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Emotional intelligence and job satisfaction: Mediating role of promotion and moderating effects of turnover intention among employees

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been recognized as a critical factor in enhancing job satisfaction and mitigating turnover intention in organizational contexts. This study investigated the influence of EI on multiple facets of job satisfaction, including contingent rewards, coworker relationships, the nature of work, pay, promotion, supervision, and operating conditions. Additionally, the study examined the mediating role of promotion and the moderating role of turnover intention within these relationships. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 89 employees in Vietnam using random sampling techniques. Data were collected through validated measures and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicated that EI significantly and positively influenced various aspects of job satisfaction. Promotion was found to mediate the relationship between EI and job satisfaction, while turnover intention moderated the relationship between EI and coworker support as well as perceptions of the nature of work. These results underscore the importance of emotional competencies in promoting positive work attitudes and reducing employee turnover intentions, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Employee Job Satisfaction, Turnover Intention.

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1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been identified as a critical factor influencing employee job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions. For instance, Lee and Ok [1] demonstrated that higher EI levels among hotel employees are associated with decreased burnout and enhanced job satisfaction. Similarly, research by Prentice and King [2] indicates that EI significantly predicts job satisfaction and turnover intentions in service occupations. However, much of this research has predominantly focused on large organizations, leaving a gap in understanding EI's impact within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Albalawi [3] highlighted this gap, emphasizing the need for studies exploring the relationship between managers' EI and employee turnover in SMEs, particularly in Middle Eastern contexts.

EI was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer [4] as an ability-based construct, emphasizing individuals' capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotions to achieve adaptive outcomes. Building on this, Cherniss and Goleman [5] highlighted EI's role in managing negative emotions such as anxiety and anger while fostering confidence, empathy, and social connectedness [6]. Over time, EI has emerged as a key factor influencing job performance, teamwork, and workplace dynamics [7, 8]. In group settings, emotionally intelligent individuals collaborate more effectively and solve problems more efficiently [9]. EI also correlates strongly with leadership effectiveness, especially in motivating others through emotional awareness [10]. In addition, it enhances coworker relationships, work engagement, and stress management [11]. Employees with high EI adapt better to organizational demands, contributing to greater resilience and performance [12]. Furthermore, EI supports career development, with emotionally intelligent individuals more likely to receive promotions and experience job satisfaction [13]. Organizations that value EI in promotion decisions foster environments where such individuals thrive [14].

H₁: Emotional Intelligence would influence Contingent Rewards.

H₂: Emotional Intelligence would influence Coworkers.

H₃: Emotional Intelligence would influence Nature of Work.

H₄: Emotional Intelligence would influence Pay.

H₅: Emotional Intelligence would influence Promotion.

H₆: Emotional Intelligence would influence Supervision.

H₇: Promotion would mediate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction.

Turnover intention refers to an employee's conscious and deliberate consideration of leaving their current organization within a certain period, even though no formal resignation has been made [15]. It reflects a psychological state wherein the employee contemplates exiting the organization or transferring to another department or company [16, 17]. In the workplace, the perceived lack of support from coworkers has been identified as a significant contributor to turnover intention [18]. Moreover, the quality of interpersonal relationships, especially with supervisors and colleagues, plays a critical role in shaping an employee's decision to stay or leave [19]. Interestingly, EI - the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions has been found to negatively correlate with turnover intention. Employees with higher EI tend to cope better with workplace challenges and, therefore, are less likely to consider leaving their jobs [20]. Another important factor is job satisfaction, particularly regarding the nature of work. When employees find their tasks meaningful, engaging, and aligned with their skills and values, they are less likely to entertain thoughts of resignation [21]. Taken together, these findings suggest that turnover intention may play a certain role in the relationship between EI and coworkers and the nature of work. Therefore, this study aims to examine the moderating role of turnover intention in the relationship between emotional intelligence and coworker and the nature of work. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H₈: Intention to Quit would moderate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Coworkers

H₉: Intention to Quit would moderate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Nature of Work

Job satisfaction is broadly defined as a positive emotional state resulting from an individual's appraisal of their job or job experiences [22]. It encompasses both extrinsic rewards and intrinsic factors, such as personal growth, social relationships, and the overall work environment. According to Spector [23], job satisfaction is shaped by multiple dimensions, including job characteristics, organizational conditions, and individual differences. Satisfied employees tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, productivity, and organizational commitment [24]. Favorable operating conditions such as structured procedures, supportive norms, and efficient workflows contribute to employees' positive emotional responses at work [23, 25]. In particular, contingent rewards recognition and compensation based on performance can enhance both motivation and satisfaction when perceived as fair and well-aligned with effort [26]. Perceived opportunities for promotion also play a critical role in shaping job satisfaction. When employees believe in fair and attainable advancement prospects, their sense of purpose and organizational commitment increase [27]. Moreover, positive coworker relationships characterized by trust, respect, and emotional support enhance employees' sense of belonging and buffer against workplace stress [28].

H₁₀: Operating Conditions would influence Job Satisfaction.

H₁₁: Contingent Rewards would influence Job Satisfaction.

H₁₂: Promotion would influence Job Satisfaction.

H₁₃: Coworkers would influence Job Satisfaction.

EI significantly influences employees' work-related psychology, enhancing job engagement and organizational loyalty [29]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizational commitment and job satisfaction were key predictors of hotel employees' turnover intentions in Phu Quoc [30]. However, current research is limited and often overlooks the role of emotional intelligence in small and medium-sized enterprises across various sectors such as education and hospitality [29, 30]. Further quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to explore how emotional intelligence affects job satisfaction and turnover intentions in specific workplace contexts. Although EI has been linked to job satisfaction and turnover intention, existing studies have primarily focused on large organizations, overlooking the dynamics within small and medium-sized

enterprises across different industries [29, 30]. Moreover, limited research has explored how specific workplace factors such as promotion opportunities, coworker relationships, and nature of work mediate or moderate the link between EI and job outcomes. Therefore, further empirical investigation is needed to clarify these mechanisms and expand our understanding of EI's role in diverse organizational settings.

This study aims to examine the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on various facets of job satisfaction, including contingent rewards, coworker relationships, the nature of work, pay, promotion, supervision, and operating conditions. Additionally, the study investigates the mediating role of promotion in the relationship between EI and job satisfaction, as well as the moderating role of turnover intention in the relationships between EI and coworker support and the nature of work. By exploring these pathways, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how EI functions in diverse workplace contexts, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study involved 89 employees residing and working in Vietnam, selected through random sampling. Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered from November 5, 2024, to February 13, 2025. Participation was voluntary, with no remuneration provided. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

2.2. Measurements

2.2.1. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

The SSEIT is a 33-item self-report measure of emotional intelligence developed by Schutte et al. [31]. SSEIT is a method of measuring general emotional intelligence using four sub-scales: emotion perception, utilizing emotions, managing self-relevant emotions, and managing others' emotions. The SSEIT uses a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale for responses. The reliability of the SSEIT scale showed 0.90 [31]. Our study determined that the Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.94.

2.2.2. Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

Job satisfaction was assessed using the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) originally developed by Smith et al. [32] in combination with adaptations and insights from subsequent studies by Spector [23], Tran and Tran [33], Ha and Vo [34], and Le et al. [35]. The JSS is a 37-item instrument designed to measure employees' attitudes toward their jobs across eight distinct facets: pay, promotion, supervision, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of work, and job satisfaction. Each subscale contains four items. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = Strongly Disagree" to "5 = Strongly Agree", with higher scores indicating greater levels of job satisfaction. The JSS has been widely validated and demonstrated high internal consistency across diverse occupational settings, including healthcare, education, and corporate sectors [23]. In our research, the Cronbach's alpha of the scale reliability coefficient was established as 0.84 for JS.

2.3. Mobley's Intention to Quit (ITQ)

Employees' intention to leave the organization was assessed using the Intention to Quit Scale developed by Mobley et al. [36]. Responses range from "1 = Strongly Disagree" to "5 = Strongly Agree". Higher scores indicate a stronger intention to leave the organization. The scale has demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.9$) and has been widely validated across various organizational and cultural settings [36, 37]. In our study, the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha of the scale, was determined to be 0.97 for ITQ.

In addition to the questionnaire, socio-demographic information was collected from the participants using a structured questionnaire. The information collected included age, gender, educational level, monthly income, marital status, field of work, position/job title, operating hours, average number of working hours per week, and the primary reason for working.

2.4. Ethical

In line with the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of World Medical Association [38] and the guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association regarding research involving human subjects, the current study meticulously followed ethical protocols [39]. Adherence to these guidelines was paramount to safeguarding the well-being, rights, and confidentiality of all participants involved in the research endeavor. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City in Decision No. 284/GXN-XHNV-ĐN&QLKH. All participants signed the informed consent in this study.

2.5. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a quantitative approach to explore the interconnections among variables within a cross-sectional framework. Data obtained underwent organization, coding, and cleansing procedures using Excel, followed by analysis through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were then computed to delineate participant characteristics. The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was employed to examine the study hypotheses and intricate interactions among variables [40]. Data analysis utilized SmartPLS 4, suitable for reflective models, moderation, mediation, and non-normal data [41]. Following Hair et al. [41] approach, researchers assessed measurement and structural models. Evaluation included indicator and construct reliability, convergent

and discriminant validity. Structural model analysis involved collinearity, coefficient determination, and path coefficients' significance using 5000 bootstrap samples. This analysis aimed to enrich existing literature. The $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

A total of 89 workers participated in the study. The sample comprised 62.9% males and 37.1% females. Most participants were aged between 21 and 25 years (41.6%), followed by those aged 26–30 years (19.1%) and 31–40 years (19.1%). Regarding marital status, the majority were single (66.3%), while 32.6% were married and 1.1% were divorced.

In terms of education, over half of the participants had completed college or university education (51.7%), 44.9% had pursued postgraduate studies, and 3.4% had a high school diploma. Workers were employed across diverse sectors, with the largest proportions in business/commerce (23.6%), education (18.0%), and customer service (14.6%). Other fields included healthcare, engineering/IT, manufacturing, finance, logistics, and the public sector.

Most participants held employee-level positions (77.5%), while 19.1% occupied middle management roles and 3.4% held senior management positions. Regarding tenure, 31.5% had worked for 1–3 years, and 29.2% for up to 5 years. Most workers reported working between 31 and 40 hours per week (27.0%) or up to 40 hours (38.2%).

Primary work motivations included financial support for self or family (42.7%), career development (31.5%), and gaining experience and skills (18.0%). Regarding monthly income, 30.3% earned between 5 and 10 million VND, 22.5% earned between 15 and 20 million VND, and 20.2% earned over 20 million VND. Only 9.0% earned below 5 million VND. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

3.2. Descriptive Study and Normality Test

The Kolmogorov Smirnov test revealed that all assessed variables gender, age, marital status, education level, work field, job position, tenure, work hours per week, work motivation, and annual income significantly deviated from a normal distribution ($p < .001$), thus violating the normality assumption

Analysis of group differences revealed that emotional intelligence and job satisfaction varied significantly across certain demographic and occupational characteristics. Specifically, participants' emotional intelligence levels differed significantly by tenure ($p < .05$), with those employed for 1–3 years demonstrating notably higher emotional intelligence compared to those with less than 6 months of experience. Additionally, job satisfaction showed significant variation according to both age and tenure ($p < .05$). The highest levels of job satisfaction were observed among the youngest group (under 20), while the lowest were reported by those aged 31–40. Similarly, employees with 1–3 years of tenure exhibited greater job satisfaction than those in other tenure brackets. In contrast, turnover intention did not differ significantly across any subgroup, indicating that participants' intention to leave their job remained relatively consistent regardless of gender, age, tenure, or other background variables. Although differences in mean ranks were noted for variables such as gender, education level, and work field, these did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that any observed disparities in emotional intelligence, turnover intention, or job satisfaction among these groups may be due to chance rather than systematic variation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables (N = 89).

Variable	N (%)	M		
		EI	TI	JS
Gender		0.875	0.532	0.138
Male	56 (62.9)	44.67	43.69	48.12
Female	33 (37.1)	45.56	47.23	39.71
Age		0.452	0.091	0.025*
Under 20	3 (3.4)	48.33	21.5	67.0
21–25	37 (41.6)	40.23	45.92	48.39
26–30	17 (19.1)	42.59	55.24	48.35
31–40	17 (19.1)	49.56	46.65	27.5
Up to 40	15 (16.9)	53.67	33.97	48.27
Marital Status		0.014*	0.414	0.023*
Single	59 (66.3)	23.86	41.91	37.18
Married	29 (32.6)	36.81	49.0	38.59
Divorced	1 (1.1)	50.57	50.84	56.8
Education Level		46.5	43.75	53.81
High school	3 (3.4)	0.323	0.607	0.130
College/University	46 (51.7)	39.43	46.6	51.17
Postgraduate	40 (44.9)	55.38	40.66	41.06
Work Field		51.38	27.31	30.63

Business/Commerce	21 (23.6)	30.69	48.19	35.46
Education	16 (18.0)	51.33	56.75	69.5
Healthcare	8 (9.0)	41.33	42.25	41.17
Customer service	13 (14.6)	44.0	40.0	73.0
Engineering/IT	6 (6.7)	54.33	45.5	55.67
Manufacturing/Industry	6 (6.7)	39.86	47.29	41.36
Marketing/Communications	1 (1.1)	55.2	58.6	41.4
Finance/Insurance	6 (6.7)	0.289	0.212	0.592
Logistics/Transport	7 (7.9)	42.91	47.51	43.5
State employee	5 (5.6)	53.88	35.29	50.47
Job Position		42.67	42.17	48.5
Employee	69 (77.5)	0.143	0.141	0.280
Middle management	17 (19.1)	42.49	47.92	47.11
Senior management	3 (3.4)	48.62	38.12	41.88
Tenure		88.0	72.0	11.0
Under 6 months	11 (12.4)	0.096	0.661	0.719
6–12 months	16 (18.0)	32.0	57.83	33.33
1–3 years	28 (31.5)	40.33	43.91	44.99
3–5 years	8 (9.0)	51.35	45.29	45.89
Up to 5 years	26 (29.2)	0.925	0.575	0.698
Work Hours per Week		40.0	55.39	42.64
Under 10 hours	14 (15.7)	48.17	44.5	45.17
10–20 hours	6 (6.7)	48.55	39.91	48.32
21–30 hours	11 (12.4)	44.1	43.29	50.5
31–40 hours	24 (27.0)	45.99	43.66	40.99
Up to 40 hours	34 (38.2)	0.106	0.587	0.105
Work Motivation		40.41	47.79	39.49
Financial support for self/ family	38 (42.7)	53.72	49.0	58.53
Gain experience and skills	16 (18.0)	50.64	38.29	47.0
Career development	28 (31.5)	25.0	44.75	25.0
Networking and relationships	2 (2.2)	28.4	48.7	40.4
Passion and personal interests	5 (5.6)	0.169	0.879	0.535
Annual Income		33.5	45.44	58.56
Under 5M VND	8 (9.0)	37.37	43.19	43.8
5–10M VND	27 (30.3)	50.81	46.22	44.91
10–15M VND	16 (18.0)	49.65	41.73	39.83
15–20M VND	20 (22.5)	51.22	50.08	46.61
Up to 20M VND	18 (20.2)	0.875	0.532	0.138

Note: *p < .05 indicates statistical significance.

Abbreviations: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Turnover Intention (TI); Job Satisfaction (JS).

3.3. Model Specification

Figure 1 shows the final PLS model. The proposed research model for this study included 10 distinct latent: Emotional Intelligence (including items from the Emotional Intelligence Scale), Intention to Quit (including items from the Intention to Quit Subscale), Contingent Rewards (including of items from the Contingent Rewards Subscale), Nature of Work (including items from the Nature of Work Subscale), Pay (consisting of items from the Pay Subscale), Supervision (including items from the Supervision Subscale), Promotion (including items from the Promotion), Operating Conditions (including of items from the Operating Conditions Subscale), Coworkers (including of items from the Coworkers Subscale), and Job Satisfaction (including of items from the Job Satisfaction Scale). Figure 1 shows the final PLS model.

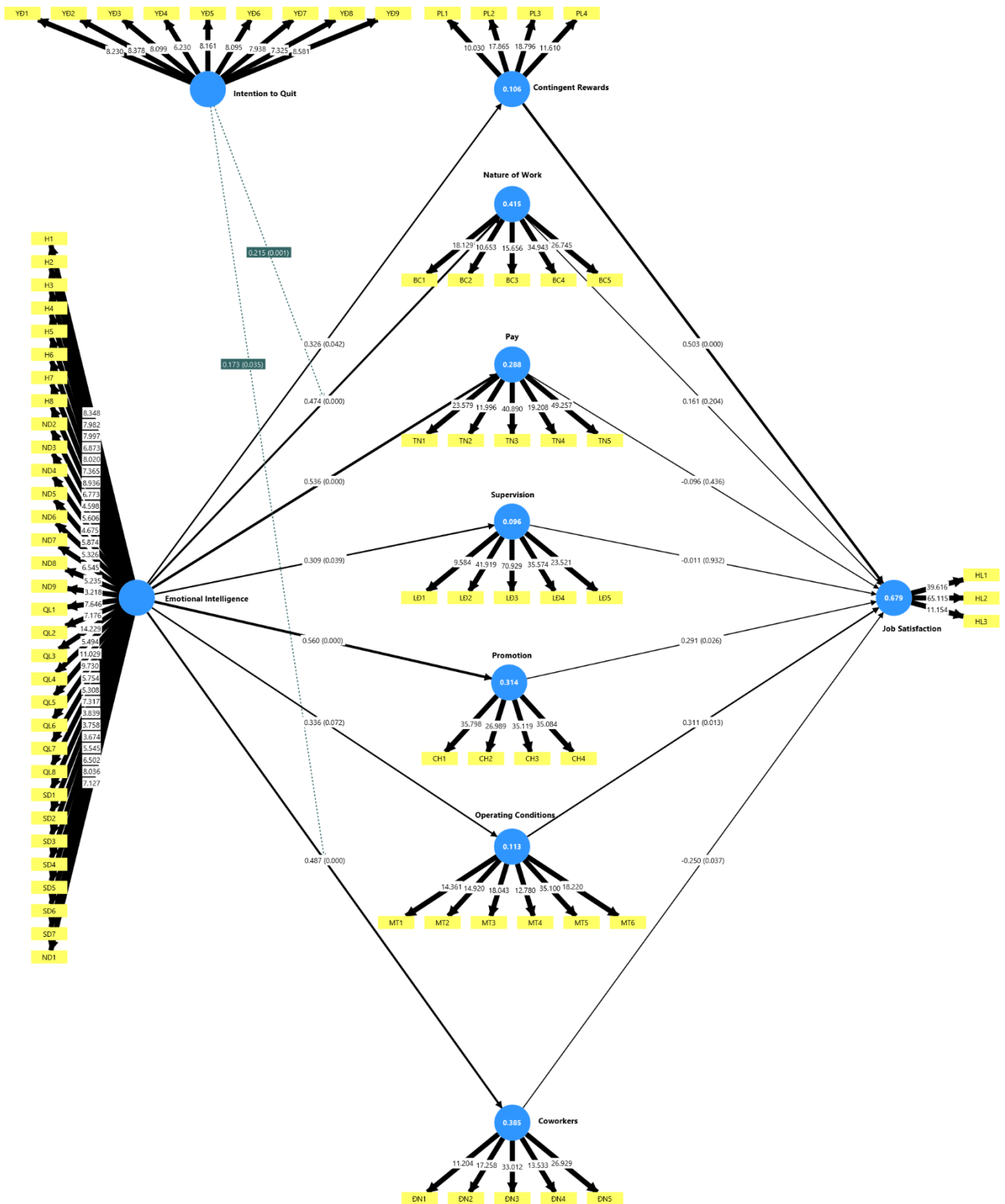


Figure 1. Results of structural modeling.

3.4. Measurement Model

The external loading value tests the correlation between observed variables and latent variables. A good threshold is considered to be above 0.7, however, a threshold below that level is not excluded in case the composite reliability is still acceptable [42]. The external loading ranged from 0.628 to 0.748 for EI, from 0.798 to 0.933 for ITQ, from 0.745 to 0.813 for CR, from 0.746 to 0.884 for NOW, from 0.779 to 0.905 for P, from 0.830 to 0.947 for S, from 0.876 to 0.911 for PR, from 0.752 to 0.877 for OC, from 0.754 to 0.912 for C, from 0.819 to 0.933 for JS, and all were significant ($p < 0.001$). Cronbach's α , which measured internal consistency, ranged from 0.801 to 0.970 for the ten constructs, all of which were satisfactory. The average variance explained (AVE) of the nine constructs is 0.50, except for EI (0.380). However, we still

accept EI although AVE is below 0.5, composite reliability is higher than 0.60, and the convergent validity of the construct is supporting adequate [43] (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Construct Correlations, Reliability, and Validity.

	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_c)	AVE
EI	0.948	0.952	0.389
ITQ	0.970	0.974	0.807
CR	0.801	0.870	0.626
NOW	0.884	0.915	0.685
P	0.906	0.930	0.728
S	0.946	0.959	0.823
PR	0.922	0.944	0.809
OC	0.881	0.910	0.629
C	0.901	0.927	0.720
JS	0.865	0.916	0.786

Note: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Contingent Rewards (CR); Coworker (C); Intention to Quit (ITQ); Job Satisfaction (JS); Nature of Work (NOW); Operating Conditions (OC); Pay (P); Promotion (PR); Supervision (S).

The heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT) were all below 0.85, thus, the discriminant validity of the model was established as well (see Table 3).

Table 3.
Heterotrait-Monotrait ratios (HTMT) of correlations.

	EI	ITQ	CR	NOW	P	S	PR	OC	C	JS
EI	—									
ITQ	0.225	—								
CR	0.065	0.167	—							
NOW	0.609	0.102	0.530	—						
P	0.559	0.078	0.629	0.708	—					
S	0.311	0.052	0.691	0.553	0.609	—				
PR	0.569	0.096	0.602	0.797	0.756	0.775	—			
OC	0.364	0.345	0.323	0.325	0.530	0.691	0.593	—		
C	0.615	0.098	0.640	0.752	0.648	0.463	0.603	0.323	—	
JS	0.318	0.099	0.811	0.506	0.078	0.663	0.318	0.726	0.350	—

Note: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Contingent Rewards (CR); Coworker (C); Intention to Quit (ITQ); Job Satisfaction (JS); Nature of Work (NOW); Operating Conditions (OC); Pay (P); Promotion (PR); Supervision (S).

3.5. Structural Model

After testing the measurement model, we continued to test and evaluate the structural model. For this model, the parameters thoroughly tested included the coefficient of determination (R^2), the effect size (f^2), the blindfolding-based cross-validated redundancy measure (Q^2), and the statistical significance and practical relevance of path coefficients.

3.6. Collinearity Statistic (VIF)

All VIF values range from 1,000 to 2,880, while one value of 3,671 is below the threshold of 3.3 or 5.0 for acceptable levels of collinearity [44].

3.7. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

This study revealed that the model accounted for varying levels of variance in job satisfaction outcomes, with the following key findings: JS $R^2 = 0.679$ (67.9% variance explained); CR $R^2 = 0.106$ (10.6% variance explained); C $R^2 = 0.385$ (38.5% variance explained); NOW $R^2 = 0.415$ (41.5% variance explained); OC $R^2 = 0.113$ (11.3% variance explained); P $R^2 = 0.228$ (22.8% variance explained); PR $R^2 = 0.314$ (31.4% variance explained); S $R^2 = 0.096$ (9.6% variance explained). The R^2 values in the model demonstrated varying degrees of explanatory strength among constructs, with Job Satisfaction showing the most substantial explanation.

3.8. Cross-Validated Redundancy (Q^2)

Q^2 measures the predictive power of the model. Values above 0 indicate confident prediction of endogenous construct values [41]. In our study, Q^2 values range from 0.009 to 0.392 for five constructs (C, NOW, P, PR, S), suggesting a medium level of predictive power.

3.9. The Effect Size (f^2)

Our investigation revealed that the path model had a significant effect size for the relationship between EI and PR, with a $f^2 = 0.457$, signifying that EI explained 45.7% of the variance in PR. The path from EI to P had a substantial effect size ($f^2 = 0.404$), accounting for 40.4% of the variance in P. The path from CR to JS demonstrated a substantial effect size ($f^2 =$

0.390), accounting for 39.0% of the variance in JS. The path from EI to C produced a modest impact size ($f^2 = 0.279$), explaining 27.9% of the variance in C. The path from EI to NOW produced a moderate impact size ($f^2 = 0.277$), explaining 27.7% of the variance in NOW. OC exhibited a minor impact on JS ($f^2 = 0.157$), accounting for 15.7% of its variation. Furthermore, other factors had a minimal impact and did not significantly contribute to variations.

3.10. Structural Hypothesis Testing

In this result, we explored the direct relationships among latent variables. For EI latent variables, the analysis revealed that EI significantly and positively influenced PR ($\beta = 0.560, p < 0.001$). Moreover, EI positively affects CR ($\beta = 0.326, p < 0.05$), C ($\beta = 0.487, p < 0.001$), NOW ($\beta = 0.474, p < 0.001$), P ($\beta = 0.536, p < 0.001$), and S ($\beta = 0.309, p < 0.05$). Thus, our analysis has confirmed the validity of H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6.

For JS, we discovered relationships that directly impact JS. The results show that CR positive impact on JS ($\beta = 0.503, p < 0.001$), OC impact on JS ($\beta = 0.311, p < 0.05$), and PR impact on JS ($\beta = 0.291, p < 0.05$). Contrary, C showed a significant negative association with JS ($\beta = -0.250, p < 0.05$). Thus, H10, H11, H12, and H13 was confirmed.

Additionally, we performed moderator and mediator analyses to evaluate the model. PR serves as a joint mediator in the relationship between EI and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.163, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, ITQ serves as a moderating variable in the relationship between EI and C ($\beta = 0.173, p < 0.05$) as well as in the relationship between EI and NOW ($\beta = 0.215, p < 0.01$). Consequently, H7, H8, and H9 were accepted. Figure 1 and Table 4 show the final PLS-SEM model.

Table 4.
The mediating effect of Emotional Intelligence; Intention to Quit, Job Satisfaction (N = 89)

Path	β coefficient	t-value	95% confidence intervals	95% BC confidence intervals
Direct effects				
CR → JS	0.503	3.957***	[0.185, 0.741]	[-0.018, 0.218]
C → JS	-0.250	2.091*	[-0.454, 0.015]	[0.031, -0.514]
EI → CR	0.326	2.033*	[0.046, 0.626]	[0.042, -0.019]
EI → C	0.487	4.887***	[0.294, 0.687]	[0.011, 0.262]
EI → NOW	0.474	5.897***	[0.323, 0.643]	[0.020, 0.254]
EI → P	0.536	5.385***	[0.347, 0.727]	[0.015, 0.300]
EI → PR	0.560	5.881***	[0.381, 0.750]	[0.014, 0.340]
EI → S	0.309	2.068*	[0.024, 0.610]	[0.033, -0.085]
ITQ x EI → C	0.173	2.112*	[-0.019, 0.304]	[-0.020, 0.030]
ITQ x EI → NOW	0.215	3.178**	[0.075, 0.340]	[-0.003, 0.085]
OC → JS	0.311	2.496*	[0.064, 0.548]	[-0.012, 0.089]
PR → JS	0.291	2.222*	[0.047, 0.569]	[0.020, 0.008]
Indirect effects				
EI → PR → JS	0.163	2.188*	[0.028, 0.328]	[0.012, 0.009]

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Abbreviations: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Contingent Rewards (CR); Coworker (C); Intention to Quit (ITQ); Job Satisfaction (JS); Nature of Work (NOW); Operating Conditions (OC); Pay (P); Promotion (PR); Supervision (S).

4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in predicting various aspects of job satisfaction and turnover intention among employees. Specifically, the research aimed to (a) assess the direct effects of EI on distinct facets of job satisfaction, (b) investigate the mediating role of promotion in the EI–job satisfaction relationship, and (c) explore the moderating effect of turnover intention on the relationship between EI and coworker relationships and the nature of work. By addressing these aims, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which emotional competencies enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention within small and medium-sized enterprises.

The findings of this study lend strong support to our hypothesis that job satisfaction varies significantly across both age cohorts and tenure brackets. In terms of age, the youngest group reported higher levels of job satisfaction compared to other age categories. This contrasts with previous literature suggesting that job satisfaction tends to increase with age [45, 46]. A possible explanation for this discrepancy lies in the distinct challenges often faced by older employees, including increased work and family responsibilities, career plateaus, and unmet career expectations [47] all of which may contribute to lower levels of satisfaction among more older workers. Similarly, tenure was found to have a statistically significant effect on job satisfaction, aligning with prior research [48, 49]. Employees with less than one year of tenure reported the lowest levels of job satisfaction. In contrast, employees with at least one year of service exhibited notably higher satisfaction levels. This trend may reflect a mutual process of adjustment and fit: individuals who remain in an organization over time are likely those who feel a sense of compatibility with the work environment, and conversely, the organization may also provide conditions that support their continued engagement [50]. Moreover, as employees gain experience, become proficient in their tasks, and internalize organizational norms, they develop stronger confidence and psychological attachment to their roles, which can enhance job satisfaction [48].

The present study’s results offer compelling evidence for the central role of EI in multiple facets of their job satisfaction. Consistent with the results of previous studies, higher EI was associated with more favorable evaluations of contingent rewards, coworker relationships, the nature of one’s work, pay satisfaction, opportunities for promotion, and the supervision

[51-53]. Emotions play an important role in the work process. Therefore, when a person has positive emotions, good emotion regulation and management, he or she will achieve higher job satisfaction than a person with poor EI [54]. Moreover, our mediation analysis demonstrated that promotion plays a role in mediating the EI–job satisfaction linkage. In other words, employees with greater emotional competencies not only experience higher job satisfaction directly but also indirectly through enhanced perceptions of upward mobility [55].

The present findings illuminate the role of turnover intention in the relationship between EI and coworkers, and EI and the nature of work. Specifically, our moderation analyses reveal that turnover intention attenuates the otherwise beneficial associations between EI and both coworker relationships and perceptions of the nature of work. Tsaur et al. [52] found that EI can predict employees' job satisfaction. Specifically, EI enhances one's ability to find meaning and satisfaction in work, fostering rapport with colleagues [4, 8]. However, when employees intend to leave, this has an impact on the relationship between EI and job satisfaction. For employees with low turnover intention, higher EI likely enhances their ability to find meaning, satisfaction, or engagement in their job tasks, resulting in more positive perceptions of the nature of work and vice versa. This result emphasizes the role of turnover intention as an important boundary condition in the application of EI in the workplace. Furthermore, the moderation effect also extends the literature on EI by demonstrating that its effectiveness depends on the context, especially in the presence of turnover intentions.

This study offers compelling evidence that multiple workplace factors significantly shape employee job satisfaction. Operating play conditions a pivotal role in cultivating a secure and valued workforce. Favorable conditions in the environment make employees feel cared for and supported by the organization, which leads to job satisfaction [56]. Similarly, when employees receive rewards tied to their efforts, they experience a heightened sense of accomplishment and connection to their workplace [26]. This result highlights the efficacy of reward systems as a strategic tool for enhancing satisfaction, provided they are perceived as fair and attainable [57]. Moreover, promotion opportunities typically involve advancement to a higher position, greater responsibility, and improved compensation. This recognition and reward for performance enhance employees' feelings of value and motivation, leading to an increase in job satisfaction [58]. Strikingly, coworkers have a negative impact on job satisfaction. In case coworkers openly complain, express dissatisfaction, or display a consistently negative attitude can influence their colleagues' perceptions of the workplace. This "ripple effect" causes others to view their jobs and the organization more negatively over time, lowering job satisfaction.

4.1. Implications

The present study offers significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the findings extend the body of knowledge on emotional intelligence (EI) by demonstrating its critical role in shaping various dimensions of job satisfaction and turnover intention within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The results further highlight the importance of considering turnover intention as a boundary condition in the relationship between EI and work-related outcomes. Practically, organizations are encouraged to integrate emotional intelligence assessments into their recruitment, training, and promotion practices. Developing employees' emotional competencies may foster more favorable perceptions of work environments, enhance coworker relationships, and improve overall job satisfaction while reducing turnover intention. Moreover, managers should recognize that turnover intention can attenuate the positive effects of EI, underscoring the necessity of implementing strategies that strengthen employee engagement and organizational commitment.

4.2. Limitations

Although this study offers meaningful contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships among variables. Future longitudinal research is warranted to better capture the temporal dynamics between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. Second, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects. Incorporating multi-source data or objective performance indicators would enhance measurement validity. Third, the sample was restricted to employees in Vietnam, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or organizational contexts. Replication studies across different industries and countries are recommended to strengthen external validity. Finally, although partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was appropriate for the exploratory nature and non-normal distribution of the data, future research could employ alternative modeling approaches to further validate the study's findings.

5. Conclusions

This study provides compelling evidence that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' work perceptions, enhancing job satisfaction, and reducing turnover intention. Promotion opportunities were found to mediate the relationship between EI and job satisfaction, whereas turnover intention moderated the associations between EI and both coworker relationships and the nature of work. These findings underscore the importance of organizational investments in developing emotional competencies and implementing strategies aimed at fostering employee retention and satisfaction. Future research is recommended to further examine these relationships across diverse organizational and cultural contexts to advance a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

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