

Could your initials influence where you choose to work?

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One of the most important decisions that we can make is what company we will work for. There are a number of factors to consider when making this decision, including salary, benefits and work location. However, there may also be less-obvious factors in play that sway our decision, and without us even knowing it. It is well known that unconscious thoughts can influence certain aspects of our behavior. An intriguing example of this is the "name-letter effect," a phenomenon which shows that we have a preference for things that begin with the same letter as our first name.

Psychologists Frederik Anseel and Wouter Duyck from Ghent University (Belgium) were interested in testing the extent of the name-letter effect and if it is potent enough to affect where we choose to work. The psychologists analyzed a database containing information about Belgian employees who work full-time. More specifically, the researchers looked at the employees' name and how often their first initial matched the first letter of their company's name. The researchers estimated the expected number of these matches (using a probability calculation) and compared that to what they actually observed.

In a new study published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, the psychologists found that there is indeed a name-letter effect between employee names and the company they work for. There were 12% more matches than was expected based on the probability estimate. The researchers noted that "hence, for about one in nine people whose initials matched their company's initial, choice of employer seems to have been influenced by the fact that the letters matched." In addition, when the psychologists looked across all letters, they found that this effect occurred with every letter of the alphabet, but was more apparent for rarer initials.

The authors concluded that they "have demonstrated that people are more likely to work

for companies with initials matching their own than to work for companies with other initials."

Related article: www.psychologicalscience.org/modules/2007/nelson.cfm

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