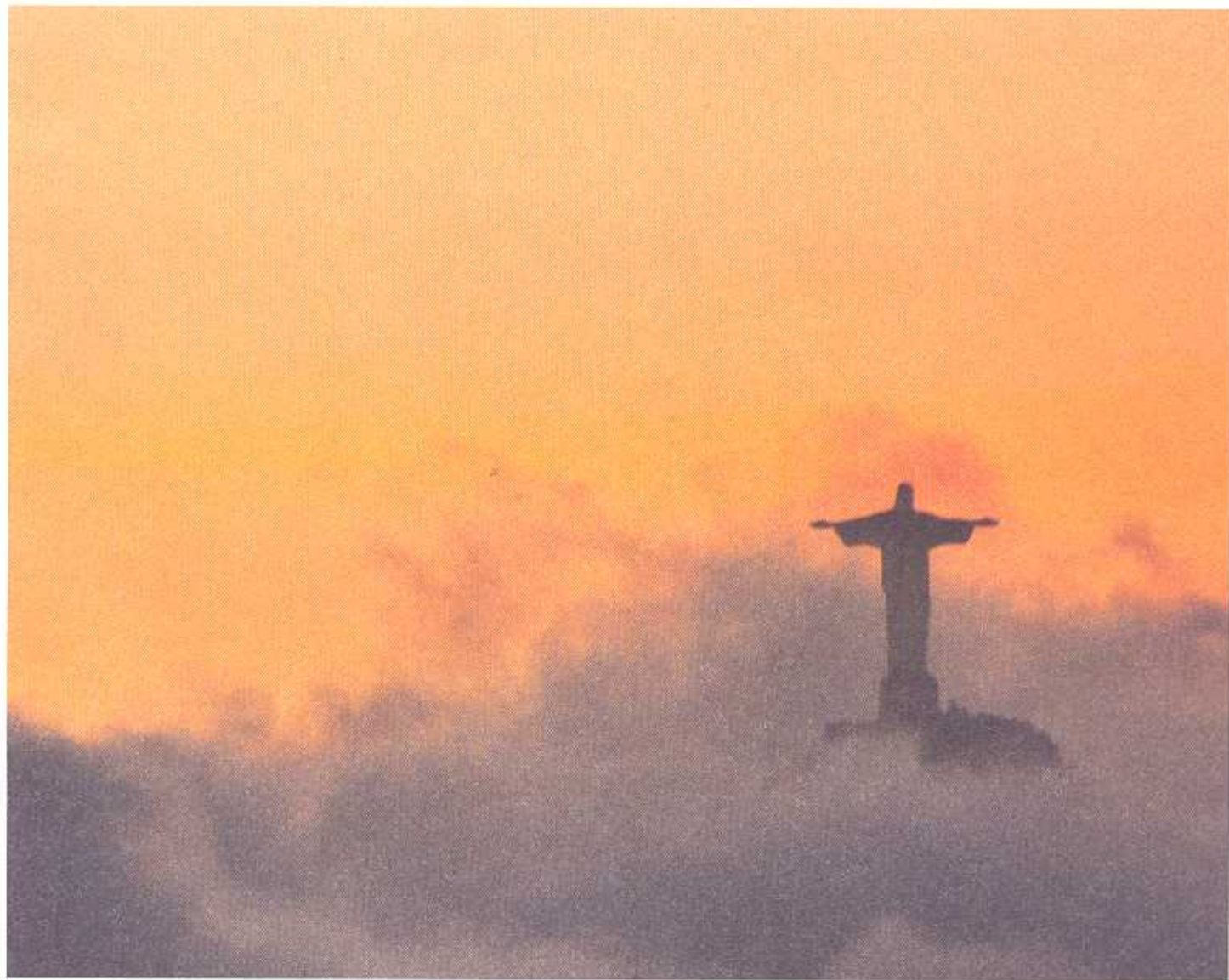


# RESEARCH WORLD

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**LATIN AMERICA ON THE RISE**  
DEMOCRACY, STABILITY AND THE ECONOMY

**RESEARCH VIA MOBILE PHONES**  
Challenges and opportunities

**JIM COLLINS ON GOOD TO GREAT**  
What makes a company stand out

# Behind the scenes



Why the job of a waiter in a restaurant is analogous to the insights department of an organisation.

**W**hen I was a teenager, I worked as a waiter in a restaurant and realised how hard that job is. The most important lesson was understanding the difference between a good waiter and a lousy one like myself.

Successful waiters realise they cannot only be the interface between the customer and the kitchen; they can also recommend dishes, influence menu combinations, check the quality of dishes and even be involved in the cooking. Many of these additional roles are invisible to the customers.

I often sense business people think of insights departments as the people who connect business decisions with customers, but not the ones with the skills or position to influence strategic decisions. Today, believing that market research is just a function in the overall business is as outdated as thinking that a waiter only passes orders to the kitchen. It's what goes on behind the scenes that counts.

## THE REAL VALUE

Have we market researchers been too busy specialising in our practice and disseminating the right approach to research, and lost sight of the real value of our work? Isn't it time to focus less on the way we do research (delivering more plates more quickly) and spend more time thinking about what our customers really want from us (improving the restaurant experience)?

Market research is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Most of our clients don't want to do research; what they want is to have more successful products, services and brands. To help them, we need to act more as innovators. The future of research will depend on how well we accomplish this. We need to complement traditional research thinking skills with new thinking skills – not coincidentally, most of them come from the world of design.

## NEW THINKING

**Understand the difference between knowledge and empathy.** We feel proud to be regarded as the voice of the customer, but how much of this is just channelling customer input and how much is really feeling empathy for the customer? We need to make sure the company has an emotional attachment with its customers. Empathy goes beyond customer knowledge.

## Use the past (what is) to envision the future (what ought to be).

Researchers often discover the present based on past behaviours and are wary of speculating about the future because there is no evidence to back our arguments. But in an age where innovation belongs to those who understand where we are going, researchers are best placed to help others see what's ahead. We need to help others envision the future based on what is there today.

## Combine intuitive and analytical thinking.

Researchers are rational thinkers and usually deduce the truth from observable facts. The scientist inside us often reprimands our feelings to respect the unbiased truth. However, a growing body of research suggests that crucial decisions in business and innovation are emotionally, not rationally, driven. Defending our intuition to analytical business thinkers will lead to better results and higher appraisal of our skills inside innovative companies.

**Support divergent thinking.** Client research budgets usually focus on convergent evaluative thinking to narrow down available options, reduce the uncertainty of decision-making, validate existing assumptions or track the status of the business. This satisfies clients focused on operations, but not those who work to define the future. Exploring, discovering and identifying opportunities is equally important and we have a responsibility to support divergent thinking and add more value throughout the innovation process.

It's time to recognise that the best waiters are those who don't limit themselves to delivering dishes and checks – becoming immensely valuable to the best restaurants. **IWW**

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