

Emotional intelligence as a determinant of job satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional intelligence is often described as a job satisfaction predictor. Teamwork is an essential component of work performance, as well as good stress regulation, which promotes better job efficacy. The aim of this study was to examine the influence of emotional intelligence skills on job satisfaction.

Methods: The data were collected by completing a survey which consisted of three questionnaires: a demographic questionnaire, an emotional skills and competence questionnaire (ESCQ-15) and a job satisfaction questionnaire. Participants were categorized according to the results of ESCQ-15 into three categories: low, average and high. Likewise, they were categorized by job satisfaction into three categories: dissatisfied, satisfied to some degree and satisfied.

Main findings: This study did not provide evidence of a significant interrelation between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction ($p=0.888$). Moreover, the research did not show statistically significant differences in any of the job satisfaction questionnaire variables.

In terms of job satisfaction, this research shows that men are more satisfied with job advancement than women ($p=0.006$). In addition, those with a university degree are less satisfied with managers than people with a lower level of education ($p=0.035$). The study did not provide statistically significant differences in job satisfaction by age group.

According to the results of this study, women have higher levels of emotional intelligence than men ($p=0.024$). Middle-aged people are more emotionally intelligent than younger and older people ($p=0.015$). The study did not provide statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence by educational group.

Principal conclusions: Job satisfaction is not related to the level of emotional intelligence. Although emotional intelligence skills cannot be ignored in this segment of life, sociodemographic roles like gender and level of education play a significant role in job satisfaction.

Key words: emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, emotionality, well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand and control one's own and others' emotions (1). EI connects two areas which until recently were seen as incompatible: the affective and cognitive aspects of mental functioning (2). In scientific literature, EI is most commonly defined as a multidimensional construct that focuses on selected specific attributes or the global integration of these attributes (3). The fundamental theoretical determinants of the EI construct were set by Mayer and Salovey in 1990, who defined EI as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1).

The EI model consisted of assessment and expression of emotions in oneself and others, regulation of emotions in oneself and others, and the use of emotions for adaptive purposes (4). It was received by the public as a concept that introduces additional confusion into the already dubious field of intelligence, as the critics believed that it combines two contradictory fields, cognition and emotions (5). However, the Mayer-Salovey model was verified by factor analyses, and it seems justified to conclude that EI is defined as the ability to meet conceptual, correlational and developmental criteria for intelligence (6). This is precisely why most EI self-assessment scales are based on the Mayer-Salovey model and many researchers value this concept positively (7).

In 1995, David Goleman adapted Mayer Salovey's model of EI. He popularized this concept in public with his book, "Emotional Intelligence - Why It Can Matter More Than IQ" (2). According to Goleman, EI is a platform for developing emotional competencies, which enables the achievement of extraordinary results in work and greater subjective satisfaction (8). For this reason, the idea of a

connection between EI and job satisfaction is an interesting subject for many research studies.

Job satisfaction is most appropriately described as a personal evaluation of work conditions and work-related outcomes. It consists of perceptions filtered and processed through the system of norms, values and expectations of each individual (8). The most important job characteristics that provoke affective responses are: the job itself (interesting challenges, opportunities to learn new things), salary, promotion opportunities, work colleagues and superiors (9).

Factors of job satisfaction can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic factors arise from the individual and have psychological value for him/her, while extrinsic factors come from the environment (10). A factor that can be both intrinsic and extrinsic is communication with other colleagues, as the individual tends to behave in a positive way with regard to co-workers. Interpersonal relationships are not completely under his/her control and therefore can be considered as an extrinsic satisfaction factor of job satisfaction (11). Job satisfaction leads to important organizational outcomes, such as increased productivity, reduced rates of absenteeism and lower staff turnover (12).

In recent studies, "job satisfaction" is increasingly being replaced with the multidimensional concept of "commitment", given that commitment indicates a stronger connection with client satisfaction (13). It transpired that job satisfaction is a concept that is too personal in nature, because employees can be very satisfied at work without any impact on work performance. Commitment manifests itself in loyalty to the work team, compliance with the values it advocates, job satisfaction and the feeling of being rewarded for one's work.

Social interactions with various types of personalities are an important aspect of every job. Teamwork is an important part of work performance, as well as good stress regulation, which promotes better job efficacy (14). When

all the aforementioned differences are taken into account, job satisfaction represents the individual's subjective, emotional reaction to his/her own job (15). Therefore, an important aspect of job satisfaction is a person's perception of the current job situation; it does not have to be an accurate reflection of reality and different people can have different views on the same situation. As a result of this, EI can be seen as a key factor of job satisfaction. The aim of this study was to examine the influence of EI skills on job satisfaction.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Participants

The target group of this research were able-bodied adults who are currently employed. The research was conducted online. Those who were underage or were currently unemployed were excluded from this research. The sample was random, and participants filled out the survey voluntarily.

Methods

The data were collected by completing a survey consisting of three questionnaires: a questionnaire containing sociodemographic data, an emotional skills and competence questionnaire (ESCQ-15) and a job satisfaction questionnaire. The socioeconomic questionnaire examined age, gender, education level and profession of the examiner.

The emotional skills and competence questionnaire ESCQ-15 (Takšić, 2002) was derived from the ESCQ-45 questionnaire and provides a general assessment of individual differences in EI. The questionnaire is a one-dimensional measure of the construct, based on the Mayer-Salovey model of EI (16). Responses were made on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (unquestionably yes) indicating to what extent each statement refers to a participant. A higher score indicates a higher degree of development of emotional competence. The questionnaire measures three dimensions of the assumed model: the ability to perceive and understand emotions, the ability

to express and name emotions, and the ability to manage emotions (17). The scale is one-dimensional and a higher score indicates greater emotional competence.

The job satisfaction questionnaire developed by Gregson (18) was used in this research. It is based on the Job Descriptive Index, developed by Smith et al. (19). The questionnaire contains 25 statements, grouped into five categories: satisfaction with co-workers, satisfaction with supervisors, job satisfaction in general, salary satisfaction and satisfaction with promotion opportunities. Responses were made on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) depending upon the degree to which each statement refers to a participant.

Statistical analysis

The obtained results were processed using descriptive, non-parametric and parametric methods of inferential statistics. The sample distribution for each continuous variable and research group was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Categorical variables were presented descriptively statistically as frequency and percentage, while continuous variables, depending on the distribution, were presented as arithmetic mean and standard deviation. Differences in categorical variables were tested with the Chi-square test and Fisher's exact test. Differences between continuous variables were tested with the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test, while the correlation between variables was tested with the Spearman correlation test. P values of $p < 0.05$ were taken as statistically significant.

SPSS statistical software, version 17, was used for all statistical analyses (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

RESULTS

The survey was conducted with 150 participants. There were more women than men in the sample. Regarding the age distribution, there was approximately an equal

number of young (18-30) and middle-aged participants (31-45), whereas the fewest number of respondents were between the ages of 46 and 65. The age range of the respondents was 23-65 years. In terms of the level of education, higher education participants predominate.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents by sociodemographic variables (n=150)

	Participants n (%)
Gender	
Men	64 (42.7)
Women	86 (57.3)
Age	
18-30	62 (41.3)
31-45	65 (43.3)
46-65	23 (15.3)
Education level	
High school	50 (33.3)
Professional qualifications	18 (12)
College/university degree	82 (54.7)

The participants filled out an ESCQ-15 survey, which consisted of 15 statements, scored 1-5 using a Likert-type scale. The minimum possible value was 15 and the maximum possible value was 75. The lowest score among the participants was 36 and the highest score was 75. According to their results, the participants were categorized into three categories: low, average and high.

Table 2. Participants categorized by EI level.

EI	Low (15-50)	Average (51-59)	High (60-75)
Participants (%)	15 (10)	66 (44)	69 (46)

There is approximately an equal number of participants with average and high levels of EI, while fewer participants have a low EI level. According to the results of ESCQ-15, the respondents' sociodemographic categories (gender, age, education level) were compared.

Table 3. Differences in sociodemographic categories by EI level *

	EI						χ^2	p
	Low		Average		High			
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Gender							7.458	0.015
M	10	66.7	21	31.8	33	47.8		
F	5	33.3	45	68.2	36	52.2		
Age							12.300	0.015
18-30	3	20.0	37	56.1	22	31.9		
31-45	10	66.7	20	30.3	35	50.7		
46-65	2	13.3	9	13.6	12	17.4		
Education level							5.675	0.225
High school	5	33.3	23	34.8	22	31.9		
Professional qualifications	3	20.0	11	16.7	4	5.8		
College/university degree	7	46.7	32	48.5	43	62.3		

* χ^2 -test

In Table 3 it may be observed that women in this research have a higher level of EI than men. In terms of age groups, participants with the highest EI level are aged between 31 and 45 years, however, there were no statistically significant differences in terms of the level of education.

Participants filled out the job satisfaction questionnaire, which contained 25 statements and scored 1-5 points on the Likert-like scale. The minimum possible value was 25 and the maximum value, 125. The participants were ordered according to their results into three

categories: dissatisfied, satisfied to some extent and satisfied.

Table 4. Participants categorized by job satisfaction

Job satisfaction	Dissatisfied (25-80)	Satisfied to some extent (81-100)	Satisfied (101-125)
Participants (%)	45 (30)	73 (48.7)	32 (21.3)

From Table 4. it is observed that average satisfied participants predominate in this research.

Job satisfaction questionnaire contains five subscales, by which is determined satisfaction with individual job components: satisfaction with coworkers, satisfaction with supervisors, satisfaction with job itself, salary satisfaction and satisfaction with promotion opportunities. According to that, every subscale has 5-25 points.

Table 5. Participants categorized by different components of job satisfaction.

	Satisfaction with coworkers	Satisfaction with supervisors	Satisfaction with the job itself	Salary satisfaction	Satisfaction with promotion opportunities
Dissatisfied (0-15)	26 (17.33 %)	53 (35.33 %)	30 (20 %)	70 (46.66 %)	70 (46.66 %)
Satisfied to some extent (16-20)	65 (43.33 %)	51 (34 %)	45 (30 %)	35 (23.33 %)	57 (38 %)
Satisfied (21-25)	59 (39.33 %)	46 (30.66 %)	75 (50 %)	45 (30 %)	23 (15.33 %)

Table 6. Difference in job satisfaction between genders*

	Gender				Z	p
	M		F			
	M	IR	M	IR		
Job satisfaction questionnaire	91.50	26	87.00	21	-1.640	0.101
Satisfaction with coworkers	20.00	5	19.00	5	-0.330	0.741
Satisfaction with supervisors	19.00	7	18.00	7	-0.358	0.720
Satisfaction with the job itself	19.50	7	21.00	5	-0.010	0.992
Salary satisfaction	18.50	9	15.00	11	-1.449	0.147
Satisfaction with promotion opportunities	17.00	7	15.00	6	-2.739	0.006

*Mann-Whitney U test

In Table 5, it may be observed that most of the participants are dissatisfied with their salary and promotion opportunities at work. Most participants are satisfied to some degree or are satisfied with coworkers, while satisfaction with supervisors is equally distributed across all three categories. Half of the participants are satisfied with the job itself.

Differences in job satisfaction were compared in terms of sociodemographic categories.

There was no statistically significant difference in total job satisfaction among genders.

According to the subscales of the questionnaire, men were significantly more satisfied with promotion opportunities than women. There were no statistically significant differences regarding other job satisfaction subscales (Table 6).

There were no statistically significant differences in job satisfaction variables between age groups. (Table 2).

There were no statistically significant differences in total job satisfaction between education levels. Participants with college/university degrees were least satisfied with supervisors, while in other categories there were no statistically significant differences between groups (Table 3).

The Spearman coefficient correlation between job satisfaction and EI was calculated. In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis test did not show statistically significant differences in any of the variables of the job satisfaction questionnaire (Table 4). There was no statistically significant correlation between job satisfaction and EI (Table 6).

Table 7. Differences in job satisfaction between age groups*

	Age						H	P
	18-30		31-45		46-65			
	M	IR	M	IR	M	IR		
Job satisfaction questionnaire	91.00	18	85.00	26	92.00	20	5.298	0.071
Satisfaction with coworkers	20.00	5	19.00	5	20.00	5	2.585	0.275
Satisfaction with supervisors	19.00	8	18.00	10	17.00	9	3.036	0.219
Satisfaction with the job itself	21.00	6	18.00	8	22.00	6	5.910	0.052
Salary satisfaction	18.00	11	15.00	10	19.00	9	0.778	0.678
Satisfaction with promotion opportunities	17.00	7	15.00	7	15.00	5	5.333	0.070

*Kruskal-Wallis test

Table 8. Differences in job satisfaction between education level groups*

	Education level						H	P
	HS [†]		PE [‡]		CD [§]			
	M	IR	M	IR	M	IR		
Job satisfaction questionnaire	92.50	30	92.50	20	87.00	17	4.027	0.134
Satisfaction with coworkers	19.00	4	20.50	6	20.00	5	2.038	0.361
Satisfaction with supervisors	19.00	8	19.50	8	17.00	7	6.696	0.035
Satisfaction with the job itself	22.00	7	20.50	5	20.00	6	1.417	0.492
Salary satisfaction	18.00	12	18.00	8	15.00	10	1.913	0.384
Satisfaction with promotion opportunities	16.00	6	15.50	6	16.00	7	0.414	0.813

* - Kruskal-Wallis test, [†] - high school, [‡] - professional education, [§] - college/university degree

Table 9. Correlation between job satisfaction and EI

	EI	
	ρ	p
Job satisfaction questionnaire	-0.039	0.639
Satisfaction with coworkers	-0.036	0.663
Satisfaction with supervisors	-0.136	0.097
Satisfaction with the job itself	0.065	0.428
Salary satisfaction	0.070	0.396
Satisfaction with promotion opportunities	-0.033	0.693

*Spearman correlation coefficient

Table 10. Differences in job satisfaction*

	EI						H	P
	Low		Average		High			
	M	IR	M	IR	M	IR		
Job satisfaction questionnaire	91.00	32	90.00	19	89.00	23	0.237	0.888
Satisfaction with coworkers	19.00	4	20.00	6	20.00	5	0.199	0.905
Satisfaction with supervisors	19.00	6	19.00	8	17.00	8	3.688	0.158
Satisfaction with the job itself	18.00	7	21.00	5	20.00	8	0.819	0.664
Salary satisfaction	16.00	13	15.50	11	17.00	9	1.365	0.505
Satisfaction with promotion opportunities	16.00	4	16.00	5	16.00	7	0.989	0.610

*Kruskal-Wallis test

DISCUSSION

This study did not find a statistically significant correlation between EI and job satisfaction or individual variables of job satisfaction.

Much of the literature related to EI discusses how EI positively affects job satisfaction. Bar-On's study (1997) reports a modest relationship between EI and job satisfaction. However, this direct positive effect could be due to the sample, which comprises a group of individuals in higher level occupations. (20).

It is believed that employees with high EI show a greater adaptability to business challenges, due to a better understanding of the causes of stress, easier strategy development and greater persistence in dealing with the negative consequences of stress (21). Conversely, it is believed that employees with lower EI are likely to be less aware of their own emotions and possess fewer emotion regulation skills in difficult situations, causing stress levels to increase and job satisfaction to decrease (22).

According to Abraham (2000), even though EI is related to job satisfaction, environmental characteristics cannot be ignored (23). It is not sufficient to hire emotionally intelligent employees; for these employees to thrive, the environment must offer autonomy in decision making. To sum up, certain emotionally intelligent people are satisfied with their jobs while others are not.

According to Chiva and Alegre's research (2008), there was a statistically significant correlation between EI and job satisfaction. However, this shows that the possible mediator

between these two variables is the concept of "learning organization" (20). According to this, the supervisor of the organization is responsible for creating an organization in which people can constantly improve their ability to understand complex issues, crystalizing their vision and upgrading their mutual mental maps. To sum up, the supervisor is responsible for the process of learning (24).

The sample in this research consists of people with various types of careers and workplaces. Regardless of work competence, as well as EI, the work environment of employees cannot be ignored in this research study. In spite of the fact that emotions are the main engine providing strength to employees, they cannot be positive if the extrinsic factors of satisfaction are not accomplished (23). EI skills are also more difficult to apply if the work environment does not encourage good social interactions among coworkers.

The side results of this paper are related to a comparison of EI and job satisfaction by sociodemographic variables. In terms of job satisfaction, this research shows that men are more satisfied with job advancement than women. Moreover, those with a university degree are less satisfied with their managers than people with a lower level of education. The study did not highlight any statistically significant differences in job satisfaction by age group.

According to the results of this study, women have higher levels of EI than men. Middle-aged

people are more emotionally intelligent than younger and older people.

This study did not provide statistically significant differences in EI by educational group.

One possible reason men are more satisfied with career advancement than women is “the glass ceiling”. This is an invisible barrier that prevents women and minorities from being promoted to managerial- and executive-level positions within an organization, and it results in differences in social status and in the salaries of equally qualified employees (25). In spite of great progress in the emancipation of women, there are certain reasons why women are rarely promoted to supervising positions in companies. Among these reasons are the psychological differences between genders (e.g., a lower risk appetite among women) and women’s greater involvement in household duties and childcare (26).

One possible explanation for highly educated people being less satisfied with their supervisors than those with a lower level of education is greater expectations in terms of work, e.g., all the effort invested in their own education leads to frustration because of a lack of supervisor support.

Good leadership skills make it possible to stimulate positive interactions that raise the morale of individuals, as well as the entire group, thereby increasing the level of satisfaction at work (48), while poor leadership skills have a countereffect on job satisfaction. According to Verhofstadt and Omey, this is particularly in evidence when highly educated people start their first job (27). Furthermore, these people often wish to improve their professional skills, which is not always possible due to a lack of supervisor support.

According to the results of this study, women have higher levels of EI than men. This can be explained by social factors which encourage women to express more emotions than men (28). Moreover, women are more occupied by providing positive tone of their own and other people’s emotions. Furthermore, there are certain intersexual differences in cognitive and

behavioral systems (29). The variable that greatly affects job satisfaction is life satisfaction since job satisfaction can also be seen as an affective state related to the size of the organization, gender, age, education, marital status, role clarity and social support (30).

One of the aforementioned sociodemographic characteristics, namely age, indicated interesting results in this paper. Participants aged between 31 and 45 years predominate among the highly emotionally intelligent people. Much research shows the correlation between age and EI, especially due to the lifelong accumulation of knowledge and experience (31). In Cabella’s study, middle-aged participants scored better in EI questionnaires than young and old participants (32).

Other research studies have shown that the relationship between life satisfaction and job satisfaction is mutual because job satisfaction affects life satisfaction and vice versa (33). At the same time, major stressful events, such as natural disasters or a death in the family, and the negative moods that occur as a result, affect weaker immune functioning and can have a significant impact on job satisfaction.

One possible limitation of this study is its subjective evaluation of the participants, which does not necessarily represent the real version of human emotional reactions. A person can present him/herself in a more favorable, or to a lesser extent, less favorable manner. Moreover, a limitation of this research is the size of the sample. Despite various participants being categorized by sociodemographic characteristics and career choices, it is possible that this research would yield different results if it were conducted using a larger population. In further research, I would suggest joining the model of learning organization to these two constructs. This is especially important because human potential, as the most important part of a working organization, can continuously expand their professional competences to provide better performances at work. EI is an important part of this.

EI is a relatively young construct of modern psychology, and further research will surely provide interesting conclusions. EI skills at work are crucial in determining human interactions in a work environment, as well as regulating stress at work. However, extrinsic job satisfaction factors cannot be ignored. For this very reason, certain emotionally intelligent people are satisfied with their job, while others are dissatisfied.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this work, there is no statistically significant relationship between EI and job satisfaction. One possible reason for this is the excessive influence of extrinsic job satisfaction factors (e.g., salary, promotion opportunities).

According to this study, men are more satisfied with promotions at work than women, while those with higher education are less satisfied with managers than those with a lower level of education.

Likewise, women have a higher level of EI, while middle-aged people are more emotionally intelligent than younger and older people.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Boris Hrbač - conceptualization, supervision, literature review, critical revision of the paper, assistance in drafting the paper. Valentina Kutle wrote the manuscript with the support of Boris Hrbač. All authors have read and agreed upon the published version of the manuscript.

ETHICAL BACKGROUND

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee.

Informed consent statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data availability statement: We deny any restrictions on the availability of data, materials and associated protocols. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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