

Private Tutoring as a New Way to Benefit Employees: Developing the Business Case

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May 5, 2014

A White Paper Sponsored by Tutor.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advances the idea of offering private online tutoring as a new kind of corporate benefit for employees and their family members. Although a relatively small number of employers offer online tutoring as a benefit of working for their organization today, the research literature and available employer case studies provide a strong business case for the practice.

The largest early adopter in this area is the United States Department of Defense (DoD). In 2007, the DoD partnered with Tutor.com to create an online tutoring and homework service to provide learning support to every child whose parent serves in the U.S. Military. In 2014, more than two million families in all branches of the military have access to the benefit of online tutoring as an employee benefit.

This report reviews the evidence from applied social science and business trade publication sources on several topics related to tutoring and employee benefits. The material is divided into the following four areas:

Part 1: Organizational Culture

The first part of the report addresses how tutoring can contribute to organizational success through making companies more attractive as places to work and through enhanced employee work performance related to reducing work-family stress.

Part 2: History

The second part provides an overview of the growth of private tutoring as a service and as an employee benefit.

Part 3: Technology

Next is a discussion of the how Internet technology has dramatically improved the access, effectiveness, quality and cost of delivering private tutoring online.

Part 4: Return on Investment

The final part of the paper introduces a logic model for estimating the financial return-on-investment or ROI for employers who add online tutoring as an employee benefit.



PART 1 – ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: How Private Tutoring Contributes to Organizational Success

Having a reputation of being a good place to work (i.e., an employer of choice) can help to attract and retain good employees. Many companies also improve workforce performance and productivity by offering services that reduce stress and encourage a good work-life balance. These twin goals can be addressed by adding private tutoring as a new kind of company-sponsored benefit for employees and their family members.¹

Private Tutoring as a New Form of Work-Family Benefit

Some innovative companies now sponsor private tutoring for employees and their family members as a benefit of working for the company. This trend has been noted in industry press and as a benefit at some companies on the “best companies to work for” lists.

In 2008, Futurethink CEO Lisa Bodell included child-tutoring programs as **one of the features of the next generation of work-life benefits for working mothers in the U.S.**, along with pregnancy support, extra paid time off and sabbaticals.²

Also in 2008, Employee Benefit News reported that Intel started to offer online private tutoring for the children and grandchildren of employees. According to David Kirby at Intel, the new benefit “ties to a broader strategy that we’ve got in flight right now, which is to really create an environment for employees where they perceive and believe that Intel is a great place to work, and they get value from [working at Intel] other than just traditional compensation and benefits”.³

Private Tutoring as a Way to Attract and Retain Employee Talent

Employers have long understood the value of having a positive public image or corporate reputation for enhancing recruitment efforts to attract new employees.^{4,5,6,7,8}

MetLife interviewed over 1,200 U.S. workers in 2013 about the role of benefits in employee recruitment and retention.⁹ The study found that a large percentage of employees felt that benefits played a role in both recruitment and retention:

43% of employees agreed that: “Benefits are an important reason why I came to work for my employer.” and

50% of employees agreed that: “Benefits are an important reason I remain with my employer.”

Companies Already Support Employee Education

Although the idea of offering company-sponsored private tutoring assistance for family members as an employee benefit is new to many organizations, the majority of large companies in the U.S. already provide financial support for their employees who pursue their own post-secondary education.

Numerous surveys over the past 15 years have shown that at least two-thirds of large employers offer some form of paid tuition assistance to their employees who are taking college or university courses.¹⁰⁻¹³ Scholarships and in-kind educational benefits are also provided.

Companies consider education related benefits as contributing to employee development, recruitment and retention.^{14,15} By providing educational benefits, organizations demonstrate that they support the continued development and learning of their employees and their families.¹⁶ For example, one review concluded: “An organization that promotes opportunities to enhance current skills and develop new skills ... sends a message that it values a highly trained workforce and is committed to investing in its human capital.”¹⁷

Adding a private tutoring benefit for families of employees follows the same rationale for the company-sponsorship of educational tuition support benefits, scholarships, and in-kind education albeit with a much smaller investment. The employees themselves can also use the tutoring service if they are taking college courses.

The financial outcomes from cultural factors that can accrue to the organization that offers tutoring are twofold: First are the operational efficiencies that come with being an employer of choice and of needing **less time to recruit and hire desirable new employees**; and secondly are the **cost-savings in lower turnover rates** for the existing employees who use and value the tutoring benefit for themselves or for their family. See the ROI Section later in this paper for more detail.

Many of the “Best Companies to Work For” Offer Private Tutoring as a Benefit to Employees

Companies that have achieved public recognition for being on the lists of “best places to work” include private tutoring as an employee benefit. Some of these companies are:

- **Intel** (one of the 2009 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers online private tutoring from Tutor.com.¹⁸
- **Johnson & Johnson** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers high school junior and senior students use of the company’s discounted homework and 24/7 tutoring service.¹⁹
- **Mass Mutual Financial Group** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers older children free homework tutoring and college coaching programs.²⁰
- **MetLife** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers parents and their children access to college test prep courses and tutoring at a 10% discount.²¹
- **Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Company** (one of the 2013 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For) offers online private tutoring from Tutor.com.²²
- **Northern Trust** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers free homework tutoring, counseling sessions and college coaching through online private tutoring from Tutor.com.²³
- **Northwestern Memorial Healthcare** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers tutoring for children at the day care center located at the company’s headquarters office location.²⁴
- **Sanofi-Aventis U.S.** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers online tutoring and SAT test prep for children ages 4 to 18, which might help them score one of the available college scholarships provided by the company, each worth \$10,000. Tutoring provided by Tutor.com.²⁵
- **Southern Ohio Medical Center** (one of the 2014 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For) offers online private tutoring from Tutor.com.²⁶
- **The Phoenix Companies** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers tutoring as an employee benefit.²⁷
- **Verizon Wireless** (one of the 2013 Working Mother 100 Best Companies) offers online private tutoring from Tutor.com.²⁸

Private Online Tutoring as a Way to Reduce Family Stress for Working Parents

A second major reason for employers to offer a private tutoring benefit is to reduce the stress parents feel from their child’s daily school work and overall performance at school.

Today, more than half of all children in the U.S. under age 18 live in households with two employed parents or one employed single parent.²⁹ Consequently, most of these parents are at work when their children get out of school, often generating parental concerns about their children’s welfare after school and being able to complete their homework when unsupervised.³⁰ Many parents are often too busy working to help their children with school. Indeed, according to the 2008 national survey by the Work and Families Institute, 75% of working parents reported not having enough time to spend with their children.³¹

But private online tutoring can help overcome this time problem for families by offering 24/7 access to school support services. **This on-demand model for using tutoring services keeps parents' focused at work during the day and also gives them more relaxed time in the evening with their family.**

In addition to the increased rate of workforce participation by working parents, other societal changes have occurred over the past few decades that make it harder to balance the competing demands of work and family lives.³² These conflicting demands can sometimes have negative effects at work, at home and for the individual with increased stress and health problems.

Several studies and literature reviews of applied workplace research confirm these linkages.³³⁻³⁸ For example, the authors of a 2014 review study stated:

“Americans find themselves caught between ... two inconsistent social ideals: the ideal worker norm, which enshrines the employee ever-available for paid work, and the norm of intensive parenting, which enshrines the parent who is ever-available for their children.”³⁹

There are many examples of how family experiences sometimes interfere with job performance. An early study found that **53% of respondents reported that worrying about their children had caused them to waste time and make mistakes at work.**⁴⁰ In a sample of employees from 20 different Fortune 500 companies, 28% of men and 53% of women reported that work-family stress affected their ability to concentrate at work.⁴¹

Finally, a 2006 study of parents employed at a major global financial services company, found that parental concern about after-school time was related to job disruptions in both level of distraction at work (i.e., productivity) and in missed days of work.⁴²

To avoid these problems, many organizations have enacted corporate policies and employee benefit programs aimed at providing employees with resources to help them better manage their personal and family lives. Grover and Crooker found that employees who had family responsive benefits (e.g., flexible schedules, child-care information services) were more committed to their organization and were less likely to think about looking for a new job, regardless of whether they actually used the benefit.⁴³ In general, according to one review: “Most studies find that innovative human resource management (HRM) practices have a positive impact on firm-level outcomes.”⁴⁴

“I used to work all day and when I walked in the door, the girls would be wailing ‘Help me, Mommy! I don’t know what to do!’ Their homework made life so stressful, and I would get stuck on a math problem and not be able to help the girls figure out the answer. Sometimes I’d stress about it all night and wake up thinking about the problem! I think of Tutor.com as stress relief!”

– private interview with Lucy, a working mom

Working Parents and Homework

The National Center for Family Literacy partnered with Google in August of 2013 to conduct an online survey of 137 parents with students in grades 1 through 12 about the parents' ability to help with their children's homework. Key findings from this study indicated that: 49% of parents struggle with providing kids the homework help they need; 47% of parents feel they themselves don't understand the subject matter of the coursework for their children; and 1 in 5 parents are often “too busy” with work and activities of their daily lives to spend time reviewing their child's homework.

A Watson Wyatt survey of employers in the U.S. found that 77% of respondents believed that work-life programs improve employee satisfaction; and 54% believe that they enhance employee health and productivity.⁴⁵

In an interview with Employee Benefit News, a manager for a company offering tutoring as part of the work/life benefits, commented: "Productivity increases when parents are not preoccupied worrying about their children's needs. Additionally, the [tutoring service] helps demonstrate employers' efforts to support education."⁴⁶

The work-life services vendor Care.com has the following user self-reported survey results: 92% of employees report they are **better able to focus at work with their family's care needs met**; 91% **feel more positively regarding their employer**; and 60% have **been able to improve their focus and work more hours**. This data is for users of search and referral services of children, adults/seniors care, pets, and home and lifestyle.⁴⁷

Thus, the business case for offering educational support and tutoring for employees and their family members is similar to the arguments for offering work-life programs and employee assistance programs. But whereas the users of work-life and EAP services are most often the employees themselves, tutoring as a benefit extends to both employee and family members. Adding online private tutoring as a new kind of benefit potentially adds value to both employers and employees.



PART 2 – HISTORY: An Overview of Private Tutoring

Private Tutoring Defined

What is tutoring? Private tutoring is defined as fee-based tutoring that provides supplementary instruction on a one-to-one basis to children in academic subjects they study in the mainstream education system.⁴⁸

What is not tutoring? The first line in the National Tutoring Association’s ethics code is: “I understand that my role as a tutor is to never do the student’s work for him or her.”⁴⁹

Why do students use tutoring? Private tutoring 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 (enhancement or enrichment); and second, low-achieving students tend to use private tutoring for help in satisfying basic academic requirements (remedial education).⁵⁰ Thus, students may seek tutoring for either high achievement or remedial purposes.

Tutoring can also help to reduce psychological factors associated with learning and academic development, such as anxiety over test taking and grades.⁵¹

When is tutoring most relevant? Tutoring is especially appropriate for students who are at the transition points leading to the next stage of education, such as before the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schooling.

Tutoring in the difficult subjects of math, science, and writing for all subjects can remove stumbling blocks. Algebra is, for instance, known as the gateway course for success in high school, which often determines the trajectory for college. At Tutor.com, algebra is the number one most requested subject for tutoring support. High school students also work with tutors for help with a variety of advanced placement subjects (AP courses) as part of their preparation for college. Tutoring is also used to prepare for taking qualifying national standardized exams, such as the SAT, which are required to apply to get into many colleges and universities.

Do adults use private tutoring? Tutoring is not just for younger children and high school students. In the U.S., private tutoring is offered at over 70% of both 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education.⁵² In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education found that over one-third of college freshman took a remedial or developmental course.⁵³ Thus, college students can also benefit from tutoring to help stay in college during the challenging freshman or sophomore years.

Tutoring is especially appropriate for students who are at the transition points leading to the next stage of education, such as before the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schooling.

Effective Tutoring Requires Experienced Tutors

Research studies provide general support for the effectiveness of one-on-one personalized educational intervention for students over the more traditional classroom settings.^{54,55} The effectiveness of tutoring was established over 20 years ago in a comparative meta-analysis of 65 studies of tutoring in various subject areas. In 86% of these studies, tutored students achieved higher scores than those in the control group.⁵⁶ However, non-professional tutors – such as volunteers, parents, and student peers – require training in order to be effective.⁵⁷⁻⁵⁹

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that parents can be effective tutors and help their younger children make gains in reading skills.^{60,61} However, as children get older and into more advanced academic subjects many parents are not qualified to serve as tutors considering that the instructional methods have changed since they were in school. This is especially true for the parents of children taking college preparatory classes.

Global Growth in Private Tutoring Services

Private tutoring now has grown to have global significance.⁶² In many countries, private tutoring has arisen as a parallel education sector that provides supplementary instruction to students enrolled in the public school system. Substantial private tutoring industries can be found in countries as economically and geographically diverse as Cambodia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, India, Japan, Kenya, Morocco, Romania, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. According to Bray, private tutoring is a huge industry in much of Asia and is growing fast in Africa, Europe and North America.⁶³

Researchers from Canada suggest that, **“for an increasing number of families, tutoring has become a core competitive strategy.”**⁶⁴ For example, about 1 in 4 of Ontario parents with school-age children have hired private tutors,⁶⁵ and half of all Canadian parents claim they would hire a tutor if it were more affordable.⁶⁶

Cost of Private Tutoring to Parents

The cost of private tutors can be high if paid directly by the parents. In 2010, Sullivan noted “reasonable” rates of \$85 to \$150 or more per hour in New York City, with some having rates of over \$250 per hour.⁶⁷ The rate in other parts of the country is lower than in the largest cities. 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.⁶⁸



PART 3 – TECHNOLOGY: Advantages of Providing Private Tutoring 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 Internet tutoring.^{69,70} When using this online format, tutors can be as flexible in their instruction as with face-to-face instruction, including their use of materials; online tutors can use text chat, white boards, shared websites, voice over IP, as well as print materials and more.⁷¹

How Online Tutoring Works

Unlike face-to-face tutoring, which puts heavy scheduling and transportation burdens on students and their parents, online tutoring services allow students to meet with a tutor anytime, from any computer, and without even needing to make an appointment.⁷² **The spontaneous and voluntary nature of online tutoring means that students are able to get help the moment they need it**, before frustration sets in that causes many students to abandon the problem.

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 students and tutors work through problems using an instant-messenger-like text chat and a shared whiteboard. The most advanced online classrooms offer features like multiple whiteboards, graphing tools and the ability to share files and web pages back and forth. It is also possible to record the entire session so students, parents and teachers can review the session at any time.

The positive practical implications for parents are also important. First, tutoring services can be conveniently accessed from any home with adequate technology as well as most mobile devices. With traditional face-to-face tutoring, parents often have to take their students to wherever the tutor is located and may have to wait or return later to pick up their children to take them home.

Online tutoring that is offered 24/7 may reduce scheduling conflicts as the family is in control of when the tutoring happens. Synchronous online tutoring offers a valuable reduction in both time and transportation costs.

In addition, even when parents do find the time, because of the effort involved with finding a tutor and the challenge logistics of arranging multiple in-person meetings, as well as the cost, parents have traditionally used private tutoring only for crisis situations such as when their son or daughter has fallen far behind in school and brought home a near-failing or failing grade. The easy access to online tutoring has made tutoring more convenient and a child can log on to the Internet and connect to a tutor anytime for a brief help session that can prevent them from falling behind in homework.

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Research on the Effectiveness of Online Tutoring

A 2004 meta-analysis study examined interactive K-to-12 distance education technologies featuring videoconferencing and telecommunications compared to education delivered in face-to-face classroom settings.⁷³ In 19 studies with over 900 total participants, the study results indicated very similar findings for the two methods. The authors therefore concluded that **students experienced similar levels of academic success whether the courses had used technology-based teaching methods or traditional classroom settings**. This research provides evidence for the success of online tutoring.

Online tutoring is effective for students of different ages. Online tutoring was found to be effective for improving the reading skills of 4th grade students.⁷⁴ Another study focused on the efficacy of online tutoring in higher education settings and found that college students had improved content knowledge and many of the students even preferred the virtual tutoring over face-to-face classroom interactions.⁷⁵

Online Technology Improves Tutoring Quality and Reduces Cost

One of the reasons for the effectiveness of online tutoring is that **the technology involved drives up quality and transparency of the services while driving down the price to deliver the services.**

Traditional private tutoring that is conducted face-to-face is often very expensive because of a mismatch of the supply and demand for the tutors. The pool of experts who live in any given community who can tutor in person is quite limited. Meanwhile, there are many well-qualified tutors who live in rural college towns. A large well-managed online tutoring service brings these two populations together via the Internet in a mutually beneficial way.

Also, it is extremely difficult to gauge the quality of an in-person tutor. Not so with online tutoring where every session is recorded, the transcript of the tutoring session is reviewed, and anonymous feedback is solicited from every student served. This is part of what leads to very high levels of student-rated satisfaction ratings for online tutoring.

Student-rated Effectiveness of Online Private Tutoring at Tutor.com

The data from millions of surveys collected after the end of online tutoring sessions from the student users of Tutor.com have revealed very positive results. Recent data from student users at corporate benefit clients shows that:

- **96%** say the service helps them be more confident about their school work
- **95%** say the service helps them improve their grades
- **97%** say the service helps them complete their homework assignments
- **97%** would recommend this service to a friend
- **98%** are glad the company offers this service

Example of Online Tutoring User Experience:

Whenever Peggy Bennett of Dallas tried to help her 13-year-old daughter, Chloe Friedman, with her eighth-grade physics and algebra homework, “we’d always end up bickering,” Ms. Bennett says, with Chloe often objecting that the teacher did it differently. “It was a lose-lose situation.” Chloe says she was skeptical when her mom helped her sign up last month on Tutor.com, a New York City-based provider of on-demand tutoring. But after she logged on one evening for algebra help, a tutor, identified only by a first name and last initial, responded within a minute. Chloe says she was guided to figure out the answers, using text chat and an interactive “whiteboard” that displayed their writing and calculations on a shared screen. After hearing nothing but typing for about 10 minutes, Ms. Bennett says she heard Chloe yell from the other room, “They told me I did a good job!” Ms. Bennett adds, “That was all that she needed.”

From The Wall Street Journal, 2013.⁷⁶

PART 4 – RETURN ON INVESTMENT: A Logic Model for Private Tutoring as an Employee Benefit

Many organizations invest in their workforce in a variety of ways often with a variety of motivations and justifications for the benefits budget. To add online tutoring services as a benefit that is pre-paid by the employer does involve a cost to the sponsoring organization – but this cost is much less than for most other contemporary work-life and EAP type services. To offset this cost of providing tutoring benefits are positive financial outcomes that can provide a significant return on investment (ROI). Even having very small effect sizes and conservative estimates of the dollar value for each outcome effect area can add up to a substantial amount of total savings associated with having private tutoring as a benefit for employees.

More specifically, the financial value to the organization from sponsoring the online private tutoring benefit comes from three outcomes at different phases of the employee life-cycle: among new employees in deciding to come to work for the organization; better work performance among current employees; and keeping employees from leaving.

Area I: Recruitment

- The first area of ROI value and savings from having a tutoring benefit is the **more rapid time to hire employees**. This outcome is measured in lower recruitment and hiring costs for the new employees who are more attracted to join the organization because it offers private tutoring as a benefit of employment. The evidence for this outcome in the research literature supports early-adopters and “best practice” companies that sponsor tutoring as a benefit (see Part 1 of this paper). Attraction to a family-friendly organizational culture is also a regularly occurring theme found among the comments voluntarily provided by the individual employees whose family members have used tutoring services.

Area II: Workforce Performance

- The second area of ROI value and savings from having a private tutoring benefit for employees is **better workforce performance among the employees who use the service** due to then having lower levels of school-related absenteeism and presenteeism.

These outcomes are generated by two kinds of employees: a) working parents of children who use the tutoring benefit and thus experience less work-family conflict for supporting their children’s school and homework needs; and b) employees who are in college part-time while working at the organization who use the tutoring benefit themselves to better manage their course demands and their work duties.

Area III: Retention

- Being considered a great place to work is not only good for getting higher quality employees to join an organization; it is also good for keeping them from leaving. **Greater employee loyalty can be fostered by offering highly valued benefits that can be customized to the needs of the employee**, such as the private tutoring service benefit. This outcome is relevant to employees at risk for leaving who value the tutoring and thus do not want to lose that benefit by seeking employment somewhere else. This outcome is measured in the avoidance of costs associated with worker replacement.

Even having very small effect sizes and conservative estimates of the dollar value for each outcome effect area can add up to a substantial amount of total savings associated with having private tutoring as a benefit for employees.

Half a dozen large organizations (i.e., the U.S. military and several Fortune 500 companies) and dozens of smaller ones, altogether representing some 2.5 million lives covered, have been using tutoring as an employee benefit for the last seven years. Their repeated annual renewals during that time are strong evidence of the business value of offering private tutoring from these companies. With the increasing focus on ROI by work-life companies and their clients, there is an opportunity to lead the field in conducting a formal impact study to confirm these findings. The sizable literature linking work-family stress and diminished worker performance is logically consistent with these outcomes, as is the substantial anecdotal evidence in employee comments who describe how the service has freed-up their time to be more effective at work and to allow them to take less time off from work to attend to school-related parenting activities, and report increasing loyalty to their employer.

ROI Math: 5:1 Returns

A detailed ROI calculation can be made using an estimation tool developed for this purpose. It is available on request from Tutor.com.

In this model, default figures are taken from industry data for the level of tutoring service utilization, the rate and size of the outcome effects from tutoring, and the cost values assigned to the outcomes. However, these factors are most accurate when based on data from the specific company or organization.

The calculation for financial value for each of the outcomes is derived from a mathematical formula using factors like: the average cost to recruit a new or replacement employee, the average per hour rate of employee compensation, a productivity value multiplier ratio, and the extent of policies and communication practices that determine benefits' utilization rates.

With outcome effect rates and effect sizes estimated from industry research, and using average industry values for the client specific parameters, **the result is a total ROI in excess of 5:1.**

Conclusion

This report makes the business case for the idea of offering private online tutoring as a corporate benefit for employees and their family members.

As an industry, private tutoring has grown in popularity and sophistication. Delivery of online tutoring services via the Internet technology allows for easy access, greater effectiveness, and dramatically reduced cost.

The applied social science data and evidence from case studies shows how tutoring contributes to organizational success through making companies more attractive places to work and through reducing work-family stress. Indeed, select employers from both the private and public sectors are leading the way in this area by investing in private tutoring services for their workforces.

Using a conservative consulting logic model, *a positive ROI is very likely for employers who are considering adding online tutoring as an employee benefit.*

Yet a dollar figure ROI may not be necessary for the organization interested in further demonstrating a work culture that encourages employee learning and development and in having a market leading set of benefits that support the work-life balance of their employees. Considered in this light, private online tutoring is a new way to benefit employees and to improve the success of the organization at the same time.



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