Too old to hire?

The quiet bias keeping skilled professionals out of jobs

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ZARIF FAIAZ

In a world that prizes innovation and adaptability, one would assume experience is a critical asset. Yet, for many older professionals, particularly those over 50, the job market tells a different story—one where decades of service are quietly disregarded in favour of youth. Age discrimination, or ageism, in the workplace remains a pervasive but often under-acknowledged issue globally, and Bangladesh is no exception.

Ageism does not wear a name tag. It rarely arrives in the form of explicit rejections, but rather through subtle cues—roles that never materialise, interviews that turn awkward after dates of birth are shared, and promotions that never come. According to a 2024 survey by the International Human Resource Information Management Association (IHRIM), 62% of US workers over the age of 50 reported experiencing age-related bias in their careers, while 77% believed they were not hired for a job because of their age. Such figures reflect a broader trend across developed and developing economies alike.

While hard data is sparse in Bangladesh, anecdotal evidence and employment practices suggest a similar pattern. Many private-sector employers quietly favour younger candidates under the assumption they are more adaptable, more digitally literate, and less costly. Although the Bangladesh Labour Act prohibits discrimination on several grounds, age is rarely foregrounded as a concern. Enforcement remains lax, and legal recourse is virtually non-existent for those marginalised solely due to their age.

Public policy, too, contributes to the problem. The Bangladesh Civil Service (Age, Qualification and Examination for Direct Recruitment) Regulation, 2014, imposes an upper age limit of 30 years for applicants to most government jobs, with limited exceptions for certain quotas. While the policy is designed to streamline recruitment and manage youth unemployment, it also precludes experienced professionals from public service roles where their insights might be invaluable.

Saad Ahmed, an entrepreneur based in Dhaka, describes this dynamic as "an institutionalised form of ageism that contradicts the country's development goals." He explains: "We are simultaneously an ageing society and one that claims to value experience, yet our systems bar older citizens from formal contribution. That contradiction is unsustainable."

Globally, ageism intersects with other biases—particularly gender. A recent survey by Women of Influence+ found that nearly 78% of women have experienced age-related discrimination in their careers, with many reporting that opportunities dry up once they enter their late 40s or early 50s. While such data is not widely available for Bangladeshi women specifically, cultural expectations and family obligations often push older women further from the formal labour market, compounding the discrimination they face.

The economic implications of ageism are far-reaching. Organisations that overlook older employees miss out on institutional memory, mentorship, and stability. A McKinsey report on workforce diversity suggests that mixed-age teams often outperform their more homogenous counterparts, particularly in problem-solving and knowledge transfer. In Bangladesh, with life expectancy on the rise—currently averaging around 73 years—the economic burden of supporting a growing retired population could be mitigated by enabling extended participation in the labour force.

Addressing the issue requires deliberate and sustained action. Employers need to move beyond cosmetic commitments to diversity and invest in inclusive hiring practices. That means focusing on competencies, not chronology. It also means providing upskilling opportunities tailored to older workers, whose learning styles and needs may differ from younger colleagues.

Some companies have begun to implement 'age-inclusive' policies abroad, such as blind recruitment processes that omit age and graduation dates. Others, including German automotive firms and Japanese manufacturers, have created phased retirement plans or job-sharing arrangements that allow older employees to stay engaged without the demands of full-time work.

Such initiatives are rare in Bangladesh, but there is potential. Tech hubs in Dhaka and Chattogram are beginning to see the value of pairing young developers with seasoned project managers. NGOs focused on ageing have also called for reforms that promote the economic integration of older adults, not just their welfare.

Public awareness campaigns could also shift perceptions. Ageism, unlike racism or sexism, is often internalised. Many people unconsciously accept that declining relevance is a natural consequence of ageing, even when the evidence suggests otherwise. By normalising older people in leadership, technical, and creative roles, society can begin to chip away at this bias.

"I think of it this way," said Anannya Rahman, a communications consultant based in Dhaka. "You can be twenty-five and stale or sixty and brilliant. Age is only a disadvantage if we allow ourselves to believe it is."

Indeed, the case for challenging ageism is not merely moral, it is economic. In a country like Bangladesh, where nearly 13% of the population will be over 60 by 2031, creating an age-inclusive workforce is both a social imperative and a strategic necessity.

Age, after all, should be a credential, not a crime.

ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB)

Lecturer, various departments
Deadline: May 31
Eligibility:
- MBA/Master's with Bachelor's/Honor's degree in relevant discipline with no third class in all examinations with a minimum 3.80 CGPA.

Minimum experience: N/A

SAJIDA Foundation

Financial Analyst
Deadline: May 17
Eligibility:
- Bachelor's degree in Finance with a strong academic record from a recognised and reputable institution.

Minimum experience: 1 year

ActionAid Bangladesh

Associate Officer, MIS
Deadline: May 17
Eligibility:
- Graduation, preferably in relevant subject areas: social sciences, development studies, statistics or a related discipline. Experience in the sector will also be considered favourably.

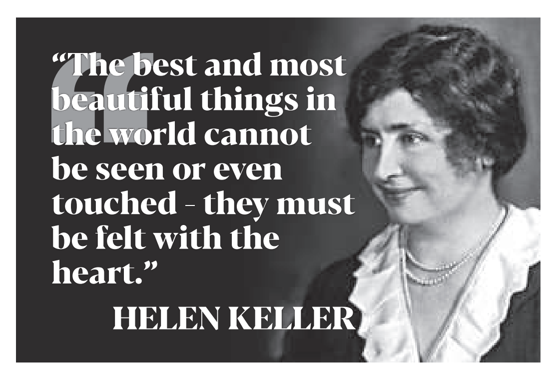
Minimum experience: 1-2 years

Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC.

Officer, Investment (Corporate/SME)
Deadline: May 24
Eligibility:
- Post graduation from a reputed university with no third class/division in academic career, with prior practical experience at investment desk in any corporate branch/head office.

Minimum experience: 3-5 years

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



Google fires 200 employees in sales and partnerships unit: report

NEXT STEP DESK

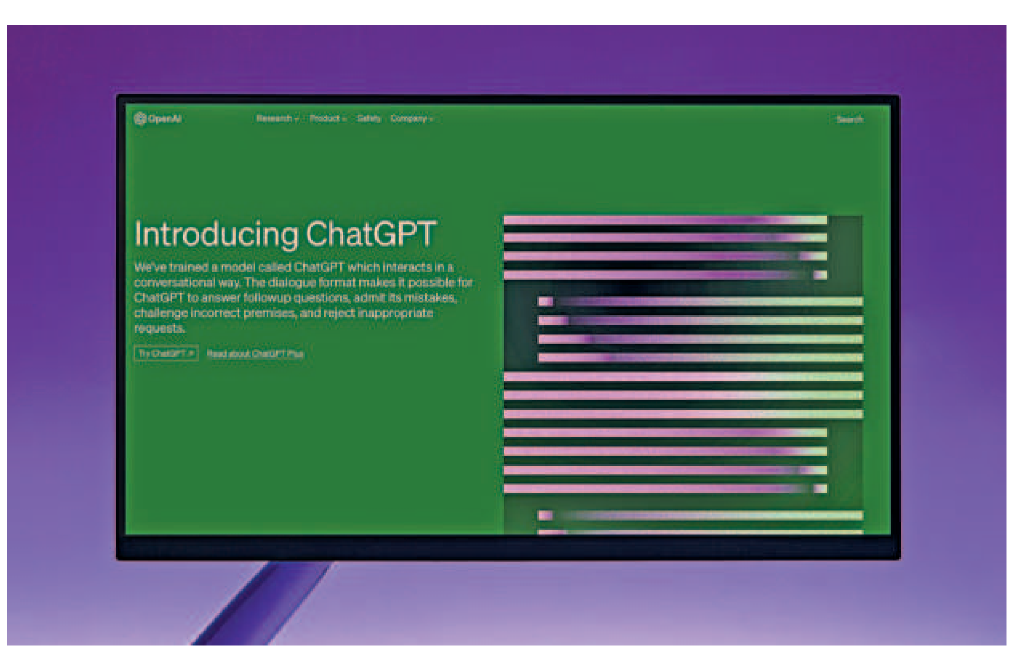
Google has laid off approximately 200 employees from its global business unit, which handles sales and partnerships, according to a recent report by The Information. The move comes as major tech companies continue shifting resources toward artificial intelligence (AI) and data centre investments while scaling back in other areas.

Google said in a statement to Reuters that "a small number of changes across teams" were made to "drive greater collaboration" and improve customer service efficiency. This follows recent layoffs in Google's platforms and devices unit, which oversees products like Android, Pixel phones, and Chrome.

The reductions align with broader cost-cutting trends across Big Tech, adds the Reuters report, stating that Google's parent company, Alphabet, eliminated 12,000 jobs (6% of its workforce) in early 2023 and reported 183,323 employees as of December 2024. Other tech giants, including Meta, Microsoft, and Amazon, have also trimmed staff while prioritising AI talent.

Google has not disclosed whether further layoffs are planned. The company continues to invest heavily in AI development amid competition with rivals like OpenAI and Microsoft.

OpenAI to cut Microsoft revenue share in non-profit restructuring: report



NEXT STEP DESK

OpenAI plans to significantly decrease the revenue share it provides to Microsoft, its largest investor, according to a report by The Information. Currently, OpenAI shares 20% of its revenue with Microsoft under an agreement that runs through 2030, but this share is expected to drop to 10% or lower by the end of the decade, states the report.

The change comes as OpenAI restructures its operations, with its nonprofit parent organisation maintaining control in a move that may limit CEO Sam Altman's influence, suggests a report by Reuters on the matter. While Microsoft will see a smaller revenue share, the company is reportedly seeking continued access to OpenAI's AI technology beyond 2030.

As per the reports, Microsoft has described its partnership with OpenAI as including "revenue sharing agreements that flow both ways", with core terms remaining intact until 2030. OpenAi stated it is working closely with Microsoft to finalise the restructuring details. Neither company provided further comment on the reported changes.

AI-first company now rehiring human staff after quality drop

NEXT STEP DESK

Klarna, a Swedish fintech company, once bragged that its AI could replace 700 customer service jobs, but is now scrambling to rehire human workers after its chatbot experiment backfired. Just months after freezing hiring and letting its workforce shrink by 22% through attrition, CEO Sebastian Siemiatkowski admitted the company's aggressive AI shift sacrificed service quality.

"Investing in the quality of human support is the way of the future for us," Siemiatkowski told Bloomberg, according to a recent report, reversing course on a strategy that had slashed Klarna's headcount to 3,500 employees. The buy-now-pay-later company, valued at $14.6 billion, is now recruiting students, rural workers, and loyal customers for fully remote customer service roles.

The u-turn comes after Klarna's AI chatbot, launched in early 2024, quickly handled 75% of customer chats, 2.3 million conversations monthly, but drew criticism for robotic, scripted responses. Users complained the bot acted as little more than a "filter" to funnel complex issues to human agents.

Siemiatkowski, who had claimed on an X post in January that "AI can already do all our jobs", has now claimed to Bloomberg in a recent interview that replacing humans with AI has "led to lower quality". "Investing in the quality of human support is the way of the future for us," he said to Bloomberg.

Klarna had initially championed AI as a cost-cutting marvel, with Siemiatkowski telling staff in late 2024 to rely on AI to fill gaps left by departing colleagues. But after the chatbot struggled with nuanced tasks like refund negotiations and multilingual support.

The reversal highlights the limits of AI in customer service, even for tech-forward firms. Klarna, which helped popularise BNPL loans and recently partnered with Walmart, now faces the delicate task of balancing automation with the human touch its large user base demands.