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# Empowerment Evaluation Examined

MICHAEL SCRIVEN

## ABSTRACT

It is suggested that there are some serious problems with defining the concept of empowerment evaluation, with its underlying assumptions, and with its proposed justification.



## INTRODUCTION

Michael Scriven

The anthology I was asked to review is the volume on empowerment evaluation edited by Fetterman, Kaftarian, and Wandersman (1996). It provides a good sampling of current work in the area, with 16 essays, the first and last by Fetterman, the rest by a varied collection of contributors, including the distinguished academic activist Henry Levin and many from the firing line of community change projects and funding. Although there is much in this volume that deserves a detailed review, Michael Patton has undertaken that task in a companion piece in this issue, and another chapter by chapter analysis is likely to be redundant. The most important task for a critique from an alternative viewpoint is to focus on the forest rather than the trees, so the discussion here will mainly deal with the overall effort made in this volume to clarify and justify empowerment evaluation, particularly in Fetterman's contributions. I will only make reference to a couple of the chapters that are of particular relevance to the general issues. What began as a book review has thus been somewhat enlarged in scope to become a review and critique of a movement that is now an important part of the evaluation scene.

### The Problem of Definition

In what follows, I will attach numbers to various definitions or definitional components of the concept of empowerment evaluation that have been identified as important by various authors. The opening position taken by Levin, a brilliant radical who has made major contributions to evaluation, is worth considering as a starting point. He takes as his definition a single short quote from an earlier work by Fetterman (1994, p. 1) as the definition on which to

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build his essay in this volume. Empowerment evaluation, said Fetterman at that time, is “the use of evaluation concepts and techniques to foster self determination” (1). Notice that this defines it in terms of a particular use, without suggesting — as others do in conversation — that it involves a different sense of the term “evaluation” (2), or a different analysis of evaluation's intrinsic nature (3), or that the use of evaluation concepts and techniques to empower must be by project staff (4). Levin (1996, p. 49–50) interprets this definition of empowerment evaluation as requiring what he calls “meaningful” involvement of the evaluatees in “the design, implementation, and use of evaluations” (5). The concept of meaningful involvement is like the notion of good-faith negotiation in union bargaining: it is not precise, but we have a body of “case law” on it that defines it well enough for most practical purposes.

To aid in the following discussion, I have listed the five preceding definitions or definitional components of empowerment evaluation, along with others I will introduce shortly, in Table 1, which should serve as a convenient reference for readers.

Levin's interpretation of empowerment evaluation (#5 in Table 1) although entirely sensible, is not in fact entailed by Fetterman's (1994) definition (#1 in Table 1). The earlier definition is perfectly consistent with the use of evaluation as a tool by those with power, to require that programs being evaluated foster self-determination in those being served by the program, without in any way involving the program staff in the evaluation or even in learning about evaluation (we call this version #6 in Table 1). This kind of evaluation occurs in the evaluation of many drug programs, where the funding agency tells the evaluators that merely servicing the immediate medical or social needs of addicts is not to be regarded as an adequate criterion of success — programs must also be evaluated on the basis of whether they are empowering the addicts to kick the habit. Whether or not agencies require this, many evaluators do it, in this and other cases (e.g., programs for the physically disabled), and by doing so are establishing this as a criterion of merit in the program, hence

**TABLE 1**  
**Alternative Definitions or Definitional Components**  
**of the Concept of Empowerment Evaluation**

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1. “Empowerment evaluation is the use of evaluation concepts and techniques to foster self-determination.” (Fetterman, 1994, p.1)
  2. Empowerment evaluation involves a different sense of the term “evaluation.”
  3. Empowerment evaluation provides a different analysis of evaluation's intrinsic nature.
  4. Definition #1 does not require that the use of evaluation concepts to empower must be by project staff.
  5. Empowerment evaluation requires “meaningful” involvement of the evaluatee in the “the design, implementation, and use of evaluations.” (Levin, 1996, p. 49–50)
  6. Empowerment evaluation is the use of a tool by those with power, to require that programs being evaluated foster self-determination in those being served by the program, without in any way involving the program staff in the evaluation or even in learning about evaluation.
  7. Teaching program staff about evaluation, but without having them “participate meaningfully in design, implementation, and use of evaluation.”
  8. Empowerment evaluation “is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programs using a form of self evaluation and reflection. Program participants conduct their own evaluations and typically act as facilitators; an outside evaluator often serves as a coach or additional facilitator....” (Fetterman, 1996a, p. 5)
-

leading to the empowerment of program recipients. One might well call this empowerment evaluation.

This use is also well supported by a quote that Fetterman often uses to support his vision of empowerment evaluation — the saying about teaching a person how to fish rather than giving that person a fish, hence feeding them for life rather than for a day (1996a, p. 11). Loosely speaking, the analogy in the program area is presumably that of giving someone increased self determination to effect a long-term solution to their problem rather than merely providing a temporary remedy, e.g., for homelessness or drug addiction. A more exact analogy, since it is evaluation we are talking about, would be with teaching those who are poor how to increase their virtual income by becoming better product and service evaluators, thus empowering them as consumer-evaluators. I could find only one example of this in the book — teaching farm women how to assess hazardous situations on the farm.

A supporter of empowerment evaluation — as defined by #1 (in Table 1) — might also construe it to include teaching program staff about evaluation but without having them “participate meaningfully in design, implementation, and use” of the evaluation (this version is labeled #7 in Table 1). This view is consistent with a slogan Levin uses to support his stronger version, “knowledge is power” (p. 60): the staff then knows about evaluation, but does not perform it or assist in performing it (e.g., by designing its application) on themselves or their program. They are empowered in the crucial way that increasing medical knowledge empowers patients, e.g., by enabling them to be vigilant observers of the practice of medicine, especially but not only on themselves, and thus be in a position to defend themselves and others against improper practices. These conceptions of empowerment evaluation (#6 and #7 in Table 1) are quite interesting, entirely consistent with the original definition, and I think are worth pursuing. But they are not mentioned in the anthology, and indeed seem now to be excluded from the concept, because Fetterman has gone beyond his 1994 definition in another way, in the same direction that Levin does.

They both make an additional procedural assumption, and it shows up in the present volume, where Fetterman gives a significantly different definition of empowerment evaluation which incorporates Levin's additional assumption (definition #5) and goes still further. We will call this new definition #8. Fetterman says that empowerment evaluation “is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programs using a form of self evaluation and reflection. Program participants conduct their own evaluations and typically act as facilitators; an outside evaluator often serves as a coach or additional facilitator...” (1996a, p. 5). Here I think we have the best definition of empowerment evaluation as it is currently conceived by Fetterman and his closest associates today. It is something more than in 1994, but still something less than some less reflective empowerment enthusiasts think, when they assume the legitimacy of statements #2 and #3 in Table 1, thus insisting that it is necessary to jettison the usual meanings of “evaluation” or the usual conceptions of its nature in order to accommodate the empowerment concept. Their taking a stance different from the one Fetterman at least sometimes espouses may be due, at least in part, to the fact that one must read his writing very carefully to capture all the fine nuances, and even then it is sometimes difficult to be certain of his position. There are times when, to this reader, it sounds as if he would accept the ringing tones of #2 and #3, despite the fact that at other times he appears to reject them, making it sound as if acceptance of empowerment evaluation requires renunciation of most or all commonly held definitions of evaluation, its nature, and its purposes. We'll return to this impression later.

### The Problem of Determining Who is Really Empowered

It is crucial to understand that the role of the program's ultimate beneficiary in all this — the consumer — is extremely and unfortunately ambiguous. In the volume reviewed here, Fetterman refers to “program participants conducting their own evaluations” (1996a, p. 5). Unfortunately, he does not specify here or — as far as I could determine — on any of the many later occasions when he uses the term, whether “participants” are the staff operating the program, those to whom the program staff deliver services, or both. So in this conception of evaluation there is no special place marked out for the service recipients — the program's customers, consumers, or clients. Earlier I referred to the metaphor of empowerment evaluation serving to aid directly the people who, in the story, should be taught how to fish. Without the clarification just mentioned, and considerable further development, empowerment evaluation can, unfortunately, be viewed as teaching the office staff at the cannery to fish, rather than the folk who need the fish. Given that the people with whom the empowerment evaluator is normally dealing are the program staff, and that most of the testimonials to its value come from them, one has to be concerned that the ultimate recipients are not receiving enough attention. As I will argue in a moment, that can be a fatal mistake.

Empowerment evaluation enthusiasts, Fetterman included, often imply, by tone if not by claim, that the movement represents a great moral revolution, something akin — albeit on a smaller scale — to the civil rights movement. I think such a view is somewhat premature and rather naive about some elements in the geography of power. In simple terms, for any evaluation context, there are owners (e.g., legislators, boards of directors, boards of foundations), there are managers (hired by the owners to run programs), there are staff (of the programs) and there are the consumers. Somewhere on the sidelines there are also other stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, taxpayers, families, communities, schools and colleges, health systems, lobbyists). In the old days, evaluation was just an owners' and managers' tool: it was supposed to tell you whether the program was hitting its targets and timelines. This picture was resented by (some) consumers who realized that this kind of evaluation did not reflect their interests very well, if at all, and in the new days (beginning in the 1940s) they set up consumer-oriented evaluation, which pushed back from the grassroots against exploitation of or indifference about consumers. These two pressures left the staff uncomfortably situated in the middle of the squeeze. Along come the newer days and some evaluators who champion the cause of the staff, and make them feel better by giving them — or arguing for giving them — a slice of the evaluation action. Now, this seems like a pretty good idea since it can improve the way evaluations are designed, run, and implemented, and it certainly avoids making the staff feel that everything is done to them, not by them.

But there is a great danger about this, as seen from the consumer point of view, and serving the consumer is, after all, what every program is supposed to be about. The danger is, to put it bluntly, that the consumer will now get exploited or marginalized by the staff as well as the owners and managers. Of course, the staff was, the cynic might say, already the instrument used by the owners to exploit the consumers; but now there is a possibility that the staff may come at the task of oppression from a new angle - their own - as well as the old one. Empowerment evaluation may have enabled them to see new ways in which evaluation can be used for their own advantage. The underlying engine of power is interest, and the interests of the staff and the consumers are no more akin than those of the owners and consumers. So, amid all the voices we hear in this volume, we need to listen very carefully for a still small voice piping up for the consumers. And if we do not hear it, we had better take care to think about

what it might say, or we will get a very one-sided view of the Newer Days. Unless this issue is addressed explicitly and thoroughly, with empirical research as well as statements of intention, empowerment evaluation has an Achilles heel.

Now Fetterman himself thinks the service recipients are benefitting from empowerment evaluation: "The approach is particularly valuable for disenfranchised people and programs..." (1996a, p. 24). But lumping the people in with the programs is not a sign of understanding the differences between their interests, and we do not find much consciousness of those differences in the examples provided in this volume. Every now and again, as in Levin's essay, we do find that someone quite close to the consumers is involved — for example, the parents, acting as proxies for the true consumers, who are (primarily) the students. But the general approach tends to treat the consumers as just part of the environment for the enthusiastic push towards staff involvement.

Is this important? There is no apparent awareness here that: (a) it is hard, often very hard, to identify those who are in fact impacted by programs, especially those who are indirectly impacted through ripple effect; (b) hard to determine their needs and vulnerabilities; and (c) important to weight those needs and vulnerabilities much more heavily than the interests of those who are simply there to serve them, the staff. Fetterman himself will mention in successive sentences a case in which farm women were empowered to reduce hazards by improving their evaluation skills, and a case where evaluation was turned over to project directors, as if these were on a par, rather than totally different.

At best, this failure to focus clearly and precisely on who should be empowered, and when, is one of the most unclear parts of the concept of empowerment evaluation, and that lack of clarity tells us that we cannot casually welcome this approach to evaluation as an obvious improvement. It has some advantages for the staff, indeed, but we know little about what it does to, or for, the consumers. As it stands, one has to say that the consumers sometimes get lucky and sometimes do not, and empowerment evaluation as presently articulated is insensitive to their concerns. A notable exception in this volume is the essay by Andrews on non-profit women's services organizations. Not incidentally, this is the only essay that generates a reference under "Ethics" in the index.

### **The Problem of Bias in Empowerment Evaluation**

Viewing empowerment evaluation cautiously, one would have to suspect that its success is mainly due to the fact that staff, a much more numerous group than managers, are enthusiastic about an approach to evaluation that is focused on their needs and abilities. This does not make the impact of empowerment evaluation any better for consumers than that of management evaluation. It does not even make it better for owners, including government; or for Stakeholders, including taxpayers. Sometimes it will be better, sometimes worse, but of one thing we can be sure, it will essentially always be less credible. After all, empowerment evaluation, as Fetterman most recently defines it (#8 in Table 1), means having a program evaluate its own performance - and whatever you call it, that is hardly the state of the art in controlling bias. The control of bias is not done by finding perfectly unbiased evaluators, but rather by removing direct interest in a particular outcome of the evaluation. And it is certainly not accomplished just by teaching people how to evaluate themselves and leaving them to do it by themselves, or with the help of someone they are paying.

Continuing with the attempt to get clear about what is part of empowerment evaluation and what is not, we should note that even if we follow Levin in building in the requirement

that the staff is to be “meaningfully involved” in planning the evaluation, it is a large further step to give the evaluatees veto power over the evaluation design or operation, and a yet further one to suggest that the staff should design and implement the evaluation. But both of these elements are built into the concept of empowerment evaluation as defined by Fetterman in this volume (#8 in Table 1).

The arguments for these extensions are very appealing to staff, and very dangerous for consumers. For example, it is in the interests of staff to make the evaluation easy to do, if they are going to be obliged or under pressure to do it; and it is in their interests to make the results look good, since it is their jobs that are at risk. None of that is of primary (and rarely of secondary) interest to consumers. Consumers are individuals, but it seems clear that for Fetterman, the client is the organization and hence its staff, not individuals (1996a, p. 9, 1996b, p. 380). The organization after all, pays the bill. Only in the case of consumers' organizations, and then only sometimes, do the two coincide.

Empowerment evaluation also suffers because the credibility of a favorable evaluation done by an independent evaluator is obviously of much greater value to the staff with respect to external audiences than the issuance of a favorable self evaluation, once the belief that this is the latest type of evaluation wears off (a wearing-off process we are trying to assist here). Much more seriously, it also fails staff in objective terms because of their occupational myopia problem: those very close to the object of evaluative scrutiny do not see it well and will eventually suffer because of the failings they cannot detect. The deeply involved “evaluation facilitator” will be caught in the same way.

To that complaint, at one point Fetterman replies by dismissing the concept of objectivity (1996a, pp. 21–22). It is a suicidal tactic, common among deconstructionists and constructivists these days, because of course it implies that we cannot take his own position seriously. He puts forward reasons for thinking his position represents a valuable insight, which is a claim to objective truth that he does not want to be treated as merely the expression of a bias; but he is also telling us that there is no such thing as objective truth. Which should we believe?

Objectivity is simply the name for the avoidance of identifiable, usually well-known, sources of systematic error, which we typically label as biases. It is not a claim that the possibility of bias or error has been eliminated. Dismissing the gains in objectivity that can be obtained from the judicious use of an external evaluator by dismissing the notion of objectivity is a double edged argument, and in the end, it seems clear that Fetterman is less interested in reducing sources of error than in facilitating change. But advocating the latter without the former is a dangerous game for all concerned. One sign that Fetterman may not fully appreciate this danger is the way in which he attacks the external evaluator as a passer-by, lacking in commitment to the program, but fails to see the deeper truth — that the empowerment evaluator is also a passer-by whose visa is only valid for a little longer. The empowerment evaluator does not stay long enough to see whether the staff missed deep problems that an external evaluator might have turned up, problems that can eventually blow up in their faces.

One should not have to add that external evaluators will sometimes miss deep problems that are obvious to staff and that they often have less credibility with staff than the empowerment evaluator, and often for that or other reasons, there is less chance that their recommendations will be implemented. The dilemma of whether to use external or internal evaluation is as false as that between quantitative and qualitative methods. The solution is always to use the best of both, not just one or the other. It is unfortunate that this volume may inadvertently perpetuate the false dilemma, despite the protestations that empowerment evaluation is a complementary function.

### Problems with Downplaying External Evaluation

When professionals evaluators talk about meeting quality standards for evaluation these days, given the existence of the Program Evaluation Standards, they are often concerned about whether the interests of consumers are adequately determined, and adequately weighted, in evaluating the program. If an evaluation is designed and done largely by the staff, one can no more count on it to meet those requirements than one would count on that in an evaluation designed and done by owners or managers. This is not to deny that a good, consumer-centered evaluation will sometimes be done, especially if the "evaluation coach" is doing a good job, but how often that happens is hard to say and, in any case, the coach eventually leaves. Supposedly the empowered staff now continues to do good evaluations in the coach's absence, Fetterman suggests (1996a, p. 6). Does this occur? We do not know, and the empowerment evaluation movement does not seem to be engaged in doing these follow ups or other kinds of meta-evaluations (e.g., bringing in an external evaluator to look at the empowerment evaluation). One can hardly rely on later feedback from the staff about the good long-term effects of empowerment evaluation, since the question is whether the consumers benefited. What is needed is some external evaluation of empowerment evaluation. And, there are other reasons for the same kind of specific suggestion about complementary roles. It may be that further development of these provides the way towards improving the performance of both parties, rather than abstract reference to the potential for peaceful coexistence.

The other obvious role emerges in the following way. If the evaluation coach is doing a good job, s/he would be making clear that both credibility and validity require that self-evaluation needs to be occasionally supplemented with external evaluation. But in this book about improving internal evaluation, the index has no references for either external or internal evaluation. Another absence that seems incongruous is the absence of any cases of paid evaluations done by program recipients (perhaps even evaluation of the empowerment evaluation effort itself). Teaching the real consumers how to fish for this kind of fish — since you can't eat it — should mean that they sometimes get hired for their new skill.

Another reason for bringing in the external evaluator arises from another kind of risk created by empowerment evaluation. Involving staff in a significant way even with understanding the evaluation of the program they run — let alone designing it and doing it — creates a serious risk of evaluation blockage. I could not find any mention of these risks in the book: for example, they are not addressed in the list of "Caveats and Concerns" that begins on p. 21, where one might expect to find them. One problem is that staff may refuse to cooperate when they see that a certain line of inquiry could or will finish up pointing the finger at them. The friendly, accepting atmosphere in this collection is nice, but it seems at times far removed from the sharp edge in evaluation. Many of us no doubt remember cases where understanding the evaluation design led to rebellion based on self interest rather than legitimate complaint. I think immediately of the U.S. Navy refusing to take part in a congressionally mandated survey of evaluation practice, around the time of the Tailhook scandal, presumably because once they saw the standards they would be held to, they decided they could not risk another scandal. So, empowerment evaluation will surely empower improper responses as well as proper ones. Another risk is the analogy to 'medical student's disease' — the tendency of beginning students of disease to find every syndrome in the text in oneself. When the facilitator leaves, when even that pale shadow of external expertise is no longer there, do the symptoms of student hypochondria begin to emerge? It would be hard to tell without an evaluation, and hard

to believe the results of an empowerment evaluator evaluating for this possibly bad effect of their own involvement.

This is a further example of the reasons that make me feel that empowerment evaluation, unless it becomes more serious about building in a role for external evaluation, is an approach to evaluation that does not take seriously the task of evaluating itself, always a matter for concern.

### **Problems with Confusing Teaching of Evaluation with Doing Evaluation**

Some of the discussions at professional meetings in the last three years have, I feel, helped us to get a better perspective on empowerment evaluation. I like Patton's use of the term "evaluation consulting" to cover what he does, which is not evaluation of programs, but helping programs evaluate themselves; not quite in the way that Fetterman recommends, but in somewhat the same spirit. (Fetterman's terms are "evaluation coaching" and "evaluation facilitation"). It is perfectly appropriate to call both Patton and Fetterman evaluators, just as one calls professors of mathematics mathematicians; but one should not assume that this shows teaching mathematics is in general the same as, or one way of, doing mathematics. The middle school mathematics teacher is not made into a mathematician by virtue of teaching mathematics. Evaluators do much more than evaluate; but they have to be able to evaluate, and evaluate well, in order to deserve the title. Fetterman is an enthusiastic and effective evangelist whose efforts are extending the domain of the territory in which evaluators can do good work, and making believers out of sceptics. But what he is doing to extend that territory is primarily teaching and supervising evaluation in new ways and in new areas. These are good things to be doing, and his contributions are commendable, but that does not mean he is doing evaluation in a new, let alone a better, way.

Fetterman denies this. Speaking of training, facilitation, advocacy, etc., he says: "Rather than additional roles for an evaluator whose primary function is to assess worth... these facets are an integral part of the evaluation process" (1996a, p. 9). This is not persuasive: mathematics teaching is not part of mathematics, though it is part of the job of many mathematicians, and evaluation training and facilitating is not part of evaluation per se. Teaching something worthwhile is a good cause, and it often improves one's own understanding of the concepts, but one does not want to regard it as part of evaluation itself. Nor can one be good at teaching evaluation if one is not good at evaluation itself. It is not incidental to calling Fetterman an evaluator that he keeps his hand in by doing some evaluations that employ the standard approaches and methods.

### **Past History, Future Directions**

To write the history of the empowerment evaluation movement, one has to be able to distinguish it from other activities. For example, there are times when it seems to be taken to include any case of training program staff to evaluate their own program, or even any case in which there is an effort to listen to staff's experiences (1996a, p. 10). Obviously not, for that has been happening as long as evaluation has had its own name, perhaps longer.

Based on the best definition of it we can locate, which is Fetterman's (#8), empowerment evaluation is hardly a new idea. Levin gives a reference to Rappaport's (1981) paper, "In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention," but the precedents in the evaluation literature are both earlier and more to the point. For example, there is the

highly visible role in early evaluation literature of illuminative evaluation (Parlett & Hamilton, 1977), transactional evaluation (Rippey, 1973), and responsive evaluation (Stake, 1980). Fetterman references, although he does not ascribe anything to, Parlett and Hamilton's work, but the underlying rationale of the empowerment approach was well-known before that.

Those earlier approaches were essentially similar to Fetterman's, and flawed in exactly the same way. But flaws are often not fatal. There are good features of empowerment evaluation, like the emphasis on upgrading staff's evaluation skills, and they are features we can and should support, without abandoning the strengths of the traditional approaches. It is really important to stress again, among the serious concerns raised here, that on a global level, Fetterman has done a great deal to increase the outreach of evaluation and the commitment to it. The critical questions here are, What kind of evaluation has he succeeded in disseminating, and with what net long-term impact? I raise concerns about that, but they should not be taken to imply that the impact of empowerment evaluation is always or overall negative or that Fetterman's achievements should be denigrated. On the contrary, the impact of his work is often positive and the effort often valuable. Yet, the overall question of empowerment evaluation's ultimate usefulness is, I feel, still unanswered at this stage, partly because the relation of empowerment evaluation to more traditional approaches is not yet clear.

Fetterman often says that empowerment evaluation should not be seen as a substitute for but rather as a complement to more traditional approaches, and this makes good sense. ("It is not a substitute for other forms of evaluative inquiry...." (1996a, p. 21; see also p. 6). Yet many who are using empowerment evaluation seem to see it as the successor to the old approach. Indeed, the large scale international use of these empowerment approaches we are now seeing strike me as precisely a substitute for more conventional approaches. The fact that they are labeled as if they are a type of evaluation, that many of their reports are labeled evaluations, and that their key figures are said to be evaluation theorists or leaders in a *new approach* to evaluation, leads many owners and managers, perhaps even some consumers, to think this approach will answer their needs pretty well, with the bonus of good staff support. In my opinion, it will not do this, but even if it did so, it will not meet the needs of consumers and owners (legislators and taxpayers) for evaluation that has credibility and externality (both — they are not the same) and that gives appropriate weighting to costs and consumer benefits. Moreover, in the present version, I doubt that empowerment evaluation will even meet the needs of professional staff very well, although it may meet their wants. However, it does better in this respect than in the others, since it is aimed at staff, and it is a great deal better for them than nothing at all.

Fetterman's own vision of how empowerment evaluation has transformed evaluation is partly based on his view that evaluation of a more straightforward kind is at risk of "unresponsiveness and irrelevance" and hence may "follow the path of the dinosaurs to extinction" (1996a, p. 25). Times have changed, he feels, and "People are demanding much more of evaluation and are not tolerant of the limited role of the outside expert who has no knowledge of or vested interest in their program or community." This is a revealing passage. It suggests that Fetterman really does think that empowerment evaluation is a new kind of evaluation, at least some of the time a replacement for rather than a supplement to the 'old-fashioned' kind, which — at least some of the time — provides an external expert with no vested interest. To say that the outside expert "has no knowledge of" the program is pretty strong stuff. Most external evaluators would say that they have very important knowledge of the program. Often they

have all the knowledge one can pick up from interviewing the staff, but Fetterman may not have intended his remarks to apply to such evaluators. Even those who work historically at a great distance virtually always have the knowledge that can be gleaned from program documentation and data on the effects of the program. This is surely important knowledge, and rejecting this in favor of internal evaluation, with vested interest, advocacy, and community involvement, is not an obvious bargain.

It is no doubt true that many people are demanding the "committed evaluator"; they always have. They say that outsiders are seldom fun, and may be a hazard to boot. But evaluation does not exist to enhance insiders' enjoyment, but rather as a profession, a profession rather like the ones from which we get auditors and appraisers and judges. As long as there are taxpayers and consumers, courts of law and legislatures, professional managers and investigators, there will always be people who value the external expert with no vested interest. Unfortunately, as presented thus far, empowerment evaluation will lead its adherents to devalue this critical role.

So what is good and bad about empowerment evaluation?

1. Devolving some of the responsibility for evaluation is good. A program whose staff are not doing reasonably good evaluation of their own program is incompetently staffed, at some or all levels. Empowerment evaluation is doing something important to reduce that deficit.
2. Devolving all of it is bad. Management and staff are not in a good position to overcome their natural biases, but even if they could be trained to do so, the results would lack credibility, which is often an essential requirement for an evaluation. Empowerment evaluation is too often inclined to think that probable bias and lack of credibility are not a serious trade-off against involvement, and that involvement with staff is the important kind of involvement, whereas involvement with consumers is more relevant to evaluating programs that are supposed to serve consumers.
3. Thinking that devolution creates a new kind of evaluation is bad. Training staff in evaluation and involving them in evaluating their own program is neither new nor a kind of evaluation.

Making empowerment evaluation a clearly defined part of good evaluation, where appropriate (which is often), and with strong controls on bias (e.g., by using consumer representatives and an external evaluator), is a relatively new emphasis which could be highly valuable. If combined with serious (third-party) evaluation of the results of doing this, it could represent a major contribution to the evaluation repertoire. In my judgment, the best future for empowerment evaluation lies in this direction.

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