

## **Case Study: The Rationale for the Workplace Needs Assessment**

Kitchens Unlimited<sup>1</sup> manufactures a number of different kitchen components for a diverse clientele world wide. The company employs over 500 hundred people. Production employees are unionized. The work force is ethnically diverse throughout the company. The company is experiencing rapid technological change and has slowly been implementing a new management procedure that involves teamwork, multi-skilling and more employee decision-making on a day-to-day basis.

Kitchens Unlimited has just implemented a new performance appraisal system as part of the new participatory approach to management. Within this system, all employees are required to fill in a comprehensive form and rate themselves according to a list of pre-set categories such as taking initiative, teamwork, creativity, etc. In addition, employees have to write personal goals and objectives for the next year. The next step is for employees to rate employee performance. Then, final ratings are negotiated between the supervisor and employee. Non-unionized employees' annual raises will be based on their ratings.

Unfortunately, the new system has not been working very well. Many employees have gone into meetings with their supervisors with blank forms. Supervisors report that many employees are "unwilling to set goals and talk about their achievements." Other supervisors feel uncomfortable with the new system.

Management thinks that a workplace education program with a focus on reading, writing, negotiating and oral communication will rectify "the performance appraisal problem" and "other basic skills needs." The ed provider suggests that a WNA be conducted to identify the basic skills needs of the workforce and company and to see how these needs fit with other workplace needs and issues. Management says that a WNA is unnecessary because they know the people who need a program. Instead, they feel a literacy task analysis to assess the basic skills needed for the performance appraisal system and other job tasks is the only assessment needed. The union seems lukewarm to the idea of the WNA.

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1. Adapted from the work of Sue Folinsbee