BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS DE LIVRES

Fetterman, D. M. (2013). *Empowerment Evaluation in the Digital Villages: Hewlett Packard's $15 Million Race Towards Social Justice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 154 pages. Available in paperback (ISBN 978-0-8047-8112-1), hardcover (ISBN 978-0-8047-8111-4), and e-book (ISBN 978-0-8047-8425-2).

Reviewed by Adina Jacobson

In *Empowerment Evaluation in the Digital Villages: Hewlett Packard's $15 Million Race Towards Social Justice*, David M. Fetterman presents the story of three digital villages working towards "bridging the digital divide." That is, three diverse, low-income communities, using substantial grant funding from Hewlett Packard, embarked on projects aimed to help their members access and productively use the Internet and technology. These projects all used empowerment evaluation as a tool to help them achieve success. This book uses the three experiences as case examples demonstrating the mechanics, successes, and challenges behind empowerment evaluation.

The book's 10 chapters can be grouped into three key topics:

- *Background*, explaining the needs, key players (funder, communities, and evaluators), and theory behind empowerment evaluation. Chapter 4 is of particular interest to newcomers to Fetterman's work, as it introduces readers to empowerment evaluation's basic principles and rationale.
- *Case examples*, narrative explaining the key stages in empowerment evaluation for each of the three digital villages. These stages include articulating a mission, taking stock of the current situation, planning ongoing performance monitoring/management, and measuring change over time. Within each chapter, Fetterman provides some background information, details the implementation of that evaluation stage within each digital village, and then articulates some sort of conclusion or wrap-up, including linkages to the next chapter.

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- *Synthesis*, an analysis of overarching impact and lessons learned. Learnings centre on the value of community capacity building but also include some helpful reflection on successes and failures of the evaluation itself, which may inform planning for other evaluations.

The predictable formula used in case examples (background, description of each project during the evaluation stage, and conclusion) helps readers to easily navigate the text. If one were doing a more detailed study of empowerment evaluation, it would be relatively easy to look at each chapter in isolation. However, at times, this approach can fragment the story of each digital village. Readers may find themselves flipping between sections, trying to remember information presented in earlier chapters or (for those who are similarly bad with names) remember which village is which.

Throughout *Empowerment Evaluation in the Digital Villages,* Fetterman uses a central image, or allegory, of a race to explain the Digital Villages project. The image is first introduced in the context of fuel, explaining that "[d]esire is the fuel of choice that drives any successful community change initiative." The image of a race is woven throughout the book, providing compelling comparisons that drive home Fetterman's understanding of the context, the project, and empowerment evaluation. Fetterman successfully uses these comparisons to communicate the way he views the role of various aspects of empowerment evaluation. When it comes to empowerment evaluation itself, Fetterman uses different examples, at times comparing empowerment evaluation to the race car's "engine," a "road map," or "learning to drive a car." While this did create a few head-scratching moments of trying to figure out which it is, each comparison adds to one's understanding as multiple metaphors demonstrate the approach's multiple roles. Furthermore, the race allegory served to keep this reader fully engaged. Use of race and race car central imagery set this book apart from other dry evaluation texts. The technique unified the text as well, with this reader eagerly awaiting the next use of race terminology (even if only to see how long Fetterman could keep the image relevant).

The book is directed toward three reader groups:

1. communities and community members who are working toward social change and may be able to use some of the techniques described;

2. academics (including evaluators, educators, and healthcare providers) who are interested in empowerment evaluation and may benefit from a case example of a successful empowerment evaluation; and

3. those who are skeptical of the potential for social change who may find the stories inspirational.

This reviewer, writing from the perspective of a practicing evaluator, believes that Fetterman has likely been successful in reaching his first and third target groups/objectives (i.e., communities and skeptics). The book is highly inspirational, showing that large-scale change is possible while viewing it through a realistic lens to see that it is also challenging and takes time.

With regards to the second target group/objective (academics/evaluators learning about the methodology), *Empowerment Evaluation in the Digital Villages* piques one's interest in empowerment evaluation. This book engages readers in the case example and provides compelling arguments for the value of empowerment evaluation, particularly in ensuring that evaluation findings are used in a meaningful way. However, as a stand-alone piece, this book leaves evaluators wanting more. The sections on methodology and lessons learned are a good read but do not provide the level of detail that would be needed to replicate the methodology.

Empowerment Evaluation in the Digital Villages is a well-organized book that makes impressive use of central imagery to engage readers. It did a rather good job of convincing me that empowerment evaluation would be a positive force on many communities. However, as an evaluator who is not experienced in the approach, I was left wanting more detail and clarity from the book. As such, it is a recommended read either as an introduction to be quickly followed up by other works on empowerment evaluation, or for the more experienced empowerment evaluator to use as an illustration of the power of the approach.