To this end, case studies are utilized under a qualitative label.

The general rationale for having seven diverse individual case study sectors is "They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2008: p.123). With this in mind, there are also other specific reasons for selecting the organizations used for data collection. Educational and health organizations have been

highlighted previously within a number of IIP studies (e.g. Harris, 2000; Smith, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Hoque *et al.,* 2005). Thus, the first three organizations whereby data is initially collected – i.e. the high school, the university and the catering department within the NHS trust – enables direct conceptual comparisons with the literature review. The defence, transport, third sector and adult retailer contexts subsequently assist in expanding the findings beyond these initial contexts.

To build on the above rationale, the catering department provides a unique perspective into the NHS for two reasons. Firstly, the focus within this NHS trust is solely concentrated on catering, a perspective not explored within other studies. Secondly, the individualized IIP accreditation of the catering department provides a rare perspective that is not concentrated on within the literature. The defence organization provides a contrasting perspective through being a different industry and having held and subsequently ceased IIP recognition. Thus, the reasons for first attaining and then ceasing accreditation can add unique comparisons on the issue of the relevance and sustainability of IIP. The transport company furthers these insights by comparing and contrasting an organization within an industry that has very few organizations recognized by IIP. The third sector organization provides a unique not-for-profit perspective, whereby profitability is not of primary concern for business performance. Finally, the adult themed retailer builds in another unique perspective never before covered within the IIP literature. This is because this company is the only retailer within its industry to have ever achieved IIP recognition.

The ability to provide an in-depth analysis is a strength of utilizing case studies. Compared to more traditional quantitative methods, a qualitative case study reduces the possibility of missing data and increases verification (Cooper and Schindler, 1998). In addition, with assertions between IIP recognition and increases in business performance (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008), an in-depth approach can explore and analyze the experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes that mediate impressions relating to this alleged nexus. The use of such diverse organizations presents bounteous opportunities to explore any insights gathered in various backgrounds to provide the findings with a greater depth of meaning, validity and interpretation. Verification of insights generated is increased through the constant comparison of the seven organizations. This helps to intensify the analysis of the phenomenon being studied

(Taylor and McAdam, 2003). If an insight uncovered has greater implications that bridge other sectors of business, the resultant impact generates supplementary value in terms of an original contribution to knowledge. Hence, these diverse and generally dissimilar cases are selected because it is believed they can lead to greater understanding of the research context (Stake, 2008).

Hussey and Hussey (1997) highlight some potential weaknesses within a case study approach. Firstly, the negotiation of access to an organization can often be difficult and the process of gathering the data can be very time consuming. These issues are highlighted and discussed within the research design section of this chapter. In short, these issues were problematic but overcome. Secondly, there is the difficulty in placing boundaries on what to research. The literature review plays a pivotal role in directing what areas are to be discussed – the importance of which is concentrated on within the subsequent section. Nevertheless, common sense is applied to ensure the project is achievable and manageable within the resources and time frame allocated. Finally, the respondents used for interviews do not exist in a vacuum, but instead continuously interact with rest of society. This presents difficulties in understanding the meaning of events without knowledge of what went before and what may follow. The questionnaire framework created for use within the interviews (see section 4.7. and **Appendix one**) importantly and carefully constructs questions that contribute towards clarifying responses and meanings. This approach helps to bridge the gap in knowledge between researcher and the researched, and further enhances the understanding of responses provided.

Howe and Eisenhart (1990) argue that the research question and the knowledge gaps generated within the literature review should drive the methodological choice. Indeed, Marshall and Rossman (1989) recognize the importance of demonstrating how the research design emerged after considering the literature. This is the case with this research approach. Berry and Grieves (2003) highlight that there is a general lack of research into the area of IIP, for example, whilst Down and Smith (1998) and Collins and Smith (2004) suggest there is a specific paucity of qualitative research on the standard. Furthermore, Svennson (2006) argues that sustainability within quality management needs further study, with Collins and Smith (2004) calling for the assessment of IIP at various stages – this can incorporate the sustainability of the

standard. Therefore, the multiple case study approach can effectively assist in filling the qualitative and sustainability gaps in knowledge revealed within the literature review.

It is recognized that other approaches could have been adopted for this study. As examples, a longitudinal or ethnographic approach could have yielded particular insights and overcome certain limitations within the data. With this research having a temporal lock, a longitudinal approach could have explored and compared data from different time frames. This could have had specific benefit if internal and external factors affecting training and development within an organization changed considerably over time. Time constraints surrounding this study, however, played the most significant role in not using this particular approach. An ethnographic approach could have brought the researcher even closer to the respondents within the sample organizations studied. This could have potentially contributed towards the verification of findings. The specific terms surrounding the negotiation of access to the sample organizations, however, provided the main reason for an ethnographic approach becoming a non-viable option within this study.

4.3. Induction and the literature review

The debate surrounding the inductive approach, its location within this research project and the use of the literature review is crucial to fully understanding the methodology used. Thus, it is essential to understand how induction and the literature review fits into the specific approach adopted by this research project. Complexities begin to occur when trying to consider a qualitative methodological stance as simply an 'inductive approach' to the analysis of data. Indeed, Strauss (1987: p.12) argues that the literature review is essential to theoretical development, and that without it, theoretical hypothetical implications are useless. The following discussion highlights the importance of using the literature review as a procedure that enhances the overall research design.

Glaser (2002) is one author who argues that a researcher can remain detached from the data analysis and interpretation. Significantly, this research project rejects this proposition. Charmaz (2008) highlights a number of reasons for this rejection. Firstly, she argues the researcher is not an impartial observer – they are influenced by prior

experiences and the research context and surroundings. In essence, a researcher is constantly located within the empirical reality explored. Secondly, she argues that a qualitative methodology cannot rest upon pure induction; "the questions we ask on the empirical world frame what we know of it" (p.206). Consequently, the findings are constructed interpretations of data, not emanations from them. "Thus, our theoretical analyses are interpretive renderings of a reality, not objective reportings of it" (Charmaz, 2008: p.206).

To build on this, Seldén (2005) argues that conceptualizations do not emerge from data; instead, they are sourced within the specific researcher and dependent on their depth of scholarly reading. This issue is understood when the approach of this research project proactively keeps the researcher constantly located within the empirical reality (Charmaz, 2008). In essence, "No analysis is neutral—despite research analysts' claims of neutrality" (Charmaz, 2008: p.208); hence, no researcher approaches their studies uninitiated (Schwandt, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Charmaz, 2008). Seldén's (2005) argument highlights the importance of the literature review that thoroughly explores the surrounding rhetoric to assist in the construction of conceptualizations. The intensity and detail of the literature review ensures an appropriate depth of scholarly reading for insight and comparison.

Ultimately, the position adopted by this study is most recognizable and compatible with the work of Corbin and Strauss (2008), Strauss (1987) and Charmaz (2000, 2006, 2008); the literature review, within an inductive approach, has an important role to play through both the experience of insight (induction) and thinking prior to the data gathering (the literature review). This can address the potential argument proposed by Stanley and Wise (1983: p.152) that this qualitative approach is simply adopting a form of 'inductivist positivism'; indeed, authors like Strauss (1987) openly advocate the comparable positivistic technique of exploiting the use of the surrounding literature. This study is inductive, but the researcher knowingly and openly adopts, as Charmaz (2008) describes it, the positivistic *procedure* of using the literature review to guide further exploration and deepen analytical thinking. In this instance, the categories and themes highlighted and extracted from the literature review for further study act as a guideline for the subsequent constructivist, qualitative approach (defined and explained

in the following section). This is an essential feature underpinning the entire research project.

4.4. Understanding the position of this research

A methodology is required to understand an amalgam of interrelated factors that interact in complicated and often unanticipated ways (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Thus, a multiple case study approach has been chosen to engage with this complexity. It is important to recognize that capturing the entirety of complexity is unfeasible, but a structured and focused approach helps to resolve this situation. This is achieved through building multiple perspectives from those respondents involved within the research. Ultimately, their experiences are central to the data analysis.

The following explores the epistemological, ontological and axiological positions of this research. Thus, the methodological perspective and philosophical orientation adopted can be understood and appreciated.

  ➢ Epistemology

The epistemological position of this study is one of 'interpretivism', which is commonly associated with qualitative studies (Bryman and Bell, 2007). To clarify, this study respects that all respondents are individuals and, as a consequence, accepts that there is a subjective meaning of social actions that needs to be understood. This means that the epistemological foundations and norms of positivism are rejected to instead concentrate and emphasize the ways in which individuals interpret their social world (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As outlined earlier, the literature review is emphasized and used as a positivistic *procedure*, but nevertheless, the epistemological position of interpretivism is maintained throughout. Positivism is viewed as an alternative philosophical position that has differing strengths and weaknesses; the results generated can ultimately support and enhance qualitative research conducted. Furthermore, the paucity of qualitative research on IIP revealed in the literature review, which are reiterated above (e.g. Down and Smith, 1998; Collins and Smith, 2004), provide extended reasoning for this choice of methodological approach. It is recognized, however, that the representation of positivism here is a simplification of the most dichotomized viewpoints, as that

discussion in itself can breed contention and conflict depending on the school of thought applied.

The specific epistemological position of this study has evolved largely from 'interactionism' and 'pragmatism' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: p.2). Interactionism can be related to Blumer's (1969) idea of 'symbolic interaction', whereby people (i.e. employers, employees and customers within this research) do not simply respond directly to the actions of others. Instead, people seek out the meaning which is attached to such actions. Pragmatism can be connected to influential writers of the early twentieth century (e.g. Dewey, 1929; Mead, 1956). In effect, "knowledge arises through … acting and interacting of self-reflective beings" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: p.2). From the perspective of this research, this means that knowledge derived from the literature review is compared to the consequences within concrete experience (Dewey, 1929) – i.e. the literature review assists in informing the inductive process. In other words, this practical perspective is explored through action and interaction to understand and develop insights into the 'reality' within specific organizational contexts. In this research, these contexts are represented by the seven organizations studied.

In any qualitative study, validity remains a core issue. Hussey and Hussey (1997, p.57) state "*Validity* is the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation". Validity is not just the 'fit' or 'usefulness' attached to the analysis of primary data, it is also the rigor built into the research process (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This issue is often linked to the amount of data gathered within a research project. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992), for example, dispute the ability to validate emerging insights within qualitative approaches, because of the apparently inadequate sample size. Conversely, Glaser (1998) argues that small sample sizes can be valid and relevant, because the initial construction of insights overrides the need for large sample sizes. To take things further, Charmaz (2006) argues that rich, substantial and relevant data within concentrated samples assists in the validation of the construction of interpretations. Thus, the issue of validity and sample size is potentially dichotomous.

To expand on the above, Dey (1999: p.119) condemns the small sample size as a 'smash and grab' data collection approach, which he argues leads to superficial analyses. This research project addresses this issue of validity through the *depth* of case study analyses. A single case may have been seen as what Charmaz (2006: p.18) calls 'skimpy data', but having seven case studies provides the rich, substantial and relevant data for building insights and increasing validity. In other words, the insights are extended from the initial data collection within the high school through comparison and exploration within six differing organizational sectors, namely, the university, the catering department within the NHS Trust, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization, and the adult themed retailer. Hence, the validity of the insights generated is increased through the conscious incorporation of a sample base that involves seven companies from a diverse range of organizational settings that enables cross-comparisons to expand the level of meaning and validity within the data interpretations – a strategic approach to sampling supported by Yin (1994, 2003).

➢ Ontology

The ontological position of this study is one of 'constructivism', whereby social constructions are considered to be built up from perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2000, 2008). The social actors within this research consist of managers and front-line employees randomly selected throughout the organizations studied. Constructivism enables there to be an appreciation that perceptions and interactions affect everyday work, and that this can change constantly. This study, however, exploits the conceptual language derived from the literature review. This "knowledge may not mirror the world but it does help us to understand it" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: p.11). In other words, although theory is socially constructed, the literature review acts as a critical point of reflection and comparison. This provides relevance and guidance to ensure the research prompts a significant contribution to knowledge. Indeed, Oppenhiem (1992) argues this standpoint on the literature review can develop the conceptualization of the study by having theoretical underpinnings to help increase the quality of the research.
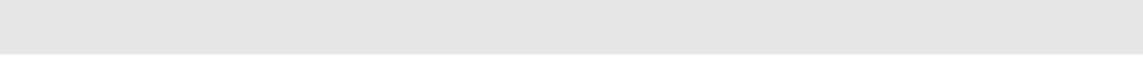
➢ Axiological position

The ontological and epistemological positions, which keep the observer interlocked with the observed, can be linked to the axiological position, whereby the researcher is value-laden and biased (Firestone, 1987; Guba and Lincoln, 1988). Indeed, "No analysis is neutral" (Charmaz, 2008: p.208), because no researcher can approach their studies uninitiated (Schwandt, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Charmaz, 2008). Charmaz (2008) believes this position is essential to social constructivism and supports the rejection of positivistic attempts at objectivity. In other words, a researcher is located within an empirical reality. Put more potently, "our theoretical analyses are interpretive renderings of a reality, not objective reportings of it" (Charmaz, 2008: p.206). The awareness of potential bias is recognized, but awareness and self-control increases the reliability of the findings. This enables the researcher to remain interlocked and silently connected within the interpretation of data. Indeed, Bell (1993) argues that it is better to acknowledge bias than to eliminate it altogether when conducting this kind of research; it increases the quality of the results. As Charmaz (2006: p.149) suggests: "In the end, inquiry takes us outward yet reflecting about it draws us inwards"; a researcher becomes part of a socially-constructed insight.

4.5. Conclusion

Any qualitative approach is a complex methodology of choice. The first half of this chapter has provided the necessary details to understand and appreciate the methodological and philosophical underpinnings of this research project. There is no 'reinvention of the wheel'; this study uses a multiple case study approach which is commonly applied in social research. To recap, the methodological approach used generates insights from data with the surrounding literature providing potential direction and constant comparison throughout the analysis. In essence, the literature review highlights areas of interest and in need of further study. The data collection process then begins to explore these areas within the first case study. Within this process, there is a flexibility to pursue, explore and expand on particular areas of interest that emerge from the data. This can occur within one case, but is essential developmental practice for the subsequent cases. One particular benefit of this multiple case study approach is that it allows for a generated insight to be analyzed and explored across seven differing

organizational sectors; this assists in validating the findings. The second half of this chapter explores the specific methods employed by this study within this methodological backdrop.

Research Design

4.6. Introduction

The second half of this chapter is dedicated to understanding the specific research methods incorporated into this study. These methods reflect the philosophical underpinnings discussed previously. Firstly, the semi-structured interview design is explored. This includes details of techniques adopted within the actual interviews and the establishment of a framework to explicate how the research questionnaire was constructed. Next, and without overstepping confidentiality boundaries, brief details are provided concerning the respondents involved and the related access issues. Within the last two sections, the tools and techniques used for analyzing the data are introduced and explored. The latter of these sections concerning codes and categories is discussed separately to accentuate the core nature of these techniques within the analytical process.

4.7. The semi-structured interview design

Thirty-eight recorded and transcribed semi-structured interviews are used to gain the required in-depth data for analysis. This approach is common within qualitative research (Tharenou *et al.,* 2007) and this study is no exception. Unstructured interviews are more fitting with a subjective and somewhat vague approach, e.g. Glaser (1992), whose approach has a notable absence of direction from the literature. Structured interviews do not allow for the essential flexibility needed when following emerging areas of analysis. Therefore, semi-structured interviews provide the ideal opportunity to incorporate the direction uncovered within the literature review and develop interesting and emerging themes of analysis. In addition, unimportant and/or insignificant areas of analysis can be discarded as the collection of data progresses. This approach is supported by Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008) and Jones (1985), who argue that a framework should help to plot out developing themes, but not constrain the researcher to the initial areas of intended exploration.

Transcriptions are required to conduct the line-by-line analysis of the data within the coding process. Willig (2001) supports this depth of detail to provide a full data analysis. In addition, he goes on to suggest that recording reduces the need for note taking, thereby giving the interviewer the opportunity to build a rapport and concentrate on moving the discussion in a direction that maximises the collection of relevant data. Indeed, Bauer and Gaskell (2000) suggest an interviewer should always be attentive and interested in the interviewee by maintaining appropriate eye contact, nods and reinforcements. This assists the interviewer by increasing the ability to observe body language and react to any unforeseen difficulties, such as nervousness or a lack of understanding.

To facilitate a gain in trust between the interviewer and a respondent, a number of steps were taken before the recorded interview was conducted. These details form part of the interview questionnaire in **Appendix one** and closely follow approaches advocated by Bauer and Gaskell (2000), and Hannabuss (1996). In the first instance, the interviewee is thanked for their involvement and given brief introductory comments about the research project and the researcher. This helps to relax the participant, prepare them for possible questions that might arise, and instigate the rapport building process. It also gets the interviewee to start talking. Whilst asking for permission to record the interview, it is thoroughly and clearly explained that confidentiality shall be complete. In other words, only the interviewer and interviewee will have access to the raw data collected within that interview. Beyond this, any information that is provided is made anonymous to protect the identity of the interviewee. It is explained that tapes, transcriptions and any notes taken shall be secured at all times in a locked safety box to ensure that the privacy of data is always maintained. Finally, it is clearly understood that any information exchanged can be withdrawn at any time at the request of the interviewee. The protection of the participant within this interview is an essential part of the trust building process. Not only does it help to relax an interviewee, but it also reassures them that their responses will not be misused or abused.

The process of actually gathering the recordings needed was fairly straightforward and problem free. The interviewer within this project consciously followed eight techniques suggested by Hannabuss' (1996) during the actual interviews – these assisted in gaining the rich data necessary for analysis:

1. Establish a rapport
2. Keep the discussion going
3. Ask questions which avoid closed answers
4. Avoid jargon and abstractions
5. Avoid double negatives and loaded expressions
6. Know when not to interrupt and use silence
7. Being non-judgemental
8. Know how to focus and pace the interview

Interviews tended to last roughly forty-five minutes to an hour, with the shortest interview being thirty-five minutes and the longest being one hour and 30 minutes. The same questionnaire was followed with each respondent, but some interviewees had more to say and others took longer to fully express their opinions and meanings. Almost all of the data was audible, clear and coherent – respondents could be contacted after the interview if clarification was needed during the transcription phase. The volume of a respondent's voice presented one challenge if they were a little quiet when responding to questions posed, but they were asked politely within the interview to speak louder or repeat a point if it was felt to be too quiet. Sometimes a respondent might have lost track of a point they were making, but questions were designed into the interview questionnaire to seek clarity and confirmation of their responses – details of the questions framework can be found below. The venue for all interviews was private, comfortable, well lit and quiet with the minimum of interruption and external noise. This assisted with the rapport building process at the beginning of the interviews, enabling respondents to get into their stride fairly quickly after introductions were made.

For four of the research organizations (the high school, the university, the catering department, and the transport company), random in-depth interviews with managers and other employees provide the necessary insights pertaining to the research context concerning the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This means there was no predetermined requirement concerning who could be interviewed and involved respondents from a wide coverage of disperse roles and departments/ areas. Within the other three organizations (the defence organization, the third sector organization, and

the adult themed retailer), key informants from senior management were used to gain the insights necessary. For the defence organization in particular, it was also necessary for interviewees to have experiences relating to IIP assessment during and after IIP accreditation. Extended details of the respondents used are in the following section. This approach using individual interviews is justifiable on the grounds of tradition in academia and the surrounding topic concerning individual experiences and personal biographies (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). Indeed, Taylor and McAdam (2003) and Silverman (2000) further justify this single approach to data collection by arguing the process should be kept simple. This research project seeks to retain this simplicity for data collection whilst continually focusing on the pragmatic reality of IIP through individual experiences and personal biographies.

The involvement of staff throughout four of the seven organizations provides essential data within a field known for its paucity of coverage (e.g. Berry and Grieves, 2003; Collins and Smith, 2004 – see the literature review for in-depth examples). Bell *et al.* (2001, 2002a) provides one of the few examples of data collection outside the management mindset. Therefore, the exploration of managers' and employees' viewpoints is critical to the research question, especially when IIP is supposed to impact on the entire workforce. This inclusive approach supports the generation of insights within a field notorious for dichotomous opinions – for example, whether or not IIP actually contributes towards increases in business performance.

The actual questions constructed within the interview questionnaire designed (Appendix one) resemble a guiding framework similar to Bauer and Gaskell (2000: p.52-53). This framework contributed to the particular wordings and pattern of contextual questions to effectively gain the desired data set to meet the requirements of the research question. The guideline for example lines of questioning are as follows (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: p.52-53):

> ➢ Inviting descriptions:
> Could you tell me about the time you [enter subject]?
> What comes to mind when you think of [enter subject]?
> How would you describe [enter subject] to someone who has not come across it before?

➢ And taking things further:

Can you tell me more about [enter subject/opinion]?

What makes you feel like that?

And this is important to you? Why?

➢ Eliciting contextual information:

When did you first hear about [enter subject]?

What did other people say about it at the time?

What was your immediate reaction?

➢ Testing your hypotheses:

From what you say it seems that you think [enter opinion], am I right here?

What would you think if such and such?

➢ From specific to vice versa:

In your experience is [enter subject/opinion] typical of things/people like that?

Particular example?

➢ Taking a naïve position:

I am not familiar with that, could you tell me a little more about it?

How would you describe that to someone who was new to the situation?

➢ Final thoughts:

We have covered a lot of interesting issues, is there anything we have not covered?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

These styles of questions enabled and perpetrated the collection of relevant and effective data. They provided a strategic approach which articulated questions into a specific manner for maximum utilization. If problems occurred at the time of questioning – for example, a respondent lacked an understanding of a particular question – alternative styles were prepared and adopted to achieve the same data collection goals. The pilot study (the data collection within the first organization)

assisted in dealing with the majority of the seen and unforeseen difficulties that arose, while at the same time pinpointing particular areas of interest to intensify exploration within the subsequent organizations studied.

5.8. *Understanding the respondents involved and related issues*

This section provides brief background details of the respondents involved within this research project. At the same time as providing these insights, confidentiality is importantly maintained to protect the identity of these individuals. The discussion includes issues relating to the attainment of access into the organizations studied, a brief mention of which departments are involved and the length of service of employees, and time issues connected with the collection of data. First though, the following provides a breakdown of the interview numbers and their job roles according to the organization studied and their related organizational code used within the data analysis chapter.

Ten interviews within the High School:
- 3 senior managers
- 2 line managers
- 2 teachers
- 3 support roles
  - Exams officer
  - Technician
  - Support assistant.

Ten interviews within the university:
- 3 senior managers
- 2 line managers
- 2 lecturers
- 2 research roles
- 1 support role.

Six interviews within the catering department:
- 1 senior manager
- 1 line manager

- ➢ 4 front-line employees
  - o Chef
  - o Catering assistant
  - o Administration officer
  - o Learning and development advisor.

Three interviews within the defence organization:
- ➢ 3 senior managers (from 3 different departments).

Five interviews within the transport company:
- ➢ 1 senior manager
- ➢ 2 line managers
- ➢ 2 front-line employees
  - o Building role
  - o Body trade role.

Two interviews within the third sector organization:
- ➢ 2 senior managers

Two interviews within the adult themed retailer:
- ➢ 2 senior managers

It can be ascertained from the above descriptions that the number of interviews in each organization differs and there are a number of reasons for this. One of the most crucial impacting factors relates to access constraints. These are discussed in more depth below, but the important issue here is that for each organization there were significant time constraints. For the high school and university, it was agreed that ten interviews could be timetabled with the organizational contacts making the necessary arrangements. For the catering department, all interviews had to be completed within one working day, as per the agreement for access. With the employees working within a busy NHS trust schedule, six interviews actually provided an effective result that spanned a significant diversity of job roles. In addition, it was easier to organize interviews with key members of staff when it is just one department that is IIP recognized. For the third sector

organization and adult themed retailer, two interviews from each with key informants provide the insights necessary. This data was collected subsequent to that from the five large organizations to provide comparable insights from the small business perspective.

Three interviews with key senior managers in the defence organization provided the insights required when the business is no longer IIP recognized. Thus, the most important credential for interview selection was the ability to discuss experiences of IIP assessment at the time of recognition and subsequent to life without the standard. In addition to this, tight restrictions on access were imposed because of security reasons. Thus, three interviews was the maximum obtainable. For the transport company, the agreement for access insisted that all interviews had to be completed within one working day. Hence, five interviews was the maximum obtainable under the restrictions provided. Nevertheless, for all the organizations involved, key managers and/or HR staff connected to IIP assessment were involved as respondents. This assisted in providing the essential insights relating to the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

Gaining access into the seven organizations studied presented a number of challenges. Perhaps the most significant of these was in the beginning when trust between the interviewer and the organizational contacts were at their most tentative. Importantly, a critical factor for obtaining access was the promise that financial data would not be shared. This did not stop respondents referring to such data, but the actual figures remained off limits. Thus, the findings explored within the data analysis contain references to the performance of the organizations, but are constrained to the thoughts and feelings expressed by the interviewees. The promise expressed concerning financial data and the assurance that the research study primarily concentrated on IIP involvement and recognition helped to build trust between the interviewer and respondents. In turn, this assisted in relaxing the interviewees within the one-to-one recorded scenario.

Within all the large organization cases studied, respondents were from a diverse range of departments across their organizations. Within the high school, the university, the catering department and the transport company, the length of service for employees were mixed. In other words, opinions and feelings were drawn from a rich backdrop of varying degrees of organizational experience and involvement. The defence

organization provides contrast to this, whereby all three senior managers had been with the organization for 15 years or more. For this organization, it was important that respondents could refer to experiences during and after IIP recognition which had ceased in 2001. For the two small businesses, the respondents had been with the organization for five years or longer. In essence, these respondents were involved with the organization before IIP involvement, as well as through the assessment and reassessment processes.

The allocation of time and staff resources within each organization to allow participation within the interview process provided a significant restriction for the research process. In the high school, interviews had to be conducted to fit in with the teaching timetable. This sometimes meant that interviews had to be restricted to a maximum of one hour. For the catering department, the defence organization and the transport company, day visits had to be arranged to comply with respondent availability and security precautions. The university provided the most flexibility in terms of access times, but the interview schedule remained ad-hoc due to the individualistic nature of the roles of respondents within their various departments. For the third sector organization and adult themed retailer, it took months to arrange just the two interview time slots within each case study. Ultimately, this made the data collection process slow and time consuming, as well as providing numerous travel implications for the researcher in terms of cost and reaching the specific interview destinations required.

The breakdown of respondents involved shows there is a significant diversity of job roles within the data collection process. The issues that arose both before and during the interviews themselves were not unexpected. An important point to reaffirm is that access was granted based on an agreement that there would be a non-disclosure of financial figures within any of the organizations studied. It is recognized, however, that such financial data would have assisted the data analysis; thus, it does provide one of the limitations regarding the data. Other issues involving trust, time constraints and access limitations were successfully worked around to achieve the intended data collection necessary for an in-depth analysis. Again, it is recognized that the respondents used provides another limitation to the study. In essence, other case studies and insights could have added more validity and further conceptualization to the findings. The restricted time and resources play a crucial role here. Nevertheless, rigor

has been built into the interview design to maximize the data set at the disposal of the researcher, as well as crucially including key players involved with IIP assessment within the organizations studied.

4.9. The style of analysis

This chapter has already discussed the specific approaches involved in the collection of data, including semi-structured interviews and the use of questioning. The particular tools and techniques used for analyzing the data is the final revelation concerning the particular research methods adopted. In short, this research project uses codes, categories, constant comparison, intensive data interrogation, theoretical saturation and deviant case analysis to assist in the interpretation of the dataset. These tools and techniques for analysis are considered flexible and unique to a particular researcher (Charmaz, 2008). Indeed, the analysis involves the unique interpretations of the researcher (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1998; Schwandt, 2000; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). As a consequence, this researcher uses particular tools and techniques that are thought to assist effectively in the interpretation of data and the generation of insights. Codes and categories potentially provide the most notable inconsistency in terms of flexibility, because they act as fixtures and signposts that importantly direct the analysis and maintain focus. Despite this, they are integral to the data analysis process. Thus, codes and categories are discussed separately within the subsequent section as a core feature of the analytical process.

Constant comparison is "the analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: p.65). The units of analysis for constant comparison are the individuals selected randomly throughout the seven organizations studied. This includes a cross-section of employees in management roles, line managers (when applicable), the front-line employees, and any other staff who can potentially affect the socially constructed everyday working world. A total of thirty-eight transcribed semi-structured interviews within seven organizations contribute to the analysis.

The multiple case study approach assists in overcoming the problem suggested by Silverman (2000) of 'anecdotalism' often associated with qualitative studies. This

potentially exists if only a few reports of telling examples of insights from within the analysis are suggested without sufficient attempts to analyze the less clear and even contradictory data. To confront this potential issue, thoughts, opinions and feelings are explored amongst a significant cross-section of the workforce. Consequently, this yields a breadth of data for comparison between managers and front-line employees alike. This complex data is closely scrutinized and analyzed to ensure the full development of an insight uncovered. In addition, the use of seven organizations clarifies and analyzes in-depth the insights developed by providing a selection of differing organizational backdrops for further constant comparisons and exploration. In other words, one organizational comparison to the next, and so on, helps to further advance and inform the interpretations generated from the dataset.

Throughout the analytical process, there is an intensive interrogation of the data to open the data up and create comparative thinking. In essence, this interrogation seeks to continuously ask questions of the data and provide alternative perspectives that advance the development of interpretations. Within individual interviews, for example, this often involved the rephrasing and rewording of subsequent questions, as well as returning and expanding on issues later within the questionnaire. Although Glaser (1992) argues this is "cumbersome and self-conscious" (p.60) and pushes researchers away from the simplicity of interpreting and comparing data, this study rejects this proposition and adopts this interrogative approach that is strongly advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998, Strauss, 1987). Ultimately, the approach forces a researcher to think differently about their data and restrict their potential perceptual inhibitors.

This research project uses theoretical saturation to generate solid and relevant insights. Theoretical saturation is where no additional data are being found, instances are repeating over and over; when one category is saturated, there is no choice but to go onto new groups and categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In effect, the further gathering and analysis of data adds little to the conceptualization (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). One of the approaches adopted by this study is the constant comparison of the seven organizations involved. Once an interesting insight is uncovered and validated in one organization, exploration of this generated theory is applied and explored in the other cases for further advancement. This further development of these insights within differing organizational sectors helps to suggest these findings may not be restricted to

the seven cases studied here. Nevertheless, further research would be needed on a larger and wider scale to understand to what extent the findings could be generalized.

For this research project, deviant case analysis is used in three ways. The first is to ensure the thorough understanding and exploration of data that seemingly contradicts or conflicts with emerging theories. Silverman (2005) supports this approach to provide comprehensive data treatment. The second is the selection of cases that may intentionally provide and develop deviant data. In this instance, this represents the choice of seven organizations within diverse sectors: high school education, HE education, catering, defence, transport, not-for-profit and adult themed retailing. Mason (1996) supports this ethos of gathering data within cases which may seek out negative connotations within the emerging construction of insights. The third is ensuring that the researcher is not satisfied with the explanations and insights provided. Instead, questions are designed into the interview questionnaire to explore particular responses initially given. This helps to ensure legitimacy within the data gathered and reduces spurious data (Silverman, 2005). In effect, those responses first provided by interviewees are subsequently explored through rephrasing the questions and/or seeking clarity on the expression of meaning provided.

4.10. Deriving categories and codes

Categories and the codes contained within them are synonymous with qualitative research methods of analysis (Kolb, 2008). The underpinning 'core category' is the principal phenomenon being studied (Corbin and Strauss, 2008); in this instance, the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This core category represents the dominating context within this study and is subsequently built up of subject- and literature-related categories. These latter categories, applied to the **Findings tables** (p.132-139) within the findings, data analysis and discussion chapter, represent the initial deductive element of this research project. They are first established through the literature review to bring to the surface the most intriguing and relevant gaps within the knowledge base. Following on from this, questions surrounding these tentative categories are induced into the pilot semi-structured interview design. These questions and categories are then constantly analyzed and refined as the collection of data progresses.

Codes within the categories are derived and developed concepts from the data (Kolb, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Coding is the initial step to taking an analytical stance on the data collected; they provide the essential link between the collection of data and the development of emerging conceptualizations (Charmaz, 2008). Initial coding during research is also known as open coding; it opens up enquiry and every point is tentative (Strauss, 1987). The **Findings tables** within the findings, data analysis and discussion chapter reflect upon the final axial coding process. In other words, the data fractured from the initial (open) coding has been reassembled to provide coherence for the emerging analysis within the discussion chapter (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). It is important to appreciate that this table does not signify the whole and extended coding process. Instead, only the codes relevant to the discussion section remain to avoid an overload of complexity and unnecessary data.

The entire categorizing and coding process demands a thorough exploration of the data line-by-line to fully appreciate and understand the findings uncovered. The analysis begins immediately after the collection of data from the first/ pilot organization. In effect, "the codes take form together as elements of a nascent theory that explains these data and directs further data-gathering" (Charmaz, 2006: p.46). Consequently, tentative codes, categories and interview questions are refined and developed for the subsequent data set collection that follows. This means that the interview design (**Appendix one**) is reconstructed and uniquely focussed (known as focussed coding, the second coding process) for each organization studied thereafter to follow significant and potential areas of analysis. The **Findings tables** created (through axial coding, the third and final coding process) assists in understanding and appreciating the interpretation and analytical process engaged.

4.11. Conclusion

The second half of this chapter has described and explored the specific research design for this study. The multiple case study approach adopted assists in researching a particular phenomenon: the relevance and sustainability of IIP. Thirty-eight semi-structured interviews across seven organizations provide the in-depth data for the generation of insights within this phenomenon. The organizations cover diverse sectors, including high school and HE education, catering/ health, defence, and transport. In

addition, the respondents involved are from diverse job roles with varying lengths of service across various departments. This study uses particular tools and techniques commonly associated with qualitative approaches to analyze the dataset; these involve categories, codes, constant comparison, intensive data interrogation, theoretical saturation and deviant case analysis. Combined together, the following chapter contains the **Findings tables** (p.132-139) generated out of this analytical process. This represents the final efforts within this process after detailed and thorough exploration of the findings.

Case study profiles

5.1. Introduction

The following profiles provide a brief insight into the cases studied within this research project. The purpose of this is to assist in contextualizing and framing the data findings and analysis. An exploration of each individual journey regarding IIP recognition is presented combined with a feel for organizational culture and management approaches. Each profile is supported by numerous quotations from the managers and front-line employees interviewed.

5.2. The high school

The high school is a large organization (with less than 1000 employees) that has seen significant improvements in recent years. Thoughts and responses from interviewees reflect on the clear divergent state of the school. In other words, the organization is within a sustained period of growth and success in terms of student pass rates and the general performance of the school. Indeed, success is considered to be at an all-time high and the results and comments from OFSTED reflect this.

Much of this is connected and attributed to the Head of the school who took the leadership reins at a time when motivation and performance were thought to have almost hit 'rock bottom'. This new leader with a new vision is regarded as the linchpin for turning the fortunes of the organization around. The following expressions are mentioned in relation to the Head's leadership style:

> "Very approachable … big on positive feedback." High School respondent – support role;

> "Very supportive and encouraging." High School respondent – teacher;

> "Dynamic, innovative, creative …" High School respondent – senior manager;

> "Inspirational." High School respondent – line manager.

Thus, employees praise his/her leadership approach and especially applaud the differences he/she has created before IIP involvement, in terms of training and development, and career enhancement opportunity. The Head integrated high standards of training and development as common practice. Interestingly, this common practice is available to all staff if they desire it; it is not a structured delivery process. This is thought to motivate employees further, because they feel in control of their own career destinies. In addition, the school intends to maintain IIP recognition for the foreseeable future.

The IIP journey for the high school is a fairly straightforward one. Before first achieving IIP recognition in 2002, the Head initially sought to analyze the current training and development practices, as the following quotation illustrates:

> "We started the process of talking to them [IIP UK] and find out what it [IIP] was about. My reasoning for that was to get reflection – it wasn't actually to get Investors in People status. I didn't honestly expect to get it first time as we did. What I wanted was for them to reflect back to us where we needed to improve." High School respondent – senior manager.

The initial assessment conducted by IIP assessors, however, led instantly to recognition. This is because the school was already able to provide evidence for the ten indicators that assess employers, as the following highlights:

> "Investors in People is just saying 'well yeah, you're doing it'." High School respondent – senior manager;

> "It just rubberstamps a lot of the things we're doing already." High School respondent – line manager.

This means there was no requirement or need to collaborate with IIP UK to enhance the current practices of the organization to achieve IIP status. In addition, and subsequent to both of the IIP recognition processes the organization has gone through, the school was given very few points to develop between assessment phases. In other words, IIP assessors:

> "found it extremely difficult to secure a development point for [the school]." High School respondent – senior manager.

This is because the organization was already achieving and maintaining such high standards of training and development practice. This highlights an ease with which the school achieved and maintained IIP recognition. Added to this was another factor:

> "Since the last Investors in People [reassessment], we've never given Investors in People a second thought." High School respondent – senior manager.

Thus, it appears that the school is more than capable of preserving the standards that it aspires to with or without the involvement of IIP. These perspectives on the IIP journey already begin to highlight issues with regards to the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Nevertheless, that dialogue and analysis is reserved for the discussion section that follows the data findings.

Employees' pride is expressed continuously throughout the interviews. The word 'enjoyment' is frequently connected to the workplace and the high morale status of the workforce reflects this:

> "I love it, really enjoy it." High School respondent – teacher;

"I love it down here, it's my second home." High school respondent – support role.

In addition, most of the employees discuss their long-term hopes to maintain a career within education, many referring directly to their desire to remain within that particular school. An abundance of employee biographies and stories of personal triumphs highlight much of the positive energy that existed at the time of the interviews. When discussing persistent difficulties and problems within the workplace – for example, large class sizes, bureaucratic red tape, departmental cultural differences – interviewees accepted such issues and retained their positive outlook. In other words, because the organization was performing so well, employees appeared to be able to cope better with the day-to-day difficulties that are thought to occur frequently within any educational establishment.

For the interviewer, this kind of positive outlook is thought to be extremely rare and precious within a workplace. It is a tribute to the leadership skills of the Headmaster and surrounding senior staff that this high performing culture can be achieved and maintained. This positive outlook was continuously and thoroughly questioned and probed throughout the interviews, but employee mindsets stood up to all scrutiny within all areas of the questionnaire.

5.3. The university

The university is a large organization (employee numbers in their 000's) with complex and differing departments and subcultures that, to some degree, independently coexist. This is reflected by the rich multiplicity of responses from interviewees within these diverse contexts, who barely register the world outside of their own working department and/ or subdivision. The following quotation highlights this diversity:

"I think it's hard to develop a universal culture across the university for various reasons, but especially if not everybody is not striving for the same end … so many employees, so many subject areas, how can you even imagine one culture?" University respondent – lecturer.

Perhaps this is attributed to the service nature of the organization, where student experiences are unique to those particular areas of the business. Despite this, the organization is considered to be divergent in terms of growth, size and reputation, although opinions remain split as to whether performance reflects this divergent state. This is mainly because certain departments are outperforming others; therefore, an interviewee's working background affects their responses considerably. The following quotations from three different departments reflect some of the other thoughts concerning performance:

> "I keep hearing mixed things from different people [with regards to performance], but it's [the university] continually growing." University respondent – research role;

> "Students performance leaves a lot to be desired." University respondent – line manager;

> "The university has seen massive growth, but needs to consolidate its position." University respondent – senior manager.

Regardless of this, the university is thought to be a considerable challenger within the higher education marketplace, whilst maintaining a financially secure situation with plenty of potential for future growth and expansion. Opinions are split across higher management and HR roles on whether the organization should maintain IIP recognition. Some believe the standard retains value, whilst others feel the university has grown beyond its capability:

> "I'm beginning to feel that IIP has had its place and time … we've got our own HR strategy and we are developing our own training and development strategy, and that needs to take over, because that is what we worry about on a daily basis, not on a four year cycle." University respondent – senior manager;

> "It's old hat now." University respondent – senior manager;

"I think benchmarking yourself against external standards is a good thing to do. You can't do everything on the basis of assuming that you can self refer essentially, you've got to have some kind of external kitemark to go against … I think it [IIP] is worth having, because it is actually now seen, certainly as far as I'm aware, as the main benchmark for managers." University respondent – senior manager.

The IIP journey for the university has been a long one since recognition was first achieved in the mid to late 1990s. The gap since the original accreditation and the substantial changes in staff means that the original thoughts behind the desire to achieve the standard have been lost. Senior managers mention the need to attain IIP in the face of intense competition and the rising number of other universities gaining recognition, but they remain unsure what specific drivers may have contributed towards a push for the standard at that particular time. The university has successfully achieved reaccreditation every three years since the standard was first attained. Importantly, there has been no time where reaccreditation was in doubt when going through IIP reassessment.

Unlike the high school, significant development points to move the organization forward between assessments are raised within each accreditation process. Indeed, there is a consensus between senior managers that the IIP assessment process:

"made us think more about the way we invested in and developed our people." University respondent – senior manager.

The main motivation for keeping IIP is the perceptual value (connected to customers, current staff and potential staff) thought to be associated with the standard. There is, however, a significantly mixed feeling between respondents as to whether or not the organization should continue to maintain IIP recognition, because of questions raised concerning the actual benefit and contribution of the standard. Nevertheless, IIP recognition is to be maintained for the foreseeable future.

Interviewees' feelings about the organization explore a number of positive reactions concerning those that are happy within their current state. A number of negative

connotations, however, are frequently associated with the organization, including a tough induction year, too much administration work and/or a lack of job security. The latter of these has consequential knock-on effects into other areas of the interview; importantly, feelings of support, motivations and ambitions reflect the most detrimental effects. As a result, ambitions to remain in the organization and the sector itself portray a number of short-term visions.

Despite the above pitfalls, training and development is considered to be a strong feature within the university. Although senior managers are insistent that there is a structured training and development regime, the reality, however, reflects a much more ad-hoc approach. The primary reason for this is thought to be the difficulty of fitting training and development events into the working calendar. Consequently, employees feel frustrated by this. On the one hand, there is plenty of training and development available, but this positive endeavor can be nullified by the difficulties in completing it.

5.4. The catering department

The catering department (with less than 200 employees) is part of a large NHS trust (employee numbers in their 000's) and has recorded its most successful year to date. This performance success is reflected by the catering department's ability to achieve IIP recognition where the entire trust as a whole could not. The trust ceased interest in attaining the status when it was found only certain pockets of excellence matched the standard's requirements – interestingly, the organization is thought to be seeking improvements independently of IIP involvement before considering another assessment. IIP recognition for the catering department provided initial kudos within the trust. The following quotation highlights the extent of this achievement:

> "They tried in the trust to do it [attain IIP accreditation] and failed miserably, so sometimes we use it as a 'look at what we can do and you cant', so we always promote and always brag about it, which I think is really, really good." Catering respondent – senior manager.

Subsequently, it is thought that this recognition may have helped to raise respect levels for their type of work, which they feel is underappreciated in the face of more traditional and directly impacting patient care.

The department's continued development and performance successes reflect a divergent state. Training and development is available in abundance to all staff members. This acts as one of the factors that contribute towards the existing high motivation, low staff turnover and long-term ambitions to remain within the organization. The following quotation helps to emphasize the high regard that the department is held in:

> "I know that I probably wouldn't be in the place I am now if I hadn't had this help or training to be in this position … I do think that it is very rare [to get this level of support within a job role], because I do know that all the colleagues that I work for, they do care for me in more ways than one. Yeah, again, we have that close family community." Catering respondent – front-line employee.

Importantly, the cost for such training and development events is generally outsourced:

> "We tap into [company name], which is free government funding ... everybody that's been on a training course, it's been fully funded either through our own department or through 'train to gain'. We've been able to tap into hundreds of thousands of pounds from the NHS universities." Catering respondent – senior manager.

This helps to maintain availability and consistency of training and development practices. Some events are mandatory, but flexibility and choice is exerted beyond that. Importantly, the culture of training and development had been integrated prior to IIP involvement:

> "We've always done training [prior to IIP] and always will do training." Catering respondent – senior manager.

The leading senior manager of the catering department is considered to have played an essential role in the recent performance successes. He/she has uniquely instilled a commitment to training and development that is far superior to anything previously available. This is thought to be critically linked to the outlook of the manager, who believes investment in training and development is crucial for organizational success and employee fulfillment/ motivation. This is not to say training and development did not exist before; rather, it has been highlighted and exploited to greater effect.

The catering department first achieved IIP recognition in 2003. Since his/her appointment into the role of leading senior manager, it was always their intention to eventually gain recognition from the standard to reflect the changes instigated:

> "We used it because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here, that's the reason why we started off." Catering respondent – senior manager.

This meant that the initial assessment process was straightforward because changes to training and development practices were made prior to IIP involvement. Subsequent reassessment in 2006 was also a straightforward process with the department continuing to maintain its high levels of training and development practices. In addition, the department intends on maintaining IIP recognition for the foreseeable future.

5.5. The defence organization

The defence organization has had its share of ups and downs. This large organization (employee numbers in their 000's) has fought through a number of significant restructurings and redundancy agendas, whilst constantly refusing to lose the battle for survival:

> "We've come through a hell of a journey. In 2000, we were making 2000 people redundant. The future for the company looked very bleak; we hadn't got a lot on the order book … In the last three, four years we've turned a corner … it looks very rosy. For the next ten years, we've got an order book we would never have even dreamed of in 2000." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Currently, the past three years has seen significant improvements and growth which has helped to radically alter the mindset of employees. The organization reflects a divergent state and the desire to remain competitive and innovative continues to be high on the list of priorities. This approach resulted in IIP becoming a redundant feature of the strategic approach adopted, because they feel they have grown beyond it. Consequently, IIP accreditation was ceased in 2001.

The IIP journey for the defence organization started back in the early 1990s when the standard was still relatively new and untested. Indeed, there was a feeling that one motivation for achieving IIP recognition was because competitors had become involved with the standard and they did not want to be seen as 'not following the trend'. Nevertheless, the main reason for initially gaining and maintaining IIP can be summarized by this quotation:

> "We got a gong for something we're already doing, rather than chasing a gong and having to put something in place to get the gong." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Thus, achieving initial IIP status was a straightforward process. Importantly, interests in following the principles of IIP changed and fluctuated throughout the lifespan of recognition from the standard. An example of this can be related to the various recessions the organization survived, whereby each time redundancies were commonplace and training and development budgets were almost abandoned. Interestingly, IIP recognition was never lost within these difficult periods which lasted for years at a time. When the organization eventually ceased IIP involvement and accreditation in 2001 with the business in a healthy and prosperous state, they instead chose to focus on other quality improvement tools and techniques that are thought to bring the competitiveness required within an international arena (these are kept anonymous to help protect the identity of the organization). The following quotation highlights this move towards other techniques:

> "Effectively, we grew beyond it [IIP]." Defence respondent – senior manager.

The changes in fortunes for the defence organization are massively attributed to the current managing director. He/she is considered to be instrumental in generating the recent successes using a ruthless but effective style of leadership:

> "The MD we've got has probably turned this organization round in the seven years he's been here. From being almost bankrupt, we're now making money hand over fist – major, major turn round … He's been ruthless, he's taken people out who've been in the business 30/40 years, and we've become almost immune to the outside world. He's given them a chance to perform and if they've not performed he's moved them, so he's brought his own team around him, who are mimicking his style." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Consequently, this is felt to give the workforce the consistency required to build confidence to follow his/her vision. In addition, the diversity offered within jobs keeps motivation high and staff turnover low. Indeed, it is believed that most employees consider a long-term career within this organization, because of its status and the opportunities it can provide. The organization is in the most stable condition it has seen for years and this reflects positively within the interviews conducted.

Training and development opportunities are thought to be widely available to all employees who desire it. A mainly ad-hoc approach to training and development is adopted, because it is believed that not all staff members will desire constant progression and nor should it be enforced upon them.

5.6. The transport company

The transport company, like all the other cases studies so far, is a large organization (with less than 1000 employees) in a divergent state. At the time of interview, the company had peaked in terms of financial turnover, profitability and growth; it is the most successful year in their history. The knock-on positive effect within the workforce is clear within the interviews. In addition, this transport company is one of only three in the UK with IIP status. It is thought, however, that industry awards retain much more value within this sector and this highlights the lack of IIP uptake. Nevertheless, the organization intends to maintain IIP recognition for the foreseeable future.

The transport company first achieved IIP recognition in 2004. Thus, the IIP journey is one of the shortest of all the organizations studied. The ease with which recognition was initially obtained can be summarized by the following quotation:

> "We spoke to training consultants from time-to-time to see what was on offer in the outside world, and it was through them that IIP first cropped up. They referred to the fact 'do you realize that what you're doing now is such an improvement, it's so close to IIP standard, have you ever thought of just looking at the missing bits and going for it?'" Transport respondent – senior manager.

This outside influence helped to instigate the move towards IIP accreditation. The initial assessment process was actually easier than the consultant thought, with the organization passing straight through the process. This is because a culture of training and development was embedded prior to IIP involvement, as the following highlights:

> "If I was going on a course, it was before IIP came along. I was sent on a [training] course [and] they sent me on a management course … that's before we got [IIP] … I'm arranging courses now for my [employees] to go on a computer course and I do that whether we had IIP or not." Transport respondent – line manager;

All respondents speak very positively of the company and reveal particular affection and affinity for the industry as a whole, as exemplified by these quotations:

> "I'd always maintained an interest right from a relatively early age – early teens – in public transport, and I just had this hankering for working in the bus industry." Transport respondent – senior manager;

> "I just love the company now. I mean, I left the company three years ago to become a driving examiner … I missed it to be honest, so the opportunity to come back arose early this year and I put in for it and I came back." Transport manager – line manager;

"It's a lot better um than previous jobs I've had. I feel I'm accepted more as a person and listened to. You're entitled to an opinion here and you can voice that opinion as well, you're not just a number sort of thing." Transport respondent – front-line employee.

Similar to the third quotation above, current job roles are often compared to similar roles elsewhere whereby the conditions are thought to be significantly inferior. Specifically, the culture, management approach and training and development prospects are held in comparable high regard. This combination of factors means that motivation and commitment were particularly high at the time of interview. The following quotation provides an example that spans all these areas:

"The culture – there's definitely a drive for constant improvement ... We've changed the buses. We've changed the image. We've changed the drivers' uniforms. We've improved the training. As I said before, we came runners up in the UK bus company of the year awards, which takes quite a lot of doing actually. So it's a company that's driven by the MD, but he always wants to improve it. He's not happy staying where we are; he's wants to get that extra level. That's the culture." Transport respondent – Line manager.

The current managing director is thought to be instrumental in bringing to the company this record level of achievement. He/she has had a considerable impact on incorporating quality improvements, including the significantly improved training and development opportunities. The following quotations highlight the managing director's impact and style:

"He's forward thinking and he's got quite a modern approach … he's not one of those old style [of managers], [who are] set in their ways. He's quite open to people's views." Transport respondent – front-line employee;

"He's a forward thinker. He's down to earth. He'll get his hands dirty if he needs to. He'll muck in. He'll also tell you when you're wrong; he's straight." Transport respondent – line manager.

A mainly ad-hoc approach to training and development is thought to improve staff motivation through flexibility and choice; these opportunities are thought to be widely available to all employees, if they desire it.

5.7. The third sector organization

This third sector organization is a small business consisting of ten full-time employees. The following briefly describes what the organization does:

> "The [named organization] exists as an infrastructure organization to support the other more front-facing organizations in the third sector." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

In other words, this company acts as an independent organization that helps local voluntary and community groups to work effectively for their members, as well as assisting them to speak up and represent what is important to them. The business is in a current state of consolidation that reflects the tough economic period survived at the time of interview. The following quotation reflects on current pressures for this third sector perspective:

> "There is enormous pressure to maximize what our income can do and does do, and massive insecurity, even annually, of not knowing whether we're going to be refunded, or whether we're going to be able to find more funding. So an awful lot of energy goes towards renewing your funding and your financing. And again, that can bring in your stresses in losing your objective and perspective on what you want to do." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

The above that relates to potentially losing touch with an objective and perspective was spoken within the context of IIP and training and development. In other words, the respondent questioned the organization's ability to maintain interest and focus on IIP and their objectives within an economic climate that emphasized financial issues. Nevertheless, respondents maintain a positive outlook regarding their organization:

"I think that it's a positive learning environment." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

"I like it [the organization and area of business] because it allows me to be creative … it allows me to broaden my experience of knowledge. I often get the opportunity to take risks, and I like all of those opportunities." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

The organization first achieved IIP recognition in 2007 and reassessment was completed at the time of interview. The following quotation highlights the potential of IIP, but also suggests a limited integration into everyday practice over its lifespan:

"It does provoke you, as an organization, to look back and see whether those impacts actually lasted, whether they became integrated into the organization, or whether they were more in positional. And personally, I think as time has progressed I would question whether it became integrated." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

"The central or core activities intrinsic to what the [named organization] does around giving that support to the third sector is augmented by the fact that we acquire funding by holding projects, and so we have 5 or 6 projects currently, which are all very effective and they are working well. As a collective whole, that makes the [named organization] appear positive and vibrant. However, I suspect that is a little bit of an unreal picture; whether those core values [relating to IIP] are actually being met as effectively as they could be, I would question." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

The above quotations highlight the difficulty in maintaining the values projected by IIP UK within this small business context. Indeed, the respondents go onto to question IIP's compatibility within their sector and small business perspective. On top of this, their IIP journey has a lot in common with the other cases within this study, i.e. recognition was achieved with the minimum of change, as the following quotation highlights:

"We didn't have to change anything to achieve IIP, we already had everything in place." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

Furthermore, when the managers were asked by IIP assessors to address a particular area of practice for subsequent assessment, the organization still attained recognition despite not achieving this required change to practice:

"We actually got pulled up for the same thing as in the first assessment, but yes, we still achieved recognition." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

When it came to the thoughts of continuing IIP recognition, both interviewees questioned the impact of the standard and the need to maintain it. One of the interviewees compared their feelings to that of an experience within another organization that had briefly attained IIP:

"I actually worked in another third sector organization and we originally got IIP because it was free. We actually stopped it when assessment came round again because we already had everything in place for training and the cost was also deemed unnecessary." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

Although reassessment has been achieved at the time of interview for the case studied, questions do remain concerning the contribution and necessity of IIP for this organization and potentially the sector, as highlighted earlier with regards to the economic climate.

Training and development is considered mainly ad-hoc due to the very individualistic nature of employee needs within this particular organization. The variety and potential availability of these enhancement opportunities are thought to be widespread. The following quotation highlights this when asked what training and development is available to staff:

"All sorts. Staff often have different hats. Training available is often externally provided, might be provided by [named organization], the overarching organization we are affiliated to within the third sector. It might be specific

training like first aid or something more pragmatic … there's loads available."
Third sector respondent – senior manager.

The following quotation, however, highlights the financial limitations of being able to offer training and development to all staff, on an equal footing. In addition, concerns are raised about the effectiveness and impact of any training and development conducted:

"The need to continually professionally develop is recognized. It's hampered by a lack of finance and the difficulties of priority about how you spend your money and how effective it will be." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

In essence, the organization supports the ethos and values surrounding training and development, but their spending on these activities has to be wise and reap a tangible benefit to be considered successful. Thus, a lot of caution and consideration is applied to any decisions regarding training and development.

5.8. *The adult themed retailer*

The adult themed retailer is a small business consisting of forty staff within 14 outlets. The business is in a current state of consolidation that reflects the tough economic period survived at the time of interview. The following briefly describes what the organization does, as well as highlighting the recent performance of the business:

"[Named organization] is a chain of licensed adult shops … With the current retail climate, we've seen a major impact over the last two years. The performance as a whole is stable and the majority of shops open are keeping their head above water. We've had recent management changes, which has seen a little bit of a shuffle in how the company and the performance of the company are managed. But as a whole, tough times create stronger businesses at the other end of it and I think [named organization] will come out of that as one of the stronger ones." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

These positive words still remain even though the organization has had to reduce its outlets from fifteen to fourteen within the twelve months prior to the research interview

taking place. It is believed that the future looks promising after surviving a significant economic decline in retailing. Indeed, the organizational culture is positively reflected upon despite any challenges faced within a significantly fluxing UK economy:

> "[The culture is like] Family. Everybody gets on, everybody interlinks with everybody all the time." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

> "We've tried to keep that feeling of a close business because we started with just two of us in one store and become a larger organization. We try to keep that family orientation." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

The organization first achieved IIP recognition in 2005 and remains the only organization within this industry to have the award. The first of the following quotations highlight how IIP interest first came about. In addition, both quotations below highlight, like with many of the other cases studied within this research project, how little change was needed to achieve IIP recognition:

> "In a sense we first approached IIP, yes. We were actually involved in staff training anyway through Business Link and they said 'have you ever considered it? Because obviously you're developing your people anyway'. And because we were already doing 80% of what was needed, with very little hand holding Business Link suggested we should be looking at doing this [IIP involvement]. That's how we got involved with it. And we actually got it done within a nine month period, which was very very quick." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

> "Us personally, we had to make very few changes, because my background is business development and business analysis, so I'd actually already put in place processes and procedural staffing checks. I actually come from a corporate background into this business. I actually use that background to try and structure the needs of [named organization]. And the staffing needs were obviously just an add-on to that. It doesn't matter what your business is, if it's structured, it will work. So what we did was use Business Link to link us into the IIP. When they came and assessed us, we pretty much did everything that what was

required for the standard anyway, which is why we got it so quick." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Despite this lack of IIP integration, the standard was achieved for one particular unique benefit, as the following highlights when respondents' were asked why the organization initially sought recognition:

"[For] An acceptance into mainstream retail. We wanted to be seen and taken seriously as just another high street store. Being part of IIP, what it means dealing with councils and training standards departments, the Police and all those we do on a regular basis, to be able to say you're an IIP and also an award winning retailer, it has a lot of sense, because they know how difficult it is to get IIP. That continues to be a benefit also. It is also a unique benefit to the industry." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Thus, the perceptual value linked to external bodies, rather than customers, is considered very valuable for the organization being treated as an equally professional high street retailer. The link to customers, however, is limited when the organization has to follow particular stipulations related to highlighting and sharing their IIP achievement:

"And even to date, we are not allowed to put our plaque anywhere outside of the building. We're only allowed to put it on the inside of the building, which is a little hypocritical on their part as we are not allowed to display our IIP." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

"You're not allowed to celebrate with everyone in the sex industry. That was one of their stipulations. If we were to succeed in the IIP, then we were not allowed to show it to the public. They would have to come into the shop to see it. So you'll see the plaques behind the counters rather than at the front of the shop. Although, we have it on our headed paper and we are very open about it wherever we can be." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

The organization's inability to share their IIP success is further condemned by the type of industry they operate in. In other words, because of the particular products their customers seek, IIP is considered to bear little significance, if any, inside the store:

> "Whether a customer walks into a sex shop and says 'oh wow, they are an investor in people', I doubt very much it even crosses their mind." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

In terms of training and development, the respondents believe opportunities are plentiful and obtainable:

> "If a member of staff says 'I want to progress here', then we'd invest in that person." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

The expense and type of training and development activity, however, is clearly distinguished between manager and front-line employee roles:

> "Most training comes in-house, the external training comes with the management [roles]." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

In short, employees tend to be restricted to in-house activities, where as managers get access to external opportunities which are considered to be outside of the organization's capability to deliver enhancements on these advanced roles.

5.9. Conclusion

The profiles above provide a portal into the organizations used within this research project. These help to contextualize and frame the findings and subsequent data analysis that follow. Each organizational journey regarding IIP recognition, from the perspective of managers and front-line employees, has been acknowledged. In addition, a brief synopsis pertaining to the existing management styles and organizational cultures is introduced to assist in gaining an understanding of the cases used.

Data findings

5.10. Introduction

An extended summary of the categories and codes can be found in the **Data Findings Table** (**Appendix three**). Within that table, the categories and codes were constructed and developed from a combination of addressing the research questions within this project, exploring the surrounding literature on IIP and the collection of primary data. Codes were continuously developed and refined throughout the data collection process, as well as often being directly related to the particular questions posed within the interviews (sample questionnaire provided in **Appendix one**). The following insights regarding the data collection process provide an introduction to some of the key codes that impact of the subsequent data analysis section. These present a brief but informative glimpse into the complex qualitative data collected. Each of the areas presented is related to its relevant research question. In addition, there is an explanation as to the meaning of each code, a succinct summary of the findings and an example quotation to exemplify the data collected. Single examples of quotations are provided here to avoid mass repetition within the subsequent data analysis and discussion section.

A total of thirty-eight transcribed semi-structured interviews contribute to the data findings expressed below. The following is a breakdown of the interview numbers according to the organization studied. This helps to visualize and begin to understand the context of the findings:

- ➢ High School – 10 interviews
- ➢ University – 10 interviews
- ➢ Catering department – 6 interviews
- ➢ Defence organization – 3 interviews
- ➢ Transport company – 5 interviews
- ➢ Third sector organization – 2 interviews
- ➢ Adult themed retailer – 2 interviews

5.11. Findings tables

Codes relating to research question one:

How do experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance?

Code: *Why* – *relates to feelings on why IIP status was first achieved and is subsequently maintained*
Summary: Within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer, interviewees felt that IIP status was first achieved to represent standards of practice that had already been attained. Respondents within the university make reference to a shift towards IIP in the 1990s that coincides with the behaviour of Higher Education establishments at that time.
Example quotation: "We actually got a gong for something we're already doing, rather than chasing a gong and having to put something in place to get the gong." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Ease* – *relates to interviewees feelings on achieving IIP recognition with ease*
Summary: For the school, catering department, defence organization, transport company, third sector organization and adult themed retailer, it is felt that IIP recognition was easy to achieve because significant changes in practice had been made prior to the involvement/ consideration of the standard. Respondents within the university were unsure of the original changes that were required for initial recognition, although they feel that IIP recognition is easy to maintain.
Example quotation: "We used it [IIP] because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here." Catering respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Contribution* – *relates to feelings on how much contribution IIP has had on training*
Summary: Feelings relating to the contribution of IIP on training are mixed – some respondents were even struggling to formalize an opinion. Some interviewees feel there must be a link or association, but others, especially those that understand IIP to a greater extent, suggest training and development quality has come, and remains, completely independent of IIP input.
Example quotation: "We've always done training and always will do training, regardless of IIP." Catering respondent – support role.

Code: *Stopped* – *relates to interviewees feelings within the defence organization on why IIP accreditation was ceased*
Summary: Almost all interviewees strongly feel that their organizations can sustain quality without IIP involvement or recognition. Some respondents within the university remain unsure of any potential differences.
Example quotation: "Effectively, we grew beyond it [IIP]." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Knowledge* – *relates to interviewees' knowledge of IIP*
Summary: Knowledge of IIP is generally found to be very limited throughout the cases studied, especially within front-line employees. The level of knowledge tends to improve with progression up the management hierarchy. Direct experience with IIP assessment does link to improved levels of knowledge, although this is inconsistently found.
Example quotation: "The only thing I know about Investors In People is it's at the bottom of our headed paper." University respondent – support role.

Code: *Following* – *relates to feelings on whether IIP is followed all the time*
Summary: With knowledge relating to IIP being limited within all the organizations, and with training and development practices being improved before IIP involvement (within the high school, the catering department, defence organization, the transport company, third sector organization and adult themed retailer), the majority of respondents question whether the principles and ideals of the standard are being followed. It is felt that IIP is only really followed when initial assessment or reassessment is imminent.
Example quotation: "Besides seeing a plaque in a reception or whatever, I'm not entirely sure that people are fully aware or on board with it." High School respondent – line manager.

Code: *Unique* – *relates to unique or unforeseen benefits that have arisen from IIP recognition*
Summary: The catering department achieved IIP recognition where the entire trust had failed. This gave the department initial kudos and helped to improve their profile of work with regards to care of patients. The adult themed retailer gained the unique benefit of achieving greater professional status amongst other retailers, training standards departments, councils and the Police.
Example quotation: "They tried in the trust to do it [attain IIP accreditation] and failed miserably, so sometimes we use it as a 'look at what we can do and you can't', so we always promote and always brag about it, which I think is really, really good." Catering respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Feelings* – relates to the feelings interviewees have about their organization
Summary: Nearly all interviewees expressed positive feelings towards their organizations. The university provided the only exceptions, whereby concerns over a lack of job security, a difficult first year and the high level of administration work hinder the general positive feedback. Many of the respondents commented upon the current divergent state of their workplaces.
Example quotation: "I love it down here, it's my second home." High school respondent – support role.

Code: *Availability* – relates to perceptions on the availability of training
Summary: Respondents generally felt that training is readily available. However, a small minority mentions budget problems and relevance issues within the high school, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer, as well as a 'glass ceiling' for higher management roles within the transport company.
Code: *Progression* – relates to perceptions on progression opportunities within the organization
Summary: Generally, progression within the organizations studied is felt to be achievable. However, there is a small minority within the school, the university and the transport company that feel otherwise, due to limited budgets, short-term contracts and limited training availability for senior management roles respectively.
Example quotation: "All staff, I think, are given a chance to show themselves, prove themselves." High School respondent – teacher.

Code: *Empower-train* – relates to any examples of empowerment opportunities within the organization
Summary: A number of interviewees across the five large organizations mentioned the importance and possibility of empowerment, employee involvement, multi-skilling and/or job rotation opportunities. The importance of empowerment was played down within the small organizations.
Example quotation: "Empowerment is important to staff development." University respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Clash-guide* – *relates to any potential clashes between IIP and any other quality improvement tools and techniques or industry standards*
Summary: Interviewees throughout all seven organizations suggested there appears to be no significant clashes between IIP and other quality improvement tools and techniques or industry standards.
Code: *Standing* – *relates to the standing of IIP compared to other quality improvement tools and techniques or industry standards*
Summary: Interviewees within all organizations that had achieved other quality improvement tools and/or techniques (the high school, the university, the catering department, the defence organization and the third sector organization) suggested clearly that these standards had a greater standing than that of IIP. For the remaining two organizations (the transport company and the adult themed retailer), the relevant industry rewards were felt to hold a greater standing than that of IIP also.
Example quotation: "ISO 9001 takes priority over IIP. The processes it provokes are clearer, easier for us to conform to, easier for us to institute in practice and maintain. It just sits more comfortably with the organization." Third sector respondent – senior manager

Code: *Day-to-day* – *relates to the impact of day-to-day activities on IIP*
Summary: It is clear within all of the organizations that IIP is not a priority concern on a day-to-day basis amidst other more pressing organizational activities. Indeed, some interviewees admitted that IIP only came to the forefront when reassessment was immediately imminent. Respondents from all organizations highlighted how interest in IIP rapidly fades between assessments.
Example quotation: "IIP does not come into the picture really with the day-to-day running of the department." Catering respondent – front-line employee.

Code: *Outlook* – *relates to limitations pertaining to the outlook of IIP recognition overall*
Summary: Several respondents from all organizations highlighted limitations when commenting on their IIP outlook. In other words, there are a number of concerns over the sustained relevance and applicability of IIP.
Example quotation: "IIP is merely a tick box exercise, it's old hat now." University respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Continuation – relates to opinions regarding the continuation of IIP recognition whilst using other quality improvement tools and techniques*

Summary: The defenece organization and third sector organization raised particular concern with the continuation of IIP amidst other already achieved quality improvement tools and techniques. Indeed, it was one of the primary factors for the defence organization ceasing accreditation.

Example quotation: "In a small business, to be working towards two quality standards, with the inkling of a third in the background, it's not helpful … those processes don't necessarily sit comfortably together either, so you have to work out more bridges, so you're hitting both. So may be just going with ISO 9001 will be a real positive for us." Third sector organization – senior manager.

Code: *Incompatible – relates to feelings concerning the compatibility of IIP in particular sectors*

Summary: Respondents within the third sector organization raised particular concerns regarding the compatibility of IIP within the not-for-profit sector. It is felt that the business driven ideologies of IIP do not merge comfortably with those of a not-for-profit organization.

Example quotation: "The most important factor is that you find a standard that is particularly appropriate for the organization you have and the sector you sit in. And I'm not sure that IIP, with its business face, sits comfortably within my own organization and the sector." Third sector organization – senior manager.

Code: *Ethos – relates to feelings concerning the ethos of training and development before IIP recognition*

Summary: A number of respondents within six organizations (the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer) highlighted the existence of a training and development ethos before IIP recognition. In other words, these organizations developed a culture of training and development excellence prior to IIP involvement. Importantly, the university does not serve as a deviant case; respondents could not remember the original connotations surrounding initial IIP assessment.

Example quotation: "If I was going on a course, it was before IIP came along. I was sent on a [training] course [and] they sent me on a management course…that's before we got [IIP]…I'm arranging courses now for my [employees] to go on a computer course and I do that whether we had IIP or not." Transport respondent.

Code: *Bureaucracy* – *relates to the level of bureaucratic exacerbation that IIP creates*
Summary: It is agreed within all seven organizations that IIP can exacerbate bureaucracy. The level of impact on bureaucracy, however, is not considered to be that damaging or influential on the standing of IIP.
Example quotation: "Some people would see that [IIP assessment] as unnecessary bureaucracy … doesn't mean I don't curse the bastards for bureaucracy from time-to-time when they're making me do something." University respondent – senior management.

Code: *Duplication* – *relates to potential duplication of training evaluation processes between IIP and other quality improvement tools and techniques*
Summary: Respondents within the defence organization and third sector organization took particular issue with the duplication of other training evaluation processes. Indeed, it is one of the reasons why the defence organization ceased IIP accreditation. For the third sector organization, it has led to a number of discussions within management where the future of IIP has been contemplated.
Example quotation: "We have other processes, like we have an employee survey … and all of a sudden you start thinking 'well, hang on, we've got two kind of assessment processes here that's delivering the same output in terms of planning against these areas, so why are we doing both?'" Defence respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Importance* – relates to feelings as to the importance of the IIP logo/ symbols
Summary: The IIP logo/ symbols are thought to be very important visual aspects of recognition all seven of the organizations studied. In the defence organization, however, the value of the IIP logo/ symbols is thought to have significantly reduced since the nineties and since more small organizations have achieved status. The transport company and adult themed retailer also highlight that its respective industry's are unconcerned with IIP, which reduces its value and significance.
Example quotation: "[The IIP logo/symbols are] very important. It shows everybody what we've got, and what we've done, and what we've achieved in such a short space of time." Transport respondent – line manager.

Code: *Intrinsic* – relates to feelings of an intrinsic ability to deliver quality without IIP
Summary: Interviewees from four of the organizations feel strongly that good practice has existed and does exist outside of the IIP's influence. Only respondents within the transport company are split as to whether or not IIP has actually made an integral contribution.
Example quotation:

Interviewer: "Do you think it [the IIP logo/symbols] makes a difference to the boobs customers?"

Respondent: "Yeah, I do. They must see a big difference in the way we treat and respect the customers."

I: "In terms of the [IIP] plaque though, are they not too fussed about the plaque, are they more bothered about the service?"

R: "I think they're more bothered about the service."

I: "So perhaps they're…not consciously seeing it?"

R: "I don't think so, no (agreeing with the interviewer)."

I: "They are just getting the benefits of it?"

R: "Yeah, basically." Transport respondent – line manager.

Code: *Customer* – relates to feelings on whether the IIP logo/symbol makes any difference to customers' perceptions
Summary: It is strongly felt by the majority of interviewees that the IIP logo/ symbols makes little or no difference to customer perceptions – only two respondents within the catering department suggest a positive impact.
Example quotation: "Would they [the customers] notice it [IIP recognition]? We know as a department [we have IIP], but does anybody else?" Catering respondent – front-line employee.

Code: *Employment* – relates to feelings on whether IIP makes any difference to applying for jobs
Summary: The majority of interviewees believe there is nominal difference made to them when applying for a job within an organization with IIP status.
Example quotation: "When I came here, they didn't have it [IIP] then, but it's not something I would look for, if you know what I mean, I would have come here for the job. I wouldn't have looked for IIP." Transport respondent – front-line employee.
Summary: The majority of interviewees believe there is nominal difference made to others when applying for a job within an organization with IIP status. Some respondents suggest it could possibly impact on those interested in the standard.
Example quotation: "Nobody who comes for a job ever says 'oh by the way, have you got IIP?' … I just think for most people when it comes to getting a job, they're not bothered … it comes so far down their list of requirements after 'what's the pay?', 'what's the holidays like?', 'what hours do I have to work?'. I think for the vast majority of people they're the primary things, and if you're lucky, if you're very lucky, they might even think 'and they are IIP accredited', even if they don't mention it. But I think for the vast majority of people it's just lost of them." Transport respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Value* – relates to the perceived value of the IIP logo/ symbols in relation to other organizations
Summary: This code became prominent when questioning the defence organization respondents on whether they lost anything of significance when ceasing IIP recognition. It was felt that the increase in uptake for IIP recognition in SMEs potentially reduces the value for larger organizations.
Example quotation: "When a hairdresser, teashop or local butcher has IIP, it does question its value within a large organization that has sophisticated training and development." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Code: *Loss* – relates to the differences perceived after ceasing IIP recognition
Summary: This code is only relevant to the defence organization. It was clearly felt that nothing of significance was lost when ceasing IIP recognition. The attainment and value of other internationally renowned quality initiatives far outweighed any potential loss associated with IIP recognition.
Example quotation: "I don't necessarily think we do anything different now and within the area of learning and development than we did when we had IIP. We are a large organization, we actually do have a clear vision and strategy as a company, and then we obviously link the learning and development strategy to the vision and direction of the company." Defence respondent – senior manager.

5.12. Conclusion

This section introduced, explained and provided examples of relevant codes that relate directly to the subsequent data analysis. An extended table of categories and codes can be found in **Appendix three**. The following section explores the meanings of the findings introduced to assist in answering the research questions posed at the start of this project. As a precursor to the data analysis, it is important to introduce one more term that is pivotal to the discussion section: 'themes'. To avoid confusion between categories and codes, the term 'theme' is used to describe a particular area of analysis. A 'theme' can draw data from any combination of categories and codes to deliver the complex and required depth of analysis and interpretation of generated insights. In effect, 'themes' are the final product and key signposts drawn from the analytical process.

5.13. Introduction

The data analysis and discussion section is split into five themes. The first three relate directly to the research questions posed within the introduction chapter. The final two represent the exploration and interpretation of the initial three themes leading to the development of two new theoretical outlooks. These are representative of the findings concerning the seven cases studied. Each theme provides an in-depth exploration of the primary data collected with relation to the greater body of knowledge surrounding IIP. Quotations are constantly used to support and enhance the areas of discussion. Finally, conclusions are presented that reflect upon the impact for HR practitioners and the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

5.14. Theme one: How do experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance?

A major focal point from the cases studied addresses the alleged causal link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance proposed by IIP UK (2008e), Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Cowling (2008), Bourne *et al.* (2008) and Martin and Elwes (2008). The findings help to move the surrounding field forward by tackling the issue of how experiences surrounding IIP accreditation processes mediate impressions of business performance. In other words, there is an exploration of to what extent IIP is actually responsible for increases in business performance, a conundrum that has remained ever since the genesis of the standard. The discussion within this theme is not looking to discredit the findings that suggest IIP recognized organizations perform better than non-IIP organizations; rather, the intention is to provide timely and detailed propositions as to why that link exists. This importantly moves beyond the simplification implied by the authors mentioned above that the IIP standard is *directly* responsible. Consequently, the discussion leads to a number of concerns for HR practitioners and the strategies organizations adopt pertaining to employee development.

Given the paucity of qualitative studies concerning IIP highlighted within the literature review (e.g. Berry and Grieves, 2003; Collins and Smith, 2004), in-depth semi-structured interviews contribute towards filling the gap in knowledge. This is achieved through the development of insights that provide a unique perspective on the firmly established issue of contention regarding business performance. In addition, Grugulis and Bevitt's (2002) criticism of studies solely using employers' opinions of employees is addressed. This is achieved by directly involving the opinions of managers and front-line employees.

As previously discussed and since its conception in 1991, there have been many claims that IIP increases performance and profitability (TQM International, 1994; Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; McLuskey, 1999; McAdam *et al.* 2002; IIP UK, 2008a, 2008c). The literature review critiques this supposition and the claims surrounding such links when the standard lacks tangibility in terms of measuring its success (Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Smith, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Hoque, 2003; Robson *et al.,* 2005; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). It certainly appears that a dichotomy of opinion concerning performance and profitability connections with IIP recognition remains. With the most recent studies asserting a causal link, HR practitioners and managers could almost be persuaded towards the positive connotations asserted with IIP recognition. This research goes some way, however, to redressing the balance by generating contemporary empirical insights that explore these unsubstantiated assumptions and provide alternative reasoning as to why IIP recognized organizations may perform better than non-IIP recognized organizations.

Decisively, six of the seven case study organizations – the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization, and the adult themed retailer – decided to gain IIP recognition *after* making large changes to their existing approaches towards quality performance through people. Changes to training and development programmes, for example, were conceived and implemented prior to recognition from, or involvement with, the IIP standard. In other words, these organizations made no attempt to pursue, or even consider, IIP recognition at the time of making performance enhancing changes – it was an afterthought. Indeed, it appears that the 'best practice' considered essential for IIP

success (Taylor and McAdam, 2003) existed prior to involvement with the standard. For an organization initially engaging with IIP, this preexistence also seemingly bypasses any potential problems highlighted by Ram (2000) of defining 'best practice' in the first place, when this level of practice is already being achieved. The following quotations from interviewees typify the original approach to gaining IIP:

> "We actually got a gong for something we're already doing, rather than chasing a gong and having to put something in place to get the gong." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "It just rubberstamps a lot of the things we're doing already." High School respondent – line manager;

> "We used it [IIP] because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here." Catering respondent – senior manager;

> "Investors in People is just saying 'well yeah, you're doing it'." High School respondent – senior manager;

> "We had to make very few changes [for IIP recognition], because my background is business development and business analysis, so I'd actually already put in place processes and procedural staffing checks." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

The 'real bottom-line benefits' associated with engaging with IIP (Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a; Bourne *et al.,* 2008) could appear encouraging when the large organizations researched were all divergent and currently performing to a high standard at the time of interview. Indeed, this certainly implicates that the organizational investment in training and development practices had led to increases in business performance, as Kidger *et al.* (2004) argue. With the interviews for the small businesses being collected at a later time within a struggling economic climate, however, business performance levels would not support this outlook. Nevertheless, the difficulties in evaluating and measuring the success of IIP (Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,*

1998; Smith, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson *et al.,* 2005; Higgins and Cohen, 2006) creates the problem of actually connecting IIP with increases in business performance. The quotations above, however, help to suggest that IIP involvement and/or recognition did not lead to increased business performance; rather, it was the change in mindset previously and independently that led to such benefits. This would certainly support Westhead and Storey (1997), Cosh *et al.* (1998), Smith *et al.* (2002), Robson *et al.* (2005), and Higgins and Cohen (2006), whereby the assumption and connection with financial gain is questionable. Indeed, Smith *et al.'s* (2002) argument that the impact IIP has on turnover is ill-defined seems fitting, where advocating literature (Hillage and Moralee, 1996; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a; McAdam *et al.,* 2002; Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008) and IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) appears adamant that there *is* a direct link with financial gain. In addition, these findings could indicate one possibility as to why 29% of 14 organizations felt performance was unchanged within the first year of IIP recognition (McAdam *et al.,* 2002). These findings begin to ask serious questions of the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

The seventh case study yet to be mentioned, the university, gained IIP recognition at a time when most other universities began to actively pursue it. This recognition came in the early 1990s, but the data interpretation remains unclear as to what original changes may have been made to incorporate and accommodate the standard. Even those interviewees involved within the initial recognition process cannot recollect why the organization became associated with IIP. This means the university cannot be included directly and effectively within this discussion; however, it also means the organization cannot be used as a deviant case. In essence, the university is unable to clearly support or deny connections between IIP and increases in business performance at the time of initial involvement and recognition with the standard. This means mere speculation is left to determine the impact of IIP in the early 1990s. Thus, the lack of clarification and available data leads to this particular case being exempt from this theme.

For four of the large organizations and the third sector organization, IIP was not used to help achieve the increases in business performance; instead, the standard acted as a mere depiction of the achievements already established. Things were not too much different within the adult themed retailer:

"When they came and assessed us, we pretty much did 80% of what was required for the standard anyway." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

This significant lack, and often complete absence, of direct involvement would certainly question the framework proposed by Bell *et al.* (2002a) – *The evolutionary journey of IIP* (**Figure 2**) – that implicates a longitudinal perspective of benefits when an organization is engaged with IIP. In contrast to suggestions from Taylor and Thackwray (1996), it appears that IIP involvement and recognition did not act as a cultural development tool to enable an organization to become a learning organization. Instead, any cultural changes required or desired have been made independently. The following quotations highlight an example of how the culture of training and development had been integrated prior to IIP involvement:

"If I was going on a course, it was before IIP came along. I was sent on a [training] course [and] they sent me on a management course … that's before we got [IIP] … I'm arranging courses now for my [employees] to go on a computer course and I do that whether we had IIP or not." Transport respondent – line manager;

"We've always done training [prior to IIP involvement] and always will do training." Catering respondent – senior manager;

"I think that the ethos of valuing training, learning and development was already within the organization and within its members [prior to IIP involvement]." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

To go one step further, IIP reassessment for the third sector organization highlighted a gap in practice that appeared within their initial recognition process:

"We actually got pulled up for the same thing as in the first assessment, but yes, we still achieved recognition." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

Hence, a crucial area for improvement between assessments was not successfully addressed. Importantly, this provides a key example of where IIP involvement has had minimal, if any, impact on training and development practices.

Furthermore, the defence organization ceased IIP recognition around 2001 because they felt they have now progressed beyond its limited contribution:

"Effectively, we grew beyond it [IIP]." Defence respondent – senior manager.

The previous changes to organizational practice highlighted assist in exploring the potential reasons as to the increased performance and profitability nexus within IIP recognized organizations compared to non-IIP organizations.

To build on the above, IIP status could be seen as a subsequent means of simply gaining official recognition for their efforts in achieving changes to organizational practice. The quotations above certainly reflect this outlook. For the adult themed retailer in particular, a primary factor for attaining IIP recognition was the ability to establish their business as a professional entity in retail:

"[We attained IIP to gain] An acceptance into mainstream retail. We wanted to be seen and taken seriously as just another high street store. Being part of IIP, what it means dealing with councils and training standards departments, the Police and all those we do on a regular basis, to be able to say you're an IIP and also an award winning retailer, it has a lot of sense, because they know how difficult it is to get IIP. That continues to be a benefit also. It is also a unique benefit to the industry." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Comparisons can be drawn with the findings of Hoque (2003), Ram (2000) and Douglas *et al.* (1999), whereby IIP recognition is argued to merely represent a 'badge'/ 'plaque on the wall' (the perceptual value of the IIP logo/ symbols is critiqued within theme three). Indeed, this questions the argument of Lentell and Morris (2001) that IIP must

deliver success because of its long-term existence and popularity. Instead, the resultant consequences of involvement with IIP meant that when it came to the initial assessment, five of the seven organizations passed straight through without initial changes in practice being required.

Within all seven cases, training and development progression availability and equality of opportunity is thought to be widespread. The following quotations highlight this:

"All staff, I think, are given a chance to show themselves, prove themselves." High School respondent – teacher;

"During an appraisal a couple of years ago, I suggested going on a course and I was sent off and I got a certificate in [named subject], so that was interesting (laughs). They've always been quite positive for me and I always feel like I've got something out of them and that's been very useful." University respondent – support role;

"I do suffer from dyslexia so [a senior manager] was appreciative of me telling [him/her] that and [he/she] did make time for me to go to college and help me with reading and writing … [A line manager] has been appreciative of what my needs have been." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"It [the training schedule] is [achievable] for me and my staff, yeah. Every member of staff that I've just taken on, we've just started a new system now of fast track new [employees within a specific job role]. They are automatically sent on a supervisory management course and then they automatically go on a computer course, so I mean it's an ongoing thing. Computers now are coming more and more into our office and we've got an older element of staff, so they're not used to computers, so we're just arranging new computer courses for everyone to go on to. So yeah, it's an ongoing thing and it is achievable." Transport respondent – line manager;

"If a member of staff says 'I want to progress here', then we'd invest in that person." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

The findings from the organizations studied provide an important additional perspective compared with Hoque's (2008: p.57) argument that IIP could be "failing to live up to its promise regarding equality of opportunity" for training and development. On the one hand, Hoque's views are not reflected because equality of opportunity is felt to exist. Yet on the other hand, IIP is failing to provide an equality of opportunity when these opportunities had already become available previous to IIP involvement; thus, Hoque's (2008) argument remains valid within this context. This continues to question IIP's connection to business performance when the standard has minimal, if any, impact on training and development practice improvements.

IIP UK (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and Malleson (2007) boast that IIP recognition leads to increases in job satisfaction. Indeed, a high level of job satisfaction does appear to exist within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer:

"I love it down here, it's my second home." High school respondent – support role;

"I just love the company." Transport respondent – line manager;

"I've got twenty-one years in the field and sixty-something days now. It seems a long time to be working here, but I don't see any reason at the moment why I would want to leave unless someone came up with this brilliant job offer and wanted to give me 50 pounds an hour; then I might think about it. But I'm happy where I am, I enjoy the work." Catering respondent – line manager;

"It looks very rosy for the next ten years. We've got an order book we would never have even dreamed of in 2000." Defence respondent – senior manager;

"I like it [the organization and area of business] because it allows me to be creative … it allows me to broaden my experience of knowledge. I often get the opportunity to take risks, and I like all of those opportunities." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

"[The organization is like a] Family. Everybody gets on, everybody interlinks with everybody all the time." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

With changes being made to training and development practices prior to IIP involvement and recognition, however, it appears that the standard's impact on job satisfaction is limited. In contrast, the attainment of external recognition can perhaps provide a temporary boost in motivation. The catering department, for example, gained initial kudos for achieving IIP recognition where the trust had failed:

"They tried in the trust to do it [attain IIP accreditation] and failed miserably, so sometimes we use it as a 'look at what we can do and you can't', so we always promote and always brag about it, which I think is really, really good." Catering respondent – senior manager.

Nevertheless, links to job satisfaction through changes implemented with regards to training and development practices cannot be attributed to IIP involvement and recognition. The following quotations support this outlook:

"We've always done training and always will do training, regardless of IIP." Catering respondent – support role;

"I mean, I have to say if I was going on a course, it was before IIP came along." Transport respondent – line manager;

"IIP? Well, first of all, we used it because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here." Catering respondent – senior manager.

Thus, the benefits implied that connect job satisfaction increases and IIP (Malleson, 2007; IIP UK, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) are disputed within this context. This means that questions raised by Robson *et al.* (2005) and Silvestro (2002) about the direct relationship between job satisfaction and business performance become irrelevant within this discussion when job satisfaction increases (those connected with training and development changes) are detached from IIP. Explicitly, increases in job satisfaction that have been delivered as a consequence of changes in training and development practices were effectively achieved prior to, and independently of, IIP involvement and recognition.

To expand further on the above discussion of changes to training and development practices, there are a number of criticisms within the literature that do not fit the context of this research project. Smith and Collins (2007) and Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) argue that an engagement with IIP can raise difficulties when formulating and negotiating individualistic training programmes for staff, because of the standardizing nature of the standard. The earlier quotations highlighting IIP as a 'gong' or 'rubberstamp', however, illustrate that the standard was not a significant part of changes made to training programmes – it was merely external recognition for improvements already made. If problems had existed, they were overcome prior to IIP involvement. Indeed, the following quotations emphasize IIP's contribution towards changes in training and development practices:

> "I don't think investors in people has [contributed] in itself … the [training and development] philosophy already existed." High School respondent – senior manager;

> "Not a lot … I can't really see a massive connection there." High School respondent – line manager;

> "We've always done training and always will do training, regardless of IIP." Catering respondent – support role;

"The university follows the [enhanced training and development] philosophy anyway." University respondent – line manager;

"Zilch." University respondent – lecturer;

"Not much. Because I think that the ethos of valuing training, learning and development was already within the organization and within its members [prior to IIP involvement]." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

"I don't think the philosophy [of high quality training and development] is being provoked by IIP." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

One the one hand, this highlights the straightforward compatibility between six of the organizations and IIP when issues integrating the standard do not exist. To go one step further, it appears compatibility issues with regards to language and flexibility (e.g. Smith, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Hoque *et al.,* 2005) – an issue addressed within **Theme two** – are seemingly bypassed when IIP is not involved in changes designed and implemented. On the other hand, this underlines the standard's withdrawn impact on changes made to training and development practices; thus, leading to further questions over the relevance of the standard and its impact on business performance.

The above issues relating to training and development practices and job satisfaction can be connected to the literature on empowerment. There are a number of authors who argue that empowerment is a recognized business competitiveness improvement approach (e.g. Dale, 1994; Gadd and Oakland, 1995; Karia and Asaari, 2006). Importantly, these arguments are not universally accepted (e.g. Parnell and Crandell, 2001; Silvestro, 2005; Robson *et al.,* 2005). Nevertheless, the importance of empowerment is significantly highlighted within the research organizations:

"Staff are empowered through targets and development … empowerment helps to motivate and encourage staff to develop the way they want to." High School respondent – senior manager;

"Empowerment is important to staff development." University respondent – senior manager;

"There is lots of job rotation and multi-skilling … I really like the empowering opportunities, I am able to progress as slowly or as fast as I want. I wouldn't like to be head chef, I wouldn't like the stress or the burden or the pressures of that sort of responsibility. I'm quite happy in the position I am at now, although, as I said, I've had lots of other jobs within the catering department in the past. I'm very much relied upon to go into whatever [area] and I can accomplish that job or task, so yes, I'm very relied upon in the catering department." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"Empowerment is important to keeping staff from being bored." Defence respondent – senior manager.

These quotations certainly support the crucial role of empowerment within training and development enhancements suggested by IIP UK (2008a, 2008b, 2008c). As with job satisfaction, however, connections to business performance become somewhat irrelevant when the principles of empowerment, through training and development practices, are integrated prior to IIP involvement. Nevertheless, it appears that empowerment has a positive impact upon staff. There was no suggestion within any of the interviews that empowerment acted as a mask for work intensification, a warning echoed by McArdle *et al.* (1995); nor did any respondents refer to any suspicions relating to increases in training and development activities, a potential concern raised by Rix (1994). Ultimately, if business performance has been improved through empowerment, the involvement of IIP is again questionable when the standard has had a clearly withdrawn impact on changes made to training and development practices.

Importantly, this research project reflects on interpretations after policy changes made to IIP in 2000 and 2004, as well as in response to the recent causal claims made by Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Cowling (2008), Bourne *et al.* (2008), Martin and Elwes (2008) and IIP UK (2008e). Thus, the findings presented provide fresh insights into this area of contention, despite similarities drawn with previous studies. Indeed, Hoque (2008)

argues that contemporary insights are required to understand the impact of these latest policy changes.

There are other data consistent throughout the seven sample organizations that support the questioning of the IIP recognition and business performance nexus proposed by IIP UK (2008e), Tamkin *et al.* (2008) and Cowling (2008). These findings concern the general lack of knowledge and understanding of IIP found throughout the workforces of each organization. In effect, this means staff cannot engage directly with the requirements of the standard if they do not know what it is or understand what it does. The following quotations are typical of the vast majority of responses provided by front-line employees when asked to clarify their knowledge and understanding concerning IIP:

> "It's just a name I've heard." High School respondent – support role;

> "I didn't take a lot of it in." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

> "The only thing I know about Investors In People is it's at the bottom of our headed paper." University respondent – support role.

It is perhaps somewhat disconcerting when Tickle and McLean (2004) suggest it is critical to realizing the true potential of IIP that managers and employees throughout an organization are informed about, and understand, how the standard works. Indeed, this is the very first stage of seven considered essential by Tickle and Mclean (2004: p.10, see **Table 1**: p.25 or p.187) within their framework, *The stages of the IIP journey*. This framework is constantly critiqued throughout this chapter as a prelude to the fourth theme (*Developing a more fitting framework for the IIP journey*), whereby a new and directly comparable framework is constructed. Within all seven organizations, however, it has been found that employees and, to a large extent, managers have limited knowledge and understanding of IIP and how it affects them and their career. Knowledge and understanding throughout the workforce of the organizations is considered by the majority of interviewees to be equally limited. These quotations typify how others within their organization view IIP:

"Besides seeing a plaque in a reception or whatever, I'm not entirely sure that people are fully aware or on board with it." High School respondent – line manager;

"Most people wouldn't necessarily understand it." University respondent - lecturer;

"I don't think a lot of people have a clue." High School respondent – senior manager;

"The understanding about what IIP is trying to provoke diminishes the further away you are from the core group of people who are trying to achieve it." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

"I think if you asked them to explain it, they would probably have a bit of a blank face." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager;

"I don't think IIP comes forefront to most people's minds, they just want to know how good a training they get and whether they enjoy the job." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Advocates of the standard, Tickle and McLean (2004: p.10), imply the true potential of IIP is not being realized within the first stage of the IIP *journey* if awareness of the standard is not being educated throughout the workforce. The limited knowledge and understanding of IIP found contributes to questioning the existence of the alleged causal link between the standard's recognition and increases in business performance. This is accomplished by revealing a lack of organizational commitment to IIP through the limited communication of the standard to staff; part of the IIP process deemed essential by Smith (2000). The six organizations with existing quality improvement practices prior to IIP consideration appear to have not found it a necessity for organizational success to inform and explain the role and existence of IIP to the staff. For the large organizations, this is reflected by their booming successes at the time of interview.

Perhaps one unforeseen benefit of integrating changes to organizational practices prior to IIP involvement and recognition is the overcoming of language issues associated with the standard (Harris, 2000; Hoque et al., 2005). Indeed, organizations have overcome potential implementation difficulties through bypassing the necessity to understand and communicate the language associated with IIP. In other words, the standard fits the organizational circumstances, and not the other way around. This, however, only continues to question the impact of IIP.

A lack of commitment to IIP leads to questions being raised over the relevance and sustainability of the standard. For a standard that is supposed to act as a 'quality improvement tool' (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10), the improvements made within six of the sample organizations, prior to any consideration of IIP recognition, suggest that this label appears inappropriate. The re-labeling of IIP under these conditions is explored within the last theme that constructs a new theoretical insight concerning the definition of the standard (*An alternative definition for IIP*) to fully appreciate the connotations of such a statement. Nevertheless, from the current position it can be understood that the level of application to IIP's ideals importantly differs from organization to organization. Consequently, a reduced involvement with the standard significantly impacts on the relevance and sustainability of IIP.

As IIP implementation is a top down process (Bell *et al.,* 2002a), it may be expected that the knowledge and understanding of the standard is greater within the management contingent. It therefore meets expectations that knowledge and understanding have been found to be greater within the management roles of all the organizations. The issue, however, is not that clear cut. Those in the highest positions within the management hierarchies retained the greatest depth of knowledge and understanding. In contrast, interviewees further down the management hierarchies are found to have knowledge and understanding similar to, or just above, that of other employees. Importantly, this cannot be said of the defence organization, because all interviewees came from high ranking management positions, although respondents felt a similar pattern would exist. The following quotations are some of the examples of managers' limited knowledge when asked to explain what IIP is:

"I don't really know to be honest." High School respondent – line manager;

"I don't know (laughs)" University respondent – line manager;

"I don't know about us doing anything with it, it's just what we see, it's just a plaque." Transport respondent – line manager.

These responses are perhaps not that surprising if managers, although onboard and committed to the ideology of IIP, are consumed by the day-to-day activities of the organization (Reade, 2004). Thus, employee development may indeed be seen as crucial, as suggested within Reade's (2004) findings, but a commitment to IIP is not treated as or considered an essential element of the training and development process. The ease with which six of the seven organizations achieved IIP recognition, however, suggests that a dilution of commitment to IIP is more likely to be because of the lack of involvement and necessity of the standard within the enhancement of training and development practices.

If some managers have limited knowledge and understanding of what IIP is, surely committing to their principles within a top-down approach reveals potentially concerning limitations. The benefits concerning increases in business performance continue to be questioned when the basic stages associated with the maximum potential of the standard simply do not exist. At the very least, the top-down communication of IIP appears to be ineffective or unnecessary. The need for such communication, however, may become redundant if IIP recognition is easy to achieve and sustain. This is especially prudent if the standard is simply being used as an external benchmark, rather than "a business improvement tool to raise their [the organization's] standards of quality and overall business performance" (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10). This continues to raise questions regarding the relevance and sustainable value and benefit of the standard.

This deficit in knowledge and understanding concerning IIP reveals an interesting conflict within the current literature. A prime example concerns a study by Bell *et al.* (2002a), whereby there is almost a tacit assumption that awareness concerning IIP is actually proactively sought during initial recognition. The data collected, however,

appears to show that the development of awareness has been skipped, or at least radically reduced within the vast majority of the workforce. This is made clear by the widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of IIP previously mentioned.

To conclude on knowledge and understanding, the severe underdevelopment of IIP awareness can be directly referred to the ease with which IIP recognition was achieved within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization, and the adult themed retailer. In other words, the first of seven stages to maximize the standard's potential suggested by Tickle and McLean (2004: p.10) as essential is not being adhered to. This in turn suggests that Hillage and Moralee's (1996) relatively early argument that IIP can increase workforce commitment appears overstated when staff lack even the basic awareness of the standard. Instead, with IIP recognition being relatively simple to attain for the organizations studied, either the maximum potential is not being achieved, or the potential has been achieved prior to recognition. In six of the cases, the latter would be more applicable, which is especially reflected within the large organizations where business performance is at an all time high. This would surely have connotations relating to the initial value of the standard, not to mention the sustainable value. For the university, the potential of the standard may still arguably be lacking according to Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10) stages within the IIP *journey*. With the initial changes for IIP recognition remaining unclear, however, it cannot be speculated the extent to which these deficits affect this issue.

The combination of issues above build upon the initial debate engaged, relating to changes prior to IIP consideration, to offer alternative reasons and support as to why an IIP recognized organization may perform better than a non-IIP organization. The list of issues suggested is not exhaustive. There could be other factors (rather than just IIP recognition and business performance) within the complex micro and macro-environments influencing the increased business performance and profitability, rather than the alleged causal relationship between these organizational variables. Further in-depth research beyond this study can contribute towards and build upon the findings here. In other words, subsequent studies can seek out and identify other areas of particular significance that may impact on and contribute towards the overall theme discussed.

For HR practitioners, a valuable and timely alternative discourse and perspective is introduced. This is especially pertinent to those practitioners considering a strategic approach that embraces employee development towards IIP recognition and the possibility of improved business performance and profitability. The alleged causal link suggested by IIP UK (2008e), Tamkin *et al.* (2008) and Cowling (2008) clearly needs exploration beyond the seven organizations studied here to fully understand why IIP recognized companies appear to outperform non-IIP organizations. Nevertheless, this research project importantly highlights that HR practitioners need to think very carefully about pursuing IIP in the belief that it will automatically lead to enhanced performance and profitability.

There is a simple realization for HR practitioners concerning the lack of knowledge and understanding of IIP; that is, organizations can actually achieve IIP recognition and status without full commitment to the standard. This may suit the needs of HR practitioners if external recognition is the only desired outcome. Naturally, this may be dependent on the situation of that organization. The high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer made significant changes to quality performance prior to considering IIP; thus, a similar venture of change is possible within an interested non-recognized organization. Hence, an organization is capable of producing the high levels of quality performance required for IIP recognition without the need to be committed to the standard. Importantly, the seeking of recognition from external standards for training and development changes integrated could simply be a natural progression for an organization, as well as being a critical motivator for engaging with IIP; especially when IIP is the most recognized and longest established standard relating to training and development practice. Thus, this could provide one clue as to why IIP recognized organizations may outperform non-IIP recognized organizations.

If HR practitioners are seeking to improve quality performance in tandem with IIP, however, the perspective on the standard can alter. Organizations may need to ensure that the *journey* potential is realized to gain the maximum from the asserted benefits connected with IIP recognition. This means that all seven stages of the IIP process (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10) may need to be followed to achieve that potential.

From this perspective, this approach may be critical to ensuring greater business performance compared to a non-IIP organization.

In terms of relevance and sustainability, the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer elicit trepidation concerning IIP. This is because the asserted value of the standard has been found to be significantly reduced when uncovering how training and development changes towards quality improvement were considered and implemented in reality. Indeed, Martin and Elwes (2008) argument that IIP is the UK's premier business improvement tool, and Smith *et al.'s* (2002) suggestion that IIP has become a kitemark in terms of training and development practices, appear to be somewhat overstated propositions. The relevance and sustainability of the standard is abridged when IIP frameworks and ideologies are not considered or adhered to. This is not to say that ideologies concerning approaches to training and development, however, will be significantly different. Importantly, ideologies, whether similar or otherwise, are not introduced and maintained under the IIP umbrella; they are incorporated naturally as organizational norms and this is separate from the standard. This means IIP recognition may simply represent external recognition, a 'badge' or 'plaque on the wall' for something an organization is already doing, as Hoque (2003), Ram (2000) and Douglas *et al.* (1999) suggest. This in turn reduces the relevance and sustainability of the standard if organizations are not reaping the asserted benefits connected to IIP involvement and recognition.

A lack of commitment to IIP also indicates a significantly reduced value in terms of relevance and sustainability. If the full potential of the standard is not being exploited, then the value has significantly reduced prior to initial recognition. Even the advocates of IIP would support this view (e.g. McLuskey, 1999; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; Tickle and McLean, 2004). The relevance and sustainable value of subsequent reassessments is in turn affected if the standard had so little to offer, in terms of benefits suggested, in the first place. This appears to be the case within six of the seven cases studied. The university remains a question mark because it is unclear as to what changes may have been made to incorporate and accommodate the standard before initial recognition – this is discussed within the limitations section, but importantly, it does not act as a conflicting case study.

These issues over the reduced relevance and sustainable value of IIP links to a study by Down and Smith (1999), who suggest organizations achieving recognition tend to be those with the least to change and the least to gain. The high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer all fall under this description with ease. These organizations were seeking external recognition and not a *journey* of quality improvement in tandem with IIP. This means these organizations are under no illusion as to why recognition was first achieved. They were seeking quality improvement prior to IIP consideration; for them, the standard retains primary value as an external badge of recognition in the eyes of current and potential employees and customers. Although this study finds this perceptual value to be limited (see theme three), the assumption remained a powerful motivation for the achievement and maintenance of recognition from the standard.

By researching in-depth something fairly straightforward to uncover – the level of knowledge and understanding concerning IIP – all is not as it appears to be with IIP recognition. Other research within this area has not generally been connected to these codes of analysis; instead, they have tended to focus on other areas of the standard's assessment process. By concentrating on what appears to be a fundamental and often assumed starting point regarding the introduction of IIP (e.g. Bell *et al.,* 2002a; Tickle and McLean, 2004), however, questions can be raised concerning relevance and sustainability.

Using Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10) stages of the IIP *journey*, keeping the standard relevant must be difficult if there is little commitment to and communication of IIP. Sustaining the standard must also be difficult if the ideology is not being directly and continuously adhered to. If this communication and commitment is considered essential to achieving the maximum from benefits suggested, surely recognition should be associated with this level of knowledge and understanding. Instead, the organizations studied here appear to retain and maintain the standard with ease. In addition, these organizations are thriving in terms of performance. Therefore, the importance of a commitment to and communication of IIP is not only questionable, but it is significantly reduced within the cases studied. The relevance of IIP to staff seems to be significantly

low, questioning the sustainable value of the brand when an extensively large majority of the workforce is not directly working towards and understanding the related ideals. These ideals could appear elsewhere indirectly, but this study concentrated on the direct relationships and effects concerning the standard.

With questions raised concerning the IIP recognition and business performance nexus proposed, it is important to state the possible beginnings of generalization within the findings. One reason for this is because the findings on changes to practices prior to IIP recognition are not restricted to one sector. The ability to saturate data findings across additional case studies has helped to highlight possible alternative reasons for improved business performance across a range of organizational sectors. In addition, the findings here are comparable to older studies prior to IIP policy changes in 2004; in particular, studies by Hoque (2003), Ram (2000) and Douglas *et al.* (1999), whereby the contribution of IIP is questioned. Although these studies lack the post 2004 perspective, highlighted as important by Hoque (2008), they still enhance the findings by showing these issues exist outside the confines of this research project within different organizational surroundings.

Down and Smith's (1999) and Quayle and Murphy's (1999) research could also suggest the development of generalization might be possible. Respectively, this is because it has already been found that organizations have little to change and therefore gain when implementing IIP; and fad periods of interest suggests that knowledge and understanding of the standard in some organizations will fluctuate throughout the lifetime of recognition. The cases studied here expand on these original findings by drawing out and connecting the similarities. Thus, there are prospects for generalization, but further studies beyond this research sample context are required to fully develop the fresh insights gathered. Nevertheless, the insights uncovered have been firmly established within the cases studied here.

5.14. Theme two: What influences the standing of IIP in organizations?

This theme explores what influences the standing of IIP within organizations. The literature review covered a number of areas, including critical perspectives that warn of fad periods of interest in IIP, the impact of other quality standards existing within an organization, and various potential barriers regarding the implementation of IIP. These areas have been explored and evaluated within the cases studied to understand their impact upon the research question. The in-depth nature of the semi-structured interviews used provides a unique perspective on the surrounding issues. Ultimately, these areas can impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP in a positive or negative way, dependent on their importance and recognized influence.

Within the literature review, the findings within Quayle and Murphy's (1999) research that relate to fad periods of interest when attaining and maintaining IIP recognition are pivotal to the initial discussion here. Indeed, Bell *et al.* (2002b) warn of IIP recognition merely being 'flavour of the month', a badge that simply reflects victory, valour or distinction. This outlook is echoed by Ram (2000), who warns of organizations using a minimalist approach towards the application of IIP procedures. The initial quotations below highlight how after initial recognition and subsequent reassessments are achieved, the interest in IIP fades rapidly until the next reassessment as the importance of day-to-day activities becomes reality within all seven organizations (Reade, 2004; CIPD, 2008):

> "Since the last IIP [assessment], we've never given IIP a second thought." High School respondent – senior manager;

> "I think probably we only addressed them [IIP recommendations for improvement before next assessment] in the third year when we were coming up for reassessment." Transport respondent – line manager;

> "IIP does not come into the picture really with the day-to-day running of the department." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"The world of IIP does not come into our minds when working on a day-to-day basis … I'm not sure that IIP, with its business face, sits comfortably within my own organization and the sector." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

"I don't think we sit there and go 'does this [training and development practice] fit and comply with IIP?' We do it and then we may assess whether it will go in [fit with IIP], when we're actually doing the reviews of it. The rest of the time, we don't give IIP any thought." Adult themed retailer – senior manager.

Thus, Quayle and Murphy's (1999) and Ram's (2000) concerns are well warranted in the light of the findings within the case samples when interest in the standard is clearly not continuous, which would lead to questions regarding the approach towards the application of IIP procedures. The subsequent impact means that the standing of IIP appears minimal within the day-to-day running of the business, including the training and development activities. This also exacerbates Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) concerns of IIP recognition merely being the 'flavour of the month' when organizations only seriously engage with the standard during the assessment process. The following quotations enhance the debate by highlighting serious limitations pertaining to the outlook of IIP recognition overall:

"IIP is merely a tick box exercise, it's old hat now." University respondent – senior manager;

"Training will be ongoing. For when any new staff coming into the department, they'll always put on the training … it's not like IIP is crucial to the existence of this training." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"It may be good to have IIP to look at, but in reality, its influence is minimal, if anything at all." Defence respondent – senior manager.

"The standard only acts as a benchmark, what impact beyond that can it have? It becomes background noise once assessment is dealt with." Transport respondent – line manager.

"We run them [training and development activities] totally independent [of IIP involvement] to be honest, we run them because we want to run our qualifications because we want our staff to be trained and we want them to progress through the gateways. From time to time, if we sit and match them both together [IIP and the existing training and development available], they both marry in really well ... We've made it match." Catering respondent – senior manager.

It appears from this initial discussion that interest in and interaction with IIP is significantly limited on a day-to-day basis. The standard does not have a very strong standing in relation to training and development practices when it is only really taken into consideration during times of assessment and reassessment. This is supported by the findings within **Theme 1**, whereby the impact of IIP on business performance is seriously questioned. Thus, the problems surrounding the existence of hard evidence with relation to IIP's integration and involvement (Quayle and Murphy, 1999; Ram, 2000; Smith, 2000; Smith and Taylor, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Collins and Smith, 2004; Robson *et al.,* 2005) are only further exemplified within this research project.

An important area for exploration regarding what influences the standing of IIP is how this approach fits with other quality improvement tools and techniques and quality standards. The particular approaches and standards used by the sample cases for comparison that are briefly introduced within the literature review are: ISO 9001:2000 (the defence organization and third sector organization have status); Lloyds Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) (the defence organization has status); Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (the university has status); Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) (the high school has status); the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) (the catering department follows this); the UK Bus Awards (UKBA) (the transport company has achieved this award in the past and still strives for it); and the Erotic Trade Only (ETO) Best Adult Retailer award (the adult themed retailer has won this award on a number of occasions and continues to strive towards it). Indeed, Lomas (2004) advocates the use of more than one quality improvement tool or technique in the pursuit of quality improvement success. As this section highlights below, however, the use of IIP amongst other quality improvement

tools and techniques has an impact on its standing. The following discussion on priority particularly emphasizes this.

When asking about the priority of IIP compared to other quality improvement tools and techniques, it was clear in five of the seven organizations that IIP was always second best to other approaches adopted and integrated. Specifically, all of those tools and techniques listed above are more significant and important than IIP. The transport company and the adult themed retailer are the only exceptions to this, although it is worthy to note that these two organizations do not currently hold, and are not working towards, alternative quality improving tools or techniques. Hence, these two case studies are not exceptions to the findings within the other five organizations. The following quotations highlight the priority of other approaches:

> "In terms of other measures, the other one that's most important to me at the moment is HEFCE, the Higher Educational Funding Council for England, the HEFCE people management self-assessment tool. We've just gone through this at the university and it has similarities to IIP. I've just heard from HEFCE that we've been approved … They control the funding streams, so they control a pot of money called Rewarding and Developing Staff Money that we can invest in initiatives that reward and develop staff. It currently runs at about one and a half million pounds a year, so getting this was important … It is obviously of far greater significance than IIP." University respondent – senior HR;

> "Our international frameworks are far more important to the business that IIP." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "We have to use the KSF, it is non-negotiable ... we match IIP later." Catering respondent – senior manager;

> "ISO 9001 takes priority over IIP. The processes it provokes are clearer, easier for us to conform to, easier for us to institute in practice and maintain. It just sits more comfortably with the organization." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

Thus, it is clear that for the high school, the university, the catering department, the defence organization and the third sector organization that IIP is not the leading approach regarding business performance improvement through training and development practice. Indeed, McAdam's (2002) implications that IIP is a 'key quality improvement framework' for increasing business performance appear overstated. In some ways, the standard may simply be viewed as a bolt-on exercise; this would certainly coincide with findings from **Theme one**, whereby the majority of changes needed for improvement were made prior to IIP consideration, as these quotations highlighted:

> "We actually got a gong for something we're already doing, rather than chasing a gong and having to put something in place to get the gong." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "It just rubberstamps a lot of the things we're doing already." High School respondent – line manager;

> "We used it [IIP] because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here." Catering respondent – senior manager;

> "I think that the ethos of valuing training, learning and development was already within the organization and within its members [prior to IIP involvement]." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

This certainly emphasizes the minimum changes made to attain IIP followed by the minimalist gains as a result (Down and Smith, 1999). In essence, the domineering standing of other quality improvement tools and techniques has a detrimental impact on the standing of IIP. It appears that even though organizations are pursuing more than one approach, as Lomas (2004) recommends, the priority of these are crucially different. For the organizations studied here, IIP is not a fundamental aspect of business performance improvement through a concentration on training and development practices. To go one step further, some organizations have questioned the continuation

of IIP amongst these other approaches; this has particular relevance for the university, the defence organization and the third sector organization:

"IIP is merely a tick box exercise, it's old hat now." University respondent – senior manager;

"Effectively we grew beyond it [IIP] … because we're in an export business as well as a UK based business, the demands of the worldwide trading said 'you needed more than these individual gongs', so we went towards a Lloyds accreditation. And Lloyds accreditation is a worldwide accreditation, and that took in and embraced quality metrics, it embraced people metrics, it embraced manufacturing metrics, we evolved towards that probably about 1999-2000 … We started to look at the number of accreditations the company had and say 'hang on a minute, we're starting to actually duplicate', so a lot of man hours were being wasted in the business. By being reviewed by Lloyds, who also talk people issues, we were being done by IIP, who were talking people issues, there was an accreditation by [named organization] to sell and they were looking at people issues, so you've got people continually looking at the same things, so we tried to streamline all the things that said 'what's the accreditation that would give us global recognition?'" Defence organization respondent – senior manager;

"Within the [third] sector, it [IIP] is possibly not as appropriate, possibly less effective than other alternatives … In a small business, to be working towards two quality standards, with the inkling of a third in the background, it's not helpful … those processes don't necessarily sit comfortably together either, so you have to work out more bridges, so you're hitting both. So may be just going with ISO 9001 will be a real positive for us." Third sector organization – senior manager.

These outlooks can importantly be linked to Hoque's (2003) concerns that IIP may have limited long-term benefit when the standard does not directly instill good training and development practice. The findings here go even further by suggesting that some organizations may actively use and/or seek other quality improvement tools and

techniques to bridge any gaps in training and development practice left by IIP. For the defence organization in particular, the limited international application and brand recognition of IIP led the organization to finding and using a more globally relevant quality improvement approach. One respondent expands on this limited international application:

> "As a country we were very insular. We were UK based and we sell [products] out to the world. Now we've actually got a footprint in about 50 odd different countries and we're manufacturing in those countries, we had to grow globally, so all the accreditations had to follow the same process where we've got it once and it's worldwide." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Thus, the defence organization sought recognition from a standard that would be applicable within a global marketplace. For the third sector organization, there are specific concerns relating to the not-for-profit nature of the organization compared with the business driven, profit orientated face of IIP:

> "The most important factor is that you find a standard that is particularly appropriate for the organization you have and the sector you sit in. And I'm not sure that IIP, with its business face, sits comfortably within my own organization and the sector." Third sector organization – senior manager.

Furthermore, even when an organization is not engaged with alternative quality improvement tools and techniques, the industry awards the transport company and the adult themed retailer aspire to are of greater significance and perceptual value than IIP:

> "I think they [organizations in the industry in general] are probably more interested in winning industry awards than they are having an IIP badge." Transport company – senior manager;

> "We've got adult retailer awards for four years on the run and the European Retail Chain Award. They are done like Oscars, they are nominated by people within the industry who point out who they believe is the best overall company." Adult themed retailer – senior manager.

The kudos surrounding these awards is thought to be more powerful than the IIP logo/ symbols – the analysis concerning the IIP logo/ symbols is the primary focus of the following theme. The situation, however, is slightly more complex for the adult themed retailer. This is because the positive impact on external bodies (e.g. the Police and the local council) of having IIP recognition also has a positive impact on the standing of IIP. The following quotations highlight this:

> "We wanted to be seen and taken seriously as just another high street store. Being part of IIP, what it means dealing with councils and training standards departments, the Police and all those we do on a regular basis, to be able to say you're an IIP and also an award winning retailer, it has a lot of sense, because they know how difficult it is to get IIP. That continues to be a benefit also. It is also a unique benefit to the industry." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager;

> "When I sit and go to a council meeting and they've got their IIP award on the wall, I go 'I've got one of them, because I'm the same as you, I am a company that's both professional and driven by developing their individuals'. And they sort of look at you and go 'hmm, they're not just a sex shop'. So it has worked very successfully on that side of it." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Thus, the adult themed retailer does reap a long-term benefit from the recognition of IIP. This is importantly linked to the make-up of the industry this organization operates in and provides a unique exception from the other cases studied. Nevertheless, the analysis regarding other quality improvement tools and techniques and industry awards have highlighted specific detrimental influences on the standing of IIP.

A number of issues were raised in the literature review referring to barriers that can impact on the IIP accreditation process. These include: language difficulties (Collins and Smith, 2004); late feedback on training implemented (Guardian, 2005); the priority of other day-to-day activities (Reade, 2004; CIPD, 2008); the exacerbation of bureaucracy (Smith and Taylor, 2000); problems with IIP compatibility for SMEs

(Smith *et al.,* 2002; Smith and Collins, 2007); duplication of other training evaluation processes (Higgins and Cohen, 2006); and issues surrounding the changing of established cultures (Atkinson, 1990; Drucker, 1992; Allen, 2000). The data collected helps to explore the importance of these barriers and how they potentially influence the standing of IIP.

Numerous factors deemed important within the literature had minimal impact and consequence within the cases studied. In particular, any potential effects regarding language difficulties, late feedback on training implemented and issues surrounding the changing of established cultures are substantially nullified by the approaches towards IIP recognition established within **Theme one**. This is not to say that these issues are unfounded or lacking substance, it is a question of relevance within the context of the organizations researched. In essence, these factors become redundant when organizations bypass their importance when minimal change to training and development practice is needed in order to achieve accreditation for IIP.

The potential language difficulties highlighted by Collins and Smith (2004) encountered when communicating IIP objectives from employers to employees become inconsequential when the standard is not an integral part of the change process that leads to business performance improvement through training and development practice. The findings presented in **Theme one** regarding the lack of IIP understanding amongst staff members supports this outlook. The following quotations provide some of the potent examples explored:

> "It's just a name I've heard." High School respondent – support role;

> "The only thing I know about IIP is it's at the bottom of our headed paper." University respondent – support role.

Indeed, the feedback forms for training simply become a tick-box exercise rather than an integral part of the evaluation process. Thus, late forms may only serve to delay a bureaucratic process rather than demonstrating the lack of commitment to nurturing staff suggested by the Guardian (2005). Atkinson (1990) and Allen (2000) contend that long established cultures are difficult to change. Arguably, the greater the involvement

of IIP within a culture change process, the greater its importance and standing within an organization. There is no necessity, however, to adapt a long standing culture when no significant change is required for IIP recognition, as the following quotations highlight:

> "If I was going on a course, it was before IIP came along. I was sent on a [training] course [and] they sent me on a management course…that's before we got [IIP]…I'm arranging courses now for my [employees] to go on a computer course and I do that whether we had IIP or not." Transport respondent;

> "We've always done training [prior to IIP] and always will do training." Catering respondent;

> "I think that the ethos of valuing training, learning and development was already within the organization and within its members [before IIP involvement]." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

> "Us personally, we had to make very few changes, because my background is business development and business analysis. So I'd actually already put in place processes and procedural staffing checks." Adult themed retailer – senior manager.

Hence, issues surrounding the difficulties in changing organizational culture become of nominal significance when any such difficulties are addressed and tackled prior to IIP involvement. The unimportance of the barriers highlighted above, compared to other organizations within other studies, potentially have a negative influence on the standing of IIP when the standard is simply not integrated that deeply into organizational practice.

The analysis in this section thus far covers particular barriers that indirectly influence the standing of IIP, because of the standard's withdrawn level of integration. There are barriers within the literature that do have more of a direct impact on the organizations studied. The initial discussion within this theme concerning fad periods of interest in IIP, for example, highlights how the priority of other day-to-day activities indeed has a negative influence upon the standing of IIP. Hence, this supports the warnings proposed

by Reade (2004) and CIPD (2008). The following discussion covers a number of other barriers that potentially influence the standing of IIP. It is nevertheless important to highlight that the impact of these factors are of low significance in contrast to other factors discussed, i.e. fads periods of interest in IIP, and the value and impact of other quality improvement standards and industry awards.

There is an agreement with Smith and Taylor (2000) that IIP can exacerbate bureaucracy. The following quotation provides a fitting example of how this bureaucracy is viewed across all the cases studied:

> "Some people would see that [IIP assessment] as unnecessary bureaucracy … doesn't mean I don't curse the bastards for bureaucracy from time-to-time when they're making me do something." University respondent – senior management.

This respondent highlights how IIP can potentially burden bureaucratic processes. The latter part of this quotation, however, represents a 'tongue-in-cheek' remark that indicates following IIP can be an irritation, but the level of impact on bureaucracy is not considered to be that damaging or influential. The exacerbation of bureaucracy may be a potential factor that can influence the standing of IIP compared to using other quality improvement tools or techniques, i.e. a standard with less bureaucratic implications, or even the option of having no standard to avoid all additional bureaucracy, may be preferable when put side-by-side with IIP. Indeed, respondents within the small organizations studied are continuously raising questions throughout management hierarchies regarding the necessity to consume so many man hours within IIP's bureaucratic process. As the following respondent so aptly suggests:

> "I'm not sure that IIP, with its business face, sits comfortably within my own organization and the sector." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

It is certainly important to note that this respondent's meaning does go beyond this discussion of bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the exacerbation of bureaucracy has a potentially negative influence on the standing of IIP. The above quotation also questions the compatibility of IIP within an SME and not-for-profit context, a concern echoed by

Smith *et al.* (2002) and Smith and Collins (2007). The respondents from the adult themed retailer also raise concerns for the compatibility of IIP within their sector:

> "IIP were a bit reluctant to get involved with us at the beginning. And even to date, we are not allowed to put our plaque anywhere outside of the building. We're only allowed to put it on the inside of the building, which is a little hypocritical on their part as we are not allowed to display our IIP." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

> "That was one of their stipulations, if we were to succeed in the IIP, then we were not allowed to show it to the public." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

For both organizations, it was felt that IIP struggled to fit with the sector (a not-for-profit and adult industry context) and the small nature of the businesses. Although questions were raised regarding compatibility within an SME context, respondents still noted the ease with which IIP recognition was achieved. Therefore, this has not yet had a negative impact on the standing of IIP. It was suggested in both organizations, however, that continuation of recognition is a future concern based on issues of compatibility and long-term value.

With regards to the potential duplication of other training evaluation processes (Higgins and Cohen, 2006), it was the defence organization and third sector organization that took particular issue with this:

> "You'd end up with a contest that says 'well, IIP does this, theirs [an alternative quality improvement tool] does that, are they the same?' You've got to go through that rigmarole, whereas a Lloyds accreditation in America, people can say 'I know exactly what that is', or an ISO accreditation, they'll know exactly what that is." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "We have other processes, like we have an employee survey … and all of a sudden you start thinking 'well, hang on, we've got two kind of assessment

processes here that's delivering the same output in terms of planning against these areas, so why are we doing both?'" Defence respondent – senior manager.

Respondents within the defence organization viewed this duplication as one of the reasons for ceasing IIP accreditation. This builds on previous reasoning discussed earlier within this theme concerning the limited international application and brand recognition of IIP that led the organization to finding and using a more globally relevant quality improvement standard. Furthermore, the university and third sector organization question the continuation of IIP amidst accreditation from other similar quality improvement tools and techniques. The following provides a reminder of examples explored earlier in this theme:

"In a small business, to be working towards two quality standards, with the inkling of a third in the background, it's not helpful … those processes don't necessarily sit comfortably together either, so you have to work out more bridges, so you're hitting both. So may be just going with ISO 9001 will be a real positive for us." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

Thus, duplication can have an influence on the standing of IIP. The impact of this influence does depend on the importance and standing of other quality improvement tools and techniques employed or sought. This ultimately means that the perceptual value becomes increasingly important in determining relevance and sustainability for IIP. The following theme explores the perceptual value of the IIP logo/ symbols.

In essence, there are various potential factors that can influence the standing of IIP. These factors can include: the fad periods of interest in the standard; the use and integration of other quality improvement standards and industry standards; the priority of other day-to-day activities; the bureaucratic burden related to the standard; compatibility of IIP in SMEs; and the potential problem of duplicated evaluation processes. For the organizations studied within this research project, these factors have a varying degree of detrimental impact on the standing of IIP. The positive impact on external bodies within the adult themed retailer provides a rare example otherwise. In terms of the research project's title, it is clear that if factors have a detrimental influence on the standing of IIP, it will too impact on the relevance and sustainability of the

standard. The existence and impact of other quality improvement standards and industry awards has a particular bearing on the relevance of IIP. In the case of the defence organization, for example, Lloyd's accreditation was the most significant factor for ceasing IIP accreditation. For sustainability, the future consideration, acquisition and pursuit of other quality improvement standards and/or industry awards could influence the standing of IIP.

HR practitioners need to consider a number of impacting influences when considering or using IIP recognition. For those organizations considering recognition, it is important to assess the current portfolio of quality improvement standards and industry awards that could impact on the standing of IIP. Related to this assessment, practitioners need to understand and consider the potential for increased bureaucratic burden and unnecessary duplication of training and development evaluation processes.

In addition, HR practitioners need to be aware that the importance of day-to-day activities can have a particular impact on interest in and commitment to IIP between assessments. Thus, for an organization to achieve maximum benefit from and commitment to IIP, there may be a need to communicate and instill the standard on a much deeper level. The necessity for this importantly links to the findings within **Theme one**, whereby an understanding and communication of IIP throughout the workforce was not deemed essential for successful accreditation. Furthermore, the most significant business performance increases for the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer came before IIP involvement. As **Theme one** iterates, the purpose behind IIP recognition could play an essential role in determining the standard's level of involvement and impact on the business. If IIP is to merely represent a 'badge' or 'plaque on the wall' for something an organization is already doing, as Hoque (2003), Ram (2000) and Douglas *et al.* (1999) suggest, the impact of fad periods of interest in the standard is of little consequence. In essence, the standing of IIP is already adversely affected by this representation and a level of interest in the standard is of little importance when IIP is simply not integrated that deeply into training and development practice.

5.15. Theme three: How do the IIP logo/symbols impact on the perceptions of managers and employees?

The perceptual value of IIP recognition in the eyes of customers and employees became prominent within the primary data collection when interviewees suggested that this value might be crucial if the standard is simply used as a plaque/ badge representing external recognition for something the organization was already doing. Indeed, findings within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer suggest this to be the case. This importantly coincides with other studies whereby IIP recognition is found to merely represent a 'badge' to be achieved or a 'plaque on the wall' (Douglas *et al.,* 1999; Ram, 2000; Hoque, 2003). Furthermore, this supports Smith and Taylor's (2000) questions over the impact of IIP as a training and development tool when the involvement of the standard on these activities is nominal. In effect, if organizations can/ have increased business performance without IIP, the perceived value of IIP suddenly becomes more prominent and important to the research question concerning relevance and sustainability. The in-depth qualitative approach has allowed for this exploration as the theme became prominent within the pilot study.

There have been few studies that explore the value, directly or indirectly, of IIP outside the contexts of management hierarchies (see Bell *et al.,* 2002a, 2002b and Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002, for actual examples). Indeed, personnel managers within Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) findings and IIP UK (2008b) assume there is an employee (current and potential) and customer perceptual value connected with IIP recognition, but empirical data is lacking and often unsubstantiated. Grugils and Bevitt's (2002) study of an NHS trust does question the value of the IIP badge for employees, but similarly highlights a lack of research from the perspective of employees. Therefore, this study explores the perceived value of the IIP logo/ symbols from the perspective of both managers and front-line employees interviewed to understand how this can impact on the relevance and sustainability of the standard.

A large number of interviewees in all seven sample organizations surmised that the logo/ symbols associated with IIP recognition are extremely important in giving the

standard some kind of tangible association. The following quotations highlight this importance:

> "[The IIP logo/ symbols are] very important. It shows everybody what we've got, and what we've done, and what we've achieved in such a short space of time." Transport respondent – line manager;

> "I believe it's a very popular [logo], as in a very identifiable logo." University respondent – lecturer;

> "It's [the logo] important if that's the only visual symbol. If we hadn't had had that plaque then I wouldn't have known about it at all. Whereas I don't really know anything more about it from having the plaque, but I know that it exists, because I've seen the symbol." University respondent – lecturer;

> "Ah yes, I think they [the IIP logo/ symbols] are very important, or they are given a lot of creedence." Third sector respondent – senior manager;

> "[The IIP logo/ symbols are] Massively important when dealing with hierarchy people, councils, Police, trading standards, all the people that recognize it." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

This certainly highlights the potential importance of the badge/ plaque connected with achieving recognition. Whether the logo/ symbols make any difference to employees seeking employment within an IIP recognized organization, or whether they alter the perceptions of customers, however, is very questionable. When interviewees were asked if IIP recognition made a difference or contribution in them applying for a job, for example, nearly all respondents reported no kind of connection. The following quotations highlight a disassociation with IIP:

> "I'm always motivated to work here even if we didn't have it [IIP recognition], so it was something I wanted to do when I was younger, well, to be a chef." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"When I came here, they didn't have it [IIP] then, but it's not something I would look for, if you know what I mean, I would have come here for the job. I wouldn't have looked for IIP." Transport respondent – front-line employee;

"I think as long as you're happy in your job, that's what I want to see. I just want to be happy in my job really." Catering respondent – front-line employee;

Interviewer: "Did it make much difference when you applied for a job here?"

Respondent: "No, it didn't to me, no. I didn't notice it to be honest (laughs)."
Transport respondent – front-line employee.

In other words, IIP recognition does not directly enhance an organization's reputation or their quality status for those questioned – a benefit IIP UK (2008b) argues is automatically associated with recognition. Only one interviewee suggested it would represent a positive sign for an organization to see such recognition, although they could not elaborate why:

"When I've seen other job adverts and things like that, if I've seen it I wouldn't think it was a bad thing to have it on there, I would think it was a good thing." University respondent – research role.

In addition, the majority of interviewees suggested IIP recognition would bear little importance for others in the workforce applying for jobs, unless they had a particular vested interest:

"Nobody who comes for a job ever says 'oh by the way, have you got IIP?' … I just think for most people when it comes to getting a job, they're not bothered … it comes so far down their list of requirements after 'what's the pay?', 'what's the holidays like?', 'what hours do I have to work?'. I think for the vast majority of people they're the primary things, and if you're lucky, if you're very lucky, they might even think 'and they are IIP accredited', even if they don't mention it. But I think for the vast majority of people it's just lost of them." Transport respondent – senior manager;

Interviewer: "Do you think other staff ever considered IIP before applying for jobs"

Respondent: "No. They look at the salary; that's what they are interested in (laughs)." University respondent – support role;

"People who are interested in stuff like that, they probably know more about it because they've read up about it, but for those who are not really interested, they wouldn't look for it, they would just look at the job and that's it." Transport respondent – front-line employee.

"I wouldn't imagine anyone coming in and going 'because you are an IIP company, I am going to apply'. They've applied for a job because they think it'll be fun. So no I don't think it crosses people's minds." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

With the IIP logo/ symbols being an important tangible linchpin for altering employee perceptions, it appears that recognition from the standard has little effect and Grugulis and Bevitt (2002) are prudent when questioning its impact on employees. Indeed, Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) assumption that employee value exists seems overoptimistic when connected to the findings within this research project. Nevertheless, this would still benefit from extended research within a much greater sample size to discover if these opinions are general within the UK working population.

When interviewees were asked if the IIP logo/ symbols made any difference to the perceptions of customers, most respondents agreed that IIP recognition would have very little effect, if any. Reasoning behind these opinions were mixed, but generally related to customers not knowing what IIP stands for and being disinterested in a logo/ symbol that does not seemingly directly affect the product and/or service directly. With Ram (2000) highlighting an impact and influence on customers as a potentially significant trigger for IIP involvement, these findings suggest that the actual benefit could be nominal. The following quotations emphasize the limited impact of the IIP logo/ symbols on customers' perceptions:

"Would they [the customers] notice it [IIP recognition]? We know as a department [we have IIP], but does anybody else?" Catering respondent – front-line employee;

"No, I don't think that [IIP recognition] is something they [customers] take into consideration." University respondent – support role;

"How could I imply that our customers value IIP, since I'm fairly sure I would have to explain what it was?" Third sector respondent – senior manager;

"Whether a customer walks into a sex shop and says 'oh wow, they are an investor in people', I doubt very much it [IIP] even crosses their mind." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Despite the significance put on the IIP logo/ symbols, it appears that employees' and customers' perceptions are considered to remain relatively unchanged in the light of IIP recognition. Thus, the potential benefits for and impact on customers highlighted by Maxwell and MacRae (2001), amidst their limited findings and understanding, appears to have not come to fruition. With such importance on how the IIP logo/ symbols are viewed within Bell *et al.*'s (2002b) findings, it seems the reality could be much different. The relevance and sustainability of IIP is reduced if the standard does not deliver on the benefits it suggests. In this case, the benefits questioned are those that suggest that public recognition for the IIP logo/ symbols attracts the best quality job applicants and provides a reason for customers to select specific goods and services from an IIP recognized organization (IIP UK, 2008a). Within the organizations studied here, this is simply not considered to be the case. Certainly, further research is required to expand beyond the parameters of this study to fully explore these insights. Research is particularly needed to directly explore the perceptions of customers.

Beyond the public recognition limitations, the perception of IIP could possibly be defended from another angle. One interviewee highlights such a defence:

Interviewer: "Do you think it [the IIP logo/symbols] makes a difference to the customers?"

Respondent:	"Yeah, I do. They must see a big difference in the way we treat and respect the customers."
I:	"In terms of the [IIP] plaque though, are they not too fussed about the plaque, are they more bothered about the service?"
R:	"I think they're more bothered about the service."
I:	"So perhaps they're…not consciously seeing it?"
R:	"I don't think so, no (agreeing with the interviewer)."
I:	"They are just getting the benefits of it?"
R:	"Yeah, basically." Transport respondent – line manager.

Perhaps customers become more satisfied, unconscious of the IIP impact. Instead, customers reap the implicit rewards of the quality improvements instilled within an organization. The example above appears to support this ethos. This is where **Theme One**, however, highlights a major flaw in trying to defend IIP from this perspective. This is because major changes to training and development practices within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer were made prior to IIP involvement; thus, an emphasis on rewarding customers more effectively (Williams and Visser, 2002) leading to indirect improvements in customer satisfaction are accredited to the organization and not IIP recognition. The significance of changes in customers' perceptions within the university is undecipherable due to problems identifying the initial changes to practice needed or not for IIP recognition – an issue identified within **Theme One**. Ultimately, the relevance and sustainability of IIP is further questioned when linking together the significance of all the themes explored.

The catering department does provide an important alternative perception concerning the IIP logo/ symbols. This is because the department succeeded where the trust as a whole failed in terms of achieving IIP recognition:

"They tried in the trust to do it [attain IIP accreditation] and failed miserably, so sometimes we use it as a 'look at what we can do and you can't', so we always promote and always brag about it, which I think is really, really good." Catering respondent – senior manager.

As a consequence, initial recognition provided kudos or 'bragging rights' over the entire trust, which did lead to enhanced motivation. Furthermore, gaining accreditation is believed to have added the benefit of giving the catering department a boost in terms of respect throughout the trust compared to the more traditional aspects of care. For the managers and front-line employees of the department, this seemingly developed greater acknowledgement of the work they did. Importantly though, these effects were attached to initial accreditation only. Subsequent reassessment did not deliver the same additional benefits and the initial euphoria connected with the original attainment of IIP dissipated soon after. Nevertheless, the IIP logo/ symbols did deliver unanticipated benefits when recognition was first achieved. This indeed provided initial relevance for the standard, but the sustainable value remains in question when compared to the preceding point concerning the nominal impact on attracting the best quality job applicants.

The adult themed retailer also provides an important alternative perception concerning the IIP logo/ symbols. For this organization, IIP depicted a professional acceptance into the general world of retail that is specifically unique for this sector, whereby the case studied is currently the only organization with status. The following quotations highlight this alternative benefit:

> "[We attained IIP to gain] An acceptance into mainstream retail. We wanted to be seen and taken seriously as just another high street store. Being part of IIP, what it means dealing with councils and training standards departments, the Police and all those we do on a regular basis, to be able to say you're an IIP and also an award winning retailer, it has a lot of sense, because they know how difficult it is to get IIP. That continues to be a benefit also. It is also a unique benefit to the industry." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager;

> "When I sit and go to a council meeting and they've got their IIP award on the wall, I go 'I've got one of them, because I'm the same as you, I am a company that's both professional and driven by developing their individuals'. And they sort of look at you and go 'hmm, they're not just a sex shop'. So it has worked very successfully on that side of it." Adult themed retailer respondent – senior manager.

Hence, IIP recognition can provide unique benefits beyond those connotations suggested for employee recruitment and customer service. This has certainly been emphasized within the catering department and adult themed retailer. Importantly, this highlights that IIP recognition does have the potential to be useful perceptually, even though there are serious concerns and limitations surrounding employee recruitment and customer service. Nevertheless, these alternative benefits only exist within unique settings. Any potential benefit needs to be researched and explored within individual IIP recognized organization to fully understand the impact on relevance and sustainability.

The findings explored are currently limited to the confines of this research study. Self-evidently, further research is required to fully explore and draw out more generalizeable statements concerning the impact that IIP recognition has on the employee and customer perceptions. The present study has demonstrated that the absence of such an association is not restricted to one specific sector, thus, continuing to raise doubts concerning the claimed perceptual value of IIP. Irrespective of the association between perceptions and IIP accreditation, the manner or process by which IIP recognition is attained may itself be of great significance. Specifically, an organization that has followed an IIP *journey* consistent with and/or similar to those of the organizations in this study (i.e. the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization or the adult themed retailer) are more likely to ascertain that any positive changes to employee and/or customer perceptions through quality improvements are affected prior to IIP involvement and recognition, rather than a consequence of such interventions.

For HR practitioners, the importance of value in terms of employees and customers perceptions may be highly significant; personnel managers within Bell *et al.*'s (2002b) findings highlight such an importance. In addition, the impact on these perceptions will be important if indeed IIP is merely used as a 'flavour of the month' 'badge collecting' exercise, as many of Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) respondents suggest. If IIP recognition is simply external accreditation for something the organization is already doing, these employee and customer perceptions may play a crucial role for the standard to retain any residual value. This study, however, has inaugurated suggestions that IIP may indeed be lacking in perceptual value. Therefore, HR practitioners may consider

researching these employee and customer perceptions to understand what value IIP has, if any, whether through current employees, the recruitment process or customer service.

If a HR practitioner was to consider ceasing IIP recognition because the standard was not achieving its intended benefits, there could be a fear that there is some kind of cost associated with losing status. Indeed, this a fear projected by personnel managers within Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) study. The lack of understanding across employees and customers concerning IIP, however, instantly insinuates that this concern could be unfounded. To go one step further, the changes made prior to the involvement of IIP suggest there would be little, if any, reduction in training and development quality if recognition was to discontinue. The defence organization ceased IIP recognition in 2001 and the following quotations highlight how that loss did not diminish training and development quality or impact on the perceptions of the organization:

> "I don't necessarily think we do anything different now and within the area of learning and development than we did when we had IIP. We are a large organization, we actually do have a clear vision and strategy as a company, and then we obviously link the learning and development strategy to the vision and direction of the company." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "We have systems in place whereby we can record the training that people do … and irrespective of whether we have IIP, that's something that we know is important to do … The organization has not lost anything in terms of reputation since halting IIP accreditation … The demands of the worldwide trading said 'you needed more than these individual gongs', so we went towards a Lloyds accreditation. Lloyds accreditation is a worldwide accreditation, and that took in and embraced quality metrics, it embraced people metrics, it embraced manufacturing metrics. We evolved towards that probably about 1999-2000." Defence respondent – senior manager;

> "Either way, IIP or not, I could come up with evidence to support and demonstrate quality training activities." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Thus, it appears there was very little, if any, negative impact for the defence organization in terms of reputation, business performance or training and development quality. The primary reasons for this come from well established training and development practices, as well as incorporating international quality standards that overshadow any potential contribution of IIP. This means that HR practitioners may need to importantly reflect on how quality improvements were integrated and how they will be maintained before considering the termination of IIP recognition. To go one step further, any cost of losing status could be reduced because the value of the IIP plaque has diminished as more and more organizations become accredited (Higgins and Cohen, 2006). This was also a consideration for the defence organization:

> "When a hairdresser, teashop or local butcher has IIP, it does question its value within a large organization that has sophisticated training and development." Defence respondent – senior manager.

Ceasing recognition in the light of this reduced value may have assisted the decision to continue without IIP and follow other internationally renowned quality standards.

In short, the findings within this research have highlighted significant issues concerning the perceptual value of IIP recognition. Importantly, this builds upon the limited studies conducted within the literature, with Grugulis and Bevitt's (2002) single case study being a rare example of in-depth exploration. This has led to a number of questions regarding the relevance and sustainability of the standard. As a named brand, it appears within the cases studied that employees and customers remain uninfluenced by the standard's logo/ symbols. This conclusion holds firm despite the initial unanticipated benefits related to the catering department's achievement of IIP accreditation where the entire trust had failed. Even the implicit benefits concerning improvements in quality are questioned as a result of organizations making changes prior to IIP involvement. Research beyond the confines of the sample explored needs to be conducted to fully understand the perceptual value surrounding IIP recognition. Nevertheless, this study has highlighted potential limitations that question the unsubstantiated assumptions HR practitioners and managers may make concerning this value.

5.16. Building fresh theoretical insights:

Theme four: A more fitting framework for the IIP journey

The findings within this study can help to add value to previous research studies and work towards the development/ revision of a framework that describes the *journey* of IIP recognition. A new generated theoretical insight can enhance the field surrounding IIP by providing a pragmatic framework which fits, and reflects, an alternative IIP *journey* an organization can take. The field can benefit from this practical outlook that clearly visualizes an alternative reality concerning the use of IIP. Essentially, this new framework is based on and comparable to Tickle and McLean's (2004) *The stages of the IIP journey*. The various stages have been augmented or eliminated, combined with the introduction of one new stage, to provide a framework that represents an empirical reflection of the organizations studied. This has implications for: what is required to achieve IIP status; the defining of the standard; how HR practitioners can utilize the quality improvement tool; and the perceived value and relevance of the standard. These implications are discussed throughout this theme.

Connections can be made to previous studies which can contribute to the application and justification of the new framework developed. A study by Down and Smith (1999), who suggest organizations achieving recognition tend to be those with the least to change and the least to gain, has particular relevance. The knowledge and understanding deficit found concerning the standard contributes to this suggestion when IIP recognition is being easily obtained and maintained without the full potential of the IIP *journey* (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10) being exploited. This is referring directly to the first stage in **Table 1** (reproduced from the literature review below) concerning the raising of IIP awareness throughout the workforce. Based on the organizations within this study, the first stage *raising awareness* can be eliminated from the framework altogether to coincide with the findings presented within **Theme one**. This is because the data demonstrates that organizations can achieve IIP recognition without needing to fully commit towards raising awareness.

Table 1: The stages of the IIP journey (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10):

STAGE	PROCESS
Raising awareness	Designed to inform and raise the level of understanding to both managers and staff of how IiP works, the benefits stakeholders can expect and what is involved in the process itself
Diagnostic stage	Staff interviews, surveys or questionnaires
	Observing meetings and training and development activities
	Documentary reviews
	Benchmarks the organisation against the Standard and highlights any gaps to be addressed. This stage is crucial in getting the organisation to acknowledge that there are gaps and make a commitment to plug those gaps
Action Planning	Identifying what action needs to be taken to achieve the Standard
Evaluation	Evaluation of action to ensure it is effective
Assessment	External verification by a qualified IiP assessor via interviews, document reviews and observation of good practice If the assessment is successful, the assessor makes a recommendation to the adjudication panel who base their final decision on whether the evidence submitted through the assessor is worthy of the IiP award
Celebration	An opportunity to celebrate the successful achievement of the award both internally and externally. Certificates and plaques are awarded through local award ceremonies
Continuous Review	Once organisations have achieved the award, they are encouraged to continuously improve and assess their position against the Standard and be externally assessed within three years of achieving the award.

If little change is required to obtain IIP status, it may be reasonable to assume the importance of each stage within the IIP *journey* has been significantly reduced. Certainly, it has been argued already there is little to gain when, in four of the organizations studied, quality improvement changes had already been made prior to any consideration for recognition by the standard (see **Theme one**). Consequently, this connects to the questions raised concerning the asserted causal link between IIP recognition and increases in performance and productivity. Ultimately, the evidence within this study eliminates the context for the stage *action planning* in the table above, because the changes organizations are making during the IIP assessment process are nominal, if any. This impacts on the preceding *diagnostic stage* as it becomes a redundant and unnecessary feature of the IIP assessment process. Specifically, the various interviews, activities and reviews that measure the gaps that need to be addressed to achieve IIP recognition are not a pivotal part of the IIP *journey*. In turn, the *evaluation* stage becomes an internal process and remains detached from the standard. The findings discussed can begin to formulate a more fitting framework that represents the organizations studied. With the reasons for the removal and adaptation of particular stages set out, **Table 2** is introduced below to represent a revised framework based on the findings of this study. Other stages included within this framework are subsequently analyzed.

Table 2 below, for the purposes of the organizations' findings within this study, is called: *The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements through IIP*. Importantly, this new framework is not designed to be all-inclusive of organizations associated with the standard. Instead, this framework provides a pragmatic alternative *journey* an organization may take in the search for improvements in business performance through training and development. Based on the findings analyzed and presented, this framework encompasses the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company and the third sector organization with relative ease. Although the adult themed retailer did make some changes to practices during the IIP assessment process, the new framework still represents with better precision their journey integrating the standard. With the initial IIP *journey* becoming forgotten over time for the university, it is unclear which framework may have best represented this particular organization – this is an issue raised within the limitations section.

Table 2: The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements though IIP:

STAGE	PROCESS
1. Commitment to improving quality	Top management makes a commitment to improving performance and profitability through the training and development of staff.
2. Action planning	Actions to improve organizational performance and profitability through training and development are identified and implemented internally.
3. Evaluation	An internal evaluation determines the effectiveness of the new commitment.
4. IIP consideration	External recognition for quality improvements is considered through IIP to provide an established benchmark for which the organization can be compared to.
5. Assessment	External verification by an IIP assessor via interviews, document reviews and observation of good practice is conducted. A decision whether or not to award IIP status is provided by an adjudication panel.
6. Celebration	Achievement can be celebrated along with the right to show a plaque of recognition and use the logo on letterheads and other organizational materials.
7. Continuous review	Organizations are encouraged to continuously improve and are required to be reassessed for recognition every three years.

The first three stages of the new framework represent a *journey* towards quality improvement that does not involve IIP. The first stage, *commitment to improving quality*, directly replaces the now irrelevant and redundant *raising awareness* and *diagnostic stage* within Tickle and McLean's (2004) framework. The stages *action planning* and *evaluation* remain within the new framework, but their emphasis is now internally controlled. In other words, these first three stages within the new model retain similarities with Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10) first four stages in terms of content, but with the processes being traversed and fulfilled without IIP involvement. Consequently, this may also provide a more fitting framework representation for Down and Smith's (1999) research cases, whereby organizations required little involvement from IIP to initially attain IIP status.

The fourth stage of the newly developed framework is newly incorporated to represent the initial consideration for IIP involvement and recognition. This stage reflects the issues and findings discussed within earlier themes concerning IIP recognition and the business performance nexus. In essence, this stage represents the initial consideration for IIP *after* significant improvements to business performance through training and development practices had been achieved.

The final three stages of the new table resemble the final three stages of the original framework in **Table 1**. It is important to highlight that this new framework simplifies the language used within these final stages. The content has not changed, but the information is delivered more succinctly. Ultimately, the revised framework closely resembles six of the seven organizations studied and provides an alternative and practical representation of the IIP *journey* of recognition. This contrasting framework contributes an empirical perspective that can significantly support the opinions of authors that are critical of the actual benefits gained from IIP involvement and recognition (e.g. Westhead and Storey, 1997; Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Down and Smith, 1999; Douglas *et al.,* 1999; Smith, 2000; Ram, 2000; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Hoque, 2003; Robson *et al.,* 2005; Higgins and Cohen, 2006).

The new framework clearly and visually reduces the perceived value and relevance of the standard compared to the original framework proposed by Tickle and McLean (2004: p.10). The rhetoric surrounding the standard, like **Table 1**, often insinuates a greater deal of involvement and collaboration throughout the IIP assessment and recognition process (including Smith, 2000; Lentell and Morris, 2001; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; Bell *et al.,* 2002a; Lloyd and Payne, 2002; Tickle and McLean, 2004). The in-depth case studies researched, however, uncover a reality that simplifies the involvement – especially the assessment process – of IIP. Instead, many of the benefits claimed by IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) are achieved independently of IIP involvement. The benefits associated with IIP recognition are revisited below (IIP UK, 2008a):

  - ➢ Improved earnings, profitability and productivity
  - ➢ Customer satisfaction
  - ➢ Improved motivation
  - ➢ Reduced costs and wastage
  - ➢ Enhanced quality
  - ➢ Competitive advantage through improved performance
  - ➢ Public recognition

Additional benefits include:
  - ➢ The opportunity to review current policies and practices against a recognized benchmark
  - ➢ A framework for planning future strategy and action
  - ➢ A structured way to improve the effectiveness of training and development activities

Only the benefits surrounding an opportunity to review current policies and practices against a recognized benchmark, and the development of a framework for planning future strategy and action appear to maintain merit for the organizations studied. The majority of other benefits can be directly associated with the changes organizations made prior to IIP recognition. This is reflected by these quotations from interviewees:

> "We got a gong for something we're already doing." Defence respondent – senior manager;

"It just rubberstamps a lot of the things we're doing already." High School respondent – line manager;

"We used it [IIP] because of all the training we were doing and we thought we need to get some sort of recognition here." Catering respondent – senior manager.

"I think that the ethos of valuing training, learning and development was already within the organization and within its members [prior to IIP involvement]." Third sector respondent – senior manager.

This research contributes a framework to the field surrounding IIP that reflects a pragmatic view of the standard within a qualitative perspective. This is in contrast to the reliance on generalized assumptions that have been raised and discussed within the literature review. A fitting example of this is with the assumed causal link between IIP recognition and increases in business performance (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; IIP UK, 2008e; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008) challenged within the first theme of this analysis. HR practitioners, managers, stakeholders and even staff can now visualize the pragmatic implications of IIP, dependent on which *journey* the organization desires to take in the quest for business performance improvement.

The developed framework challenges the very definition of IIP introduced at the beginning of the literature review, whereby the standard is defined as a 'quality improvement initiative'. The connotations of such a definition relates to the asserted and implied effects on business performance. If an organization desires to utilize the IIP *journey* proposed by Tickle and McLean (2004: p.10), the definition that associates the standard with the potential benefits of being a quality improvement initiative may hold firm. For the organizations studied here under the new framework, however, IIP could simply be defined as a badge/ plaque of external recognition. This would certainly reflect previous studies conducted by Douglas *et al.* (1999) and Ram (2000), where perhaps the new framework is more fitting within particular organizations. Yet, it is important to remember that the perceptual value of the standard as a badge/ plaque for recognition is found to be limited within the sample organizations studied. This can

have connotations for naming IIP as a badge or plaque of recognition – an issue explored in **Theme three**. Nevertheless, this alternative theoretical insight reduces the potential impact IIP has on increases in business performance, because the standard has a lot less to offer under the guise of the new framework. Ultimately, two potential *journeys* are highlighted and there are connotations within the very definition of IIP for managers and HR practitioners to consider – a discussion furthered within the following theme.

For HR practitioners, a *journey* that involves IIP can be seen from different angles. Practitioners need to be clear on why they are getting this manner of recognition. If they want the full package in terms of maximizing the proposed/ asserted benefits and creating organizational change towards quality improvement, the stages and commitment towards the standard suggested by Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10) framework may be more appropriate to their needs. In contrast, if practitioners are simply seeking external recognition for quality improvements already achieved, the developed framework in **Table 2** may be much more appropriate. Practitioners following this framework, however, need to understand that the perceptual value and benefit of IIP recognition may be limited compared to the expectations assumed – Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) findings, for example, show that HR practitioners assume the IIP logo is important to those who view it. Understanding this potential misconception can lead practitioners to moderating their expectations concerning perceptual benefits accordingly. Complications arise if HR practitioners assume that Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10) IIP *journey* will lead to the desired organizational changes required for quality improvement.

In terms of the thesis title, the new framework reduces the relevance and sustainability of IIP. The relevance of the standard is clearly reduced if an organization, like six of the seven cases studied here, only desire external recognition for quality improvements already implemented prior to consideration of the standard. This is straightforward to visualize and understand if an organization is not fully involved within the stages of the IIP *journey* proposed by the original framework. Sustainability is in turn affected if the commitment to the standard is greatly reduced from the beginning of recognition. In other words, if an organization can internally make desired quality improvements towards their own goals prior to and during IIP recognition, the input from the standard

is minimized. Even the sustainable value in terms of public recognition (IIP UK, 2008a) – including current and potential employees, and customers – is found to be limited.

Theme five: An alternative definition for IIP

The above theme questions defining IIP as a 'quality improvement initiative', because of limitations concerning commitment to the standard. Indeed, the findings and themes developed within this research suggest this definition is excessive. By revisiting the loose definitions introduced within the literature review, this allegation can be explored in more detail to generate an alternative view that fits the sample organizations and represents the new framework developed within the above theme. This is especially prominent when the standard has gone through several policy changes since its conception (Collins and Smith, 2004; Reade, 2004; Hoque, 2008); this includes particular changes in the way IIP is actually delivered and marketed (Hoque *et al.,* 2005). The following revisits the examples of definitions for IIP introduced within the literature review:

> "Investors in People (IIP), the government initiative designed to enhance organisation training and development practices…" (Collins and Smith, 2004: p.583);

> "Investors in People (IiP) was introduced in 1991 with the purpose of creating a benchmark for training and development practice." (Hoque *et al.,* 2005: p.135);

> "…the Investors in People (IIP) Standard has been used by organisations around the world as a business improvement tool to raise their standards of quality and overall business performance." (Tickle and McLean, 2004: p.10).

The first two quotations relate directly to training and development. As a benchmark, IIP's standardizing nature is comparable to an organization's quality of training and development. The initial quotation, however, suggests IIP can enhance training and development; this is argued not to be the case for the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company and the third sector

organization within the first theme one. Improvements to training and development were introduced and established prior to IIP consideration. In addition, the last quotation suggests the standard can improve quality and overall business performance. Again, the same five organizations made such improvements independently of IIP consideration. It is important to note that the university does not act as a deviant case within this discussion; this is because it is unclear to what extent IIP involvement affected training and development or improvements in quality and performance at the time of initial recognition. In addition, changes were found to be minimal within the adult themed retailer.

The nature of the findings within this study may highlight why there is no clear and accepted definition of IIP. There are common areas of discussion and many of these are questioned within this research. Even expressions within critical research stating IIP to be simply a 'plaque' or 'badge' of recognition (Douglas *et al.,* 1999; Ram, 2000; Hoque, 2003) are problematic. These expressions could imply there is some residual perceptual value connected to attaining IIP as a symbol of recognition to those that view it. This research finds the perceptual value of the IIP logo/ symbols through managers, employees and customers, however, to be nominal.

The definition of IIP may itself be contingent on the manner in which an organization seeks to utilize its engagement with the IIP recognition process. Those organizations engaged in the more conventional IIP recognition *journey* (i.e. represented by Tickle and McLean's (2004) framework presented in **Table 1**, p.187) are more influenced by the *stages* of the IIP *journey* itself , subscribing to the definition of their engagement as a 'quality improvement initiative'. Conversely, an organization engaging with the standard through a *journey* reflected in the newly developed framework (i.e. as presented in **Table 2**: p.188), a differing definition of the engagement may be more appropriate:

> 'IIP can simply be external recognition for changes made to training and development practices.'

The parameter of the definition can be expanded upon to further reflect the cases within this study and the limitations found concerning perceptual value:

> 'These changes in training and development practices importantly led to significant improvements in business performance prior to IIP consideration. In addition, IIP recognition may not lead to any significant perceptual value concerning current or potential employees and/or customers.'

This generated alternative definition based on practical evidence needs testing outside of the boundaries of this research context to fully explore its applicability. In other words, it will be valuable to understand how many organizations fit this alternative definition, especially considering the related negative impact on the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This can provide further insight into the actual contribution and benefit of IIP in reality compared to the overarching rhetoric. The in-depth and exploratory nature of this research means that this outlook is expected to evolve and develop as and when other findings are introduced and compared. In essence, the widespread comparison and contrast of issues has led to a deeper understanding of overriding and significant debates. Further research is expected to continue constructing a clearer picture concerning the impact of IIP and its asserted benefits. This will hopefully generate a generalized perspective that can contribute to the current dichotomy of opinions relating to the standard. Further qualitative research may continue to provide in-depth and essential insights that build upon the shortcomings of recent quantitative reports highlighted within this study, namely Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Cowling (2008), Bourne *et al.* (2008) and Martin and Elwes (2008). This contrast and comparison can help to fully understand and appreciate the actual impact of IIP on organizations and their people, performance and profitability.

For HR practitioners, a differing definition provides the pragmatic perspective that reflects how IIP recognition can be used. Any similarities with the organizations studied here may highlight limitations in the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Consequently, this questions the benefits proposed, especially increases in business performance (e.g. Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; IIP UK, 2008a, 2008e; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008) and the surrounding perceptual value relating to employees and customers (e.g. IIP UK, 2008a). HR practitioners need to understand

their approach if using or going to use IIP. From this, they can understand further what potential benefits they may actually achieve through recognition. This is important when the suggested benefits are so notoriously difficult to measure and connect to the standard in the first place.

5.17. Conclusion

The findings explored within this chapter have provided pragmatic insights into the use of IIP within seven organizations across a range of diverse sectors. The relevance and sustainability of the standard has been consistently scrutinized throughout leading to the development of new theoretical insights that reflect the pragmatic realities surrounding recognition. Five interrelated themes drawing upon data gathered from the seven sample organizations have built layers upon layers of analysis to provide essential support for theoretical saturation. Consequently, this has led to a number of insights and recommendations for HR practitioners and managers already involved, or considering involvement, with IIP.

The subsequent *Conclusions and limitations* chapter provides a précis of the interpretations discussed above. Nevertheless, numerous limitations in the application of IIP have been highlighted and explored. These limitations concern: the links between IIP recognition and business performance; the influences on the standing of IIP; and the perceptual value of the standard's logo/ symbols. The new framework and alternative definition developed help to visualize the findings within this research project and provide HR practitioners and managers with practical insights that can inform their consideration or use of IIP. These, and the findings preceding them, highlight significant questions concerning the relevance and sustainability of the standard. For the organizations studied, the reality surrounding the gaining and use of IIP recognition is, importantly, much departed from advocating sources within the literature.

Chapter six –
Conclusions and limitations

7.1. Data analysis and discussion conclusions

The previous chapter discussed five specific themes of analysis. These developed interpretations and insights into the data findings collected. The following provides the overarching conclusions generated from this process. Thus, the discussion is presented theme-by-theme before returning to the overall conclusive impacts concerning the research context: the relevance and sustainability of IIP. Subsequently, issues pertaining to limitations and future developments are explored within the following section.

Theme one reemerges and tackles the enigma of whether IIP recognition actually increases business performance; a debate that has lasted the lifetime of the standard itself. This discussion is timely with recent studies claiming a causal link between the two (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). This research project adds significantly to this debate by revealing that the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer made significant changes to their existing approaches towards quality performance through people prior to IIP consideration. In essence, these organizations made no attempt to pursue, or even consider, IIP recognition at the time of making performance enhancing changes – it was an afterthought. These findings provide a unique researching perspective and alternative explanation for why IIP recognized organizations may perform better than non-IIP organizations.

To expand on the above, knowledge and understanding of IIP is considered an essential facet to achieving commitment to the standard (e.g. McLuskey, 1999; Smith, 2000; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; Tickle and McLean, 2004). There have been few studies, however, outside of the management paradigm. Indeed, there is almost a tacit assumption that awareness concerning IIP is actually proactively sought during initial recognition (e.g. Bell *et al.,* 2001). This study uncovers important insights within this

debate. All seven organizations studied found a substantial deficit relating to the knowledge and understanding of IIP throughout the workforce; this is not just with front-line employees, but within the management hierarchy also. Indeed, the organizations appear to attain and maintain the standard with ease despite this deficit. If an organization is not committed to the standard through IIP knowledge and understanding, but is still successfully enhancing business performance, the significance and contribution of the standard is arguably reduced.

Thus, the findings within **Theme one** highlight a considerable impact on the research question. If the standard does not deliver on its asserted benefits (IIP UK, 2008a), the reduction in relevance and sustainability is clear. Indeed, it is recommended that HR practitioners need to think very carefully about pursuing IIP in the belief that it will automatically lead to enhanced business performance. In addition, there is the awareness for practitioners that organizations can actually achieve IIP recognition and maintain status without full commitment to the standard.

Within **Theme two**, a number of factors that can potentially influence the standing of IIP were explored. These factors included: the fad periods of interest in the standard (Quayle and Murphy, 1999); the use and integration of other quality improvement tools and techniques and industry standards (e.g. ISO 9001:2000 and Lloyds Register Quality Assurance); and various potential barriers regarding the implementation of IIP (e.g. Smith and Taylor, 2000; Reade, 2004; Higgins and Cohen, 2006). For the organizations studied within this research project, a number of these factors have a varying degree of detrimental impact on the standing of IIP. The positive impact regarding the organization's professional status on external bodies within the adult themed retailer provides a rare example otherwise. It appeared that the use and integration of other quality improvement tools and techniques had the greatest detrimental impact on the standing of IIP. For the defence organization, it was the most important and significant reason for ceasing IIP accreditation. In addition, the transport company and the adult themed retailer hold relevant industry standards in much higher esteem than IIP. Thus, the existence and impact of other quality improvement standards and industry awards has a particular bearing on the relevance of IIP. For sustainability, the future consideration, acquisition and pursuit of other quality improvement standards and/or industry awards could significantly influence the standing of IIP.

Other factors that had an influence on the standing of IIP included: the fad periods of interest in the standard; the priority of other day-to-day activities; the bureaucratic burden related to the standard; issues of compatibility of IIP in SMEs; and the potential problem of duplicated evaluation processes. In terms of the research project's title, it is clear that if these factors have a detrimental influence on the standing of IIP, it will too impact on the relevance and sustainability of the standard. Issues highlighted in the literature regarding potential language difficulties (Collins and Smith, 2004), late feedback on training implemented (Guardian, 2005) and the problems associated with changing established cultures (Atkinson, 1990; Drucker, 1992; Allen, 2000) are considered to be substantially nullified by the approaches towards IIP recognition established within **Theme one**. In essence, the significant lack of changes required to attain recognition rendered these factors as unimportant for the standing of IIP. Ultimately, HR practitioners need to understand and consider a number of potentially impacting influences when considering or using IIP recognition. This can be related to a portfolio of quality improvement standards and industry awards, fad periods of interest in the standard, the priority of other day-to-day activities, or the potential for duplication and/or bureaucratic burden.

With few studies probing the perceptual value (implicitly or explicitly) of IIP outside the contexts of management hierarchies (see Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002, for a rare example), this study exploited an opportunity to explore the surrounding assumptions within **Theme three**. Primarily, there is an assumption within Bell *et al.'s* (2002b) findings and IIP UK (2008b) that there is profound perceptual value connected with IIP recognition. Despite the logo/ symbols being considered extremely important in giving the standard some kind of tangible association, however, the perceptual value is found to be limited. The effect of IIP recognition on potential and current employees and customers is considered to be nominal. This conclusion holds firm despite the initial unanticipated benefits related to the catering department's achievement of IIP accreditation where the entire trust had failed. The relevance and sustainability of the standard is significantly reduced if the benefits associated with the logo/ symbols simply do not match the assumptions surrounding them. HR practitioners need to consider that the perceptual value associated with IIP recognition may not match their expectations and provide the benefits they seek from it.

Table 2: The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements though IIP:

STAGE	PROCESS
1. **Commitment to improving quality**	Top management makes a commitment to improving performance and profitability through the training and development of staff.
2. **Action planning**	Actions to improve organizational performance and profitability through training and development are identified and implemented internally.
3. **Evaluation**	An internal evaluation determines the effectiveness of the new commitment.
4. **IIP consideration**	External recognition for quality improvements is considered through IIP to provide an established benchmark for which the organization can be compared to.
5. **Assessment**	External verification by an IIP assessor via interviews, document reviews and observation of good practice is conducted. A decision whether or not to award IIP status is provided by an adjudication panel.
6. **Celebration**	Achievement can be celebrated along with the right to show a plaque of recognition and use the logo on letterheads and other organizational materials.
7. **Continuous review**	Organizations are encouraged to continuously improve and are required to be reassessed for recognition every three years.

Based on the interpretations of the findings, a new framework was developed within **Theme four** to represent the sample organizations studied, *The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements through IIP* (**Table 2**, reproduced above). This framework provides a pragmatic alternative involving IIP that reflects a *journey* an organization may take in the quest for quality improvement. The rhetoric surrounding the standard often insinuates a greater deal of involvement and collaboration throughout the IIP assessment and recognition process (Smith, 2000; Bell *et al.,* 2001a; Lentell and Morris, 2001; Taylor and Thackwray, 2001a, 2001b; Lloyd and Payne, 2002; Tickle and McLean, 2004). The high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer, however, uncover a reality that simplifies the involvement of IIP – the assessment process is especially scrutinized. Instead, many of the benefits claimed by IIP UK (2008a, 2008e) are achieved independently of IIP involvement. The new framework visualizes the

limitations in the relevance and sustainability of the standard uncovered and developed within other themes. A HR practitioner can use the new framework and the existing surrounding literature to understand which IIP *journey* may be more appropriate/ fitting to their organizational situation. Importantly, they can visualize what potential benefits the standard may or may not bring.

Finally, a new theoretical insight in the form of a definition was developed within **Theme five** to represent the findings and constructed framework above. The importance of contributing to the literature through pragmatic insight is highlighted by the constant changes IIP has gone through since its genesis (Collins and Smith, 2004; Reade, 2004; Hoque *et al.,* 2005; Hoque, 2008). The initial alternative definition conceptualized which epitomizes the new framework, *The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements through IIP*, is as follows:

> 'IIP is simply external recognition for changes in training and development practices.'

The boundaries of this alternative insight are expanded upon to specifically represent the sample organizations within this research project:

> 'These changes in training and development practices importantly led to significant improvements in business performance prior to IIP consideration. In addition, IIP recognition may not lead to any significant perceptual value concerning current or potential employees and/or customers.'

A HR practitioner can use this alternative definition within the greater body of knowledge to understand that limitations in the application of IIP may exist dependent on how the organization approaches recognition. This visualizes potential reductions in the relevance and sustainability of the standard if an organization makes significant improvements to training and development prior to IIP consideration or involvement.

To return to the words of Hoque (2008: p.57), it does indeed appear:

> "unlikely that they [the government] will achieve their aims of either better workforce development across all levels of the organisational hierarchy or of greater equality of training provision, by offering support to IiP."

In essence, it is the organizations themselves that generate what Leitch (2006: p.1) describes as the "untapped and vast" potential of their employees, not IIP involvement or recognition. These organizations can be commended for providing such training and development investment in their workforce that has seemingly led to business performance increases. But importantly, the causal link alleged by Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Cowling (2008) Bourne *et al.* (2008), Martin and Elwes (2008), and IIP UK (2008e) that IIP recognition is directly responsible for such success is refuted within the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and adult themed retailer. These organizations have delivered business performance improvements independently of IIP consideration, raising serious questions over the relevance and sustainability of the standard. In addition, the university does not act as a deviant case; it could not be deciphered whether or not IIP initially contributed towards quality improvements. Even if IIP is simply used as external recognition, hence, a promotional badge or plaque, the effects on current/ potential employees and customers is considered nominal at best. Thus, the residual sustainable value of IIP is also seriously questioned.

This research project, like Hoque (2008), questions what contribution IIP can make towards national competitiveness and productivity when the standard is so withdrawn from the business performance improvements integrated into the six organizations in question. Further research is needed to substantiate this claim within other organizations, but the generated theoretical insights and framework here provide a compatible exemplar. With over 38000 organizations involved with IIP, connecting 29% of the UK's workforce, the potential implications for these findings are widespread. If similarities are found in a significant proportion of other organizations, the government and IIP UK would have to seriously reconsider its bold claims made concerning the contribution and impact of IIP.

7.2. Limitations and future developments

Although this study has engaged with seven organizations from seven different sectors in significant depth, this qualitative approach can obviously be expanded upon. The approach used addresses the paucity of qualitative studies highlighted within the literature review (e.g. Berry and Grieves, 2003; Collins and Smith, 2004), as well as significantly expanding on a number of previous studies directly related to IIP (e.g. Ram, 2000; Bell *et al.,* 2001, 2002b; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Hoque, 2003). Nevertheless, there is still benefit to be gained from further research covering a much larger sample set of organizations to fully explore and develop the interpretations discussed here. Importantly, this research project provides thematic areas of enquiry that have a considerable impact on IIP involvement and recognition. These areas of concentration include: understanding what business performance improvements are/were made without IIP consideration, assessing the level of commitment to IIP ideologies, and testing what knowledge and understanding of IIP exists within the workforce; understanding the impact of fad periods of interest in IIP, the impact of other quality standards existing within an organization, and various potential barriers regarding the implementation of IIP; and assessing what perceptual value IIP actually holds for internal/ external employees and customers. The findings within these themes can assist in directing and focusing future studies on IIP and quality management related topic areas. The insights uncovered concerning the lack of IIP perceptual value for employees and customers, for example, could prompt further research to be conducted to fully understand the extent to which this phenomenon exists and impacts on the entire UK.

By using socially constructed data, the complexity of interpretation is unsurprisingly immense. This approach does help, however, to tackle the shortcomings of quantitative assertions generated within previous studies (e.g. Tamkin *et al.,* 2008; Cowling, 2008; Bourne *et al.,* 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008). Hence, the complexity of data provides a natural limitation to the study. Although significant strides have been taken to understand this complexity, it is realized that an amalgam of other internal and external factors can have an impacting influence upon the relevance and sustainability of IIP. This research project has intentionally concentrated on particular issues of interest constructed through the category and coding process. Despite this, research beyond the
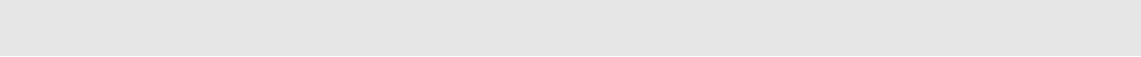
confines of this study that uncovers additional insights is welcome; this would help to further develop the interpretations built here.

One particular limitation of this study relates to the university. It could not be deciphered through the interviews the level of impact on quality improvements IIP had when the organization first attained accreditation. Hence, the university could not be used as support or as a deviant case when considering the impact of IIP prior to and during initial recognition. Although this does not pose a problem for developing insights relating to this particular issue, it does restrict the interpretations to six of the seven organizations. Data from the university could have provided valuable additional insights to build upon the analysis developed.

Building on the previous limitation, there is one particular theme of enquiry that would benefit greatly from further exploratory research. This concerns the customer perceptual value of IIP. With the research context using the opinions of managers and front-line employees, the interpretations relating to customer perceptual value concern their viewpoints only. Thus, there is a need to directly explore the perspectives of customers to fully develop the insights instigated here. This can significantly test and challenge further the assumptions made concerning the perceptual value of IIP.

The developed framework, *The stages for the external recognition of quality improvements through IIP* (**Table 2**), has been constructed based on the seven cases of this study. Ultimately, this means the theory is currently limited to the context of this study. To firmly establish this theoretical framework within the literature, it requires testing outside the boundaries of this research context. Hence, this process is expected to further evolve and develop this alternative framework to represent the realities concerning IIP involvement and recognition. The stages and processes of this new framework and those of Tickle and McLean's (2004: p.10), *The stages of the IIP journey*, for example, could be used as comparative exemplars to analyze the relevance and sustainability, or the contribution and value of IIP in other organizations. Nevertheless, researchers have a fresh and contemporary theoretical framework to compare their findings to.

Finally, the temporal point at which the research data was gathered provides the final limitation. The interviews within the five large organizations were conducted prior to the start of the recession within the UK economy in 2008. This considerable economic impact could have serious repercussions for investment in training and development amidst the growing redundancies and increases in unemployment. The interviews within the small organizations certainly reflect upon the economic downturn. Thus, it would have been very interesting to have studied the impacts on the relevance and sustainability of IIP before and during recession, even within the same organizations. Would these divergent organizations continue to thrive and invest in their people? Or would the significance of training and development be restricted to maintain a focus on organizational survival? Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown is intent that the answer to organizational survival lies within continued investment in education, training and development. Whether connected to IIP or not, exploring the reality behind this assertion would be very interesting.

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Appendices

Appendix one – The interview guideline and example questionnaire

Interview guideline

Interviewee requirements:
Staff specifically related to quality strategy
Staff set with the responsibility of IIP
Staff from different departments
Staff with management responsibility
Varying years of experience (pre and post IIP inception and re-accreditation)
New staff (less than one year) and experienced (more than one year)

Interview length: minimum 20 minutes and maximum 50 minutes.

Location: to be arranged at organization

Key areas of discussion:
Brief background and motivations for work
Perception and understanding of IIP
Attitudes towards IIP
Experiences of IIP
Appraisals, career development and training
Culture and teamwork
Leadership
IIP's 4 key components of commitment, planning, action, and evaluation

First interviewee: Random

Pre-interview:

Set a convenient time, date and location to meet. Explain the interview should run between 20 and 50 minutes. Confidentiality shall be complete, only the interviewee and the interviewer shall have any access to the information exchanged. Explain I would like to tape record the interview and ask for permission. Tapes, transcriptions and notes shall be secured at all times in a safety box to ensure privacy of data is always maintained. If possible, check the interview room to see if it meets requirements for privacy and to see if external noise is controllable.

Source a tape recorder and tapes. Ensure this works and test the limit of its capabilities in terms of how loud voices need to be for minimum recognition and where it might be best placed for clarity of data.

Note time of interview, date and location. Note any feelings about the appearance of the room.

Begin with saying thanks to the interviewee for being involved. Give brief introductory comments about the research. Ask again for permission to tape record. Double check tape recorder and commence with the interview.

Conscious efforts throughout the interview will be made to remain attentive and interested with the appropriate eye contact, nods and reinforcements. I will have the topic guide in front of me and keep the research questions in mind to avoid too much digression. I will allow for appropriate pauses to think about responses without pushing onto the next question too eagerly.

The interview questionnaire (example)

Start the tape and state the time, date, location and interviewee's name.

How are you today? Have I caught you at a busy time in yours and the station's schedule? My apologies if I have, and thanks again for taking time out to speak to me.

What are your expectations of this interview? Any nerves?

Let me please assure you anything you say is completely confidential, and that even your name will be changed to protect the information. The privacy of what we say is of critical importance to the success of my research, and without it I jeopardize everything my research stands for, ethically and academically. In other words, it is in my best interests to maintain full confidentiality, because without it, my research and PhD go out of the window.

I must also stress that at any point you can choose to withdraw your permission for me to use any information exchanged today.

I would also like to assure you that I am by no means assessing what you say within your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions and feelings I am interested to learn about in pursuit of my research question. The only thing I am assessing is the sustainability and relevance of IIP. I must stress I am not interested in finding flaws in anybodies work, or trying to make any kind of conflict to my own ends, I am simply trying to test whether IIP is sustainable and relevant in the actual real world compared to what IIP says can be achieved.

Do you have any questions or anything you are unsure of before I begin?

Could you tell me briefly how you got into this line of work?

What motivates you to…work here?
Follow on questions (dependent on response): How have these motivations changed? Where do you see yourself in 1/3/10 years time? Still here?

How do you feel about the organization at this moment in time?
Follow on: Compared to when you started and any previous feelings?

How would you rate the current performance of the organization?
Follow on: The company as a whole? Your department?

What comes to mind when you think of IIP?
Follow on: What does IIP mean to you? How would you explain it to someone who had not come across it before?

How do you believe others view IIP?

How long did you have recognition? What was the motivation behind first getting IIP?

How much of a success had IIP been? To what extent do you believe people followed IIP?
Follow on: To the organization? You? To others? In what ways? Any examples?

Are there any other quality related guidelines or standards you have to follow or maintain?
Follow on: How do they affect or work with IIP, if at all? Any conflicts of interest?

Have you ever been interviewed by an IIP assessor?
Follow on: How did this make you feel? Was there any pressures felt to ensure you 'passed'? How do you think this may have affected your answers?

What is your first thought or image when IIP assessment comes around?
Follow on: How are your job responsibilities and workload affected at this time? How does this make you feel? Is it a necessary evil (e.g. paperwork and training commitments)? How do others feel about IIP assessments?

How important to you was the IIP plaque on the wall?
Follow on: To you and getting a job here? To others? To customers?

If IIP status was to stop today, how well do you think quality would be sustained?
Follow on: What kind of changes, if any, would occur?

Do you have appraisals to evaluate your job performance?

Follow on: How do appraisals make you feel? What do you get from them? How do others feel about appraisals?

How have you improved as an individual since starting within this organization?
Follow on: How much do you believe IIP had contributed towards that? Have you always continuously improved as a member of staff?

Do you have a training schedule designed to enhance your skills and develop better career prospects? How does it compare to when you didn't have IIP?
Follow on: How much do you believe your skills and career prospects are developing as a result of this? How achievable is the training schedule? Do you feel you have the same opportunities as colleagues for such development? If not, why?

How much influence do you believe IIP had on training and development, in your opinion?

How would you describe the culture in this organization?
Follow on: And your department? Do you believe there to be separate cultures? What could be done (if anything) or is being done to develop a universal culture? Is it achievable? How do the different cultures make you feel?

Can you describe any process, activity, or policy which you would like to see changed or got rid of? Why?
Follow on: How does it make you feel as it stands?

Does the culture or cultures ever clash on how things should be done or how they could be done better? Any examples?

How does the organization deal with someone who is perhaps not conducive or in agreement with the style of culture? Any examples past or present?

What is the level of teamwork like amongst other members of staff?
Follow on: How does that make you feel? Could it, and should it, be better? Why?

How would you describe your style of leadership?
Follow on: How do think others view it? How effective do you believe it to be?

Who is your immediate boss or bosses, the person or persons you first report to?
Follow on: How do you view their leadership style? How effective is it to you? And others?

How do you feel about the leadership from the top, i.e. anybody else that affects your role?
Follow on: How has this changed since you started with the organization? How do others view this leadership? Does this style of leadership work for everybody? Examples?

Final thoughts: Is there anything you would like to add?

End the interview on a positive note and thank them again.

<u>Post interview:</u>

Reassure the interviewees of confidentiality. Provide time for them to come out of interview mode as they may wish to add comments now the tape recorder is off. Explain how the information will be used.
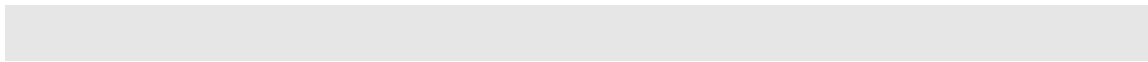
Underlined	stress
CAPITALS	loudness
/	
/	the beginning of overlapping talk
.	short pause
(2.0)	timed pause
==	continues without hearable pause
[ ]	uncertain transcription
( )	description of emotion displayed
< >	altered text for anonymity

I = Interviewer
R = Respondent

I: I'm sort of preempting myself here a little bit . did you have IIP status in the year 2000 when making people redundant?

R: yes, yes it was

I: and in 2004 when you turned a corner, did you still have it then?

R: no, we had released it . I would suggest it was about==I'm not sure of the years, but when we went through a rationalization and redundancy scheme, we actually went through redundancy in 199< >, 199< >, when we had IIP, and I think we retained until about 2001, which was the finish of all the redundancy programme, so it took <a number of> years to go through the redundancy programme

I: so that would be an interesting view of the actual standard . so how would you rate the current performance of the organization? You've already said a little bit

R: very well, very well at the moment, we're on the up, which generates a different behaviour, where you're on cost cut, cost cut, cost cut, that drives one type of behaviour, now we're looking at longevity, it drives a different behaviour, we can start to plan and think ahead

I: is that something you much prefer?

R: yeah, it's always easier in an environment when you're in growth than downsizing

I: what's it like in your department, in < > management?

R: er quite buoyant at the moment because we're going to spend something like 500 million pounds on this site alone, <name site>, in the next five years, so there's quite a lot of intensity in terms of planning, how you get it in, dealing with the authorities because we're going to have to build a new entrance and things like that, so it's quite upbeat and it's quite intense, which is always a good environment, when it's not intense, it's quite boring

I: quite a lot of responsibility with 500 million pounds

R: yeah

I: what comes to mind when you think of IIP?

R: um if I talk about when we first got it, it was==for the first time in the company, and I said earlier I've been in the company <over 20> years, we actually got a gong for something we're already doing, rather than chasing a gong and having to put something in place to get the gong

I: even right back at the beginning?

R: even right back at the beginning, yeah

I: er so if you were to try and explain it to someone who had never come across it before, how would you try and do that?

R: IIP um was really, for me, it was something that was being sponsored by the government, they wanted to get people, who were in manufacturing==well, in industry and universities, in a process of structured thought through training and development activities, where as it was ad hoc across a lot of industry

I: now, you mentioned those redundancies, do you think er, obviously the question is just coming to me off the top of my head, because you were saying the redundancies were early 90s, you must have been one of the first companies to get the standard because it only started in 1991

R: yes

I: er do you feel it had==well, did it have a negative effect because you were trying to make people redundant at the same time, but trying to promote quality?

R: I would say it was the other way round actually um . we got it, I think it was 9< > or 9< >, I think it was 9< > if I'm honest, and what it did, a large trunch of people left between 199< > and 199< > . you can imagine if we got it in 9< > we were working towards it 9< >, 9< >, so we were right in the thick of redundancy . there was a conscious decision we wouldn't roll it out as it was during that period because going through a redundancy process you had to have criteria for making people redundant that was consistent, and what we didn't want to do which compromised the longevity of IIP by saying 'you've got to have these skill sets to have a training plan', because there would be suspicion if you hadn't met that criteria, you'd be out of a job, so we tried to divorce the two, and it was only in 199< > when we really put the emphasis behind looking at all the components and constituent parts and saying 'we are now ready to formally launch IIP and go for the gong', so it actually worked, from my perspective, it worked better, because you'd gone through the large trunch of redundancy, and you were now saying to people, to maintain the future, where we need to get to, you'll need these skill sets', so it was actually a bonus, an add on, rather than something saying/

I: / it felt from the negative [thing] of redundancy then build to wards a better future . you've already answered the question of how long you've had recognition, roughly 9< > to 9< >, so what was the motivation behind first getting IIP?

R: um as a company we'd looked through==because we were going through this restructuring right across the organization and company, we'd looked at potentially what IIP would need to do in the future, so a lot of work and effort had been put into how we were going to set objectives for people, how we were going to link the goals of the company through to individuals . a lot of work had been done around personal development plans, because that would have to underpin how you were going to get there . a lot of work had been done around assessment and key skills and assessment centres and what skills we would need in the future, so when you actually looked at the accreditation of IIP, and what the criteria was for having it, I would suggest we were about five 7ths of it already in place, some of it was [sorted], some of it was new, but we'd already done the level of thinking to that level that said 'well, there's only a couple of things we would need to add to actually then go and get the accreditation', and again the accreditation was seen as another gong that said 'as a company, we are

a caring company' and it was another gong that said 'we've got gongs for quality, we've got gongs for manufacturing, well this is about our people', and it was linked very closely to the mission statement, and one of the mission statements was that people are our greatest asset, so again it was another link that said 'we're doing something with our people'

I: how much of a success do you believe IIP had been?

R: I think it was very successful in its time, it was very much==it gave us a focus on two or three areas that we'd probably thought about, but not done, so it drove an improvement in those two areas

I: so why did the organization decide to stop getting accreditation?

R: er effectively we grew beyond it, in terms of==if I go back to the sort of period of time we're talking, 9< > to 9< >, we'd have audits by manufacturing councils, we'd have audits by quality councils, we'd have audits by er process councils, over a number of years, because we're in an export business as well as a UK based business, the demands of the worldwide trading said 'you needed more than these individual gongs', so we went towards a <named standard> accreditation . and <named standard> accreditation is a worldwide accreditation, and that took in and embraced quality metrics, it embraced people metrics, it embraced manufacturing metrics, we evolved towards that probably about 199< >-200< >

I: does that mean IIP, there's two things I'm thinking of, wasn't very applicable, or stop being applicable, to the type of organization you are, or limit it?

R: it was==because we're ISO < >001 and < >001 accredited, you started to look at the number of accreditations the company had and say 'hang on a minute, we're starting to actually duplicate', so a lot of man hours were being wasted in the business, by being reviewed by <named standard>, who also talk people issues, you were being done by IIP, who were talking people issues, there was an accreditation by <named standard> to sell and they were looking at people issues, so you've got people continually looking at the same things, so we tried to streamline all the things that said 'what's the accreditation that would give us and can do as a global one'

I: and costs money in terms of man hours and getting them to assess you?

R: correct

I: the other thing I was going to say was, is it limited in the application to a global market as well? Because you were saying/

R: / in its own right, you could apply it globally, but again I think it would get swallowed up the way its got swallowed up with <this company>, in terms of it would be a subset, the activities are the same to get a bigger accreditation that's across your total business

I: er is that because IIP is==it's now known in a few other countries, but it's only really well known in the UK?

R: yeah

I: if you tried to take it to America/

R: / they'd have something completely different, you'd end up er with a contest that says 'well, IIP does this, theirs does that, are they the same?', you've got to go through that rigmarole, where as a <named standard> accreditation in America, people can say 'I know exactly what that is', or an ISO accreditation, they'll know exactly what that is

I: I was going to say and mention the ISO one, is that is very worldwide renowned

R: yeah

I: so you dropped IIP first rather than something like ISO?

R: yes, because again as a country we were very insular, we were UK based and we sell aircraft out to the world, now we've actually got a footprint in about 50 odd different countries and we're manufacturing in those countries, we had to grow globally, so all the accreditations had to follow the same process where we've got it once and it's worldwide

I: I already know the answer to this question, are there any other quality related guidelines that you to follow? You've mentioned ISO, you've mentioned the <named standard> one er . how important do you believe the IIP plaque on the wall to be?

R: er at the time we had thought it was insignificant . it was the plastic blue triangle and people would walk past it and not really ask what the hell it is, and again, it could be done to location, you know, if it's in one of the outside sheds on the side, we had to put it somewhere, but it wasn't at the main gate in reception or anything like that

I: so you didn't make a conscious effort to put it where everyone could see it? . it just went somewhere?

R: yes, because again there's <a number of> different site entrances for this site and I don't whether they asked the question or not, but we only got one, so it was which side entrance do you put it on, similarly at <name> because we weren't <particular industry> accredited, which was seven sites, but individual sites had to be accredited under that as well, and we only had <name> and <name>, so again, there's six different entrances at [name], so where do you put it at [name]?

I: do you think it's a bit annoying only getting the one for the size of the site?

R: I think so, yes, as many as you want, you know, if you had to pay for them

I: er does it make any difference, do you believe, to anybody getting a job here, or wanting to have a job here, having IIP previously?

R: I would say yes, I would say yes, very much so, we're going through er quite a recruitment because of the workload I mentioned, and I've been running with it for the past 18 months, and a load of questions you're getting asked in interviews are around what type of company it is to work for, how it supports its people, what sort of further education there is available, how do we think about sponsoring this, that and the other, so I think in the marketplace people are hooked into a company that supports its people

I: that seems to be quite unique to this case study that I've looked at, because other case studies, people are a lot less bothered about what's (going on)==it seems to be secondary, once they are in, once they've got their foot in the door, then they might be interested about training and further education

R: certainly with us, again we are a large global company and people know that and we have a website that's available to go and look at, and I think a lot of people are hooking into that, and if you look at the website itself it'll talk about what we do with people, so they're coming almost having done their homework, so it might be a bit of smoke and mirrors doing their homework 'well, I need to ask these sort of questions', but my personal view when I'm talking to people is they're genuinely interested, because they will probably know somebody in the area that works for the company and they will have talked to them about what we're providers of . and it is quite diverse, you can be legal, you can be

commercial, you can do <named industry>, you can do facilities management, you can be a quality process engineer, all within the same company

I: do you think that's because people are viewing this kind of job as a career, almost a lifelong job, compared to these people==other people I might have talked to where it's [career] hopping?

R: very much so, I've spent my life, my whole working life within the company, alright I've spent it in <name> management, but I have been seconded into other areas of the business, on a 12 months secondment to do a particular task, because of the skills sets I've got in terms of project management or whatever, so you've always got that opportunity to do something different within the company, and I think that drives a behaviour, like you saying, in terms of longevity and employment . there are a number of opportunities and you don't get bored

I: do you think that's important in keeping people happy?

R: I do, I do, and I think from a company point of view it's probably why it's a reasonable salary you get in the company, but it's not the top end, although it's a benchmark company, it's not the top because there is all this other stuff that goes with it in terms of support

I: it's very different to the other types of companies that I've considered . when IIP status stopped, do you think there was any drop in quality or do you think it carried on growing?

R: no, I think it carried on growing um . I can't actual tell you when it stopped, because we didn't make a conscious decision to say 'we're not going to carry on with the accreditation', it just fell over if you know what I mean, it just went into disrepute

I: walking through it, barging over it?

R: yeah, because I think a lot of stuff that IIP, and what we'd already been driving, became a day-to-day activity in the business, so it was constant churn, and again you were still being checked off by <named standard> and people like that, there was still the emphasis behind it

The following is a breakdown of the interview numbers according to the organization studied and their related organizational code:

- ➢ High School (Sch) – 10 interviews
- ➢ University (Uni) – 10 interviews
- ➢ Catering department (Cat) – 6 interviews
- ➢ Defence organization (Def) – 3 interviews
- ➢ Transport company (Tran) – 5 interviews
- ➢ Third sector organization (Thi) – 2 interviews
- ➢ Adult themed retailer (Adu) – 2 interviews

Category	Code	Findings
Motivations/ feelings	*Motivation*	*This code relates to the motivations interviewees have for working in this type of industry:* **Sch** - Although not explicitly the same, motivations for working are of a similar positive nature relating to the rewarding aspects of educating children and fulfilling ambitions beyond the simplicities of earning money as a 'means to an end'. **Uni** - The majority of those interviewed enjoys working for the university and reflects on this with positive comments. Three people out of the ten, however, portray mixed feelings connected to certain issues, especially in terms of job security. **Cat** - All of those interviewed enjoy working in the department and reflected upon this with very positive comments. Motivation at the time of the interviews is generally very high with a shared positive outlook for the future. **Def** - Those interviewed enjoy working for a large well-established company. Diversity plays a key role in keeping motivations high and staff turnover low. **Tran** – All of those interviewed enjoy their job and express a real affinity for the industry. **Thi** – Both interviewees expressed a close affiliation and connection with their industry. **Adu** – Both interviewees express a sense of pride and fulfillment working in an industry that is unique and fun.
	Feelings	*This code relates to the feelings interviewees*

		have about their organization:
		Sch - Feelings are shared across the interviewees as everyone claims that the school is in a sustained state of 'boom' following record results on levels of achievement the previous year. The interviewees and other employees are generally feeling highly motivated and proud at the time of interview. The word 'enjoyment' was frequently used to describe the type of work.
		Uni - Feelings about the organization are mixed. The majority have positive feelings, but reflected on particular difficulties within the workplace. Issues, including a lack of job security, a difficult first year and the high level of administration work, hinder the general positive feedback attained at the time of interview.
		Cat - Feelings are shared as everyone expressed positive comments on the organization. Performance is at an all time high and predicted to continuously improve.
		Def - Positive comments are reflected within the state of 'boom' the organization is currently engaged with.
		Tran – All relayed positive comments of how the organization is continuing to develop and it is currently at an all-time high.
		Thi – Feelings are generally positive although pressures of increased outputs are mentioned.
		Adu – It is felt the organization has survived a tough period and business is looking positive for the foreseeable future.
	Support	*This code relates to feelings of support provided by the organization:*
		Sch – Interviewees express feelings of continual support. These feelings relate to training being readily available, fantastic support from the head, and comparisons with other less supportive schools.
		Uni – Some interviewees express feelings that reflect positively on support from the employer. A few reflect negatively, however, on support concerning short-term contracts.
		Cat – All interviewees express positive comments on support from the employer, especially in terms of training. Training is externally funded reducing any associated monetary problems, which is comparable in significance to the rest of the organization and other organizations.

		Def – Code not discussed. **Tran** – Interviewees express positive perceptions on support from the employer. The organization emphasizes the importance of giving employees a real 'voice'. **Thi** – Not relevant. **Adu** – Not relevant.
	Performance	*This code relates to the current feelings on the performance of the organization:* **Sch** – All interviewees reflect positively on performance ranging between feelings expressing 'good' to 'excellent'. The school is at an all-time high in terms of performance. **Uni** – Interviewees express mixed feelings on performance. It is agreed that the organization continues to grow in terms of size and reputation, but some feel that the reputation needs further development. Different departments are out-performing others leading to varied opinions on performance. Some interviewees express issues with the underperformance of students. **Cat** – In terms of a department, performance is considered to be at a record high and is predicted to develop. The trust is generally thought to need improvement as a whole. **Def** – Performance has seen a massive turnaround in the past three to four years. Before this, the future of the company was in doubt and a lot of redundancies occurred. **Tran** – Performance is considered to be at a record high and is predicted to develop further. **Thi** – Respondents reflect positively about current projects, but highlight difficulties of balancing and managing the workload. **Adu** – The business has survived recession and sales have increased. Respondents feel positive about future performance potential.
	Ambition	*This code relates to the level of future ambition and commitment within the organization:* **Sch** – All interviewees express desires to remain in education and most suggested long-term ambitions within the school they are in. **Uni** – Ambitions within the university are mixed. Just over half reflect long-term and medium-term ambitions, but the rest suggest short-term ambitions. Contracts are partly to blame and two of the interviewees have since left the organization. **Cat** – Long-term commitment to the organization

Category	Code	Findings
		is generally high with only a few suggesting the possibility of working elsewhere in the future. **Def** – Two of the three interviewees envisage their time in the organization until retirement, the other is looking for a career change after a long stint within the organization. **Tran** – All the interviewees express a long-term desire and commitment to the organization. The staff turnover of drivers within the business, however, is known to be notoriously high. **Thi** – Both interviewees are committed to the industry. **Adu** – Both interviewees are committed to their small business operation.
IIP perceptions/ understandings	*Knowledge*	*This code relates to interviewees' knowledge of IIP:* **Sch** – Knowledge of IIP is found to be very limited within the majority of interviewees. Those with prior experience and those at the top of the hierarchy demonstrate greater knowledge. A considerable proportion of the management positions, however, still have large knowledge gaps, and even some of those previously interviewed by IIP assessors still have very limited knowledge. **Uni** – Knowledge of IIP is found to be very limited within the majority of interviewees. Some interviewees' previous experiences with IIP in other organizations help a little with the knowledge deficit. Those interviewees found to be knowledgeable relate to upper hierarchical management positions whereby contact with IIP has been very direct. **Cat** – Half the interviewees admit a very limited knowledge of IIP. Of the other half, they all relate to leadership positions with knowledge improving the further up the hierarchy you go. **Def** – The three interviewed are extremely knowledgeable about IIP, which is reflected in their lengthy stays within the organization. **Tran** – The interviewees related to upper management demonstrated a greater breadth of knowledge of IIP. Knowledge becomes very scarce the further down the hierarchy you go. Staff without leadership responsibility and even lower ranked managers/supervisors have very little knowledge of IIP. **Thi** – Interviewees are knowledgeable.

		Adu – Interviewees are knowledgeable.
	Perception	*This code relates to the perception of IIP by interviewees:* **Sch** – All but one of the interviewees expressed positive comments concerning IIP and the potential links to improved training and development. The one that did not only expresses their inability to answer the question because they know so little about IIP. One of the interviewees suggests that the reality of being able to measure training needs is questionable. **Uni** – The majority of interviewees express positive comments that relate to investments made in staff. One interviewee expresses no opinion because they know so little about IIP. Another interviewee suggests that IIP has had its place in the organization, and that the university's HR strategy now fills the gap potentially left by not having recognition. **Cat** – Interviewees make a lot of connections to training and development within a positive context. Several mention IIP in terms of being a reward for input into training practices. **Def** – Interviewees express usefulness of IIP as an external reward/gong. There are suggestions IIP has long since run its course in this organization. **Tran** – Interviewees express a number of positive comments relating to value and quality. **Thi** – Interviewees question the impact of IIP. **Adu** – Interviewees express a positive benefit in terms of achieving professional status within retail amongst peers.
	Interviewed	*This code relates to whether interviewees have been interviewed by an IIP assessor:* **Sch** – 5 yes, 5 no. **Uni** – 3 yes, 6 no. **Cat** – 3 yes, 2 no. **Def** – 3 yes. **Tran** – 1 yes. **Thi** – 2 yes. **Adu** – 2 yes.
	Explain	*This code relates to how well an interviewee could explain IIP to somebody who had never heard of it:* **Sch** – Similar to the code *perception*, the majority of interviewees positively suggest how they would relate IIP to training and development when explaining the standard to others. Three

		interviewees admitted they would struggle to explain to others what IIP is. It is noted that two of these three interviewees have an opinion relating to training and development in the code *perception*. **Uni** – Just over half the interviewees admit to lacking the knowledge of IIP, or providing misled guesses, to be able to explain to others what the standard is. The rest provide positively related connotations with training and development. **Cat** – Those outside of the management hierarchy admit to not being able to provide explanations to others as to what IIP is. Explanations become better as we move up the hierarchy and experience dealing directly with the standard increases. **Def** – All interviewees can provide clear explanations to others as to what IIP is. Their emphasis does not retain positive links throughout; they warn of the limitations using the standard. **Tran** – Explanations to others about IIP improves as we move further up the hierarchy. The greater the knowledge and direct experience with IIP, the clearer the explanations become. **Thi** – easily achieved by these senior managers. **Adu** – easily achieved by these senior managers.
	Others	*This code relates to how the interviewees believe others within their organizations view IIP:* **Sch** – Some interviewees say they do not discuss IIP in the workplace, therefore, they cannot speculate. Other interviewees suggest there is a mixed view of understanding. One suggests the more involved people are with assessment, the more knowledgeable they are. However, another interviewee suggests that during assessment more junior staff do not get a full explanation as to what IIP does. Some suggest there might be very little understanding of IIP amongst other staff. **Uni** – Nearly all the interviewees suggest that an understanding of IIP within other staff members is probably generally very limited. One interviewee suggests that involvement in assessment may increase knowledge. Another suggests a need for re-education within the organization as IIP has not been mentioned since their arrival within the organization (less than a year ago). **Cat** – All interviewees suggest there is probably

		a general lack of knowledge as to what IIP is throughout the department. Only one suggests the possibility of employees realistically knowing more. **Def** – Code not discussed. **Tran** – The majority of interviewees suggest that employees generally know very little about IIP. One interviewee suggests that managers are torn between whether IIP is a good thing or a waste of time. Only one interviewee holds the opinion that most people know what it is about and recognize its value. **Thi** – It is believed there would be a very limited understanding of IIP amongst other employees. **Adu** – It is believed there would be a very limited understanding of IIP throughout the rest of the workforce.
	Success	*This code relates to how much of a success interviewees believe IIP has been in their organization:* **Sch** – Just over half the interviewees express a number of positive comments relating to the success of IIP. However, two interviewees remark on how the school would achieve this success regardless of IIP recognition. Some interviewees could not express an opinion as to the success of IIP and one interviewee expresses that IIP has not touched their life. **Uni** – Two interviewees express that IIP has been useful as an external 'kitemark', but that's the limit of its contribution. Two interviewees suggest IIP success is limited if people in the organization do not even know what it is. Only one interviewee expresses positive benefits beyond external recognition and another interviewee suggests that IIP had much more value when it was first introduced. Some interviewees considered they were not in a position to express an opinion as to the success of IIP. **Cat** – All interviewees reflect positively on IIP's success within the department. It is emphasized that training was good before recognition. **Def** – All interviewees express that IIP had much more value at the beginning of recognition. One interviewee suggests that IIP assessment cannot deliver everything that is needed within the organization. **Tran** – Interviewees outside of top management

		could not express an opinion as to the success of IIP. Opinion within management is split: some believe the standard to be successful in terms of providing a clear focus and issues for improvement; but others question whether improvement would have occurred naturally without IIP and suggest that the new MD may have actually had the main influence on recent success. **Thi** – Both interviewees argue success is incredibly difficult to measure and question the relevance of IIP in their sector. **Adu** – Both interviewees highlight the kudos achieved from being in such a unique sector, but question IIP's level of integration within training improvements.
	Stopped	*This code relates to interviewees feelings on how well quality could be sustained without IIP:* **Sch** – All ten interviewees feel the levels of quality improvement developed by the school would continue regardless of IIP status. It is felt by the majority that IIP status just works as a 'pat on the back' for all the achievements thus far rather than a radical initiative leading the school to great strides in terms of quality improvements. **Uni** – The majority of interviewees consider that quality improvement would be sustained or could continue to improve without IIP. Others are unsure of any potential differences. Several interviewees raise concerns over the sustainability of the standard. **Cat** – All of the interviewees feel confident that quality improvement would be sustained or continue to improve without IIP. **Def** – All interviewees are adamant that quality would not reduce without IIP. The organization is considered to have grown beyond it. **Tran** – All interviewees believe quality would continue, although one suggests an alternative and similar guideline would be required. There is an argument that changes would have occurred regardless of IIP recognition. **Thi** – The use of ISO 9001 is thought to ensure the continuation of quality improved performance. **Adu** – Both interviewees feel the organization would carry on improving with or without IIP.
	Ease	*This code relates to interviewees feelings on achieving IIP recognition with ease:*

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>Sch – The IIP recognition is considered to have been achieved very easily as practice was already up to the standard it needed to be. During reassessment, IIP assessors found it very difficult to identify points for development.
Uni – IIP recognition is now considered fairly easy to maintain because of other standards which assist greatly.
Cat – IIP recognition is considered to have been achieved very easily because changes to practice had been made before seeking IIP.
Def – IIP recognition was considered a gong for something the organization was already doing.
Tran – It is felt that most changes to practice had been made prior to IIP recognition. Very little was needed to gain accreditation.
Thi – It is felt that changes in training practices were made prior to IIP, therefore, recognition was easily achieved.
Adu – An 80/20 split is referred to when describing the ease with which IIP is achieved, i.e. 80% of changes to training practices were made prior to IIP consideration.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><i>Why</i></td><td><i>This code relates to feelings on why IIP status was first achieved and is subsequently maintained:</i>
Sch – IIP helps to reflect on a successful organization, whether that is internal or external visualization. The standard should help to find areas for the improvement of staff.
Uni – IIP is considered to have different states of emphasis dependent on the interviewee: reflects on something being done already; shows new staff they would be treated as assets; external quality assurance; aid to recruitment; and a different way of thinking about investment in staff.
Cat – IIP is considered recognition for all the investment put into training. One interviewee suggests that this relates directly to the mindset of the manager who is very training orientated.
Def – IIP was considered a gong for something the organization was doing already.
Tran – Before IIP recognition, a consultant suggested that the organization was so close to IIP that they should go for it, so they did. IIP shows the organization is doing what it suggests it is doing. With the organization being council owned, IIP is well supported and promoted. In</td></tr>
</table>

			the future, having IIP may potentially affect the attainment of contracts. **Thi** – IIP was first achieved to provide recognition from a standard outside of the sector, although its compatibility is questioned. **Adu** – IIP was achieved to help gain acceptance and professional status within mainstream retail.
		Following	*This code relates to feelings on whether IIP is followed all the time:* **Sch** – Between assessments, IIP is not really given a second thought. **Uni** – IIP only really gets followed when reassessment is required. One example outside of reassessment is provided to do with HEFCE approval. One interviewee suggests IIP is an 'old hat' tick box exercise. **Cat** – With an immense emphasis on training, everything is done with IIP in mind. One interviewee suggests how the standard may simply be used as a plaque in some organizations. **Def** – IIP was not considered high on the agenda, especially since a merger. IIP is considered as duplication for other standards that are followed with more interest and importance. **Tran** – Although IIP acts as a reminder to remain committed to people, changes suggested during assessment were not implemented until just before reassessment. **Thi** – IIP is only really considered at the time of assessment. One interviewee mentions how a requirement for change was highlighted in the first assessment but was never addressed in; thus, it came up again in the subsequent assessment, although recognition was still achieved. **Adu** – The organization does not consider IIP on a day-to-day basis.
		Intrinsic	*This code relates to feelings of an intrinsic ability to deliver quality without IIP:* **Sch** – Practice associated with IIP recognition is considered to exist outside of the standard's influence. Staff are thought to be naturally following IIP without knowing it. **Uni** – The organization is considered to absorb good practice regardless of IIP recognition. **Cat** – Training was readily available before IIP recognition. **Def** – A lot of changes to practice were made prior to IIP assessment. **Tran** – When first considering IIP recognition,

		the organization is thought to have been very close to passing straight through the assessment process. Management is split as to whether quality has been intrinsically improving during IIP recognition or whether the standard has actually made an integral contribution. **Thi** – The majority of changes to practice were made prior to IIP assessment. **Adu** – 80% of changes to practice are thought to have been made prior to IIP assessment.
	Unique	*This code relates to unique or unforeseen benefits that have arisen from IIP recognition:* **Cat** – The catering department achieved IIP recognition where the entire trust had failed. This gave the department initial kudos and helped to improve their profile of work with regards to care of patients. **Adu** – The adult themed retailer gained the unique benefit of achieving greater professional status amongst other retailers, training standards departments, councils and the Police.
	Clash-guide and standing	*The clash-guide code relates to any potential clashes between IIP and any other guidelines; the standing code relates to the standing of IIP compared to other quality improvement tools and techniques or industry standards:* **Sch** – There does not appear to be any significant clashes with the OFSTED requirements, but this is mainly due to OFSTED taking priority over IIP. This means IIP has to fit around the OFSTED requirements, although there are no particular differences worthy of noting. IIP could be potentially used as evidence for OFSTED. **Uni** – Other quality related guidelines, including HEFCE, exist and these take priority over IIP. However, there are no examples of particular differences worthy of noting. **Cat** – Numerous quality related guidelines exist – health and safety, hygiene, etc – and these take priority over IIP. This means IIP has to fit into existing structures and requirements. The department is said to fit very well with IIP requirements. **Def** – All interviewees speak of IIP acting as duplication for other, more valuable, quality guidelines. IIP cannot be applied to an international market, because it is only relevant to the UK. **Tran** – Industry awards are held in a higher

		regard than IIP. **Thi** – No clashes exist and ISO 9001 is felt to have considerable priority over IIP. **Adu** – Industry awards are held in a higher regard than IIP.
	Day-to-day	*This code relates to the impact of day-to-day activities on IIP:* It is clear within all of the organizations that IIP is not a priority concern on a day-to-day basis amidst other more pressing organizational activities. Indeed, some interviewees admitted that IIP only came to the forefront when reassessment was immediately imminent. Respondents from all organizations highlighted how interest in IIP rapidly fades between assessments.
	Outlook	*This code relates to limitations pertaining to the outlook of IIP recognition overall:* Several respondents from all organizations highlighted limitations when commenting on their IIP outlook. In other words, there are a number of concerns over the sustained relevance and applicability of IIP.
	Continuation	*This code relates to opinions regarding the continuation of IIP recognition whilst using other quality improvement tools and techniques:* **Def** – Interviewees raised particular concern with the continuation of IIP amidst other already achieved quality improvement tools and techniques. Indeed, it was one of the primary factors for the defence organization ceasing accreditation. **Thi** – Interviewees raised particular concern with the continuation of IIP amidst other already achieved quality improvement tools and techniques.
	Incompatible	*This code relates to feelings concerning the compatibility of IIP in particular sectors:* **Thi** – Respondents within the third sector organization raised particular concerns regarding the compatibility of IIP within the not-for-profit sector. It is felt that the business driven ideologies of IIP do not merge comfortably with those of a not-for-profit organization.
	Bureaucracy	*This code relates to the level of bureaucratic exacerbation that IIP creates:* It is agreed within all seven organizations that IIP can exacerbate bureaucracy. The level of impact

		on bureaucracy, however, is not considered to be that damaging or influential on the standing of IIP.
	Duplication	*This code relates to potential duplication of training evaluation processes between IIP and other quality improvement tools and techniques:* **Def** – Respondents within the defence organization took particular issue with the duplication of other training evaluation processes. Indeed, it is one of the reasons why the defence organization ceased IIP accreditation. **Thi** – Respondents within the third sector organization took particular issue with the duplication of other training evaluation processes. It has led to a number of discussions within management where the future of IIP has been contemplated.
	Importance	*This code relates to feelings as to the importance of the IIP logo/symbol:* **Sch** – Interviewees highlight the visual importance of IIP. **Uni** – The logo is considered a vital aspect of IIP recognition. It is considered to be the tangible aspect of the standard, although only one interviewee suggests it is a sign that breeds encouragement. **Cat** – The logo is felt to represent recognition within the department and reflects positively on staff and customers. One interviewee does question the importance of the logo within the NHS (not catering) where reputation is considered far more important. **Def** – The logo can suggest the organization is caring, but the importance is thought to have reduced since the nineties now so many organizations have recognition – the value of IIP in large organizations is thought to have reduced with more small organizations achieving status. The organization only received one plaque at the time of IIP recognition reducing a lot of any potential impact on staff and customers. **Tran** – The logo is considered a very important visual aspect of recognition, especially with the standard becoming well recognized in the country. The transport industry is thought to be unconcerned with IIP as industry awards hold much greater value – only three companies in this area have IIP recognition. **Thi** – The logo and symbols are thought to be

		very important. One interviewee suggests it creates a common dialect across sectors. **Adu** – The logo and symbols are very important for external bodies, e.g. councils, the Police and trading standards. However, it is unimportant for customers within this industry, especially when they cannot visualize the plaque outside of the organization's premises.
	Employment	*This code relates to feelings on whether IIP makes any difference to applying for jobs:* **Sch** – Interviewees feel the recognition from IIP is unimportant to those that apply for a job at the organization. **Uni** – The large majority of interviewees suggest IIP has no impact on job application for themselves or others. Two suggested the possibility it could act as a bonus. **Cat** – Generally, the standard is regarded in a positive manner in terms of status and achievement. However, for potential employees, the standard may have limited impact in terms of value and significance. **Def** – Two interviewees suggested no difference and one suggested a difference because of long-term training implications on the career. **Tran** – All interviewees suggest it makes no difference to them applying for jobs, but a few mentioned it could (but remained unsure) affect those interested and clued up on IIP. **Thi** – Interviewees feel the recognition from IIP is unimportant to those that apply for a job at the organization. **Adu** – Interviewees feel the recognition from IIP is unimportant to those that apply for a job at the organization.
	Customer	*This code relates to feelings on whether the IIP logo/symbol makes any difference to customers' perceptions:* **Sch** – It is felt that the IIP logo and symbols would have no bearing on students or parents. **Uni** – The large majority suggest it makes no difference to customers' perceptions. Only two suggest the possibility of any potential impact, but doubted it. **Cat** – The majority of interviewees suggest a minimal impact with customers, although two suggest a positive impact on perceptions. One suggests it may be more important for the bosses and another suggests reputation supercedes the

Category	Code	Findings
		importance of IIP. **Def** – It is suggested that the difference with customers is very little. **Tran** – Interviewees suggest an indirect link to differences in customers' perceptions unless they knew about the standard. **Thi** – Interviewees feel that the IIP logo and symbols are significantly irrelevant for their specific sector (not-for-profit). **Adu** – Interviewees feel that the IIP logo and symbols are significantly irrelevant for their specific sector (the adult/sex industry).
	Value	*This code relates to the perceived value of the IIP logo/ symbols in relation to other organizations:* **Def** – This code became prominent when questioning respondents on whether they lost anything of significance when ceasing IIP recognition. It was felt that the increase in uptake for IIP recognition in SMEs potentially reduces the value for larger organizations.
	Loss	*This code relates to the differences perceived after ceasing IIP recognition:* **Def** – This code is only relevant to the defence organization. It was clearly felt that nothing of significance was lost when ceasing IIP recognition. The attainment and value of other internationally renowned quality initiatives far outweighed any potential loss associated with IIP recognition.
Category	*Code*	**Findings**
Training	*Schedule*	*This code relates to an interviewees' perception on their training schedule:* **Sch** – Interviewees mention inset days as part of a training schedule. However, training beyond this (including courses, education etc) appears ad hoc. **Uni** – Only one interviewee mentions a fixed and directed training schedule. Others describe how the process of training is flexible and recommended, but not essential to complete. However, there is some basic training that is required of all staff to complete. **Cat** – Only some of the training schedule is mandatory, the rest is optional and flexible to the needs of staff. Funding is not an issue within the catering department, but can be elsewhere within the Trust. **Def** – There is a training schedule, but it is fairly

		flexible to the needs of employees. **Tran** – Only one interviewee states they have a fixed and directed training schedule. Others have flexibility and choice over what training they may do. Funding is not thought to be an issue. **Thi** – Training is relatively ad-hoc and budgets impact on availability. **Adu** – Training is relatively ad-hoc and budgets impact on availability.
	Availability	*This code relates to perceptions on the availability of training:* **Sch** – The majority of interviewees feel there is plenty of training available. However, one interviewee suggests that training courses lack applicability and relevance, and another suggests budgets restrict the availability. One interviewee feels there is a greater availability of training in IT because of its importance and business links. **Uni** – The majority of interviewees feel training is readily available. However, two interviewees suggest that any training beyond the basics is difficult to complete and fit into a timetable. **Cat** – All interviewees feel there is plenty of training available to them. This is complimented with the training being externally funded. However, training is difficult throughout the rest of the Trust with the organization being not-for-profit. **Def** – Code not discussed. **Tran** – All but one of the interviewees feel there is plenty of training available to them. One interviewee suggests training is restricted for high positions. **Thi** – Potentially, plenty of training exists, but it is significantly limited by budget restraints. **Adu** – The organization promotes training and career development, but budgets restraints are significant.
	Progression	*This code relates to perceptions on progression opportunities within the organization:* **Sch** – The majority of interviewees feel that progression within the organization is achievable. One interviewee suggests this is limited by the budget allowed for training, and another had no comment to make because they were not interested in progression at the time of interview. **Uni** – All but one of the interviewees feels that progression through training is readily achievable. One interviewee suggests that the

		type of contract restricts availability of training, i.e. a short-term contract equals less availability. **Cat** – All interviewees feels that progression through training is achievable. One interviewee remarks on the difficulty of funding within the rest of the trust. **Def** – Progression is considered to be achievable, however, it is implied that it is not for everybody. The workplace has to accept that some employees are not particularly interested in progression. **Tran** – Thoughts on progression are mixed. More than half of the interviewees feel that progression through training is achievable. One interviewee suggests this progression through training has been attainable even before IIP recognition. However, one interviewee feels progression is not achievable, and another mentions limitations of progression due to having a higher position within the organization. **Thi** – The managers interviewed feel progression is possible for employees, but it cannot be made readily available to everybody. **Adu** – The managers interviewed feel progression is possible for employees, but it has to be limited to a significant few due the size of the organization and restrictions on budgets.
	Contribution	*This code relates to feelings on how much contribution IIP has had on training:* **Sch** – Two interviewees believe IIP contributes to training, with another suggesting that the standard provides a training focus. However, just under half the interviewees suggest there is very little contribution from IIP due to reasons like the existing philosophy and lack of IIP understanding. One interviewee suggests the contribution is difficult to even quantify. Two interviewees felt they could not answer the question. **Uni** – Just under half the interviewees feel there is very little contribution from IIP to training with another interviewee suggesting the university follows the philosophy supported by the standard anyway. Two interviewees feel they could not answer the question. One interviewee feels the impact of IIP was far greater at the beginning of recognition. One interviewee suggests the emphasis is on HR to follow the standard and deliver a meaningful contribution. **Cat** – All interviewees suggest training existed

Category	Code	Findings
		before IIP recognition; therefore, its contribution is limited to external recognition for this. However, an IIP assessor did link the department to external funding. **Def** – IIP is thought to only have contributed in two or three areas at the beginning of recognition. **Tran** – Just under half the interviewees feel the contribution to training from IIP is limited. However, one interviewee feels that IIP draws training together into a nice neat package with another interviewee suggesting that some training was introduced with IIP in mind. **Thi** – It is felt that the contribution of IIP is limited; the philosophy of high quality training and development practice existed prior to IIP involvement. **Adu** – It is felt that IIP has had some impact on training and development practices in terms of suggestions, but a direct contribution is questioned.
	Ethos	*This code relates to feelings concerning the ethos of training and development before IIP recognition:* A number of respondents within six organizations (the high school, the catering department, the defence organization, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer) highlighted the existence of a training and development ethos before IIP recognition. In other words, these organizations developed a culture of training and development excellence prior to IIP involvement. Importantly, the university does not serve as a deviant case; respondents could not remember the original connotations surrounding initial IIP assessment.
Category	*Code*	**Findings**
<u>Culture</u>	*Feel-cult*	*This code relates to interviewees feelings about the culture within the organization:* **Sch** – All ten interviewees made positive statements about the current culture. This includes comments on the welcoming and happy atmosphere, supportive networks, and decentralized role status. **Uni** – The majority of interviewees made positive comments about the culture. Issues with the limited long-term nature of the culture are expressed by several respondents. This is mainly due to short-term contracted work associated within their job roles. Others mention apathy

Category	Code	Findings
		within students and other staff, a very hierarchical management structure, and bickering and individualistic departments they work in. **Cat** – All of the interviewees made positive comments about the culture. A number of interviewees commented that the support provided by the employer – for example, personal difficulties or training – is a rare commodity not often found within a workplace. **Def** – It is suggested that three layers of culture exist within the hierarchical structure. This is interesting but can be frustrating. **Tran** – All interviewees express positive comments about the culture that exists, including honesty, good communication and a family like atmosphere. A drivers' versus garage staff culture is mentioned, but it is considered normal, immoveable and acceptable. **Thi** – Both interviewees make positive comments about the culture and how it has changed and improved over time. **Adu** – Both interviewees refer to the organizational culture as 'family'. This is very much a result of the small sized nature of the organization and the married owners.
Category	*Code*	**Findings**
<u>**Management/ leadership**</u>	*Top*	*This code relates to feelings of interviewees and other staff on the style and effectiveness of top level management:* **Sch** – The headmaster is often quoted as being an 'inspiration' and 'visionary' in terms of leadership. All interviewees suggest the headmaster has had an immense impact on the quality improvements the school has achieved since his/her appointment. All interviewees consider the feelings of other staff to be very similar and positive to their own. It is thought the style of management does not work for everybody, but those people are few and far between. **Uni** – Leadership from senior leadership roles develop mixed feelings. Half the respondents suggest their leadership styles were ok. However, half find their styles to be impersonal to some degree. Some of this ultimately attributes to the large size of the organization. The view of other staff is considered to be similar. Staff are thought to often get very frustrated with leadership from the top, because of the detached nature of their

		roles.
		Cat – All of the interviewees comment on the effective and approachable nature of the management roles within the department. A few interviewees suggest the differing styles within management help to contribute to effectiveness as different problems/needs could be dealt with by different managers. One interviewee suggests that other staff can be frustrated by the lack of consultation with changes that are made. Otherwise, the views of others are considered to be the same or very similar.
		Def – Within the example explored, the top manager is considered to be instrumental to the current success of the organization. The person is ruthless but extremely effective. The feelings of other staff are thought to be very similar.
		Tran – All of the interviewees provide positive comments on the top management, including being effective, approachable and forward thinking. The feelings of other staff are thought to be the same or very similar.
		Thi – It is felt that the management approaches can have two extremes; sometimes it can be good and sometimes bad.
		Adu – It is felt that only a handful of managers had a significant impact on the business until new measures were brought in. Now, managers are much more performance orientated and it is felt that the performance of the organization has improved as a result.