

Private Online Tutoring for Working Families: Literature Review and Employer Case Study

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ABSTRACT. *This Note begins with a summary of key points from a recent white paper that reviews the research literature on offering private educational tutoring as a corporate benefit for employees and their family members. We describe what motivates employers to offer it as a benefit, the nature of the service, and the modern online delivery context. We then present highlights of a 2014 survey of 345 employees from a Fortune 100 company, all of which had one or more of their children as users of an online private tutoring service during the past year. Results are presented concerning a profile of the users, effects of service use on user scholastic outcomes, and the impact of family use of tutoring on workplace outcomes for the employee/parent (recruitment, absenteeism, presenteeism, and retention) and their general attitudes toward the company culture. This research suggests that private tutoring is highly valued by employee users and deserves further consideration as a new kind of benefit to augment the existing suite of EAP and Work-Life services.*

PART I – Literature Review

This first part of this note reviews the evidence from applied social science and business trade publication sources on several topics related to private educational tutoring and employee benefits. For a full discussion of this area, please see our 2014 White Paper.¹

In this paper we argue that by offering access to school support services via the Internet, this on-

demand model for accessing high-quality tutoring services has the potential to allow working parents to be more focused at work during the day and also be more relaxed in the evening when with their family rather than trying to help their children with schoolwork and other academic tasks. The rationale for offering educational support via private tutoring for employees and their family members is similar to the arguments for offering work-life programs and employee assistance programs (EAP). But whereas the users of work-life and EAP services are most often the employees themselves, the children of the working employees are the members of the family who use private tutoring most often.

Tutoring for Working Families Can Contribute to Organizational Success

Employers have long understood the value of having a positive public image or corporate reputation for enhancing recruitment efforts to attract new employees. Having the reputation of being a good place to work can help to attract and retain employees. The goal of being perceived as an employer of choice can be advanced by offering more and better benefits than other rival companies. Offering private tutoring can be one of these benefits. Indeed, many of the early adopters of tutoring as a benefit have achieved public recognition by *Fortune* magazine and by *Working Mother* magazine for being on their annual lists of the “best places to work.” Some of these companies include:

- Intel
- Johnson & Johnson
- Mass Mutual Financial Group
- MetLife
- Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Co.
- Northern Trust
- Northwestern Memorial Healthcare
- Sanofi-Aventis U.S.
- The Phoenix Companies
- Verizon Wireless

Overview of Private Tutoring

What is private tutoring? This is defined as fee-based tutoring that provides supplementary instruction on a one-to-one basis to children or young adults in a range of academic subjects they study in the mainstream education system.² Tutors facilitate the learning of students but they do not do the assignments or answer the questions assigned to the student.

Why do students use private tutoring? It has two main roles: First, high-achieving students tend to use it to better prepare for getting into the next level of school or into college (academic enhancement); and second, low-achieving students tend to use it for help in satisfying basic academic requirements (remedial education).³

Which subjects are appropriate for private tutoring? It is most often provided for various subjects in math, science, and writing. High school students work with tutors for help with a variety of advanced placement subjects (AP courses) as part of their preparation for college.

How much does private tutoring cost? The cost of private tutors in the open market can be high when paid directly by the parents. According to a 2012 article in *Money* magazine, parents in the U.S. can expect to pay from \$80 to \$100 per hour for one-on-one tutoring.⁴ However, when tutoring is provided at a discount or sponsored entirely by the employer as an employee benefit, this becomes quite a savings to the employee who would otherwise pay such fees out of pocket or simply be unable to afford private tutoring.

Private Tutoring Delivered via the Internet

Advances in communication technology have made high-quality tutoring more widely available. Telephone tutoring is one option, but it has increasingly been supplemented or displaced by tutoring delivered over the Internet.⁵ This section provides a brief overview of how online tutoring services function.

How is online tutoring provided? When offering support via an online format, tutors can be immediately available and can be flexible in their instruction tactics through the use of text chat, white boards, shared websites, voice over IP, as well as digitized print materials and more.⁶ A student typically works with a tutor for only 20 to 30 minutes and uses that time to focus on a specific problem or issue on which the student has been working. These tutoring sessions are conducted in an “online classroom” where the student and the tutor work through problems using an instant-messaging text chat and a shared computer screen whiteboard.⁷ Online tutoring services are also convenient, as students can work with a tutor anytime, from any computer, and at some service providers even without needing to make an appointment.⁸ The most advanced online classrooms offer features like multiple whiteboards, graphing tools and the ability to share files and web pages. It is also possible to record the session so students, parents and teachers can review it at any time.

How effective is technology-based tutoring? The results of a meta-analysis report support the general effectiveness of personalized individual education conducted using technology compared to more traditional face-to-face methods.⁹ Online tutoring has been found to be effective for students of different ages, ranging from 4th graders¹⁰ to college students.¹¹ In post-use surveys, providers of online tutoring services routinely see very high levels (e.g., above 90%) of user satisfaction and user self-reported outcomes of a positive impact from brief tutoring on completing class assignments and grades.

What kinds of organizations offer online tutoring? Private tutoring is offered today at thousands of

libraries, schools, colleges, and universities in the U.S. One report found that some form of private tutoring is offered at over 70% of both 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education in the U.S.¹² At the U.S. Department of Defense private online tutoring services are offered free of charge to all employees (and their families) who serve in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, National Guard, Reserves, Wounded Warriors and also deployed civilian workers.

What is the level of utilization for private online tutoring at large organizations? Like EAP and work-life programs, the tutoring service is usually offered by the employer for potential use by all employees and their family members. Data from the largest provider in the U.S. of online private tutoring – Tutor.com – offers some basic information on level of service use. The typical utilization rate at large employers is around 1% of all employees per year – defined as those who open an account for family and/or personal use. However, not all employees have a need or interest in tutoring. At most organizations, review of HR data on the demographic characteristics of the workforce reveal that only about half of the employee population is actually relevant to potentially using private tutoring through having school-age children, children in the first years of college or being in college part-time themselves as adult learners. Thus, at most large employers, utilization of the tutoring service is around 2% of the “relevant” subpopulation of employees.

However, the optimal or desired level of overall use of tutoring as work-family benefit has not been properly studied yet. We know of no employers that have conducted formal needs assessments type of analysis of the entire employee population to gauge the degree of employee or family interest in tutoring services.

Utilization of tutoring services is also closely linked to the pricing for the service. Similar to how most external vendor-based EAP and work-life services are purchased, most corporate customers who purchase private tutoring services do so on a per employee per year (PEPY) capitated pricing format. This PEPY format assumes that the annual utilization experience will produce a

total number of tutoring sessions across all users at the company within a certain expected target range. Program utilization can also be set by the employer at a pre-determined number of total tutoring sessions in order to fit the desired financial budget for the service.

PART II – Employer Case Study with Survey of Employee Users

A new study was conducted with a Fortune 100 technology company client of the tutoring service vendor Tutor.com. It has offered a tutoring benefit since 2008. This technology company has about 50,000 covered employees and has more than 1,000 employee families who use the online tutoring benefit each year. This company was selected for study because of its long tenure with the tutoring provider and it had a large enough group of users to potentially yield a suitable survey sample size.

The service usage was initiated when an employee logged into the tutoring website and created a user account. This one account could then be used by the employee and also by his or her family members. The utilization levels from the service provider database for this company over the past year for the study period indicated a typical level of frequency of use at around 25 tutoring sessions per year per each employee user account. In the majority of these cases, there was more than one user of the service in each employee household with a user account. About 90% of these employee households included one or more children as a user. In addition, about 20% of the employee households had one or more adults (the employees and/or their spouse or partner) as a user of the tutoring service.

STUDY QUESTIONS

We investigated the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1 – What is the utilization profile for private online tutoring?

RQ2 – What is the perceived impact of the use of the tutoring service on the student’s schoolwork?

RQ3 – How does use of the tutoring service by the children of the employee indirectly contribute to the work performance (absence and productivity) and work attitudes (recruitment and retention) of the employee?

RQ4 – How much do employees value the tutoring service as a company sponsored benefit?

RQ5 – How does offering the tutoring benefit influence employee attitudes concerning aspects of the company work culture?

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This was a retrospective one-time survey with volunteer participants. A comparison group of non-users of the tutoring service was not included in the study design at the employer's request in order to reduce the data collection burden on the employees at the company.

The survey included 17 items. All of the measures were created by the researchers specifically for this study.

The data was collected online during a three-week period in the summer of 2014. An email request was sent to all employees who had user accounts at the tutoring service in the past 12 months. This invitation was sent via the company internal email system. The message included a hot-link to go directly to an online survey tool. A total of 438 useable surveys were completed from the 1,193 employees contacted. This final sample represents a response rate of 37%.

As an incentive for participation, one randomly selected respondent was awarded a personal electronic tablet device worth \$500.

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on the data with some use of correlational tests. There was very little missing data in this study. Valid sample sizes are noted for each analysis.

STUDY SAMPLE – CHILD USERS ONLY

For this Note, only the survey responses with a child (or multiple children) as the user of the

tutoring service were included. This criteria reduced the sample to a total of 345 surveys. The other data from the remaining 93 surveys representing the employee or other adults as users either alone or in combination with child users was excluded.^{NOTE 2}

No demographic characteristics of the employees or his/her other family members were assessed in the study, again at the request of the employer, to protect the privacy of the employees and families. However, three items were included on the survey that asked about the employee's education level, typical work hours and whether or not the employee was hired before or after the initiation of offering the tutoring service as a benefit. Most of the employees in this sample were well educated. Almost half (46%) had a graduate degree, 35% had a college degree and 19% had a level of education at less than a college degree (associates degree or high-school). The typical employee worked 48 hours a week. Most of the sample (62%) had been working at the company for more than eight years.

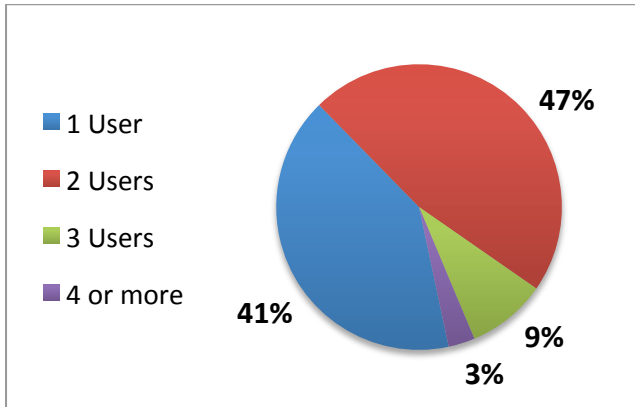
RESULTS

The results are presented in two parts. The first part includes findings related to utilization, outcomes from use and perceived value. The second part includes results for employee workplace performance and attitudes toward work culture related to the tutoring service.

PROFILE OF TUTORING SERVICE USE, ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AND VALUE

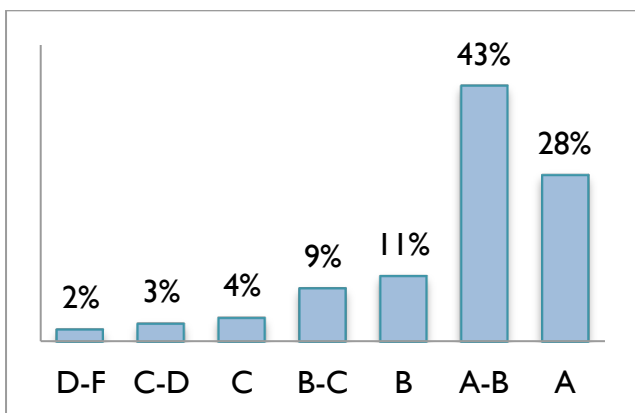
Number of Users Per Employee Household. Item: "How many people in total from your family have ever used this online tutoring?" Having one child user in the employee household accounted for 41% of the sample; two children as users represented 47% of the sample, followed by three children users at 9% and four or more children as users at 3%. See Figure 1. Thus, a majority (59%) of the sample had two or more children as users of the tutoring service per employee household. The average for the total sample was 1.74 children who used the tutoring service per each user household.

Figure 1.
Number of Children in Employee Household as Users of Tutoring Service



User Grades. Item: “For the person in your family who has used the tutoring service the most, what kind of grades did he or she have in school *before* starting to use the tutoring service?” The typical primary user of the tutoring service had a **B+** Grade Level with a GPA equivalent of 3.33 on 4.00 scale. Most of the primary users (71%) had a history of achieving high grades in the past (either mostly As or mostly As & Bs). See Figure 2. This finding indicates that for this survey sample the tutoring was most often probably used for advanced educational preparation and less often for remedial academic counseling.

Figure 2.
Typical Past Grades of Child Who Was the Primary Tutor User in the Employee Household

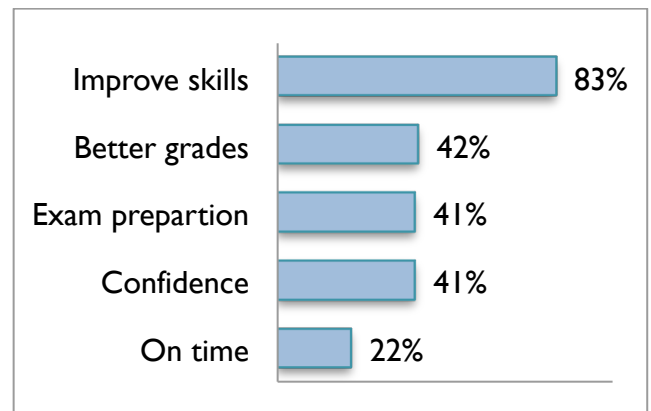


Tutoring Scholastic Results. In reference to the one person who has used the tutoring service most often - Item: “*In what ways was the tutoring service helpful for this person?*” The following five choices were provided, each with a Yes/No option:

- a) Improved skills needed for specific schoolwork tasks or assignments
- b) Increased confidence in studying and doing schoolwork more effectively
- c) Encouraged turning in schoolwork on time and not having late assignments
- d) Helped to get better grades in school
- e) Helped to prepare for important exams

Results with the percentage Yes to each outcome are displayed in Figure 3. According to the perspective of the parents who completed the survey, use of the tutoring service was most helpful for their children in the area of improving specific skills for doing schoolwork, with the other outcome areas less commonly endorsed. When examined together, on average two of the five possible outcomes were selected. Only 3% of the parents in the sample reported none of these outcomes for their child.

Figure 3.
Ways that Use of Tutoring Helped the Student



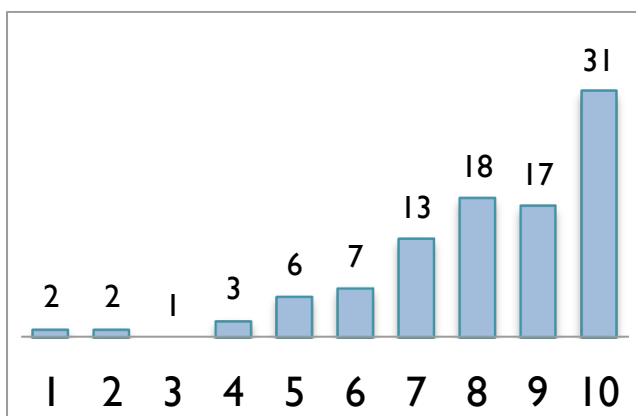
Are these outcomes related to how often the service was used? When tested among employee households with only one user ($n = 141$), each of these scholastic outcomes were positively and significantly correlated (all $p < .05$) with the

overall frequency of use of the tutoring service by the child (Improved Skills $r = .19$; Exams $r = .32$; Grades $r = .37$; Confidence $r = .41$; and On-time $r = .31$). This means that these outcomes tended to be experienced somewhat more often among those children who also used the tutoring service more often over the year. Thus, these results indicate a classic “dose-reponse” kind of relationship for the general effectiveness of the tutoring service.

Are these outcomes related to the level of past grades of the student? Again when tested among households with only one user ($n = 141$), each of these outcomes were *not* significantly correlated with past grade point average (r range from $-.02$ to $.14$). These lack of association suggests that these positive outcomes from use of tutoring were experienced to a similar degree across students with a range of prior academic achievement.

Perceived Value of Tutoring Benefit. Item: “The company offers a variety of services to employees to help address work/family issues as they may arise. Please rate the overall value to you and your family.” The response was on a 1-10 scale, with 1 = lowest value to 10 = highest value. Valid $n = 339$. The results yielded a average rating from these employees of 7.9 (median = 8). See Figure 4.

Figure 4.
Employee Rating of Value of Tutoring Benefit. Bars Show the Percentage of Sample at Each Rating Level from 1 = Lowest Value to 10 = Highest Value



This finding indicates a high level of value placed on the tutoring benefit by most of these

employees as parents of the users of the service. This finding is consistent with the other results that found a use by two or more children in many families, the generally positive impact of this use on childrens’ schoolwork and the unique role of the tutoring service compared to other potential supports for their children’s schoolwork needs.

WORKPLACE OUTCOMES AMONG PARENTS FROM THEIR CHILD’S USE OF TUTORING

Other items on the survey asked about the impact of the tutoring benefit on past recruitment, barrier to future turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism and general attitudes toward the company.

Employee Recruitment Effect. Item: “In the past when I first began working at the company, having the tutoring service as part of the employee benefits package was one factor that contributed positively to my decision to take the job.” The answer was Yes for 52%, with another 15% who answered Maybe and only 32% who said No. [Note: this item was restricted to only those employees who had been hired sometime during the past six years since the tutoring benefit had been offered at the company. Valid $n = 130$].

Employee Retention Effect. Item: “In the future if I have the opportunity to work someplace else, having to then give up the tutoring service as part of my employee benefits package would make it harder for me to leave the company.” The answer was Yes for 28%, with 35% who answered Maybe and 37% who said No. Valid $n = 341$.

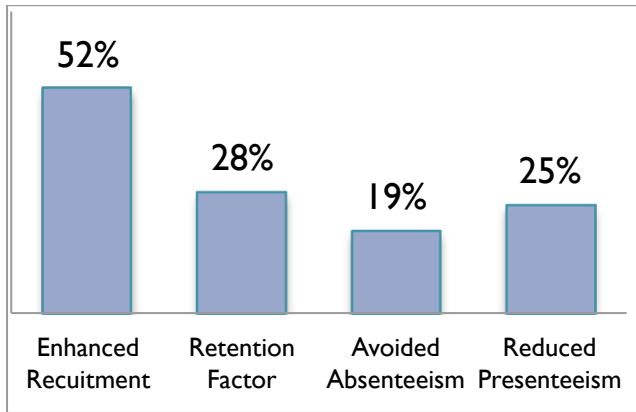
Employee Absenteeism Effect. Item: “Compared to before your family used the tutoring service, are you less likely now to occasionally need to take time off from work, to come in late to work or to leave work early to support your family’s schoolwork?” Almost a fifth of the sample - 19% - reported Yes; with 34% who answered No and 38% who chose Not Applicable. Valid $n = 343$.

Employee Presenteeism Effect. Item: “Compared to before your family used the tutoring service, are you now able to be interrupted less often while at work by calls and e-mails and worry less about your family’s schoolwork?” A fourth of the

sample - 25% - reported Yes; with 39% who answered No and 36% who answered Not Applicable. Valid $n = 343$.^{NOTE 3}

See Figure 5 for a summary of the four kinds of workplace outcome results.

Figure 5.
Workplace Outcomes for Employees After Use of Tutoring by Child of Employee



The number of hours associated with avoided work absence days and avoided unproductive time while at work were also examined.

Avoided Hours of Work Absence. Those with the avoided absence outcome were also asked the follow-up question: “If Yes, how many hours of missed work, arriving to work late or leaving work early related to your family’s schoolwork have been reduced *per month* because of the tutoring service? ____ hours (fill in a number).” Of the 66 relevant cases, 55 provided a response. The results were an average of 5.56 hours per employee per month (median = 4.0 hours). Across all employees, this result is 1.06 hours in avoided work absence on average per person (5.56 hours x 19% of sample with this outcome effect).

Avoided Hours of Work Presenteeism. Those with the avoided presenteeism outcome were also asked this follow-up question: “If Yes, how many hours of productive work time related to your

family’s schoolwork have been restored *per month* because of the tutoring service? ____ hours (fill in a number).” Of the 87 relevant cases, 76 provided a response. The results were an average of 4.32 hours per employee per month (median = 3.0 hours). Across all employees, this result is 1.08 hours in avoided presenteeism on average per person (4.32 hours x 25% of sample with this outcome effect).

These results indicate *an average* of 2.14 hours of combined work absence and unproductive work time were avoided per month for the typical employee who had a child use the tutoring service.

Effect of Tutoring Benefit on Employee Attitudes Toward the Company

Attitudes About the Employer. Item: “Please rate your level of agreement with the items listed below.” Each statements was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The three statements were: 1) “By offering the tutoring benefit, the company shows that it has a strong commitment to education and student learning”; 2) “The company is a great place to work because it offers the tutoring benefit”; and 3) “Having the tutoring benefit helps in general for recruiting new people to work at the company.” See results in Table 1.

Table 1.
Employee Attitudes Toward Employer Due to Offering the Tutoring Benefit to All Employees

	Committed to Education	Great Place to Work	Helps Recruiting
Sample n	344	340	342
Strongly Agree	73%	54%	19%
Agree	19%	35%	30%
No Opinion	2%	5%	43%
Disagree	1%	2%	6%
Strongly Disagree	5%	5%	2%

The majority of these employees with family use of the tutoring service had very favorable attitudes about all three aspects of company culture attributed to the company offering the tutoring benefit. More specifically, 92% agreed

that by offering the tutoring benefit the company shows that it has a strong commitment to education, 89% agreed that it is a great place to work and 49% agreed that it helps recruiting.

Qualitative Comments. Respondents were also given the opportunity to write-in a comment at the end of the survey. About a third of study participants offered a comment, with the vast majority of these being positive in nature. Some of these employee comments are presented below:

- *Great benefit. Helped my daughter understand calculus problems that no one else had the background or knowledge to help with.*
- *My older son relies a great deal on the tutoring service. If he didn't have it, we'd have to choose between letting his grades drop or hire a [local private] tutor.*
- *It gave me peace of mind knowing that my child has access to quality help whenever she needed. It certainly helped her improve her grades and confidence.*
- *I think it's a great service and really shows my employer cares about the family's education.*
- *This is one of the top benefits at my company for the working parent.*

SURVEY STUDY SUMMARY

The profile of tutoring service users at this one employer revealed a range of findings. Most of the employees had more than one child who had used the tutoring service. Most of the children had good grades prior to the use of the tutoring service. Over 90% of the users had at least one kind of positive scholastic outcome after use of the tutoring service, with getting help with skills for specific school assignments being the most common benefit.

The findings from this study clearly document the high personal value that these employees place on the tutoring service and positive attitudes these employees toward its impact on the work culture of the company. The amount of time saved by

some of the employees in avoided work absence and avoided work presenteeism also suggest a financial value of the benefit.

Limitations of the Study

Several aspects of this research study represent limitations that need to be discussed.

The survey response rate was 37%, which although much higher than what is typically found in marketing studies, is lower than the 50% level featured in many academic studies that are conducted independently of the employer or the service vendor. Thus, what is left unknown from the study design is how this sample of employees who completed the surveys compares to the other 63% of employees who also had self or family use of the tutoring service (i.e., the non-respondents to the survey invitation list). Given the data was collected anonymously and without demographic or other individual characteristics, there is no opportunity to conduct post-hoc comparison between the survey respondents and non-respondents. It is quite possible that those who chose to voluntarily participate in the survey had a more positive experience regarding the tutoring service and wanted to express that to their employer through the study findings.

In addition to the representativeness of the convenience sample, a matched comparison group of other employees with school- or college-age children who had no history of use of the tutoring service was not included in the design. Thus, the unique contribution to these outcomes that came from the use of the tutoring service versus from other sources remains unexamined.

The reliance on self-report data also is a concern. Use of archival records and more objective kinds of data from the employer on pre to post changes in employee work absence and work performance would have strengthened the interpretation of the findings in the study concerning the workplace performance impact of the use of the tutoring service. Future research on this topic would also benefit from collecting more qualitative data (such as from interviews or focus groups) where employees could expand on concepts of presenteeism impact, how a child's use of the

tutoring affects the level of employee stress due to work-family issues and other topics.

This study is one of the first to collect data on the user experience of private online tutoring services from the employee/parent perspective and explore its impact on work experience. Thus, even with these limitations, it has merit as a starting point for future research.

Case Study Results in Context of the Literature

Many of the findings from this study make sense in light of the existing research in the field of EAP. Four points in particular merit discussion.

First, the technology aspects of providing private tutoring online via the Internet is similar to the increase among EAP providers who are beginning to offer employees and their families more technology-based educational and clinical support services.¹³⁻¹⁵

Second, our finding that the child's use of the tutoring service had work performance outcome effect rates at 19% of the employee/parents with avoided absenteeism and 25% with reduced presenteeism is in line with (but lower than) the work performance outcome effect rates reported by employee users of legal and financial services provided by EAPs - at 39% with avoided absenteeism and 36% with reduced presenteeism according to study from 2002 of a national EAP vendor.¹⁶ But the results for tutoring are much lower than what is typically found among employee users of EAP clinical counseling services; which have been reported at 64% of counseling cases with avoided absenteeism and 73% with reduced presenteeism - according to average results from over 50 external EAP vendors in a 2013 study.¹⁷ Perhaps this is to be expected as the personal intensity and burden of clinical issues for the employee are likely to be greater than the stress of supporting a child's schoolwork needs.

Thirdly, EAP, work-life and private tutoring all share the same general business case argument that by offering a pre-paid benefit that can be used on demand by the employee and his or her family dependents as needed, the pay-off back to the

company sponsor comes in two areas: an enhanced public image of the company (and thus small gains in employee recruiting and retention) and improved employee work performance.¹⁸

And lastly, adding a tutoring service as an employee and family benefit is consistent with the industry trend of EAPs offering more work-life services directly or being an inter-organizational partner with work-life programs already in place at customer organizations.¹⁹

Conclusion

The first part of this report provided key points from the research literature on offering private educational tutoring as new kind of benefit for employees and their family members. The nature of private tutoring services was examined as well as how tutoring is now delivered via the Internet. Adding to the organizational goals of being perceived as an employer of choice was also discussed and award-winning employers were noted who provide a tutoring benefit. The second part presented key results of an employer case study that used a survey of employee users of a tutoring service from one employer. Taken together, past studies in the literature and this new survey study suggest that private tutoring has an emerging business case and thus deserves consideration as a new kind of employee benefit that can augment the existing suite of EAP and work-life services.

Notes

Note 1 = The tutoring service company featured in this study hired the first author of this Note as an external consultant for the research project and also employs the second author. For more information on tutoring please contact: Kenneth.Miller@tutor.com

Note 2 = Results based on the full survey sample were prepared and presented to the case study employer. Exploratory comparison tests revealed that the results from the adult/employee users of the tutoring service (who were excluded from this Note) were similar on most items to the users featured in this Note.

Note 3 = For the absenteeism and presenteeism items, the percentage of the sample that answered Yes indicating a positive outcome effect were calculated

using the the full sample of all respondents as the demoninator in the fraction, which included those with the Not Applicable response. This was done because the reasons why the N/A response was selected were unknown and could have been due to a variety of factors. If we had excluded the N/A cases it would have inappropriately increased the percentage of the sample with a Yes response.

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