Business Analytics vs. Data Analytics: Similarities and Differences

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Business leaders have access to more data than at any point in history — but they still often trust their instincts, formed by years of experience, in decision-making. In a 2025 Capital One survey of business leaders, 62 percent said that they relied on intuition to make decisions, up from 54 percent the previous year. This suggests that despite the volume of data that businesses collect, drawing actionable insights remains a challenge.

When people talk about business analytics vs. data analytics, they often use the terms interchangeably, particularly in conversations about bridging the gap between data access and business value. However, while the terms may overlap, often sharing the same tools and addressing similar organizational questions, a deeper exploration reveals key differences. Professionals interested in careers that turn data into workable strategies can consider a master's degree in business analytics program to gain expertise in strategic analysis, risk management, and problem-solving.

What Is Business Analytics?

Business analytics involves using quantitative processes to improve day-to-day operations. Business analysts use data to uncover key insights with practical applications, such as streamlining workflows, evaluating vendors, and identifying areas for new investment. They often work with technical teams, including data analytics and data science professionals.

Business analysts regularly use tools such as Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Visio, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, customer relationship management (CRM) software, and business intelligence (BI) platforms like Microsoft Power BI.

What Is Data Analytics?

Data analytics is the process of collecting, cleaning, and analyzing data to uncover patterns and insights. Its primary aim is to identify trends, detect anomalies, and measure performance.

Data analysis is typically more technical than business analysis and focuses on extracting and processing data from multiple sources, then using tools such as Python, R, Structured Query Language (SQL), Excel, Microsoft Power BI, and Tableau

to analyze and visualize results. Big-data technologies such as Apache Hadoop and Apache Spark also fall within its scope. Data analysts identify patterns in the data and generate reports, dashboards, and visualizations to help businesses make sense of the vast amounts of data they collect.

Business Analytics vs. Data Analytics: Similarities

A review of business analytics vs. data analytics reveals a key similarity: extracting value from data to help leaders and executives make decisions. Both roles also share key skills, including:

- Data management and querying
- Analytical and statistical thinking
- Predictive modeling and machine learning
- Communication and data storytelling
- Use of Excel and Microsoft Power BI

From sales and marketing analytics to healthcare data analytics, both roles help shape business outcomes in nearly every industry.

Business Analytics vs. Data Analytics: Differences

The primary difference between business analytics and data analytics lies in the principal responsibilities of each role. The main responsibility of data analysts is to collect and assess data and present their findings to others to inform decision-making. Business analysts provide recommendations based on data that can help organizations improve, such as streamlining operations or developing growth strategies.

One way to think of the comparison is that data analytics answers “What happened?” while business analytics addresses “Why did it happen, and what should be done next?”

Other key differences include educational background, salary, and job outlook:

- **Education:** Business analysts typically hold at least a bachelor’s degree in business administration, finance, or accounting. Data analysts often hold science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees.

- **Salary:** The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) categorizes business analytics professionals as management analysts, who earned a median annual salary of $101,190 as of May 2024. Data analysts typically fall under the category of data scientists, who earned a median annual salary of $112,590 as of May 2024.
- **Job outlook:** Employment of management analysts, including business analysts, is expected to increase by 9 percent between 2024 and 2034, much faster than the average for all occupations, according to the BLS. Employment of data scientists, including data analysts, is projected to increase by 34 percent between 2024 and 2034.

Develop the Expertise That Organizations Value

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly fundamental to data analysis and is changing both business analytics and data analytics roles:

- A total of 60 percent of executives use AI to support their decisions, according to Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends survey.
- Half of business decisions are projected to be augmented or automated by AI agents by 2027, according to the business research company Gartner.
- A total of 38 percent of respondents trusted AI agents with data analysis tasks, while 24 percent cited data issues as a barrier to realizing value from those agents, according to the 2025 PwC AI Agent Survey.

As AI continues to impact both business analytics and data analytics, professionals who can use AI to interpret results, question assumptions, and translate findings into action are becoming more valuable.

The Freeman School of Business at Tulane University offers a Master of Business Analytics and AI program with a curriculum designed to develop critical thinking, data analysis, and organizational leadership skills. Graduates go on to careers ranging from market research analyst to chief intelligence officer.

Find out how our business school's Master of Business Analytics and AI can help you realize your goals.

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