

Can age impact your job prospects?

YEAR ON YEAR While age matters for upcoming start-ups, conventional organisations tend to value experienced managers who have the right skills to lead their teams

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Turning 45 is a time to celebrate wisdom and experience. However, this is also the time when many people start getting a little nervous. If it's not life-style diseases like hypertension or diabetes they're expecting to grapple with, then it's the fear that they might be considered too old and out of sync with the times when they go hunting for jobs. Delve into the truth and you might come up with interesting revelations: Today, brash, young start-ups might want to hire the young and the restless burning with energy, but it's the tried and tested conventional organisations that still swear by experience.

What eventually matters, point out HR experts, is the perfect mix of relevant experience, interpersonal skills, the ability to analyse and adapt to situations combined with the willingness to learn and being passionate about future technologies. Hiring is not necessarily linked to age unless it is for certain positions in start-ups that are heavily populated with millennials.

Interestingly, the average age of India's top five outsourcing firms is nearly 30, compared to 10 years ago when it was around 25. This is because when IT took off, companies hired young talent in hordes, with even the average age of CEOs being much less.

Eventually, however, when some of them were unable to deliver, it was talent with age and experience that was considered. The same will happen with start-ups in times to come, say HR experts.

"At Thales, our focus has always been on hiring the most suitable talent for various positions. A perfect mix of relevant experience combined with the right attitude towards learning and development is what makes a good recruit; it is not necessarily linked to age. We also look for candidates' interpersonal skills, the ability to observe and analyse situations, the capacity to work smartly across teams," says Sekhar Sahay, HR head - India, Thales.

Agrees Urvashi Singh, SVP - C&B, executive hiring and HR leader, Genpact, "We do not discriminate on the basis of age, we value the depth of experience and the domain expertise a person brings to the table. We

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SAMEER BENDRE, chief people officer, Persistent Systems

definitely value stability, longevity in an organisation and consider the person's global exposure, interface and networking skills."

Biologically, age should never be a barrier as companies cannot discriminate on the basis of age. In the top 500 companies around the world, over 25% CEOs are above 60 years of age. In India, the general mindset is that a person beyond 45 years of age is a spent force. However, the age group a company hires entirely depends on the industry and the role for which a person is being hired.

The choice before HR heads is, therefore, between hiring people with more energy and less experience or vice-versa, says Ronesh Puri, managing director, Executive Access in India.

IT initially hired young talent because tech was new. Today, when companies have matured, experience has started to play an important role in sustaining long-term businesses.

"In this age of digital transformation, both seniors and freshers realise the importance of being relevant in today's environment and have a scientific temperament, says Sameer Bendre, chief people officer, Persistent Systems.



"Age most often (unless combined with a stagnated career) clearly comes with important experience and skill sets that are crucial at senior levels. In recent times, this has been demonstrated in new-age companies that are found and run by young entrepreneurs and an equally young team, who start looking at a more mature management style when they need to start scaling," says Alex Augustine, head, HR CMS Info Systems.

"At CMS, we actively seek out retired army colonels for their unique experience in handling high intensity roles involving people management or logistically complex projects. So far in my experience, it will be near impossible to find an equivalent skill set from a younger talent pool," he adds.