Exploring the impact of Investors in People: A focus on training and development, job satisfaction, and awareness of the Standard

Abstract

Purpose: Investors in People (IiP) is a United Kingdom government backed scheme aimed at enabling organizations to develop their training and development cultures and, thereby, their competitiveness. The paper examines the perceptions and understandings of individuals in six organizations undergoing IiP to explore recent claims within the literature concerning the Standard's impact on training and development, and job satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach: Data from 35 semi-structured interviews among managers and employees of six diverse organizations were gathered and analysed.

Findings: The paper identifies three key findings in response to recent literature: firstly, the findings do not support a causal relationship between IiP and training and development; secondly, the findings do not support a causal relationship between IiP and job satisfaction; thirdly, and to support the other findings, the results indicate little employee awareness of IiP.

Practical implications: If IiP – UKCES are to realise the potential of their Standard, it needs to find a way to ensure it has a direct and positive impact on skill development.

Originality/value: While much of the previous research has identified associations between IiP and various outcomes, this paper seeks to identify the extent to which these associations can be considered to be causal.

Keywords

Investors in People (IiP), training and development, job satisfaction

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Introduction

Commonly cited as key factors in the drive to increase competitiveness, are the development and acquisition of skills and the nurturing of a 'positive' training and development culture within the workplace (Alvesson, 1993; Kono and Clegg, 1998; Mayo, 1946; Paille *et al.*, 2011; Parker, 2000; Schein, 1997). The Leitch Report (2006), which reviewed skills and education in the United Kingdom, has been one of the more recent initiatives in this domain. Since the economic turmoil of 2008 and beyond, Lord Leitch's words have become more prescient: 'Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all' (Leitch Report, 2006, p.1).

A range of government-backed initiatives have been implemented in response to the above well-documented challenge within the UK (Finegold and Soskice, 1988; Hutton, 1996; National Economic Development Office, 1984). One such approach is Investors in People (IiP), a government sponsored scheme that offers a blueprint to help organisations improve the way they manage their employees. In terms of whether approaches such as IiP assist in addressing the developmental needs and challenges that confront organizations, there are certainly supporters who would respond in the affirmative. Indeed, within his report, even Leitch himself signposts a potential link between IiP as a possible part redress for the skills dilemma.

Nevertheless, IiP is attracting an increasing breadth of academic scrutiny and a dichotomy of opinions, with very little middle ground emerging in relation to the issue of validity and usefulness of IiP (see for example, critiques on the one hand by Hoque, 2003, 2008, and Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002, or advocacy by Tamkin *et al.*, 2008, and Bourne and Franco-Santos, 2010). Many of these tensions seem to arise around the issue of 'causality'. On the one hand, IiP is often purportedly credited with bringing about positive and constructive change and transformation in organizations, whereby IiP is projected as a (indeed in some instances *the*) catalyst for attitude and culture change resulting in enhanced competitiveness. Furthermore, this process is often represented as a straightforward linear journey; Tickle and McLean's (2004) seven stage framework, *The Stages of the IiP Journey*, is a pertinent exemplar. On the other hand, several authors argue that recognition from the Standard could merely represent a 'badge'/'plaque on the wall' for high training levels an organization is already attaining (Douglas *et al.*, 1999; Hoque, 2003; Ram, 2000).

It is the contention of this paper that after detailed fieldwork the positive claims proposed within recent studies may not be so easy to substantiate. The findings develop a rich and detailed examination of managers' and employees' perspectives on IiP in a range of organizational sectors. Hence, the study draws upon a data set that allows detailed scrutiny of the scheme's felt realities and impacts. This study highlights weaknesses in the current conceptualisation of IiP and the findings challenge recent rhetoric. Thus, with a particular focus on causality within recent literature (Bourne and Franco-Santos, 2010; Cowling, 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008; Tamkin *et al.*, 2008), two research questions are presented to drive the discussion within this paper:

1. How far do respondents feel there to be a causal relationship between IiP and training and development?

2. How far do respondents feel there to be a causal relationship between IiP and job satisfaction?

An overview of IiP: History, claims and evidence

IiP – an overview of the standard

Since its inauguration in 1991, IiP has remained a feature of the training and development landscape of the UK and beyond. The Standard is now delivered in over 70 countries involving 23 languages (IQC2, 2012). IiP was introduced to assist the enhancement of training and development practices by providing a benchmark in relation to which they could be assessed. Indeed, the initial intention of attaining IiP was to help bridge skills gaps in the workforce highlighted by the United Kingdom's comparatively poor industrial performance (Finegold and Soskice, 1988; Hoque *et al.*, 2005; National Economic Development Office, 1984). To be crowned an 'Investor in People', employers need to successfully demonstrate they have met the requirements of 10 key indicators (IiP – UKCES, 2012a). IiP has been significantly changed and simplified over the years since being originally amended from 27 indicators to 12, and then finally to 10, to focus on outcomes rather than processes (Hoque, 2008). Since April 2010, and after more than 15 years under independent control of IiP UK, responsibility for IiP has been brought back in-house under the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (IiP – UKCES, 2012b). In the course of its history and associated commentary, IiP has been accredited with many characteristics and attributes including enhancing *inter alia* business performance, training and development practices, job satisfaction, employee commitment and employee engagement, as well as reducing staff turnover (e.g. Hillage and Moralee, 1996; IiP – UKCES, 2012c, 2012e).

IiP – the causal link and claims

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). Indeed, Taylor and Thackwray (2001) argue that the Standard is generally regarded by a wide range of people as a success and they suggest that in the period between 1991 and 2001 organizations had seen real bottom-line benefits from engaging on a daily basis with the Standard. More recently, a 2008 report by the *Institute for Employment Studies* (IES) claimed that there is a causal link between organizations having IiP recognition and improved business performance (Tamkin *et al.,* 2008). A related report by the IES also argues that an average non-IiP organization is losing out on £176.35 in gross profit per employee per year (Cowling, 2008). Furthermore, a quantitative study by Bourne and Franco-Santos (2010) of IiP and its impact on business performance and job satisfaction goes even further and claims that "implementing the Investors in People Standard should improve the financial performance of your business" (p.7). As a consequence, IiP – UKCES (2012c, 2012d) has seen these reports as confirmation that its Standard does indeed deliver on suggested benefits of improved business performance.

The discussion of IiP and related benefits has endured since the Standard's inception in 1991. Hillage and Moralee (1996) suggested early within the lifespan of IiP that the Standard can lead to benefits of better training and skills, better value from training expenditure, reduced skill shortages, increased employee commitment, and a better quality of service. Lentell and Morris (2001) argued that IiP does deliver several, or all, of these benefits to a significant percentage of organizations. Here, the *de facto* argument being that, if this were not the case, the Standard could surely not have survived over such a long period of time.

Furthermore, Smith *et al.* (2002) add to this debate by suggesting that IiP has become a 'kitemark' – implying an established standard and leading 'benchmark' practice – in terms of training and development practices.

Although there may appear to be an *a priori* causal link between an organization having IiP and the suggested benefits, the precise nature of this link, however, is more equivocal than may at first appear to be the case. Crucially, the IES reports are less forthcoming concerning as to *why* the link exists and there seems to be a speculative assumption that IiP is in some way directly responsible for increased business performance. Indeed, Cosh *et al.* (1998), Higgins and Cohen (2006), Robson *et al.* (2005), and Westhead and Storey (1997) all question the assumption that there is a connection with IiP and financial gain. This issue is perpetuated by related arguments, whereby Grugulis and Bevitt (2002), Smith (2000), 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 purported benefits.

Questions have also been raised in terms of the ability of IiP to enhance training and development activity. Hoque (2003) and Ram (2000) highlight that some organizations may have to make very little changes to training and development practices to achieve IiP status. Furthermore, the standardizing nature of IiP (Bell *et al.,* 2001) can make it difficult to formulate and negotiate individualized training programmes (Smith and Collins, 2007; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002). 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 was 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. Hoque and Bacon (2008, p.455) and Ram (2000) expand the critique further by suggesting that IiP could be viewed by some small to medium-sized enterprises as a 'paper-based marketing tool' when IiP recognition is only sought to attain or maintain business from other organizational bodies of influence. In essence, once recognition from the Standard is achieved, there may be no further impact on training and development practice.

Further to the above, there have also been recent claims of a causal relationship between IiP involvement and recognition, and job satisfaction (Bourne and Franco-Santos, 2010; IiP – UKCES, 2012e; Malleson, 2007). Bourne and Franco-Santos (2010, p.5) argue that IiP can create a positive 'Organizational Social Climate' (linked directly to employee satisfaction) leading to higher levels of trust, cooperation and people engagement. Within the literature, however, there are some authors who question the underpinning assumption that increasing employee satisfaction will automatically lead to increases in business performance. Robson *et al.* (2005) and Silvestro (2002), for example, suggest there is a lack of empirical data to support the assumption made by earlier authors within the IiP literature (such as Heskett *et al.,* 1994). Robson *et al.* (2005) in particular suggest that the causal link suggested within such earlier research between IiP and job satisfaction is based on little more than speculation, yet has received widespread acceptance by a number of authors, including Meyer *et al.* (1999) and Wirtz (2003). Indeed, there would appear to have been little critical evaluation of the relationship between IiP and job satisfaction. Thus, given the plethora of evidence questioning the relationship between IiP and training and development, it is highly likely that the relationship between IiP and job satisfaction is equally questionable.

It is clear from the above discussion that there is significant debate over whether there is a causal relationship between IiP and training and development, and IiP and job satisfaction. This paper draws on the views of managers and employees within six case study organisations in order to shed light on this issue.

Methods and research design

This paper focuses on an examination of the perceptions and understandings of IiP using a multiple case study approach (Blumer, 1969; Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Denzin, 1998; Schwandt, 2000; Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2008; Yin, 2003; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Stake, 2008). Thirty-five semi-structured interviews gathered the in-depth data across a set of six UK-based research organizations (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Importantly, the respondent base of managers and front-line employees in the four large organizations provides an approach rarely focused upon within other IiP studies. There was no predetermined requirement concerning who could be interviewed and the sample included respondents from a wide range of disperse roles and departments/ areas. Within the two small organizations, key informants from senior management were used to gain the insights necessary. The data purposefully covered a diverse range of organizational backgrounds in order to illustrate the extensive presence and operation of the issues and factors identified within the literature review. Interviews lasted roughly forty-five minutes to an hour, with the shortest interview being thirty-five minutes and the longest being one hour and thirty minutes. None of the respondents invited to interview declined to be involved. The following presents brief organization details, a categorization of the interview respondents, and dates of initial IiP recognition:

Table 1: Overview of the case studies involved

Organization	Size	IiP status	Participants
High School	Large (less than 1000 employees)	Since 2002	3 senior managers (SM); 2 line managers (LM); 2 teachers; 3 support roles (exams officer; technician; support assistant)
University	Large (employee numbers in their 000's)	Since mid to late 1990s	3 SMs; 2 LMs; 2 lecturers; 2 research roles; 1 support role
National Health Service (NHS) catering department	Large (employee numbers in their 000's, but the department has less than 200 employees)	Since 2003	1 SM; 1 LM; 4 front-line employees (chef; catering assistant; administration officer; learning and development advisor)
Transport company	Large (with less than 1000 employees)	Since 2004	1 SM; 2 LMs; 2 front-line employees (building role; body trade role)
Third sector organization	Small (ten full-time employees)	Since 2007	2 SMs
Adult themed retailer	Small (forty staff within 14 outlets)	Since 2005	2 SMs

Gaining access into the six organizations studied presented a number of challenges. Indeed, approximately 20 other organizations were approached, but they declined to be involved within the study. The small organizations were approached later within the data collection process to offer alternative opinions to those generated within the large organizations. Thus, the case study sample comprises organizations that were willing to be involved. One might argue that organisations not using the standard in the spirit intended were perhaps less likely to have been willing to be involved, and, given this, it is possible that the sample could be biased towards organisations that have generated benefits from the standard and are making genuine and significant attempts to uphold its values. Employee respondents were not selected by the organizations' managers and this means there is no reason to believe their accounts would be biased or favourable towards management.

Findings

The research data analysis examined the responses and accounts of how participants experienced IiP within their organizations. These observations generally concerned issues that fell within three recurrent emergent themes:

- ➢ IiP is commonly portrayed as a training and development, and job satisfaction enhancer; however, this was not generally felt to be the case;

- ➢ IiP is not the catalyst that it purports to be for organizational change;

- ➢ A lack of employee awareness of IiP signals that the Standard merely represents a tokenistic, retrospective recognition device.

The next section of the argument elaborates and develops these findings further.

IiP's causal relationship with training and development

As previously discussed, there have been many claims that IiP increases business performance through enhancing and improving training and development practices (e.g. Bourne and Franco-Santos, 2010; Cowling, 2008; Martin and Elwes, 2008; Tamkin *et al.*, 2008). Decisively, however, five of the six case study organizations implemented such training and development changes prior to recognition from, or involvement with, IiP. Indeed, the high school, the catering department, the transport company, the third sector organization, and the adult themed retailer decided to gain IiP recognition *after* making significant changes to their existing training and development approaches. As one high school line manager put it, "It just rubberstamps a lot of the things we're doing already." In other words, these organizations made no attempt to pursue, or even consider, IiP recognition at the time of making these changes – it was an afterthought. Similarly, a senior

manager in the NHS catering department stated: "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). Indeed, the lack of pre-change was a strong feature:

"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.

For three of the large organizations and the third sector organization in particular, IiP acted as a mere depiction of the training and development advancements already established. A manager from the third sector organization, for example, stated that "I don't think the philosophy [of high quality training and development] is being provoked by IiP." Further evidence from other respondents regarding IiP's lack of impact on the philosophy/ ethos of training and development was readily available: "I don't think Investors in People has [contributed] in itself … the [training and development] philosophy already existed" (High School Respondent – Senior Manager), and again, "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). Other managers also questioned the causal relationship between IiP and high standards of training and development:

"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 and always will do training, regardless of IiP." Catering Respondent – Support Role.

The above highlights that although IiP was not necessarily responsible for causing a high standard of training and development, it nevertheless existed within the case study organizations. A senior manager from the third sector organization, however, did highlight a discrepancy regarding training and development changes: "We actually got pulled up for the same thing as in the first assessment, but yes, we still achieved recognition." Consequently, a crucial area for improvement between assessments was not successfully addressed. Although this was not found to be a widespread concern across the case studies, it nevertheless raises the possibility that weaknesses in the assessment process could lead to organisations gaining recognition despite failing to meet all of the Standard's requirements. Thus, the ability to raise training and development levels is inhibited if organizations are able to easily work through the IiP recognition processes without addressing issues that the Standard is actually designed to improve. Importantly, this provides a key example of where IiP involvement has had minimal, if any, impact on training and development practices.

It appears that claims made by IiP – UKCES and the surrounding literature are somewhat over-exaggerated within the context of the findings presented above. Recognition was easily attained within the case study organizations, because the Standard required very few, or even zero, changes. Furthermore, these organizations were very proud of the advancements made to training and development and IiP came to represent a badge for achieving these feats.

IiP's causal relationship with job satisfaction

Bourne and Franco-Santos (2010), IiP – UKCES (2012e), and Malleson (2007) all boast that IiP recognition leads to increases in job satisfaction. In contrast, the data revealed a significant *pre-existence* of a high level of job satisfaction within the high school, the catering department, the transport company, the third sector organization and the adult themed retailer. As one high school senior manager so aptly put it, "I can't really see a massive connection there [between IiP and job satisfaction]." These feelings are echoed by a front-line employee of the catering department: "I know we have got the IiP award, but catering is my passion and this is what gives me [job] satisfaction … I can't see how it [IiP] could link to my [job] satisfaction."

Importantly, the quotations regarding job satisfaction from long-term employees represented feelings that were current and predated IiP involvement. These staff highlighted within their interviews that there was no change in satisfaction levels when IiP recognition was achieved. There were a range of examples in the data that highlighted additionally how much IiP impacted on job satisfaction: "No, not really, I still feel the same [regarding whether IiP has an impact on job satisfaction], I have always said I enjoy my job …" (Catering Respondent – Support Role); and again, "I don't think I was a particularly good teacher when I first started … but now I'm a lot more confident I think as a person and a teacher … the satisfaction I feel with my improvements can't be connected to IiP whatsoever" (University Respondent – Lecturer). On occasion, the strength of feeling is high:

"At my last performance management meeting I set the targets completely and this has given me great job satisfaction … how could IiP possibly contribute towards that?" High School Respondent – Line 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 … to say IiP is relevant to these opportunities and my [job] satisfaction is lost on me." Third Sector Respondent – Senior Manager.

Only the university respondents provided any kind of negativity regarding job satisfaction in general. Thus, the university did not act as a deviant case. The case study instead underpinned a range of mixed feelings with regard to job satisfaction. As with the other cases, respondents did not make any connections between IiP and job satisfaction, or job dissatisfaction.

As with the first research question, it appears that the Standard's impact on job satisfaction was also limited. The respondents, who knew the organization before and during IiP status, could not visualize how the Standard made any contribution towards their job satisfaction. Furthermore, links to job satisfaction through changes implemented in training and development practices also cannot be attributed to IiP involvement and recognition. This is because, as recognized and highlighted by over half of the respondents, it is believed that organizational training and development has existed regardless of any input from the IiP recognition process.

The impact of employee awareness in relation to IiP

Also symptomatic of the lack of impact IiP had on both training and development, and job satisfaction, was the lack of awareness of the Standard that many staff had within the case study organisations. Indeed, a high school respondent within a support role said, "It's just a

name I've heard." In essence, this means staff could not engage directly with the requirements of the Standard if they did not know what it was or understand what it did. Over half of the respondents (other respondents had at least some to extensive awareness of IiP) exhibited this feeling: "I didn't take a lot of it in." (Catering Respondent – Front-Line Employee) and "The only thing I know about Investors in People is it's at the bottom of our headed paper" (University Respondent – Support Role).

In the light of these data, it is perhaps somewhat disconcerting when Tickle and McLean (2004) suggest that the true potential of IiP can only be realized if managers and employees throughout an organization are informed about and understand how the Standard works. Within all six organizations, however, it was found that employees and, to a large extent, managers had limited knowledge and understanding of IiP and how it affects them and their career: "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); moreover, "Most people wouldn't necessarily understand it." (University Respondent – Lecturer); and finally, "I think if you asked them [the staff] to explain it, they would probably have a bit of a blank face" (Adult Themed Retailer Respondent – Senior Manager).

Thus, the findings above further reinforce the limited direct impact IiP had on training and development, and job satisfaction. The five organizations with existing training and development improvements prior to IiP consideration, for example, appeared to have not found it a necessity for organizational success to inform and explain the role and existence of IiP to the staff. If employees are largely unaware of the Standard, it is difficult to perceive how it could have had a positive impact on raising levels of training and development or job satisfaction.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to explore how far respondents felt there to be a causal relationship between IiP and training and development, and IiP and job satisfaction. To further explore these issues, an understanding of staff awareness of IiP was examined.

In the event, the analysis of the case study organisations revealed a number of notable findings. Firstly, the findings do not support recent claims within the literature from Tamkin *et al.* (2008), Martin and Elwes (2008) and Cowling (2008) concerning a causal link between IiP and training and development. The ease with which IiP recognition was achieved indicates little impact on the case study organizations. In other words, because there was very little or no requirement to make changes to training and development practices to achieve IiP status, no issues existed when integrating the Standard. The findings strongly align with viewpoints in the literature, whereby IiP is criticized for its limited impact on training and development practices and the ease with which organisations can secure recognition (Hoque, 2003, 2008; Hoque and Bacon, 2008; Ram, 2000). To go one step further, IiP integration issues with regards to language and flexibility, because of potentially conflicting and confusing ideologies (e.g. Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Hoque *et al.,* 2005; Smith, 2000), become inapplicable when the Standard is not actually involved with the organizational changes to training and development practices.

Secondly, the findings do not support a causal relationship between IiP and job satisfaction. The benefits implied by Bourne and Franco-Santos (2010), IiP – UKCES (2012e) and Malleson (2007) that IiP involvement and recognition leads to job satisfaction increases are disputed within the study findings. Furthermore, long-term employees did not experience a boost in job satisfaction as a result of the organization initially engaging with the Standard.

Thirdly, and to significantly support the earlier findings, the results found little employee awareness of IiP. The literature provides numerous examples highlighting the importance of communicating IiP to all staff in order to generate commitment to the Standard (e.g. Smith, 2000; Tickle and McLean, 2004). Within all six organizations, however, it was evident that knowledge and understanding of IiP was significantly lacking. IiP is unlikely to create a positive effect when staff do not even know what it is. In addition, this lack of knowledge and understanding highlights significant weaknesses in the IiP assessment process. Questions have to be raised when organizations can progress through the recognition process so easily where staff have such a limited awareness of the Standard. Perhaps one unforeseen benefit of integrating changes to training and development practices prior to IiP involvement and recognition is the overcoming of language issues associated with the Standard (highlighted by, for example, Harris, 2000; Hoque *et al.*, 2005). The Standard fits the organizational circumstances, and not the other way around. This, however, only further questions the impact of IiP. For a Standard that is supposed to act as a 'quality improvement tool' (Tickle and McLean, 2004, p.10), the improvements made prior to any consideration of IiP recognition, suggest that this label appears inappropriate.

The data therefore raise a number of points of concern and trepidation concerning the Standard. Indeed, IiP recognition may simply represent external recognition, a 'badge' or 'plaque on the wall' for something an organization is already doing, as Douglas *et al.* (1999), Hoque (2003), and Ram (2000) suggest. This could provide one explanation as to why IiP recognized organizations may outperform non-IiP recognized organizations (Bourne and Franco-Santos, 2010), i.e. IiP status is merely a byproduct of recognition for the improvements already actively implemented. The organizations studied were seeking external recognition for prior accomplishments and were not using IiP as a tool by which to

engender quality improvement. These organizations were under no illusion as to why recognition was first achieved. For them, the Standard retains primary value as an external badge of recognition in the eyes of current and potential employees and customers. This in turn, however, suggests that the actual value of this badge is an area where further research is needed to understand what potential benefits exist.

As such, given IiP's limited impact on training and development, and job satisfaction, it is difficult to envisage that it has a positive impact on business performance, thereby questioning the longitudinal benefits of IiP proposed by Taylor and Thackwray (1996, cited in Bell *et al.,* 2002b). Indeed, the difficulties in evaluating and measuring the success of IiP (Cosh *et al.,* 1998; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Higgins and Cohen, 2006; Robson *et al.,* 2005; Smith, 2000; Smith *et al.,* 2002; Westhead and Storey, 1997) creates the problem of actually connecting IiP with increases in business performance. On top of this, the indicative quotations above suggest that a previous change in mindset and perception – which led to changes in training and development practices prior to IiP involvement – could have been key factors that led to business performance benefits. This would certainly support Cosh *et al.* (1998), Higgins and Cohen (2006), Robson *et al.* (2005), Smith *et al.* (2002), and Westhead and Storey (1997), whereby the assumption and connection with IiP and financial gain is questionable. Further research is needed, however, to understand more conclusively if, and to what extent, IiP contributes to business performance. The list of issues explored within this paper is not exhaustive. There could be other significant factors within the complex micro and macro-environments influencing the increased business performance, rather than IiP's alleged causal relationship with training and development, and job satisfaction.

Further research is also needed beyond the six organizations studied here in order to fully understand why IiP recognized companies appear to outperform non-IiP organizations. Nevertheless, this paper importantly highlights that IiP may not be the transformative change tool it claims to be. Thus, it is suggested that there is a timely need for government agencies to revisit how the principles of IiP are introduced and embedded into organizations. If IiP – UKCES are to realise the valuable potential of their Standard, it is evident that there is a need to adopt a modified or alternative approach to succeed with what Leitch referred to as focussing on untapped skills and increasing the UK's competiveness. Either way, given that achieving IiP recognition is possible despite minimal staff awareness of, and commitment to, the Standard, this suggests a significant need for the assessment process to be tightened up.

In short, this research provides a timely qualitative contribution concerning the domain surrounding IiP. There is a paucity of empirical studies and this research approach has begun to address this deficit. The multiple case study approach assists in providing practical insights concerning the attainment and maintenance of IiP within six organizations. Ultimately, these findings hold significant doubts concerning the relevance and usefulness of the Standard and its potential to deliver an improved future for UK organizations. This certainly continues to support the questions raised throughout the history of the Standard concerning value and relevance (Smith and Collins, 2007). Hence, even with the recent causal claims about IiP – that could imply various improvements on the Standard have evolved over time – earlier concerns in the literature that IiP was being used only as a badge of recognition clearly still persist (e.g. Douglas *et al.,* 1999; Hoque, 2003; Ram, 2000).

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