



opp

unlocking potential

20 years 09

the
OPP®
story

1989 – 2009 celebrating 20 years

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the OPP® story – 20th anniversary 2009

Robert McHenry is nothing if not tenacious. The story of OPP® is certainly a story about opportunity, and of being under the tree when the first ripe fruit fell. But it's also a tale of doggedness, patience, resilience and persistence – of knowing the fruit was ripe and what could be done with it; and pursuing that plan with an unshakeable and still unwavering determination spanning twenty years.

Robert and his wife Sally Lloyd-Bostock have poured their energy, creativity and ingenuity, as well as their capital, into the business over this time. They started out together as academics and psychologists, learning their trade as business people along the way in a series of adventures – some planned, some opportunist, some simply fortuitous. If Robert's entrepreneurial drive ever made her nervous, Sally did not cease to back him.

“...focused on the errors people make when making judgements about each other...”

The story begins in 1972 when Robert was a doctoral research student under

Professor Michael Argyle. Professor Argyle was applying his ground-breaking ideas about non-verbal communication to commercial settings – particularly to the structured selection interview – and he brought in Robert, who was one of his promising students. Robert and Michael (and Elizabeth Sydney, an occupational psychologist) together developed a novel course to teach structured selection interviewing to businesses. In 1974, now a lecturer in Experimental Psychology at Oriel College, Oxford, Robert continued to engage in consultancy with businesses, 'moonlighting' from his research and teaching.

“...he became famous for his expertise in this area...”

His own research focused on the errors people make when making judgements about each other, and he was able to apply his insights to practical problems in job selection and talent development. Through radio, television and books, he became famous for his expertise in this area. In 1979, he came to the attention of an American company, T D Williamson, which wanted to improve the way in which employees were selected and, in particular, to deploy psychometrics for selection and development. The company invited him to work with an eminent psychologist from the US in a project to embed the CPI® 434, SII, FIRO-B® and MBTI® into their organisation.

early research

All these tools were new to Robert. As he set about researching them, he noticed they were from the same supplier, Consulting Psychologists Press (CPP). During the next few years, he developed a particular admiration for the CPI

the OPP story

and became intrigued by the thinking embodied in the instrument. In 1983, he wrote to its creator, Harrison Gough, in Berkeley, California.

“...I honestly don't know what my motive was in retrospect...”

Harrison was delighted to hear from the enthusiastic young don and invited Robert to visit him at Berkeley. It turned out that Harrison, along with another psychologist, Jack Black, had set up CPP in his garage in 1956. It was agreed between them that Robert would run a UK research programme around the CPI. Robert reflects now: “I honestly don't know what my motive was in retrospect – probably I was drawn to the idea out of academic, rather than commercial interest.” The partnership was born.

a significant year

By 1985, Robert had set up a business called Robert McHenry Associates, which employed other psychologists on a temporary basis. However, his CPI and other academic research commitments, combined with running the burgeoning consultancy firm and his lecturing duties, were becoming unmanageable. Administrative and general office assistance was needed. This came in an unexpected way.

It's now an apocryphal tale that Robert and Betsy Kendall had a chance meeting when their bikes collided one day in Oxford in 1985. Betsy had been an undergraduate student of Robert's three years earlier and Robert had been impressed by her intelligence and her diligence. She was considering becoming a doctor. As they chatted she decided that her immediate future lay in helping him and Sally (who

was engaged in a separate research programme) manage their increasing work demands – and she was soon working in an office in Robert and Sally's Oxford home.

“...she became very proficient in the interpretation of the CPI, but it was the MBTI that particularly caught her imagination...”

Besides general office work and typing, one of Betsy's first tasks was to help analyse data from a CPI project on which Robert had been working. The study compared employees from an organisation based on a religious 'cult' that sold products on behalf of third parties with a control group of sales staff drawn from a conventional company. Some interesting results were emerging and this work was later to bring Robert to the attention of CPP. Betsy also mastered the Apple 2E computer and Robert's first report generator to churn through the results from selection test batteries for Robert's clients, who included Cadburys, Alcan and Fisons, learning the craft of psychometrics along the way. Under Robert's guidance, she became very proficient in the interpretation of the CPI, but it was the MBTI that particularly caught her imagination and she recalls reading everything she could get her hands on about the Indicator. In the fledgling company over the next few years, her role developed as office manager, event coordinator and general factotum, providing planning and structure to Robert's more spontaneous and emergent approach.

“...made it his business to get to know this promising British new-comer...”

The ‘cult’ study was completed towards the end of 1986 and Betsy recalls labouring over vast quantities of data to create the first draft of a major presentation that Robert was to give at a conference on the CPI in the US. A professional designer worked on the slides and they were so striking, and the paper so novel, that it stood out at the conference, attracting the attention of CPP’s President, Lorin Letendre. Lorin made it his business to get to know this promising British newcomer. The partnership with CPP was born.

“...Robert’s cat used to walk across the keyboard as I typed...”

getting started

By late 1986, Robert McHenry Associates was flourishing and the core working group grew. Another major figure was Sally Carr (who continues to work with OPP as a respected associate). A clinical psychologist and dedicated adventurer, Sally C had been another student of Robert’s before he recruited her to become a member of his office staff on the way to becoming one of his most expert MBTI trainers and, eventually, a thought leader.

Sally C’s motivation to make a difference had led her towards working in therapeutic practice, but she soon realised that helping people improve the quality of interactions in the workplace could also transform lives. She recalls the cottage industry of the early days fondly: “It

was pretty chaotic. Robert’s cat used to walk across the keyboard as I typed. I remember working one weekend until four in the morning when Betsy turned up slightly tipsy, having returned from a party to discover she’d locked herself out of her own home. But we had some fantastic clients and we delivered some great work.” She adds: “The business was built on extremely hard work, mutual respect and a willingness to do whatever it took and be resourceful to meet some pretty tough challenges.”

“...working one weekend until four in the morning when Betsy turned up slightly tipsy...”

From 1983 onwards, Robert also began to travel regularly to the USA and to build a network of useful contacts and intellectually stimulating people. For example, he had been invited to deliver a research paper on performance management at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, NC in 1983. This led to further visits there and to his becoming a teaching associate for this world-famous institution. By chance, the CPP products that Robert specialised in were also the instruments of choice for CCL. In 1988, Betsy and Sally Carr also visited CCL and eventually became associate faculty, travelling to North Carolina to work on their programmes. They regularly featured as presenters of the MBTI instrument on CCL workshops, learning along the way how to appeal to an American audience. Betsy recalls this was a great period of professional development for her, spending time with CCL’s research staff and working with some of the best facilitators and consultants in the field, such as Bob Kaplan and Steve Wall.

the OPP story

By 1988, Robert McHenry Associates was not only offering psychometric evaluations, interview skills and appraisal training, but had also become a licensee for CCL's complex leadership simulation 'Looking Glass'. With all this and tens of psychometric reports being generated each month, the business was growing too fast for Robert to be everywhere at the same time. He changed the name of the business from Robert McHenry Associates to Sigma: Strategic Management Development in order to reduce demands for his personal oversight of every project and to help promote the careers of Betsy and Sally Carr.

In 1986, Robert and Sally had decided that he should take a two year leave from his teaching work to see if he could make the business work as a full time enterprise while Sally continued her separate academic career in Oxford. It was a high risk move, Sally recalls. "From then on it felt like a roller coaster," she says. "How secure was it, really? We had two small children. As the business expanded, we borrowed money against the house and for years we couldn't take proper holidays. Our house was totally neglected. But I remember being at a bus stop and Robert rushing up to me to tell me we had just turned over more than a thousand pounds that week – so at the same time, there was huge excitement."

"...I said without hesitation: 'Me!'. It was an instinctive reaction..."

The seed of the idea for OPP itself was planted in 1987. At a Florida conference, Lorin Letendre (who had, by now, become someone Robert regularly visited in the US) heard from several UK-based users of CPP instruments that the then current

CPP distributor and market leader in Europe, was not meeting customer needs. He asked Robert if he knew anyone who might act as a local competitor to spur them into improving. Robert recalls: "I said without hesitation: 'Me!'. It was an instinctive reaction – I didn't stop to think!"

Robert had supporters. Harrison Gough had personally been poorly treated by the existing distributors on a visit to Europe and backed Robert's bid. Jack Black, the Chairman and other co-founder of CPP, was also behind him. Robert was asked to produce a business plan for the first time in his career – but which he did with the help of a colleague – with whom he had worked on the faculty of CCL, Steve Wall.

"...Robert's tenacity was stirred..."

Lorin's reaction was to suggest that, rather than competing with the existing distributors head on, Robert act only as a representative for the CPI. Robert's tenacity was stirred and, with the support of Harrison Gough and Jack Black, he persisted with his cause until he had successfully negotiated rights to the whole portfolio. The existing distributors were given contractual notice at the end of 1987 that they would no longer have exclusivity on the CPP tools in the UK from the beginning of the 1989. The partnership was cemented.

"...it was difficult to get expert advice from the UK-based distributor who represented many other instruments..."

the OPP story

Robert, Betsy and Sally Carr had talked for some time before this about ways in which the MBTI, CPI, FIRO-B and Strong® instruments could be better represented in the UK. It was difficult to get expert advice from the UK-based distributor who represented many other instruments as well as the CPP portfolio. The instruments themselves contained Americanisms and their appearance did not make them appealing to the corporate market. Customers were frustrated by long delays between ordering materials, and their eventual arrival weeks later. Robert realised that his newly expanded remit gave him a great opportunity to address these issues. His goals were to be customer-focused, to offer responsive service, and to provide expert support to users – in short, to provide careful and passionate stewardship of these world class instruments.

“...Robert made his biggest commitment to his fledgling business...”

Robert now had a year in which to set up a test distribution and qualifying training company. In pursuit of this, OPP came into being in February 1988 when Robert and Sally purchased a company ‘off the shelf’ and incorporated Oxford Psychologists Press (ten years later to become simply ‘OPP’ Ltd). The name was intended – and received – as a compliment to CPP, mirroring the name but substituting the prestigious university town for the US firm’s ‘Consulting Psychologists Press’. Robert was Company Secretary and Sally, the Chairman. In the same year Robert made his biggest commitment to his fledgling business by taking office space in the General Accident office on Banbury Road, Oxford. A Board of Directors was established with Robert as Chairman. The

office at Robert and Sally’s home became Robert’s study once again.

“...we did it up, laid new carpets throughout and so on – it was much smarter than our own home!...”

“Taking commercial office space meant signing a thirteen year lease giving us space for thirty people,” Robert says. “It felt like a massive risk.” Sally recalls: “We did it up, laid new carpets throughout and so on – it was much smarter than our own home! I made sure we had enough for a term’s school fees in reserve and it all felt very uncertain – I knew we could be in really big trouble if we couldn’t support it. But it was also exciting. It was important to me that Robert was able to pursue his ambition – he’d felt so reined in as an academic”.

“...I remember the excitement of having more than one telephone...”

Betsy recalls the early days in the new office “Robert and I set up our desks at either end of a space that seemed the size of a football pitch. I remember the excitement of having more than one telephone, more than one computer between us and having a desk on which to place our ‘desktop’ photocopier! My multiple roles seemed to multiply even further; from planning where the office partitions should go to running senior level teambuilding events and co-designing a

the OPP story

management simulation which we were to run for Hewlett Packard in Vienna”.

taking on training

If committing to new office space felt like a tough decision, things were about to get a lot tougher. The next prize of which Robert was in pursuit was the ability to deliver MBTI qualification training. This was in the gift of an organisation called APT in the US, but APT was also being lobbied by other parties from the UK who felt they had strong claims on training exclusivity. Robert recognised that the stakes were sufficiently high to warrant lobbying APT in person, so he and his wife Sally made the trip to their conference in the US in 1988.

“...massive resistance to our bid from others...”

Robert recalls: “There was massive resistance to our bid from others” but he and Sally systematically worked their way around every member of the Association’s committee representing their case, with their rivals hot on their heels. They could only hope that they had been more persuasive.

“...Sally cites it as being the stand-out moment...of the last twenty years...”

APT recognised in the couple both the intellect and the integrity required to do justice to the spirit of the MBTI. When the news of his success was finally announced, Robert recalls: “We celebrated over a drink across the street. The realisation of

what we’d done after all that struggling suddenly hit me – we really knew this was a major landmark for us”. Sally cites it as being the stand-out moment in her memory about OPP’s story of the last twenty years.

“...Betsy became the first member of OPP to qualify to use the MBTI instrument...”

Simultaneously, in June 1988 Betsy attended the APT qualifying programme in New York. She says: “This was really significant. Being amongst experts who had such deep understanding of type dynamics and how to apply the MBTI convinced me that we had made the right decision to work with APT – and that running the programme in the UK would showcase the uniqueness and power of the MBTI”. Betsy became the first member of OPP to qualify to use the MBTI instrument by passing what was to become the CPP international exam. She then took on the challenge of building OPP’s MBTI qualifying business in the UK.

“...‘we’ve done it!’ We actually have a room full of people and they are completely wowed...”

When Al Hammer and Jean Kummerow were invited over from the US to run the first OPP qualifying workshop in the UK in December 1988, Betsy observed the workshop as a first step to becoming a trainer herself. She recalls: “Half way through the event I remember thinking: ‘We’ve done it!’ We actually have a room

the OPP story

full of people and they are completely wowed by the MBTI and the training”.

“...it wiped away any concerns about the MBTI being soft and fluffy...”

At this time, APT MBTI training was run by faculty like Naomi Quenk, Jean Kummerow, Nancy Barger, Al Hammer, Sandra Hirsh and Linda Kirby, all of whom have since become the world’s foremost MBTI gurus. A US faculty member was invited to each OPP workshop, and in the early years either Betsy or Sally Carr co-trained with them. Sally Carr was particularly impressed by Naomi; “She had a keen intelligence and was incisive and quite sharp in her wry observations and humour. That was very attractive – it wiped away any concerns about the MBTI being soft and fluffy,” recalls Sally.

“...being blown away by her skills...”

Betsy recalls how privileged she was to have had this apprenticeship in the MBTI from such exceptional, gifted and generous people and to be able to count them amongst her friends: “I remember co-training with Nancy Barger for the first time and being blown away by her skills, knowledge and particularly her approach. As an ENFP she had a dazzling ability to engage with the group, tell stories, help the group find meaning and be a role model for the valuing of differences. She was a true inspiration”.

OPP open for business

In January 1989 OPP was officially open for business and could begin to sell materials for the first time. 1989 felt like a year of consolidation after the helter-skelter of the previous half decade. The MBTI qualifying workshops got off to a flying start with six public workshops running at close to the twenty-four person limit. Betsy and Sally were setting about becoming expert in running the workshop independently of APT, as well as doing all the workshop organisation and participant liaison.

“...secured an enterprise grant and spent it immediately on creating a company logo...”

OPP secured an enterprise grant and spent it immediately on creating a company logo (the first distinctive ‘OPP Man’) and hiring a temporary Managing Director to set up the basic systems the distribution business needed. Robert and Betsy were also busy with the consulting side of the business – still trading as Sigma – which generated three times as much revenue as products, as well as providing much needed cash-flow. It wasn’t until 1992 that Sigma and OPP officially merged and, even then, the former name was retained for some time.

1992 also saw OPP’s European predecessor and CPP part company. OPP had been working closely with CPP but were not directly privy to this decision. “Customers started phoning us and we realised something had happened”, Robert says. Then CPP finally officially informed Robert that he was now sole UK distributor, and the previous incumbent sportingly put its customers in touch with OPP.

the OPP story

“...OPP was now the only distributor of CPP products in the UK...”

OPP was now the only distributor of CPP products in the UK and one of the first things it resolved to do was to increase the standards for training on CPP instruments in the UK. Customers could simply say that they were qualified to purchase by virtue of having an undergraduate degree in Psychology or by having been trained by someone who claimed expertise in the instrument they wanted to buy. Many different independent qualifying courses were on offer, some good, some barely adequate and some rudimentary. This led to very inconsistent practitioner standards and a widely varying respondent experience of the instruments.

“...the winds of change were blowing in OPP’s favour...”

OPP decided to have one syllabus and one standard and to require that customers be trained in proper and ethical use before they could buy any instrument. Betsy and Sally designed a two-day MBTI training course for psychologists to run alongside the programme for non-psychologists licensed from APT. A similar model had worked very successfully for Saville and Holdsworth Ltd and was one of the reasons their products and training were so well respected.

The winds of change were blowing in OPP’s favour and other significant events were happening in training outside OPP around the same time. The British Psychological Society (BPS) was proposing to stipulate that all users of psychometric tests,

including those with post-graduate degrees in psychology, undergo specific training.

“...they were not simply seeking commercial gain but raising standards...”

However, implementing this policy and refusing to recognise the majority of independent qualification courses put OPP in the firing line from those psychologists who felt MBTI should be ‘open access’. Some also felt that they should be able to advertise themselves as trainers, and offer access to MBTI to all comers. It was difficult for OPP to communicate that in seeking to implement this policy, they were not simply seeking commercial gain but raising standards, consistency, reputation and depth of expertise in type.

This policy gave OPP the means to provide support, as it does to this day, through the consultant helpdesk, as well as build a high-quality brand focused on ethical use. In these early years Robert and Betsy designed and wrote the FIRO-B qualification workshop and with Sally Carr they wrote OPP’s Level A and B workshops, creating the first Level B+ workshop that qualified people in both MBTI and CPI. Betsy recalls that any trepidation she had about requiring psychologists to attend the training was soon dispelled “Sally Carr and I designed an MBTI course that was packed with value and I don’t recall a single psychologist feeling they hadn’t learnt a great deal about the Indicator”.

From the start OPP’s distinctive approach to training was a success with customers and demonstrated OPP’s values of quality, integrity and client focus - and no small amount of fun.

the OPP story

“...I worked seven day weeks for at least four years...”

These early years were also a time of intense hard work for Robert and Betsy. Betsy remembers that her typical day might involve running a training workshop with 16 clients all day then driving back to the office to spend three or four hours working on the materials for a new workshop, design a client intervention or deal with the increasing load of planning and administration. “I worked seven day weeks for at least four years. It was totally absorbing and energising to be so closely involved in creating new things, driving revenue and building the company.”

growing up

By 1995, dedicated IT and research and development resource was recruited for the first time and OPP started to feel like an organisation, although, as Betsy says, very much in the model of a family. Betsy looks back fondly on the celebration of ten years incorporation in 1998, held in a local polo ground for some thirty employees and their families: “There was a bouncy castle, a marquee, quantities of food and drink and an OPP band formed for the occasion with Robert’s PA on sax, a consultant on drums and an administrator on vocals – they were the stars of the show. Later in the evening a samba band came and we all had a go at drumming. It just felt like one big family. People worked hard but were treated with great respect and we had a lot of fun. I can still remember how I felt when we had our first resignation in the early 90s. It seemed like someone had left the family and it took me a while to accept that this is what happens in a company”.

While the instruments at this point had been translated into UK English, British

norms did not yet exist. In 1996 OPP launched a project to collect samples of data on the MBTI, FIRO-B and CPI that were representative of the UK population. Betsy managed the research function at the time but this work was close to Robert’s heart and he was heavily involved in the project. In the closing stages of the project, they spoke with CPP, who were working on a revised version of the US questionnaire. Betsy reflects: “We had both discovered that the very best items on the MBTI were those that Isabel Myers herself had written, and found to be most robust. It was quite uncanny to have these parallel revelations, which underlined just how brilliant Isabel Myers was. Geeky as it might now seem, it was a ‘Wow!’ moment”.

“...this represented a major investment for OPP and also helped the firm build expertise...”

The data collection and research resulted in 1998 in the launch of new UK norms for the CPI, an updated and UK based scoring system for the FIRO-B and a version of the MBTI instrument validated for the first time in the UK. This represented a major investment for OPP and also helped the firm build expertise in what has become a core competence – the translation process. It was also the achievement of a goal that Robert and Betsy had pursued for many years, first conceived in the mid ‘80s - to have well researched and validated versions of these great instruments available in the UK.

Another significant change was made in 2001: by mutual agreement OPP ceased licensing APT’s MBTI qualifying workshop. Over the 10 years it had worked with APT, OPP had adapted the workshop

the OPP story

significantly, and moved from relying on the US APT Faculty to developing its own trainers who were genuinely expert in the MBTI instrument itself. Betsy recalls that the changeover was a massive project. OPP developed and introduced its own training materials, and then translated these so that the course could be introduced in Continental Europe. It also trained faculty who could deliver training in the main European languages and retrained people who had been running their own MBTI workshops in Europe for many years.

“...this was definitely one of the high points of my last 10 years...”

All this time, Robert was fulfilling an onerous speaking programme with up to a dozen invitations each year at major industry and academic conferences in the UK and USA. Betsy was also active as a speaker and in 2001 was invited to give a key-note address to the APT International Conference, the first time a person from outside North America had been honoured in this way. “This was definitely one of the high points of my last 10 years,” says Betsy. “It was rather terrifying speaking to packed hall including all the world experts in type, but it gave me an opportunity to highlight the leading edge work that OPP was engaged in”.

“...finding better ways to leverage OPP’s developing expertise as a distributor...”

Meantime, one aspect of the deepening partnership with CPP was finding better

ways to leverage OPP’s developing expertise as a distributor. Robert had been exploring with the then CEO of CPP, David Krantz, the idea of consolidating European distributorship of CPP products and in 2000 presented a plan to him which demonstrated the advantages of doing so for both CPP and its brands. In 2001 this was agreed, and OPP began its expansion into Europe.

Expansion was not easy because new products had to be created and new offices opened in countries where customers had never heard of OPP. The first offices were set up in France, Benelux and the Netherlands and some people who had worked with past distributors in those countries were recruited. This core team was familiar with the products and their enthusiasm for them got the fledgling enterprise off to a fast start. Later, offices were set up in Ireland and Denmark and a broader distribution agreement was negotiated with Assessio to represent OPP in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

“...a quirky history and an intriguingly deceptive exterior...”

coming of age

By now, OPP had outgrown the Banbury Road office and relocated to a new building on the Northern bypass of Oxford in 2001. The building, in which OPP is still housed and which has become very much part of the company’s identity, has a quirky history and an intriguingly deceptive exterior. It started life as a Territorial Army centre, with a rifle range and a vast, high-ceilinged drill hall. It was then taken over by an examinations board and trestle tables of O and A level exam papers ran wall to wall every summer.

the OPP story

The company commissioned a local architect to turn its big, airy spaces and branching corridors and balconies into a viable office space. Betsy worked closely with the architect, Nick Fordy, to bring the solid old building back to life. "I remember wandering from room to room debating with Nick how we should best use the space.

We wanted the layout to reflect OPP's culture, so we deliberately kept it open and designed plenty of spaces for tables and chairs to enable people to meet and collaborate in a fairly spontaneous way. It's so satisfying to see this work as well today as it did the day we moved in".

"...I enjoyed the many site meetings I had with them in a fug-filled shed..."

Betsy adds: "We also wanted to be as green as we could be within a pretty tight budget and were pleased to be able to realise this in the use of materials and engineering. Our one indulgence was the lighting and we found a great lighting consultant who enabled us to show off the post-industrial design to its best. We had a great set of contractors on the project and I enjoyed the many site meetings I had with them in a fug-filled shed they had constructed in the car park. The design and move into our offices was very much my baby and one of the projects that I've found most satisfying – probably because of the impact it had on everyone in the company."

It took a year to renovate Elsfeld Hall, Betsy recalls, but the eventual move was welcomed: "We had been packed to the gunnels before, about 50 of us by then, in a space designed for many fewer. The heat in the summer was dreadful, so our new

airy space was much appreciated. And when the architect won a design award for the building that lifted people's pride in the company". In response to a staff survey a year later, the richly coloured stained glass windows were added – and the metamorphosis was complete.

Sally Lloyd-Bostock remembers the move as one of the best moments in OPP's twenty year history – a watershed of sorts. "We moved in and the place was just buzzing with people. It had a different feel about it – we'd left behind the oppressive, squashed-in offices of our early years and come to a more confident place".

growing by acquisition

Robert, meanwhile, was in acquisitive mode. Jim Slaughter, then President of IPAT, approached him for advice on how to handle a copyright issue with the 16PF®. In the course of conversations it emerged that the 16PF might be for sale, so Robert flew to Illinois to find out more. He could scarcely believe his good fortune in being close to acquiring one of the most respected brands in psychometrics.

He met with the Cattell family who agreed to enter into negotiations, and a deal was struck at the end of 2003. IPAT became an OPP group company and over the course of the next few years was integrated into the organisation, giving it some global capabilities and enhancing its product portfolio with wholly owned intellectual property. Robert's vision of OPP as 'the home of the brands' was closer to realisation.

"...Robert's vision of OPP as 'the home of the brands' was closer to realisation..."

the OPP story

An industry acquaintance in the USA then introduced him to a niche-player called Hilson Research. This was owned and run by a polymath psychologist with a sideline as an aspiring performing artist, Robin Inwald. Highly innovative and a great networker, she had developed a range of tools to measure risk-taking behaviour and sold them into law enforcement agencies across the US – on a shoe-string – and built a brand of some twenty-five years standing. Robert saw this as a complementary fit with the 16PF's clinical applications, as well as with the growing national security issues in the US. He sealed the deal with Robin in 2007.

2008 saw OPP go from strength to strength, with a second successive year of double digit revenue growth. By now, OPP in Oxford is housing over one hundred people, and another twenty four are spread across Continental Europe under the stewardship of five highly talented and exceptionally dedicated Country Managers. IPAT in the US has nineteen employees and continues to grow revenues steadily after re-focusing on its core expertise and refreshing its product portfolio.

OPP's 20,000 or so customers continue to provide positive feedback about the experience of doing business with OPP, and many cement the relationship by embedding OPP's tools into their HR processes. OPP takes its commitment to customer service extremely seriously and in 2008 began a programme of activity - and on-going measurement - dedicated to raising the bar still further in this area. It prizes its loyal customer base of independent consultants and is developing a range of new services to support them which will be launched in 2009. Investment in innovation and research, financial systems, sales, HR, marketing and IT has laid the foundation for profitable long term growth.

And Robert? He continues to be tenacious, visionary and vibrant. He is still

“...I've loved the combination of the entrepreneurial and the academic...”

impassioned about the business he founded and speaks of his company and its people with great respect, and perhaps even a little surprise. “He never really thought about being the CEO of an organisation, and all that that entails, at the outset of all this”, observes his wife, Sally. “I've loved the combination of the entrepreneurial and the academic,” he says, “and to have felt that I have influenced something as useful as the application of psychology to business”. Sally reflects that OPP has been an extraordinarily good vehicle for the energies of a man whom she describes with a laugh as, by turns, “complicated, exciting - and exasperating”.

“...at the heart of OPP is human energy...”

He's fascinated by the industry and its characters, he relishes the challenges that aspiring to be global and, even, a tough economy, will bring, and he remains ambitious for the future of the company and the market as whole. But most of all, he still loves the products – the psychometric instruments, which powered the growth of OPP and still lead the world as premium brands. It's not by chance that OPP was recently nominated for the Thames Valley Dynamic Business of the Year Award. Because at the heart of OPP is human energy – and nowhere does this beat harder than in the relentless intellectual (and physical) dynamism of Dr Robert McHenry.