Data/Information Assignment

The video was a TED talks featuring Hans Rosling who started his talk about his background as a professor in Global Health at a Swedish university. His anecdote about the Swedish students goes on to illustrate his first main point, which is that Swedish and inferably many western people have very skewed misconceptions of the so-called “Third World”. His main way of presenting this point to the audience is through a large computer screen behind him with data from almost all countries around the world. Rosling uses these misconceptions of the world’s Health and Economic distribution to help introduce the thesis of his talk; which is that data is a tool that, if it is detailed and in large quantities, could help us reevaluate and improve on the ways we address the world’s needs. Rosling uses data made available by the U.N. dating back to 1962 to show the trend and movement of different variables for most of the nations in the world. Rosling uses variables such as infant mortality rate, GDP, dollars earned per day, fertility rate, and life expectancy along with several others to help illustrate the interwoven nature of the world’s health and economic differences from the 60’s to present day. Another important point presented was that although the compilation and application of data can be useful, it can be flawed. The flaw arises when you add, the ever imperfect, human element because to be able to properly interpret the data to fully understand what it is saying you need to look at the right elements together. If the right comparisons aren’t being made or, for example if you are looking at a national average of income when you should be looking at the income distribution of particular nations, there is a fundamental flaw in how we are going to try and aid the world’s progression. Rosling goes on to introduce another problem which is the disconnect between the data and those who need it to make decisions. Rosling believes that data should be publicly funded and free to all for use because if there is transparent and correct information than it creates an environment where making better decisions is easier because everyone is fully informed.

This video is perhaps one of the most relevant things I have watched regarding the potential of data and how it can benefit our world. It’s relevance to Informatics and I101 are very notable because date interpretation is one of the key aspects of the job market this class and this major are preparing us for. One of the main flaws with data interpretation is the misunderstanding with raw data and the general public; many people aren’t trained to be able to compare data sets with one another so that they can understand the meaning behind them. Therefore, the question is how are those who collect and understand this data supposed to communicate their understanding of it so that regular people can also grasp it? This question is one of the reasons that the job market for Informatics majors and Computer Science majors is blossoming so much because we are learning how to reintroduce raw data in an easy to understand format. Our skills in technology and data interpretation are becoming extremely valuable in today’s job market. However, even with the correct data being steadily more available, there are still incorrect lingering notions about the world. So the next question is how are we supposed to communicate the correct information to people so that the future generations will have a much more accurate view of the world and its problems? The answer to that question could be a potentially very lucrative industry. Lastly, how will this increased information and comprehension affect the ability of national leaders to combat the world’s problems and implement long term solutions?
Ideally, it would increase their ability to problem solve and work together with a clear understanding of what the actual problems are and how they should be fixed. Unfortunately, however, there is the chance that the amount of information that is introduced will potentially cloud the true problems and negatively affect our ability to solve what really matters. The necessary component is, hopefully, what we are learning how to do in I101 and in Informatics so that we can be the ones who know how to sift through these data sets to find the information hidden in the data that matters.

Citations: