



» When in Rome: The Role of a Good, Global Business Analyst

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Yes, the world is flat, and the reality of today's global economy is that business analysts (BA) from all corners of the earth – North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific – often work with one another. But they don't always understand how business efficiency is impacted by the comprehension of their inherent differences. There are fundamental philosophical and behavioral differences between professionals across the world that impact business success. If BAs aren't readily capable of adapting to the environment in which they work, they are most certainly setting themselves up to fail.

When we conduct our work around the globe, our ability - or disability - to understand the impact of cultural differences can establish - or diminish - our hard-earned credibility, especially when we elicit, analyze or validate requirements. In order to do our jobs well, we must also understand the varying degrees of a region's BA maturity. Not every country's BA practice has the same level of capability or adapts to the same practices or standards. A seasoned, well-traveled BA must navigate these differences to effectively fulfill his role and perform to his reputation's potential.

While it is crucial to understand the fundamental uniqueness of any given region, to describe an area's stereotypical characteristics is risky business that sometimes mistakenly offends the described. This article describes observations of BAs

around the world – based on my own personal experience, validated by other BA professionals on the ground – without any calculation to judge or insult a particular group, country or culture. While every corner of the world practices BA in a unique way, it's certainly not my position to name any one better than another, but rather to describe how each is unique so that a global BA can tweak his or her methods for optimal business success and professional efficiency. The old adage, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" could not be more relevant than in this case.

BA Around the World

My work as a business analyst expert takes me to the far corners of the globe, with stops everywhere in between. While BA is a recognized professional discipline, I've found its standards and practices to vary somewhat dependent on location. Nevertheless, I have noticed several central themes that can be considered as a way in which to describe, compare and contrast the practice of business analysis around the globe.

■ **Organization Matters: BA's Structural Makeup, Professional Groups and Certification Standards.**

Thanks to a strong IT presence, impressive talent and influence of outsourcing, workers in India aggressively pursue BA certification. Outsourcing companies often demand certified business analysts within the scope of work. Outsourced Indian BAs are highly organized – continuously demonstrating their credibility to provide customers with the highest quality of service – and the discipline meticulously structured. With the International Institute of Business Analysts' (IIBA[®]) recent announcement of the new Certification of Competency in Business Analysis[™] (CCBATM) designation, I predict a major increase in BA certifications among the Indian business community. With centers of BA excellence readily available and an arsenal of MBA-educated, competitive workers who are anxious to become Certified Business Analysis Professionals[™] (CBAP[®]), BA in India is an ideological organizational example.

While some areas strictly maintain the IIBA's standards, others take a road less traveled. For instance, the BAs down under in Australia recognized the existence of the IIBA, but created another competitive organization called the Australian Business Analysis Association (ABAA). Australia wanted to originate its own unique BA brand, one that was aligned with the Australian cultural identity. Though the ABAA recently merged with the IIBA, its heritage as a homegrown Australian organization is an example of the country's tenacity for business independence.

In contrast to business demands, the impact of a nation's government can also influence the classification of BAs. Certification programs are steadily gaining traction in China, but the process is slow, due primarily to the already omnipresent existence of established disciplines like project management (PM). The Chinese are still validating the merits of BA within an already strong PM environment. Not until this fully occurs will a certification program's benefits be made clear.

■ **Behavior in Action: How Cultural Influences and Communication Styles Impact the Work of a BA.**

Much has been written over the years about worldwide cultural and communication differences, but consider how these

varying characteristics can be a challenge for BAs, whose job it is to maintain consistency with requirements definitions and bring global stakeholders to a common understanding and agreement about those requirements. When delivering solutions worldwide, that expected professional consistency might be met by highly interactive American, methodical Japanese or polite British stakeholders. With such a different level of interactivity from place to place, it's smart to keep some basic cultural behaviors in mind, such as:

- The Chinese statuesque behavior can be daunting, but it demonstrates a deep absorption and internal processing of information.
- The Japanese are extremely inquisitive and methodical, asking seemingly off-base questions that actually enrich the process and provide merit.
- When a multitude of opinions are offered up from Americans, it doesn't necessarily mean they disagree, but that they are extremely engaged.
- Indian stakeholders will undoubtedly negotiate with passion and animation, a staple of behavior that ultimately yields a high level of project efficiency.
- Be on your best behavior in the United Kingdom, where the conservative, risk averse will welcome a "softened" solution delivery approach.

Even within a given country there can be nuanced cultural differences. When language there differs too – such as Bangalore and Mumbai in India – practicing consistent cross-country BA can be challenging. But even with the absence of a language barrier in the United States, BA practices coast-to-coast are different. On the entrepreneurial U.S. west coast, BA is still emerging, and west coast businesses are working to understand the pecking order of BA within their organizations. Along the conservative U.S. east coast, BA is a more fully recognized profession, one with established standards that embraces professional certifications. The distinction between east and west are likely rooted in basic differences between the coasts.

What is truly interesting about cultural influence is how the sophistication and aptitude of business analysis can be impacted by its characteristics. For instance, despite the fact that Canada is considered the global birthplace of IIBA, India currently has that most advanced BA practices worldwide. The drivers? India, as a global economic growth engine, has a surplus of BA Centers of Excellence and functions less formally, where conversations are sincere, intimate and inquisitive.

■ ***BA's Future: Potential Growth Opportunities in Particular Regions***

There are a few places across the globe with business analysis growth potential worth mentioning. The first is Japan, where they are fully embracing the BA discipline and practicing it at a high, rich, progressive level. Japanese BAs have adopted the philosophy of Kaizen, the art of continuous improvement, and translate this practice into BA by asking finite, specific and detail oriented questions about requirements. They are heavily invested in the process to ensure their actions are accurate and precise. This behavior will undoubtedly fuel Japan's BA growth.

Sri Lanka is another noteworthy area, where a sense of urgency is growing around its business analysis practice. Workers are aggressively pursuing CBAP certification, optimistically thinking that a move to the globally-recognized profession marks a smart career choice. Perhaps because Sri Lanka has recently exited a civil war, its BA growth mirrors the cultural sensation of freedom and a fresh sense of purpose. This optimism marks a perfect time for Sri Lanka to enter the world's BA stage.

South Africa is considerably progressive in its acknowledgement of the BA profession. One of the hardest working cultures, South Africans are aggressive in making things happen, and that includes their pursuit of business analysis. South Africa has one of the strongest and largest IIBA chapters of any worldwide, and it continues to grow. While South African BAs practice what they preach, the industry struggles with recognition. This fact, juxtaposed with the increasing number of field professionals, demonstrates a growth opportunity indeed.

■ ***BA and PM: The Relationship Between Two Standard Disciplines.***

In the United States, project management maintains its position as a perceived dominant profession to business analysis. PM is an established, credible practice, and U.S. companies understand its organizational placement and purpose. While BA is growing at an incredibly fast pace, U.S. companies are struggling to clarify where it fits in the organizational chart and define the rules by which it plays. In North America, a clear line exists between IT and business, and it is by this organizational standard that U.S. businesses want to divide BA versus PM. While the United States sees the value in business analysis, it is safe to say organizations are still experimenting with the optimal way to adapt the practice as they grapple with its placement and role.

In China, BA's credibility challenge is even greater. PM has asserted itself as a mature, well-established Chinese profession, and the perception is that PM is so respected and successful, there is not even a need for a BA practice. But not all is lost for the BA profession in China. By the country's sheer size, it took many, many years for its PM discipline to become firmly established. Once it did, of course it made an enormous impact. In China, BA is only in its infancy, but because the county has a growing interest to improve on efficiencies, there is a great opportunity for BA to follow the PM model as a credible profession.

When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do

While a solid business analyst must be fluent in the language of basic requirements management and development, he or she must also speak and translate the "word on the street". I've seen firsthand that some BAs who miss nuanced cultural details fail professionally. It's essential that BAs who call themselves "global experts" be conscientious of the cultural influences of the region in which they work. The distinctions between locations or cultural influences must be read correctly for a global BA to be successful. I believe it's critical that BAs who want to work worldwide be able to pull together these observations, then tweak and specifically apply them to their own requirements sessions. Doing so can make or break a career as a successful

global business analyst.

Business analysts working across the globe can consider themselves orchestra conductors, with each specific region representing its own instrument. Perhaps China is the violin, India a set of drums and Canada the trumpet. Individually, each has its own sound and requires skill for it to properly perform and function. Together, a symphony of beautiful music can be made with a talented conductor behind the arrangement. With a skilled business analyst weaving together a set of unique global behaviors and characteristics, disparate people can successfully join together for optimal business results.



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