

# Too old for a tech job? Think again

by Rachel Ranosa

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Are older tech employees at risk of losing their jobs to younger colleagues?

The stereotype of the young, energetic visionary popularized by the likes of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg has led to the ‘idealization of youth’ in the tech sector, wrote Shelly Banjo of Bloomberg. The same cliché now seems to be spreading beyond Silicon Valley.

“In China, the discrimination begins even younger than in the US,” Banjo reported.

In an article on ageism in the Chinese tech sector, Banjo cited examples of job postings that only targeted candidates younger than 35. Some companies even forego certain educational requirements, such as a college degree, but remain strict with the age cap being set at 30.

The report detailed the case of a 42-year-old research engineer at ZTE who jumped to his death after he was reportedly fired from the Chinese smartphone company. The incident led many to question whether his dismissal was linked to his age.

“At 42,” Banjo noted, “he would have already been considered too old to be an engineer in China, where three-quarters of tech workers are younger than 30.”

## The ‘sage age’ in tech

Despite the conscious effort of tech companies to build diverse workforces and foster an inclusive environment, critics have highlighted how ageism has edged out other more seasoned workers.

IBM, once a dominant name in the global IT market in the 1980s, has retrenched more than 20,000 US employees aged 40 or older in the past five years, as part of an overall strategy to “correct the seniority mix,” ProPublica reported. The move was allegedly designed to eliminate experienced employees with “younger, less-experienced and lower-paid workers.”

Stories of job cuts that discriminate against older employees can raise issues of employment security. A survey by [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com), for instance, revealed four in 10 US tech workers are worried about losing their job to someone younger.

The preferential recruitment of younger tech employees may stem from the challenge that businesses today face: that of becoming more nimble, agile, and adaptable in the face of rapid innovation.

A 2011 study from Concordia University in Montreal compared the adaptability of older versus younger employees. Research showed older employees were less able to “overcome their habitual responses” when unexpected sequences or events interrupted their routine.

However, in a diversified workforce, those with longer career histories can also provide stability and confidence amid disruption, experts suggested.

The Visier Insights: Ageism in Tech report argued that older workers in the IT sector are more highly valued in terms of their performance than their non-tech colleagues. Tech workers aged 40 and older enter what is deemed the tech sage age. IT workers are given top performance ratings as they “age, mature, and gain experience.”

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*Submitted By: Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council*