Gary Morgan is the executive chairman of Roy Morgan, Australia's largest independent research company, best known for its weekly political polls and media research, two cornerstones of a wider and deeper company than is broadly understood. The company was founded in 1941 by his father Roy, and extended significantly over past decades by Gary both geographically and in service and product offerings. The combination of his activities – international business, entrepreneurship, researcher and trends commentator – provides him with a unique position from which to view the world. In this exclusive interview, John Keeney, Fast Thinking editor-in-chief, examines the known and little-known facets of the man and his company.
... the area of health needs much more research ... there isn't enough data, and we need more. Health is an area which is insufficiently explored and is crying out for more ...

... higher immigration intakes have continually strengthened this country. Cultural differences provide different ways of looking at things, and the synthesis of these is generally superior.

As an observer of business, and as a successful businessman myself, you have commented to me that "managers need five years to genuinely learn their business". Can you elaborate? I sense you feel that there is perhaps too much ineptness or superficiality at top management level here and elsewhere.

This is a major problem, it is not limited to this country, but it certainly is present here. I believe that there is too much short-term thinking generally. You can attribute this to a number of causes, including the demands of quarterly reporting in public companies.

Headhunters are continually seeking out individuals of quality and encouraging them to move on quickly to more lucrative positions. Headhunters get a fee for each move, company boards are full of "lame duck" directors only interested in the fees they collect - a shocking situation. Look at the people on the boards of the companies, too many couldn't get a CEO job.

Consider the great Australian business leaders such as Frank Lowey. He has devoted his entire life to perfecting and understanding his particular business. How common is that? Think about the continual "hands on" ethic of a Rupert Murdoch, now worldwide. How can school children be taught to become such a leader? The answer is that they can't. So, that is the problem. We need to look at mechanisms that allow more active competition.

What is the solution to this? More people. I support the higher immigration intakes. It is something which has continually strengthened this country. I could use my own company (as an example). We have a multicultural group of staff and they function together extremely well. We need more experienced cosmopolitan people.

In our own case, I have observed that cultural differences provide different ways of looking at things, and the synthesis of these is generally superior.

What have been the most influential management books you have read? I haven't read any. Maybe that's because I studied economics and mathematics and am consumed by data.

What is the most pleasant or positive aspect of your daily work life? That's easy. It's coming to work and seeing a number of committed, experienced staff members at work, and seeing daily reports on our data that has produced information which nobody else has produced.

What is the worst part of your job? It is, unquestionably, when I see or read about survey or poll results that I know are flawed or incomplete in some way, and yet published as reliable - it happens every day.

This begs the question as to how this can be done. Many industries are dominated by one or two players, because Australia is relatively small. The government needs to look at mechanisms that allow more active competition.

The establishment of a continuous public and opinion poll in the role of a healthy democracy. What is the most important in public opinion's role in a democratic society? People who publish public opinion polls must publish the exact question, sampling method details, where and when survey conducted, and make available to the computer the results of the survey.