



# Organizational justice and job insecurity as mediators of the effect of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction: A study from China <sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to explore how individual difference in emotional intelligence influenced job satisfaction, and mainly focused on the confirmation of the mediator roles of organizational justice and job insecurity. A total of 420 staffs from a large-scale IT enterprise in China completed the self-reported emotional intelligence scale, the organizational justice scale, the job insecurity scale and Minnesota job satisfaction questionnaire. The results revealed that emotional intelligence, organizational justice, job insecurity and job satisfaction were significantly correlated with each other. Structural equation modeling indicated that emotional intelligence can significantly influence job satisfaction and the relationship between EI and satisfaction was partially mediated by organizational justice and job insecurity.

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## 1. Introduction

Job satisfaction refers to employees' attitudes or opinions toward the job itself or the relevant environment and to their overall emotional response to their job roles (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951; Diener, 2000) and is one of the most effective indicators of vocational happiness (Zhang, Wu, Miao, Yan, & Peng, 2014). Most previous studies have focused on occupational characteristics, including income, job characteristics, work–family conflict, stress, and leadership (Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw, & Rich, 2010), but more researchers are turning their attention to the influence of individual factors on job satisfaction recently (Zhang et al., 2014).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is such an individual factor has close relationship with job satisfaction. EI refers to an individual's ability to perceive, evaluate, express, and manage emotion (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990). The concept of EI at a popular level was sparked by Goleman (1995) in his publication "Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ", which heralded in a new era of recognition of the importance of emotional competencies in

work and life success. Several comprehensive EI models provide alternative theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the construct (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002). Mayer et al. (1990) postulated that EI consists emotion appraisal and expression, emotion regulation and emotions utilization in solving problems. Cooper (1997) outlined a model of EI that included emotional literacy, emotional fitness, emotional depth and emotional alchemy. Salovey and Mayer (1989) formulated a model of EI that emphasized more on cognitive components and potential for intellectual and emotional growth. Stough, Saklofske, and Parker (2009) summarized previous studies and distinguish between ability-based EI models and trait EI models. For the trait EI, researchers considered it as a cluster of emotion-related self-perceptions/dispositions and should be assessment based on self-report questionnaires. And the trait EI model was adopted in this article. However, none measurement model of EI provide a tangible such "gold standard" criterion against which the test could be validated. Schutte et al. (1998) developed a trait emotional intelligence measurement by adopted the original model of EI of Mayer et al. (1990) as a basis for the self-report EI questionnaire, namely Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). This scale provides a solid foundation for a measure of individual's current level of EI that encompassed model of EI. Studies indicated that EIS provided a reliable and valid trait EI measure with good test–retest, internal reliabilities, and discriminate validity. Furthermore, the correlations of EIS with other measures showed that EIS accordance with its theoretical expectations.

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Another individual factor can markedly affect job satisfaction is organizational justice. Organizational justice refers to people's subjective sense of fairness (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2012). Bies and Moag (1986) suggest that organizational justice includes three dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactive justice. Based on a meta-analysis, Viswesvaran and Ones (2002) find that the correlation coefficients between procedural justice and distributive justice and job satisfaction are 0.36 and 0.35, respectively. Aryee, Budhwar, and Chen (2002) compare procedural justice and interactional justice based on social exchange theory and find that procedural justice can significantly predict organization-referenced work outcomes, whereas interactional justice can better explain supervisor-referenced outcomes.

Job insecurity is also the personal factors impact on job satisfaction the current study concerned. Job insecurity refers to an employee's concern about losing the current job or characteristics related to the job (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). For the job insecurity construct in the literatures, a distinction can be found between global and multidimensional definition (Loi, Lam, & Chan, 2012). The global measures concern about the continued existence of the job in the future. These multidimensional measures typically encompass factors such as threats to various job features, powerlessness to counteract such threats, future existence of the current employment (Cheng, Huang, Li, & Hsu, 2011). According to Cox (1985), stress mainly stems from the individual's perception of the stress source rather than the stress source itself. Job insecurity is a feeling based on the individual's subjective perception and explanation of changes in his or her job environment (Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, & Nätti, 2005). As a source of job stress, job insecurity not only results in employees' negative attitudes about their job and organization, impairs individual and organizational job performance, and damages employees' physical and mental health but also reduces employees' job satisfaction (Green, 2011; Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles, & König, 2010; Wagenaar et al., 2012). According to Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), employees' job insecurity causes negative emotional response and thus reduces work efficiency. Rosenblatt, Talmud, and Ruvio (1999) find that job insecurity lowers employees' level of organizational commitment. Lambert, Lynne Hogan, and Barton (2001) observe that job insecurity reduces employees' job satisfaction and increases turnover intention.

Previous studies have provided adequate evidence confirming the individual factors such as EI, job insecurity and organization justice that effect job satisfaction significantly. However, few studies have examined how those individual factors affect job satisfaction concurrently. This study aims to fill this research gap. EI could predict crucial work related outcome such as job satisfaction, job security. Jordan et al. (2002) further present a present a model linking perceptions of job insecurity to emotional reactions and point out employees with high EI are better equipping than employees with low EI to deal with affective and behavioral implications of job insecurity. From the point of emotion processes theory, job insecurity acts as a chronic stressor may moderates the effect of individuals manage emotion and decrease job satisfaction. On the other hand, EI defined in part as those who regulate their emotions according to social cognitive theory of organizational management, thus it affects one's sense of fairness in an organization significantly. Furthermore, as unethical conduct by an organization can trigger doubt among employees about the existing employer–employee relationship (Karnes, 2009), workplace ethics are likely to be closely linked to employee job insecurity. Employees who perceived the organization as unfair and experienced job insecurity were at a higher risk of emotional exhaustion and stress symptoms. Higher levels of employment insecurity and lower levels of workplace justice were associated with higher burnout scores, which may further lower their job satisfaction. Thus, the

current research focuses on the two mediating variables of organizational justice and job insecurity.

Based on Schutte et al. (1998) opinion of the trait model of EI, we hypothesize that individuals with high EI can manage and make good use of their and others' emotions to promote their perception and understanding of factors related to the organization and better understand organizational justice factors; by contrast, those with low EI easily forms a sense of organizational injustice, which lowers job satisfaction. As mentioned previously, job insecurity is a source of job stress. Given the close relationship between job insecurity and organizational justice, we further hypothesized that individuals with high EI may be more able to manage and regulate the negative emotion caused by losing a job or job characteristics and lower their job insecurity. By contrast, individuals with low EI extremely assess their unemployment risk and lack the right and positive way to respond to job stress; thus, people with low EI intensify job insecurity and further lowers job satisfaction.

To sum up, this research aimed firstly to explore how EI affects job satisfaction. According to recent findings, we expected the trait EI will be associated with job satisfaction. Secondly, the purpose of this study was to test whether, and the extent to which, organization justice and job insecurity mediated EI effects on job satisfaction by using structural equation modeling. Based on uncertainty management theory (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), we hypothesized that organization justice and job insecurity would at least partially mediate EI effects on job satisfaction.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 420 employees from a large-scale Information Technology (IT) enterprise in Chongqing City, China, which consisted of 231 men and 189 women, and all of them were junior staff in this company. There are no notable differences among participants in terms of leadership and production operation. The ages of participants ranged from 28 to 39, with a mean of 31.17 (SD = 3.41), all married. Participants completed the questionnaires in a classroom environment, and received ¥20 as compensation. From the 420 scales that were distributed and collected, 3 unfinished scales were excluded. All participants provided their written informed consent before completing the measures.

### 2.2. Instruments

#### 2.2.1. The self-reported emotional intelligence scale

The 33-item self-report emotional intelligence scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) is a widely used measure of EI. This scale asks respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree with statements such as “I am aware of my emotions as I experience them” and “I have control over my emotions” on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Petrides and Furnham (2000) identified the three dimensions of EI, namely, the abilities to (a) perceive, (b) use, and (c) manage emotions. The EIS was translated into Chinese and showed a good reliability and validity. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the three sub-scales were 0.71, 0.78 and 0.74 respectively.

#### 2.2.2. The organizational justice scale

The organizational justice scale developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) was widely used to measure procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice. This scale has been frequently used in Chinese and has good validity and reliability. The scale consists of 20 items and some examples of items include “I feel I am being rewarded fairly considering the responsibilities I

have”, “My supervisor is neutral in decision making” and “My supervisor provides explanations for the decisions related to my job”. Responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the procedural, distributive and interactional justice scales were 0.82, 0.77 and 0.86 respectively.

2.2.3. The job insecurity scale

The job insecurity scale was developed by Hellgren and Sverke (2003). This scale contains 3 items which were phrased “I am worried about having to leave my job before I would like to”, “There is a risk that I will have to leave my present job in the year to come”, and “I feel uneasy about losing my job in the near future”. Responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree). Scale scores are the sum of items. The job insecurity scale was translated into Chinese and showed good coefficient of internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficient for 0.79 in our study.

2.2.4. Minnesota job satisfaction questionnaire

The Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire (short form), developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), is a 20-item self-report measure of job satisfaction, including two dimensions, namely, intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Items are rated from 1 (strongly dissatisfaction) to 5 (strongly satisfaction). The total scores ranges from 20 (low level of job satisfaction) to 100 (high level of job satisfaction). Example of items include: “the chance to try out some of my own ideas”. This scale has been widely used in Chinese and shows good validity and reliability. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients the two dimensions of MSQ were 0.814 and 0.846.

2.3. Data analysis

A two-step procedure introduced by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was adapted to analyses the mediation effect in order to confirm the structural relations of the latent structured model. Firstly, the measurement model of the four latent variables was tested. If index of confirmatory measurement model meet the requirements, then the maximum likelihood estimation would be used to test the SEM. All the above analysis was conducted in AMOS 17.0 program. The following four indices were utilized to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999): (a)  $\chi^2/df$ , (b) the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), (c) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and (d) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). In this study, a model was considered to have a good fit if all the path coefficients were significant at the level of 0.05,  $\chi^2/df$  was below 5, SRMR was below 0.08, RMSEA was below 0.08, and CFI was 0.95 or more.

**Table 1**  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables of interest.

|                            | Mean  | SD   | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7       | 8       | 9       | 10      | 11      |
|----------------------------|-------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. Perceive emotions       | 51.15 | 5.98 | 0.26** | 0.19** | 0.13** | 0.08   | 0.10*  | -0.11*  | -0.16** | -0.10*  | 0.16**  | 0.11*   |
| 2. Use emotions            | 60.49 | 6.44 |        | 0.60** | 0.08   | 0.10*  | 0.13** | -0.10*  | -0.05   | -0.15** | 0.18**  | .13**   |
| 3. Manage emotions         | 54.53 | 7.09 |        |        | 0.17** | 0.13** | 0.12*  | -0.10*  | -0.08   | -0.23** | 0.18**  | 0.10*   |
| 4. Procedural justice      | 17.56 | 3.53 |        |        |        | 0.66** | 0.63** | -0.33** | -0.18** | -0.20** | 0.34**  | 0.29**  |
| 5. Distributive justice    | 17.76 | 4.49 |        |        |        |        | 0.76** | -0.33** | -0.19** | -0.23** | 0.41**  | 0.32**  |
| 6. Interactional justice   | 29.46 | 5.72 |        |        |        |        |        | -0.31** | -0.23** | -0.20** | 0.41**  | 0.34**  |
| 7. Insecurity1             | 2.02  | 0.88 |        |        |        |        |        |         | 0.18**  | 0.32**  | -0.34** | -0.19** |
| 8. Insecurity2             | 2.35  | 1.14 |        |        |        |        |        |         |         | 0.27**  | -0.24** | -0.07   |
| 9. Insecurity3             | 2.10  | 0.84 |        |        |        |        |        |         |         |         | -0.39** | -0.25** |
| 10. Intrinsic satisfaction | 25.37 | 3.94 |        |        |        |        |        |         |         |         |         | 0.76**  |
| 11. Extrinsic satisfaction | 48.81 | 6.66 |        |        |        |        |        |         |         |         |         |         |

Note: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all the variables were presented in Table 1.

3.2. Measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was adopted to assess whether the measurement model fit the sample data adequately or not. The fully measurement model included four latent constructs (EI, organizational justice, job insecurity and job satisfaction) and items that belong to the each variables. The initial test of the measurement model came into being a satisfactory fit to the data:  $\chi^2/df = 2.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA = 0.071; SRMR = 0.064; and CFI = 0.959. All the factor loadings for the indicators on the latent variables were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that all the latent constructs were well represented by their indicators.

3.3. Structural model

Then SEM was used to analyses the mediation effect. First of all, the direct effect of EI on job satisfaction without mediators was tested. The directly standardized path ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was significantly. Then, a partially-mediated model (model 1) which contained mediators (organizational justice and job insecurity) and a direct path from EI to job satisfaction was tested. The results showed that the model goodness of fit showed not very good to the data, see Table 2. Drawing on uncertainty management theory, organizational justice helps to reduce employees' uncertainty about the continuity of their employment by enhancing their perception of predictability and controllability in their future as employees. Studies also confirmed that organizational justice could reduce job insecurity (e.g. Kausto, Elo, Lipponen, & Elovainio, 2005; Wong, Wong, Ngo, & Lui, 2005), we propose that the relationship between EI and job satisfaction could be continuity on the combined effects of organizational justice to job insecurity. Thus, model 1 was modified by adding the path from organizational justice to job insecurity. The new model (model 2) showed a good fit to the data, but the path from EI to job satisfaction was not significant ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.513$ ). According to Cooper (1997), employees with

**Table 2**  
Modeling comparison.

| Model   | df | $\chi^2$ | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI  | RMSEA | SRMR |
|---------|----|----------|-------------|------|-------|------|
| Model 1 | 39 | 126.08   | 3.23        | 0.91 | 0.10  | 0.09 |
| Model 2 | 38 | 75.11    | 1.98        | 0.98 | 0.05  | 0.04 |
| Model 3 | 39 | 75.52    | 1.94        | 0.98 | 0.05  | 0.04 |

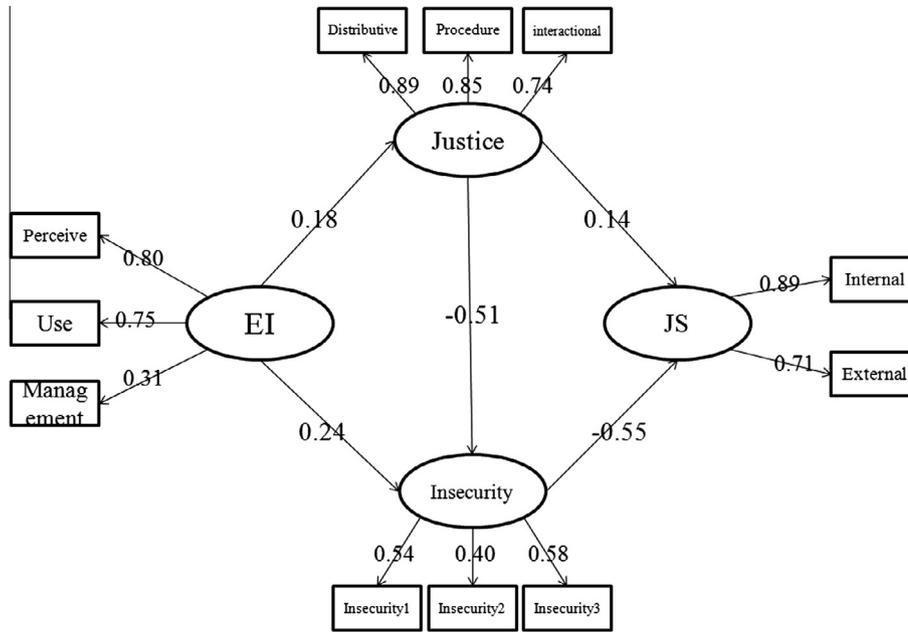


Fig. 1. The final structural model (N = 417). Note: Factor loadings are standardized (p < 0.05). EI, emotional intelligence; JS, job satisfaction.

Table 3 Direct and indirect effects and 95% confidence intervals for the final model.

| Model pathways   | Estimated effect | 95% CI      |          |
|--|------------------|-------------|----------|
|  |                  | Lower bonds | Up bonds |
| <i>Direct effect</i>   |                  |             |          |
| Emotional intelligence → organizational justice                                      | 0.19             | 0.06        | 0.31     |
| Emotional intelligence → job insecurity  | -0.24            | -0.09       | -0.39    |
| Organizational justice → job insecurity  | -0.52            | -0.32       | -0.73    |
| Organizational justice → job satisfaction  | 0.14             | 0.04        | 0.24     |
| Job insecurity → job satisfaction  | -0.56            | -0.37       | -0.86    |
| <i>Indirect effect</i>   |                  |             |          |
| Emotional intelligence → (organizational justice) → job insecurity                   | -0.10            | -0.03       | -0.18    |
| Organizational justice → (job insecurity) → job satisfaction                         | 0.29             | 0.10        | 0.33     |
| Emotional intelligence → (organizational justice, job insecurity) → job satisfaction | 0.21             | 0.14        | 0.59     |

high EI showed high job satisfaction may because they are better at identifying feelings of frustration and stress which come from such as organizational injustice or job insecurity, and subsequently, regulating those emotions to reduce stress. In another words, the effect of EI on job satisfaction could be carried out through the indirect effect of organizational justice or job security. Therefore, model 3 was built based on the model 2 (deleting the insignificant path of EI to job satisfaction), see Fig. 1. The final mediational model showed a satisfied fit to the data, see Table 2. Taken together, these results showed that organizational justice and job insecurity completely mediate the impact of EI on job satisfaction.

3.4. The confidence interval of direct and indirect effects

The mediating effects of organizational justice and job insecurity between EI and job satisfaction were tested for a significance by adopted the Bootstrap estimation procedure in AMOS (a bootstrap sample of 1500 was specified). Table 3 shows the indirect effects and their associated 95% confidence intervals. As shown

in Table 3, the indirect effects of EI on job satisfaction through organizational justice and job insecurity were significant.

4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate a model including organizational justice and job insecurity as mediators in the relationship between EI and job satisfaction in Chinese employees. As a result of SEM analysis which was made for determining the direct role of EI on job satisfaction was found good level fit indexes. In various previous studies also found out that EI had a positive relationship with job satisfaction (Reisel et al., 2010; Wagenaar et al., 2012), this research finds a direct predict effect of EI on job satisfaction. As previous mentioned, EI is an ability to regulate and understand emotions (Mayer et al., 1990). Job dissatisfaction is essentially emotional fatigue caused by job stress (Park, Park, & Kang, 2013; Pugliesi, 1999). Because people with high EI easily identify and control their emotion, they well understand the job stress source and adopt appropriate coping mechanisms to reduce work fatigue (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). For example, employees with high EI can quickly perceive and determine the causes of their stress upon feeling it and thus develop the right coping ways to manage their emotional responses toward the pressure factors.

The final model and confidence interval of direct and indirect effects also indicated that through the complete mediation of organizational justice and job insecurity, EI could affect job satisfaction. As the Chinese proverb goes, "inequality rather than want is the cause of trouble." The current study convinced this conclusion and found out that organizational justice is an important factor affecting job satisfaction. Furthermore, we observed that organizational justice mediates the influence of EI on job satisfaction. People with high EI effectively and positively assess factors such as distribution, procedures, and interpersonal interaction inside the organization and thus positively assess organizational justice (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). By contrast, people with low EI magnify unjust phenomena in the organization. Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt (1998) confirm that the experience of justice motivates positive emotions, the experience of injustice arouses negative emotions, and these positive or negative effects improve or reduce

employees' job satisfaction, respectively. The results of this study also revealed that job security can also affect job satisfaction and mediate the effects of EI and organizational justice on job satisfaction. Individuals with low EI magnify job insecurity factors and thus have a sense of insecurity; likewise, low perception of organizational justice leads individuals to distrust the organization, weakens the psychological contract between employees and the organization, and increases employees' job insecurity (Kausto et al., 2005). On the other hand, organizational justice helps to reduce employees' uncertainty about the continuity of their employment by enhancing their perception of predictability and controllability in their future as employees (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2012). Employees' perception of job insecurity is accompanied by strong emotional responses (Reisel et al., 2010) because unemployment implies the loss of income and living support and of some characteristics related to work, such as a sense of belonging, a sense of achievement, and self-esteem. Thus, all aspects of dissatisfaction with work are manifested. As a result, job insecurity and organizational justice have both direct and indirect roles in the correlation of EI and job satisfaction. These findings and the result of this study are consistent with the hypothesis previously proposed.

Those findings of this study provide enlightenment on promoting job satisfaction in modern life as special interest has developed in the positive individual trait of employees'. People's vocational happiness may be benefited from training for high EI, a process where individuals are trained to modify their typical patterns to make more positive emotional reaction on subjective sense of fairness or continuation of a job. Based on the results of this research, we believe that employees' job satisfaction can be improved in the following aspects. First, the abilities of employees to control and manage emotions can be cultivated, and employees can be trained to cope with stress in positive ways. Second, the organization should be just in formulating the remuneration system and other matters, policy making should involve employees' fair participation, and a harmonious organizational atmosphere should be constructed. Employees' job security should be improved to reinforce the psychological contract between employees and the organization because only when feeling secure do employees work hard and thus improve their job performance.

The present study certainly has limitations. First, the participants come from the same company so that organizational structure, leadership style, and other factors that can affect the research results are excluded. Thus, the research conclusions must be cautiously generalized. Second, organizational justice and job security have distinctive cultural characteristics. The psychological scales used in this research were developed from Western contexts. Therefore, an assessment instrument based on the oriental collectivistic culture must urgently be developed.

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