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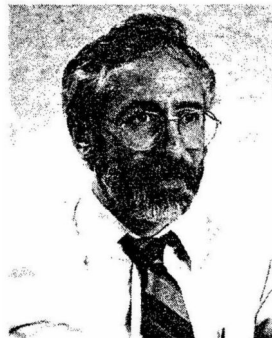
## Empowerment Evaluation: A Response to Patton and Scriven

DAVID FETTERMAN

### INTRODUCTION

Empowerment evaluation is not a panacea, and it is not designed to replace all forms of evaluation. It has specific uses and is most effective in environments where democratic participation is encouraged. However, conditions need not be ideal to engage this approach. In fact, this approach may be most needed in the least conducive environments. In any environment, however, concerted effort is required to re-orient individuals socialized in traditional evaluation roles and expectations to this new approach.

This debate, which involves some of the most prominent colleagues in the field and appears in one of the evaluation field's primary journals, is symbolic of empowerment evaluation's impact. As I reflect on this phenomenon, I can only speculate that the attention this approach is receiving is in part a function of both the utility of empowerment evaluation and the powerful contrast it creates with many traditional approaches. Empowerment evaluation has many purposes and many contributions to make to evaluation—as another tool in the evaluator's toolbox; as a vehicle to influence and improve traditional forms of evaluation (by inviting much greater involvement and participation by program participants in evaluation); and as a mechanism to further clarify and expand our understanding of what evaluation is.



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I am appreciative (although somewhat surprised) by the level and type of discourse this approach has generated and the attention it has received. This kind of engagement can only improve and refine both empowerment evaluation and evaluation in general. I appreciate and commend Blaine Worthen, the editor, for orchestrating a professional exchange that is helping us to re-examine the field of evaluation itself. He has created an environment conducive to scholarly debate and inquiry and thus facilitated both a discussion about empowerment evaluation as an approach and its role as a catalyst for a much larger discussion about the purpose(s) of evaluation.

Patton shared his manuscript with me before publication, and I provided a long list of corrections and suggestions. He incorporated these, as deemed appropriate, to refine his argument in some instances and strengthen it in others. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to create a more focused exchange. This back-and-forth process allows us to focus our attention on crystallized and improved arguments, rather than on errors and omissions. This initial exchange has also set the stage for further dissemination of contrasting views from Scriven and from me, in an effort to improve practice. In response to my request for permission to place his critique on the Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation TIG home page (<http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~davidf/empowermentevaluation.html>), Scriven responded, "... sure, post it and congratulations for doing so: it's in the best spirit of evaluation (not to mention science)!" Immediately afterward, he offered to cross-link my response to the Internet homepage he is developing. I think our prepublication exchanges and our commitment to open debate and sharing of information provide a model that we should work to maintain, refine, and improve in our scholastic community.

Patton's and Scriven's comments provide valuable contributions to the development of empowerment evaluation. Their discussions should be mined for every ounce of insight to build and refine this approach. Embracing critique is in the true spirit of a self-reflective and growing evaluative community of learners.

### **Patton: Process Use Focus**

Patton (1997a) and Vanderplatt (1995) accurately place empowerment evaluation in the larger context of emancipatory research. In addition, Patton (1997a) helps to identify empowerment evaluation's unique contribution to the field by focusing on its explicit commitment to fostering self-determination (p. 148) and building capacity (p. 155). In the process of documenting another purpose of empowerment evaluation, Patton captures a significant part of the theory behind the approach: "A fourth purpose ... is teaching evaluation logic and skills as a way of building capacity for ongoing self-assessment. In modeling terms, such skills are seen as enhancing the capacity for self-determination." (p. 155).

### **Process Use**

Empowerment evaluation explicitly highlights the impact of process use, as Patton describes:

These impacts include enhanced mutual understanding among those participating in the evaluation, support and reinforcement for the program intervention, program, organizational, and community development (e.g., developmental evaluation, Patton, 1994), and increased participant engagement in and ownership of program and evaluation processes ...

The cases in *Empowerment Evaluation* document the ways in which participants in an evaluation can come to value both the processes and findings of an evaluation. A theme running through the book is that learning to see the world as an evaluator sees it often has a lasting impact on those who participate in an evaluation—an impact that can be greater and last longer than the findings that result from that same evaluation, especially where those involved can apply that learning to future planning and evaluation situations. This capacity-building emphasis of empowerment evaluation has helped illuminate the nature and importance of process use for those who study and theorize about utilization of evaluation (1997, p. 156).

Empowerment evaluation creates an evaluative culture of learning that strengthens the relationship between the impact of evaluation and the actual process of carrying out the study (e.g., see Cousins, Donohue, and Bloom, 1996; Cousins and Earl, 1992, 1995).

### **Distinguishing Empowerment Evaluation**

Although Patton has made a significant contribution to distinguishing empowerment evaluation from collaborative and participatory evaluation, there is much work to be done, as he notes. I think this is a useful charge to respond to within the context of AEA's Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation topical interest group. (In fact, a few sessions have been designed to respond to this concern as a result of an ad hoc empowerment evaluation group meeting about this matter at last year's annual meeting. Patton's recommendation and the ad hoc group's activities are running along parallel tracks, reflecting similar suggestions for addressing this need.)

However, the effort to create greater conceptual clarity between similar approaches (which is appropriate and needed) should not be used to divide and weaken strong bonds and relationships. There is an overlap between collaborative, participatory, and empowerment approaches in practice. Synergistic strength is a function of overlapping, interrelated, and reinforcing characteristics and features. Empowerment evaluation requires collaborative and participatory activities. Collaboration and participation are features that help characterize this approach, along with an explicit commitment to self-determination and capacity building.

### **Continuum**

Patton and I have fruitfully discussed the concept of a continuum of empowerment evaluation. There is no absolute or pure form of any approach in practice. Evaluations approximate an ideal type. Empowerment evaluation, like all other forms of evaluation, exists along a continuum. Patton uses my "facets" of empowerment evaluation to measure the degree of empowerment evaluation. I think this is a useful approach.

However, we differ about the boundaries of the approach. Whereas Patton places empowerment evaluation strictly within the bounds of liberation, I take a more inclusive view. I see a wider range of acceptable adaptations to local circumstances within the empowerment evaluation domain. These accommodations to the local context, to participant and evaluator expertise, and to the developmental stage of the program are appropriate and necessary to be effective. It is important to take into account intent and context when determining the boundaries of any effort. This does not mean that empowerment evaluation is all-inclusive; there are efforts that simply do not reflect its values or incorporate its assumptions, particularly those that value distancing the evaluator from program staff members and clients. In

addition, Patton's point about making explicit this continuum of lesser and greater degrees of fidelity to an empowerment evaluation ideal is well taken, and our conversations about this continuum have advanced my thinking on this topic.

Stepping beyond this framework, I also see value in classifying some efforts as empowerment evaluation and others as the application of empowerment evaluation concepts and techniques to another type of evaluation. For example, as of this writing I am conducting an evaluation of a teacher education program at Stanford. It is a "traditional" evaluation in many respects; however, I am applying empowerment evaluation concepts and techniques to this effort, including asking student focus groups (consumers) to identify and rate the most significant features of the program. I plan to offer the approach to the incoming class, which will take charge of that component of the evaluation, to improve the program and foster self-determination in tandem with the "traditional" evaluation. This is an example of applying relevant empowerment evaluation concepts and techniques without conducting a pure or "full-blown" empowerment evaluation.

### **Target Population**

Patton is correct in identifying the disenfranchised as the primary target population for empowerment evaluation. However, once again I adopt a much wider vision of appropriate applications and populations. Empowerment evaluation efforts have been focused on traditionally disenfranchised, oppressed, and economically impoverished populations. However, disenfranchised and oppressed people also exist in traditional academic, government, and business organizations as well as in ghettos and undeveloped areas. In addition, the approach is rooted in work with individuals with disabilities. Self-determination is potentially applicable to human beings on every level of the social and economic scale.

### **Criteria and Similarities with Stakeholder and Utilization Focused Evaluation**

There are a few additional areas in which Patton and I have differing views, particularly concerning how some of the chapters in the book are characterized. Patton assesses the chapters using a single criterion: the degree of faithfulness to "empowerment evaluation". In fact, the chapters were not designed to accomplish a single purpose. For example, the Linney and Wandersman chapter concerning the Prevention Plus III Model was designed to highlight a self-evaluation tool used throughout the world to help facilitate empowerment evaluations. The templates are in the public domain and are adapted, rather than adopted, in various drug prevention program contexts. Similarly, the Yin, Kaftarian, and Jacobs chapter was designed to emphasize the role of quality in empowerment evaluation and faithfulness to the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (see also Fetterman 1994b). These chapters should be assessed in terms of their contributions in these areas, rather than as approximations to a narrowly defined approach.

Patton has accurately noted similarities with stakeholder and utilization focused evaluations in the process of critiquing specific chapters (1997a, p. 148). These similarities are not coincidental. Empowerment evaluation is strongly influenced by these approaches and should resemble them in many respects. In fact it may be considered a necessary but not sufficient characteristic of this approach.

### **Advocacy**

The issues of advocacy and accountability were also discussed in Patton's review and merit some comment. Concerning advocacy, Greene (1997) explained that "social program

evaluators are inevitably on somebody's side and not on somebody else's side. The sides chosen by evaluators are most importantly expressed in whose questions are addressed and, therefore, what criteria are used to make judgments about program quality" (p. 25). She points out how Campbell's work (1971) focuses on *policy makers*, Patton's (1997b) on *onsite program administrators and board members*, Stake's (1995) on *onsite program directors and staff*, and Scriven's (1993) on the *needs of program consumers*. These are not neutral positions; they are, in fact, positions of de facto advocacy based on the stakeholder focal point in the evaluation.

Greene (1997) presented the same position held in empowerment evaluation concerning an explicit value commitment to democratic pluralism in evaluation: viewing "evaluation as a force for democratizing public conversation about important public issues" (p. 1997, p. 29). However, she separated this position from a particular stance toward a particular program. Empowerment evaluation is designed to help program staff and participants use evaluation findings to advocate for their program **if the findings merit such advocacy**. It is much like a self-evaluation in a performance appraisal. After individuals come to an agreement about goals, strategies, and credible documentation with their supervisor (or funder on a program level) and their clients, they are entitled to use the information they have collected to argue for a raise (additional resources on a program level). In some cases, program participants have used negative findings, such as poor performance in a specific area, to document a need. They have demonstrated how effective they have been in certain areas with appropriate resources and then use the negative findings as a form of ammunition to make a case for additional funding in a separate area of need. They make a particularly compelling argument for additional resources when they have a documented, successful track record based on their self-evaluation efforts. Those who are very familiar with accreditation of educational programs and institutions have doubtlessly seen this dynamic occur.

A thornier issue for some evaluators is the role of the coach or evaluator assisting a group as an advocate. Empowerment evaluators first and foremost assist others, including helping them to evaluate their program and gather data that they may then use to advocate for changes warranted by the data. Following the same guidelines used by action ethnographers, empowerment evaluators remove themselves from playing a power role. The insiders or participants design and implement the evaluation, with the evaluator's guidance and assistance. The decision to implement a specific innovation, or to advocate for additional resources, remains in the hands of staff members and participants. They control the means of making their own changes. However, this approach (removing oneself as much as possible from a power role) can only take place in a community that has the potential to determine its own fate. Empowerment evaluation can help a group become more cohesive or empowered to do something about its plight. However, this approach requires that the group have the capacity to develop a binding decision-making process. It also requires that the group control the resources necessary to make the changes it desires.

Similar to action anthropologists (Tax, 1958) who advocate for the people they work with, empowerment evaluators can serve in the same capacity (again, if the findings merit such advocacy). The empowerment evaluator coach may shift into a new role as a program or group advocate, after participants have evaluated their program or social condition and proposed ideal solutions to their problems.

This role is not new in evaluation. An essential part of any evaluation is the communication of evaluation findings to the sponsors and to the public. Evaluation findings do not speak for themselves; they are carefully orchestrated and choreographed events. The evaluator thus can serve as an advocate during the presentation of traditional evaluation findings.

After conducting an evaluation of a national program for dropouts, our evaluation team prepared a Joint Dissemination Review Panel Submission to improve the program's credibility and its chances of securing future fundings. These actions were in accord with Mill's (1959) position that: "There is no necessity for working social scientists to allow the potential meaning of their work to be shaped by the 'accidents of its setting,' or its use to be determined by the purpose of other men (people). It is quite within their powers to discuss its meaning and decide upon its uses as matters of their own policy" (p. 177). Empowerment evaluators may write in public forums to change public opinion, embarrass power brokers, and provide relevant information about a situation at opportune moments in the policy decision-making forum. The presentation of evaluation findings to a concerned public is the evaluator's legitimate responsibility. The presentation of evaluation findings here aims to influence the use of the information. In empowerment evaluation as in traditional evaluation, advocacy is legitimate and ethical, but should take place after sufficient and appropriate evaluation activity has been completed.

### **Political Correctness**

Patton justifiably warns about political correctness in empowerment evaluation (or in any evaluation, for that matter). It can operate in the background like a subtle but pervasive noise creeping into one's consciousness. I, like Patton, have found that even groups heavily influenced by politically correct rhetoric (as he cites) generally take ownership and responsibility for their members' actions. However, my concern differs somewhat from the example Patton presented concerning causal attribution. My concern focuses on the potential tyranny of radical groups, left or right. The question is, who is allowed to make meaning. There are individuals who successfully hijack and commandeer an agenda with a seemingly endless string of well-timed questions about process, interrupting others and thus minimizing their ability to contribute. These individuals are less interested in facilitating social change or justice than in controlling others. Questions (even long-winded ones) about process and decision making are appropriate. However, such individuals can exploit these conventions for very different, controlling motives. Less conscious acts by well-intentioned members of a group include body language, tone, and facial expressions that demean others and thus shut them out of the dialogue. Politically correct "police" ready to sanction rather than educate and to narrow the norms of acceptable behavior are disempowering as well as controlling, and thus can undermine any evaluation effort.

### **Accountability**

Finally, Patton's concern about addressing the accountability theme is answered in his own words: "The philosophy comes down to this: the highest form of accountability is self-accountability" (1997a, p. 161). It does not end there, however. As I emphasize in my first chapter: "Despite its focus on self-determination and collaboration, empowerment evaluation and traditional evaluation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the empowerment evaluation process produces a rich data source that enables a more complete external examination" (1996, p. 5). In a recent empowerment evaluation (focusing on an accreditation self-study in higher education), the group decided to complement the internal evaluation

with an external review as part of the empowerment evaluation (see Fetterman 1997). Another set of eyes was valued. In this same study, one department decided to close one of its programs and merge a second program. Cutting and consolidating one's own programs represents one of the highest levels of accountability. This theme of accountability will be revisited later in this discussion.

### **Scriven: Consumer Focus**

Scriven's focus on the consumer serves as a useful reminder in all of our evaluation efforts, empowerment or otherwise. There is a natural tendency to focus on those who have the funds to pay for an evaluation or those who are the easiest to access. The consumer's voice is often excluded from the evaluation table. My mother has been committed to consumer education for her entire professional life, soliciting consumers' input on major manufacturers panels and translating the law into English and Spanish to make it understandable. Through her work, I have been thoroughly socialized in this mode of thinking and focus. On this matter Scriven and I are in substantial agreement.

It is arguable that his concern is misplaced in this context (particularly in comparison with most traditional evaluations); however, it is a useful contribution to combat the self-serving complacency that can result in a lessened role for the consumer. At the same time, not all evaluations (including empowerment evaluations) need to be exclusively consumer focused. Consumers are only one part of the puzzle, and staff members' and managers' concerns and constraints need to be taken into consideration as well if we aspire to capture a complete picture of the situation and if recommendations are to be used and/or implemented. Moreover, there is nothing wrong with beginning to develop a critical mass of program staff members when attempting to build and cultivate an evaluative community of learners, since they are initially a more cohesive entity. The contrast between program staff members and participants or consumers is not entirely valid on the face of it, as program staff members as well as participants need to become more self-determined and help others. There are real differences between staff members and consumer interests in theory; however, the lines between the two in disenfranchised communities are often very fine. Scriven's concern about consumers as focal points in only a few chapters must be gauged in terms of the following: (1) the collection was not designed to demonstrate an exclusive consumer focus; selected examples were presented to highlight empowerment evaluation's commitment to this constituency; and (2) consumers are an important but not the only legitimate focal point for all evaluations (empowerment or otherwise).

### **Movement**

Empowerment evaluation has been viewed, sometimes fearfully, as a worldwide "movement" by some colleagues. This is an understandable reaction, given the pace and scope of adoption by government, foundations, and academe. However, it remains simply one of many useful evaluation approaches in use throughout the world. The commitment and enthusiasm associated with this new approach is a function of both the level of engagement required to conduct this kind of effort and the rich, rewarding environment it creates. It is a constructive force designed to help people help themselves using evaluation as a tool, and it establishes a dynamic, evaluative community of learners.



Scriven explains "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" (1997a, p. 1). Sechrest (1997) also characterized empowerment evaluation as a movement, and thus this characterization merits additional comment. I understand that this characterization does pay indirect tribute to the widespread interest in this new evaluation approach. Empowerment evaluation has been adopted in a wide variety of settings. Specific examples include projects in foundations, academe, and government (e.g., the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and the Health and Human Services' Center for Substance Abuse Prevention). It has also been adopted by colleagues in countries ranging from Brazil to South Africa.

It has gained, over the past several years, a solid presence in professional associations as well. The American Evaluation Association has a Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation topical interest group with its own newsletter and Internet home page and email listserv. Empowerment evaluations have been well represented in evaluation, education, health, and anthropological association meetings.

Although I do not consider it a movement in the sense Scriven or Sechrest suggest, I do recognize the dedication and commitment of those colleagues conducting quality work in this area and the intellectual excitement we share in pursuing this path together. This approach is not a complete product of an individual expression or conception; it is an ongoing collective effort to refine and further develop a form of self-evaluation in which traditional evaluation concepts and techniques are used to foster self-determination and program improvement, building capacity in the process.

### Definitions

Although definitions are essential to understanding, Scriven's (1997a) attempt to make a case for definitional clarity appears to be an exercise in contorted logic. Citing my Presidential address in 1993, he suggests that "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" (p. 3). One only needs to read the next sentence in my presidential address to question the reasonableness of this interpretation: "The focus is on helping people help themselves" (p. 1). Similarly, in the same text a few pages later you find:

1. "In one form of empowerment evaluation, evaluators teach people to conduct their own evaluations and thus become more self-sufficient" (p. 3).
2. "Evaluators can serve as coaches or facilitators to help others conduct their evaluation. (p. 4).

Scriven is in error in his attempt to identify differences in my definitions of the field, arguing that my initial definition is

a significantly different definition of empowerment evaluation which incorporates Levin's additional assumption ... and goes still further .... 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 ...' (Scriven, 1997a, p.167).

Although every new approach, including empowerment evaluation, undergoes evolution, particularly in its early phases, a cursory review of my presidential address and the definition in this book reveals tremendous consistency of focus and language. Thus, when Scriven states that it is "the best definition of empowerment evaluation as it is currently conceived by Fetterman and his closest associates today" (p. 167), I find myself in agreement, but because the definition has been consolidated, not because it has changed significantly.

### Objectivity and Distance

On some issues, Scriven and I must agree to disagree. They include the need to maintain distance and the purpose(s) of evaluation. According to Scriven (1997a):

After all, empowerment evaluation ... 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 (p. 169).

Scriven's focus on controlling bias speaks to his definition of the purpose of evaluation as external accountability, which I see as only one of many legitimate purposes of evaluation. His definition confines the discussion to controlling bias, and his tool is distance. Scriven's ideal in this respect is to maintain as much distance as possible from those being evaluated (see Scriven, 1997b). According to Scriven "There are many ways to do distanced evaluations, but it is perhaps worth mentioning that in goal-free evaluation, which works very well in many circumstances, the evaluator not only never talks to program staff at all, but never reads the program rationale documents" (p. 484-485).

As Scriven points out,

The preceding remarks are not just about summative evaluation, but also about formative evaluation ... Formative evaluation is, to a large extent, best designed as summative evaluation of an early version, with particular attention to components or dimensions rather than a holistic account (because this facilitates improvement), and provided directly to the program director or staff rather than to external decision makers. It should be contrasted with a midcourse summative evaluation, on which continuance is often dependent. The latter can be holistic and is reported to an external client, who may or may not reveal it to the evaluatees. For both, a high degree of distancing is desirable" (1997b, p. 498-499).

I have conducted portions of audits without interviewing program personnel and relying on extant data alone. It is revealing how informative this approach can be; however, it is the least efficient way to understand a typical situation, let alone determine a program's merit or worth. It may be required in certain efforts, such as in investigative evaluations and audits, when it would be inappropriate to "tip your hand." However, to function in this capacity in the majority of collaborative or empowerment evaluations is inappropriate and inauthentic.

People represent one of the most significant links to valid and reliable findings. I believe the best data are secured through close observation of people and interaction with them, not through distancing oneself from them. Moreover, a complex web of interactions and considerations is lost by distancing oneself. The richness of people's lives and what they bring to a

program on all levels is captured by talking with them and spending time immersed in their daily lives.

### **Self Evaluation and External Evaluation**

Scriven's concerns about the credibility of self evaluations are expressed in the following quotation:

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 .... (1997a, p. 170).

This statement assumes that self-evaluation is always self-interested and favorable (a rare outcome, in fact) and that the evaluation has a single purpose: accountability. In contrast, many funders and accrediting agencies have found self-evaluations to be of much greater value to staff members than external evaluations—particularly for the purpose of capacity building. Scriven's statement also ignores the institutional integrity and the power of internal evaluations and audits directed to find problems and bring them to the attention of management, which can have far-reaching effects on the direction and operations of large organizations, as long as the evaluators have the ear of management and report to the highest level of authority.

Scriven (1997a) is also concerned with the relationship between internal and external evaluation:

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 (p. 170).

Scriven and I agree that the dilemma about whether to use external or internal evaluation is as false as that between quantitative and qualitative, as is noted in Chapter One of our book, *Empowerment Evaluation* (see page 6). To suggest otherwise unnecessarily muddies the waters and erodes agreed-upon common ground. Empowerment evaluators serve as "critical friends" who know how to facilitate, how to ask the difficult questions, and how to cultivate an environment in which people are encouraged to "speak about the unspoken or unspeakable."

### **Empowerment Evaluator or Consultant**

Scriven makes a useful distinction between an evaluator and an evaluation consultant (1997a, p. 172). Coaches or facilitators may serve as empowerment evaluation consultants, rather than empowerment evaluation evaluators. When I serve on an advisory board and provide advice about a college's ongoing empowerment evaluation, but am not directly involved in the daily affairs of the evaluation, I am serving as a consultant in an empowerment evaluation. Similarly, when training or teaching people how to conduct their own evaluations separately from the actual evaluation at hand, the evaluator is serving in a useful consulting capacity. However, the norm in empowerment evaluation requires an immersed coach or

facilitator, engaged in the daily operations of the self-evaluation. *Empowerment evaluators* participate in the evaluation effort with program staff members and participants. Training in empowerment evaluations is coterminous with the evaluation design and implementation, and thus is evaluation. It is similar to conducting evaluations with students or junior colleagues; we are teaching them while we are conducting the evaluation. As any apprentice knows, this is one of the best ways to learn a trade. Teaching hospitals are examples of environments that depend on this blending of teaching and practice.

### Devolving Responsibility

Scriven and I agree that “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” (1997a, p. 174).

### Watershed Moments

There are watershed moments, issues, and conceptualizations that help move intellectual discourse along to the next step. My own debate with Stufflebeam represents one moment in the dialogue: differing stands useful in clarifying opposing relationships. This current discussion with Patton and Scriven represents significant advances in thinking and debating about empowerment evaluation. I think Chelimsky and Shadish’s new book (1997) represents a watershed moment in this evaluative discussion, allowing us to break free from the artificial barriers we have created. Rather than argue about whether or not empowerment evaluation fits into evaluation, Chelimsky (1997) provides a useful framework for our discussion using three different evaluation purposes:

- Accountability (e.g., to measure results or efficiency);
- Development (e.g., to strengthen institutions); and
- Knowledge (e.g., to acquire a more profound understanding in some specific area or field).

Chelimsky’s description of the second of these purposes is most pertinent to the present discussion. She says:

... for other purposes ... such as strengthening institutions, improving agency performance, or helping managers think through their planning, evaluation, and reporting tasks—evaluators are faced with a different type of question, in particular, whether others can be assisted to develop a culture of evaluation that will build capacity for better performance. This kind of question calls for formative types of evaluation using developmental methods, such as the participatory analyses described by Fetterman (see Chapter 27). These methods usually have the goal of empowering agency people rather than determining the results of agency programs, but the latter may also be a part of the developmental focus. In such a case ..., independent evaluators employing different methods can be (and have been) asked to validate the findings established by these internal collaborations of evaluators and agency (or program) actors (1997, pp. 9–10).

Chelimsky’s conceptual framework is not designed to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive but it does allow us to entertain a more fruitful exchange. Instead of talking past each

other or arguing about a primarily developmental approach from an exclusively accountability perspective, criteria appropriate to each purpose can be discussed in a rational and precise manner. The empowerment evaluation case example presented in this collection is responsive to many of Scriven's and some of Patton's concerns. For example, Scriven concludes his review with the following vision:

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 (1997a, p. 174).

The case example of empowerment evaluation and accreditation in higher education (Fetterman 1997) followed precisely this format, including an external evaluation as part of the empowerment evaluation design. Again, an external set of eyes was valued to identify potential blind-spots, group-think, and provide new perspectives (based on their external experience). The case example is not proposed as the only way to proceed, but as one useful implementation of empowerment evaluation that matches the ideal Scriven described. The chapter focuses on internal forms of accountability; however, the Institute did close down one of its own programs and merged another one based on its own evaluation, demonstrating that empowerment evaluation can be effective in accountability domains as well as in developmental matters. Empowerment evaluation is designed primarily, however, to foster self-determination, build capacity, and improve program performance. Both external and internal approaches are required to achieve credible outcomes in the area of traditional accountability.

## CONCLUSION

Empowerment evaluation is evolving. Its intent represents a shift from the exclusive focus on merit and worth alone to a commitment to self-determination and capacity building. This shift is much like the emerging shift in medicine from a focus on disease to a focus on wellness. These are not clever word games; as Patton points out, words shape meaning, they shape how we think about what we are doing and thus shape action.

Empowerment evaluation is appealing to evaluators committed to democratic forms of participation and decision making, building capacity, fostering independence and self-determination, and fostering a community of learners. It may not be appropriate for evaluators who value the role of the external, distant expert above group interaction and participation. Empowerment evaluation is a group effort. It captures the imagination of evaluators and program participants who are committed to promoting responsible social change.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, as I stated in my presidential address in 1993, "the ultimate test of any new approach is that as it becomes more clearly defined, useful, and acceptable, it becomes absorbed into the mainstream of evaluation. I look forward to the day when it will be simply one more tool in the evaluator's toolbox" (1994, p. 12). Empowerment evaluation has taken root and hopefully will grow to fulfill that vision, becoming an enduring and vital part of the intellectual landscape of evaluation.

Empowerment evaluation is helping to clarify how evaluators define evaluation, regardless of their place in the evaluation continuum. It is influencing traditional forms of evaluation

and helping to distinguish similar but different approaches, such as participatory and collaborative forms of evaluation. I did not anticipate either the warm reception or the strong opposition the introduction of this approach sparked. In an echo of Prospero's blessing to Miranda in "The Tempest," this experience has brought both calm seas and auspicious gales. I deeply appreciate my colleagues, both those who are for and those who are against this approach, who have taken the time to engage in this important dialogue.

## NOTES

1. Not to imply that those who are unsupportive of empowerment evaluation are disinterested in promoting responsible social change, but merely that they would see evaluation doing that in a somewhat different way.

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