Emotional Intelligence, Work Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Creativity: A Critical Study on Vietnamese Universities

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Abstract: Although a lot of research on job creativity has already been conducted from a psychological viewpoint, there is a limited number of studies considering work stress and emotional intelligence as higher-order constructs when investigating their impacts on employee creativity. This research aims to examine how emotional intelligence and work stress affect job satisfaction, and whether satisfaction and emotional intelligence enhance employee creativity. By analyzing PLS-SEM with higher-order constructs for a sample of 207 lecturers at Vietnamese universities of economics, the results revealed a negative impact of work stress and a positive impact of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction. Besides, the positive influences of job satisfaction and emotional intelligence on employee creativity are also supported. This investigation highlights the importance of developing emotional intelligence and controlling work stress to enhance job satisfaction and creativity in the context of Vietnamese universities.

1. Introduction

Management scholars have found that job satisfaction can be determined by emotional intelligence (Miao et al., 2016; Yan et al., 2018; Sy et al., 2006). Emotional intelligence can be defined as "*an awareness and understanding of people's feelings, including one's own, and how to use this knowledge to engage effectively in interpersonal relationships in a wide variety of contexts and situations. People with high levels of emotional intelligence have more success, enjoy a broader network of colleagues, are more respected, and can negotiate solutions to problems with greater ease*" (Collins, 2018). Some studies also emphasize the need to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity (O'Boyle et al.,

2011; Joseph & Newman, 2010). In addition, work stress is also recognized as a critical antecedent of job satisfaction, whereas work stress can be structured from challenge and hindrance stressors.

Different from previous studies, this paper provides a new research framework with two high-order constructs of emotional intelligence and work stress. We consider work stress to be a higher-orderconstruct that includes both challenge and hindrance stressors. Similarly, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as a higher-order construct consisting of self-emotional appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE). In the context of PLS-SEM, higher-order models cut down structural paths rather than developing ties among many independent and dependent structures (Becker et al., 2012; Polites et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2012). In addition, higher-order models offer the means to minimize homogeneity between formative indicators (Hair et al., 2018).

Moreover, most of the previous studies on emotional intelligence, employee creativity, job pressure, and job satisfaction were mainly conducted at companies, but the number of studies for educational institutions/universities is still limited, especially in developing countries. This motivates us to investigate the above relationships at Vietnamese universities. Nowadays, many Vietnamese universities are competing, so creativity and innovation are highly valued and often vital to universities' survival. Lecturers usually face the issues concerned with the demands and expectations of parents, the requirements of educational managers, the non-serious attitude of students, technology and educational reforms, heavy workload, and so forth. Such issues lead to emotional disturbance, work stress, job dissatisfaction.

This article is organized as follows. We first review the constructs of emotional intelligence, employee creativity, job satisfaction, and work stress in the second section. Then, the hypotheses are developed to set up a proposed model. In section 4, we mention the methodology. In the conclusion, the article gives a brief discussion of the contribution to management, the limitation, and future research.

2. Literature review

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

During the last few decades, emotional intelligence (EI) has attracted the attention of experts because it is of the utmost importance in several realms of life (Soleimani & Einollah Zadeh, 2017). EI is defined by Goldeman (2001) as "*the capability of noticing the inner feelings of oneself and others, encouraging oneself, regulating feelings, and managing human relationships*". Previously, Mayer and Salovey (1997) define EI as a set of interrelated skills concerning "*the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth*". In other words, employees with high EI tend to look assertive,

optimistic, tolerant, and flexible because they can handle well and always think positively (Griffeth, et al., 2000). At the same time, Higgs (2000) stated that EI referred to feeling and how you can manage these emotions, motivation for doing things, imagination and success, sensitivity, and successful handling of relationships.

EI has an impact on a wide variety of work activities, including teamwork, talent growth, creativity, quality of service, and client loyalty. (Delcourt et. al., 2013). EI could affect employees' interpersonal relationships with their supervisors, co-workers, and their workload. Similarly, it could foresee important results relating to jobs, including job satisfaction. (Abraham,2000), creativity, innovation in work (Gardner, 2003). EI was defined by Hogeveen et al. (2016) as the ability to accurately and effectively handle emotional knowledge. Based on these definitions, EI can be operated in four aspects: self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion, and use of emotion (Khalid et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2019).

Self - Emotional Appraisal (SEA) signifies an assessment and an expression of an emotion that relates to the capacity of a person to understand and identify his/her deep emotions. The principle of SAE is utilizing the capability to remain stable and calm throughout provocation or confrontation, meanwhile maintaining minimal defense and eventually developing rationality (Wolmaran & Martins, 2001; Brackett, et al. 2010). In a sequence of levels, self-regulation advances chiefly from social sources and adjustments of individual sources. SEA would allow individuals to play a greater role in their ideas, feelings, and performances (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012).

Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA) means the assessment and recognition of other people's emotions. According to Grayson (2013), it reflects "*the capability to notice one's emotions, to distinguish them, to fully understand what and why one feels, and to acknowledge the reasons for any feeling*". People who are good at this capacity would easily read others' minds as well as be receptive to the thoughts and feelings of others. Emotional self-awareness is a method of recognizing the emotions of a person and observing how they might influence humans.

Use of emotion (UOE) describes the ability to regulate emotional impulses as an emotional motivation that enables others to achieve their objectives (Anari, 2012). Self-motivation also includes the opportunity to set objectives and to establish a hard and optimistic reverse effect. Self-motivation is the guarantee which will be engaged in daily activities for a specific purpose (Mohamad & Jais, 2015).

Regulation of emotion (ROE) expresses one's ability to control his/her feelings, which would lead to quicker healing from psychological distress. It is related to social skills which help a person to maintain relationships with others. Respect, shared concern, engagement, generosity, patience, tolerance, compassion, compromising, debate, and communication are important social skills

(Schuetz, 2011). It also involves satisfying the needs of each other, communicating, and consulting about one's feelings, ideas, and thoughts. There are also other social skills as well as qualities that are proved to be effective in creating innovation, convincing others, building, guiding, and leading teams.

Job satisfaction (JS)

Job satisfaction means the feeling of satisfaction with one's work, which is seemingly considered to be a strong reason or motivation for working. This term relates to the link between an employee and the company for which he/she works (Gayathiri & Ramakrishnan, 2013). It also illustrates the attitudes of workers, thus bringing about a bright atmosphere to the workplace (Aziri, 2011; Luz & Oliveira (2018). Lizote et al. (2017) also indicate JS as an emotional state, depending on whether or not a set of standards has been met. Employees' satisfaction is a positive feeling which encourages them to increasingly try their best to sacrifice for their company. As a consequence, JS improves overall efficiency and helps the organization meet its goals (Khan, 2016). For Paula & Queiroga (2015), "*satisfaction is one of the fundamental variables for any organization concerned with maintaining good practices of human resources management*".

The positive impact of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction was proved in many previous studies (Anari, 2012; Yin et al., 2013; El Badawy & Magdy, 2015; Judge & Kammeyer-Muller, 2012; Joshi et al., 2015). Employees who cannot regulate their emotions properly, show less job satisfaction. Even, Mayer et al. (2004) supported that individuals with high EI tend to have high organizational commitment. Also, Lopzs et al. (2004) supposed EI to be necessary to promote social contact and work interaction. People with high EI tend to build up job satisfaction day by day through experiences based on constructive social exchange. Therefore, our first hypothesis is constructed as follows:

H1: Emotional Intelligence positively influence job satisfaction

Work stress (WS)

This concept is considered as the psychology of a person with thoughts and emotional experiences related to their working place and environment (Chang-Yang et al., 2015). Specifically, when there is a situation where the requirements exceed the personal and social resources, the employee could suffer a status of extreme hardship, distress, or insult which is referred to as the biggest and most worrying risk and stress. Stress is a perceived emotion. It is a continuum of emotional, spiritual, behavioral, and physical reactions ignited by new or developing pressures (Lu & Kuo, 2016). Work stress is often the product of employee-facing expectations, pressure, and negative responses that are inconsistent with their range of expertise, thereby creating obstacles and risks to employee career (Bashir & Ramay, 2010). According to Ding et al. (2019), WS can be conceived into two

types: challenge and hindrance stressors.

Challenge Stressors (CS) can cause stress, but they also provide workers with motivations and opportunities to succeed and develop (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Work range, responsibility, workload, and time pressure are its factors. There is rising proof that stressors may have beneficial ties to the motivation, happiness, and success of employees (Podsakoff et al., 2007; LePine et al., 2005).

Hindrance stressors (HS) cause stress but do not support workers with growth and development opportunities, as opposed to challenge stressors (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). These include business strategy, bureaucracy, the uncertainty of employment, and work instability (Lu & Kuo, 2016). HS is believed to limit personal output and thus inhibit the advancement of an employee's objective. Due to the composition of job demands, which are assumed to be unstable at almost all levels, these stressors are likely to generate negative affective and behavioral responses from workers that correlate to their perceived stress levels (Tsaur &Tang, 2012).

Work stress is a major factor leading to job dissatisfaction (Lambert et al., 2018; Joshi et al., 2015). The more stressed an employee is, the lower the level of satisfaction with his job is. This statement is reinforced by Rehman (2012) and Chang-Yang (2015), who indicated that the link between stress and satisfaction at work is extremely contradictory. The studies conducted for medical and police services by Trivellas (2013) and Gyamfi (2014) have shown similar results.WS was also regarded as a cause of negative results such as the discontent of workers, psychological distress, burnout, turnover intention(Jung & Yoon, 2014;Yeung, 2009). The authors, therefore, theorize the hypothesis below:

H2: Work stress is negatively related to job satisfaction

Employees creativity (EC)

EC means the development of innovative and useful ideas relating to goods, services, procedures, or processes in companies (Scott, & Bruce, 1994; Farmer et al., 2003). Zhou & Hoever (2014) also agreed that creativity is the process by which new ideas are executed. Creativity is established deeply and firmly from one's own experience and knowledge, which requires a high intellectual level. Therefore, the creative mind of employees is recognized as one of the primary components that make up the success and development of businesses (Sacramento et al. 2013).

The literature has found connections between emotional aspects and creative performance, indicating that emotions are conducive to creativity (Lassk, &Shepherd, 2013; Geher et al., 2017; Zampetakis et al., 2009). Sternberg (1985) also indicated that emotional intelligence needs to be efficiently controlled to function creatively every day. Those having high EI can also get high

creativity scores. Once employees perform creatively, their daily tasks will be innovated efficiently (Ding & Liu, 2019). Therefore, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H3: Emotional intelligence is positively related to employee creativity

When individuals feel treated well, they tend to be more involved in all activities with their best efforts for their organization (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). The five most important issues concerning job satisfaction are working conditions, reward policy, relationship, work environment, and nature of work (Sacramento et al., 2013). When people perform jobs with satisfaction, they often think about how their work can be improved or come up with the best ideas to devote to their organization (Whitelock et al., 2008). As a result, they will willingly utilize their resources to contribute to the development of the organization without any hesitation or considering receiving any benefits in return. Soleimani & Einolahzadeh (2017) also confirmed a positive link between job satisfaction and employee creativity. Hence, the fourth hypothesis is given as follows:

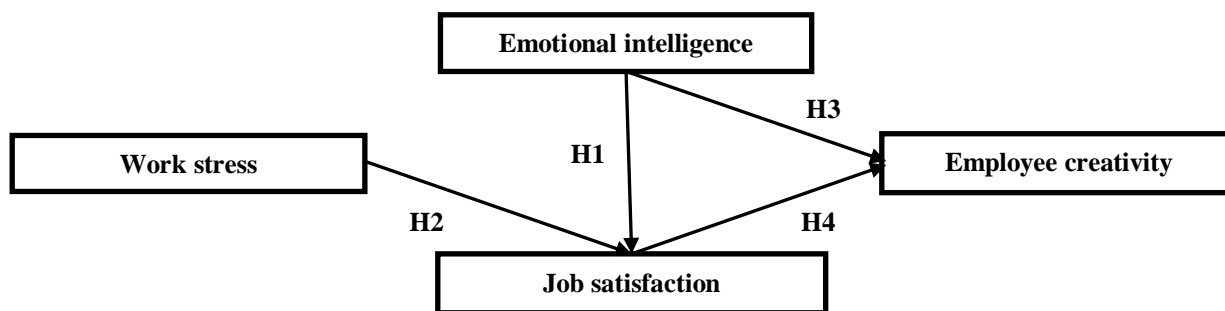*H4: Job satisfaction is positively related to employee creativity*

Figure 1. The proposed research framework

3. Method

Data collection

A questionnaire was developed and sent to the full-time lecturers working at ten well-known universities of economics in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. We contacted them through emails, telephone, and personal visits from June to August 2020. About 700 questionnaires were distributed. We only received 228 responses, for a response rate of 32.57 percent. By discarding 21 incomplete or inconsistent responses, 207 questionnaires can be used for further analysis.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

Measure	Value	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	92	44.4%
	Male	115	55.6%

Age	22 to below 30 years	4	1.9%
	30 to below 35 years	46	22.2%
	35 to below 40 years	42	20.3%
	40 to below 45 years	52	25.1%
	45 to below 50 years	33	15.9%
	50 years and above	30	14.5%
Education	Master	149	72.0%
	Doctor	58	28.0%
Experience	Below 5 years	15	7.2%
	5 to below 10 years	65	31.4%
	10 to below 15 years	52	25.1%
	15 to below 20 years	40	19.3%
	20 years and above	35	16.9%

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 1 provides the respondents' demographic information. Out of 207 lecturers, around half of them were male (55.6%), more than 67% were from 30 to 45 years old. Notably, only 28% had their doctoral degree but it appropriately reflects the status of lecturers' qualifications at Vietnamese universities. In 2019, Vietnam has 73,312 lecturers while nearly 21,000 lecturers hold doctoral degrees, accounting for more than 28% (Ngoc Linh, 2021).In addition, more than 60% had over 10 years of teaching experience.

Questionnaire development

Following Wong and Law (2002), Khalid et al. (2018), and Choi et al. (2019), this study measures emotional intelligence through the self-reported WLEIS scale, consisting of four factors such as self-emotional appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE). According to Ding et al. (2019), work stressors were also conceptualized as a higher-order construct, including challenge stressors (CS) and hindrance stressors (CS). Job satisfaction was adapted from Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction Subscale (Cammann et al., 1979). Employee creativity was shortened from Scott & Bruce (1994) and Zhou & George (2001). Moreover, all measures were anchored with the 5-point Likert scale(1 = "Strongly disagree;" 5 = "Strongly agree"). A professional translator translated the questionnaire from English into Vietnamese.

Data analysis

According to Andersen & Gerbing (1988), we used the two-step analysis approach with Smart PLS version 3.0 to analyze the research model. First, we tested the validity and reliability of the measures. Second, we evaluate the postulated connections of the structural model described above,

a bootstrapping method (1000 resamples) was used to determine the significance levels of path coefficients.

4. Findings and Discussions

Measurement model assessment

Table 2. Loadings, AVE, CR, and Cronbach's Alpha for the first-order constructs

First-order constructs	Measurement	Outer loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)	SEA 1	0.816	0.650	0.881	0.819
	SEA 2	0.858			
	SEA 3	0.816			
	SEA 4	0.729			
Others' emotion appraisal (OEA)	OEA 1	0.801	0.657	0.884	0.826
	OEA 2	0.859			
	OEA 3	0.714			
	OEA 4	0.859			
Use of emotion (UOE)	UOE 1	0.786	0.635	0.874	0.808
	UOE 2	0.776			
	UOE 3	0.806			
	UOE 4	0.818			
Regulation of emotion (ROE)	ROE 1	0.874	0.790	0.938	0.911
	ROE 2	0.907			
	ROE 3	0.869			
	ROE 4	0.904			
Challenge Stressors (CS)	CS 1	0.875	0.801	0.942	0.917
	CS 2	0.868			
	CS 3	0.912			
	CS 4	0.924			
Hindrance stressor (HS)	HS 1	0.805	0.618	0.866	0.794
	HS 2	0.764			
	HS 3	0.797			
	HS 4	0.778			
Job satisfaction (JS)	JS 1	0.889	0.709	0.879	0.795
	JS 2*	0.764			
	JS 3	0.868			
Employee creativity (EC)	EC 1	0.788	0.666	0.856	0.750
	EC 2	0.822			
	EC 3	0.837			

Source: Authors' calculations

The accuracy and rationality of the first orders are tested first. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's Alpha values, outer loadings, and composite reliability (CR) are greater than 0.7, which firmly demonstrates the reliability of the construction measurements. Besides, Table 2 also describes the average variance extracted (AVE) to evaluate the convergent validity. All the AVE values are over 0.5, so convergent validity was established (Hair et al. (2017).

Table 3. VIF and outer weights for second-order constructs

Second-order constructs	First-order constructs	Outer weights	t-value	VIF
Emotional intelligence	Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)	0.315	17.346	1.594
	Others' emotion appraisal (OEA)	0.288	12.745	1.448
	Use of emotion (UOE)	0.309	13.763	1.485
	Regulation of emotion (ROE)	0.384	18.621	1.547
Work stressor	Challenge Stressor (CS)	0.627	30.055	1.589
	Hindrance stressor (HS)	0.486	31.503	1.589

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 4. HTMT ratio analysis

	CS	EC	HS	JS	OEA	ROE	SEA	UOE
EC	0.081							
HS	0.709	0.073						
JS	0.163	0.491	0.336					
OEA	0.076	0.478	0.089	0.289				
ROE	0.132	0.533	0.137	0.407	0.481			
SEA	0.119	0.455	0.207	0.511	0.595	0.535		
UOE	0.116	0.648	0.155	0.562	0.430	0.579	0.569	

Source: Authors' calculations

As for EI and WS, they are conceptualized as higher-order constructs that include many formatted first-order constructs. In the measurement analysis, there are two types of models: reflective measurement model and formative measurement model. Following Diamantopoulos et al. (2008), the CR, AVE, and loadings mostly aid in assessing convergence validation for reflective constructs, instead of higher-order formative ones. Therefore, the study follows the guideline established by Hair et al. (2017) to assess the collinearity, weights, and significance of higher-order constructs (Table3). Variance inflation factor (VIF) lower than 2 shows the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2017). By a bootstrapping procedure (1000 samples), T-valuesare over 1.96 (p<0.05), which suggests that the weights of the constructs are important.

Next, discriminant validity is also examined in Table 4. Henseler & Fassott (2010) suggested that Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) should be used to test discriminating validity at a cut-off value of 0.85(Henseler & Fassott, 2010; Voorhees et al., 2016).

Structural model assessment

The path coefficientsand p-values were calculated using a bootstrapping method (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, a blindfold procedure should be applied to evaluate the predicted application of the internal mode (Hair et al., 2017).The Q^2 predictive relevance for emotional intelligence of 0.209 and work satisfaction of 0.172 using the omission distance of 7 shows that there is predictive relevance in the model.

Table 5 shows that emotional intelligence has significantly positive impacts on both job satisfaction (β = 0.467, p < 0.01) and employee creativity (β = 0.475, p < 0.01). The findings are in line with some studies related to the role of emotions and EI in education such as Najmuddin et al. (2011), Corcoran & Tormey (2012), Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017). Emotional intelligence is extremely beneficial to teachers' performance and job satisfaction since it helps them communicate clearly, resulting in effective interactions at work and their personal lives (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017; Mehmood et al., 2013). Individuals with high EI can flexibly adapt their emotions in stressful situations (Jung & Yoon, 2016).

Table 5. Results of a structural equation modeling

	Coefficients	f square	P Values
H1: Emotional intelligence → job satisfaction	0.467	0.292	0.000
H2: Work stress → Job satisfaction	-0.161	0.035	0.020
H3: Emotional intelligence→ Employee creativity	0.475	0.257	0.000
H4: Job satisfaction → Employee creativity	0.160	0.029	0.031

Source: Authors' calculations

Next, work stressors have a negative impact on job satisfaction (β = -0.161, p = 0.02). It means that lecturers who experience more challenge and hindrance stressors feel more job-dissatisfied. They usually have insufficient time and pressure to meet the requirements of their faculties and universities. There are many reasons for this problem:

- The simultaneous inappropriate allocation of too many tasks leads to work overload. This problem stems from not only management ability but also Asian culture. Individuals in a high power distance society, such as Vietnam, are also required to respect their leaders' authority and seniority, as well as to accept their leader's commands (Hofstede Insights 2018); which may lead to a tolerance for workplace mistreatment (Kwan et al., 2014). Besides, the slow application of the system-based or technology-based management methods to increase the transparency of the environment is also a big challenge.

- Unlike Western universities, department decisions are so strong in Vietnamese universities, and lecturers often feel powerless in resolving departmental influences to their careers.

- Higher stress levels are connected with lower rank, untenured status, and certain discipline clusters in terms of academic professional features. Failure to provide necessary resources or supports for high-quality teaching and research, as well as a lack of rewards or inadequate recognition for their efforts, contribute to their stress and work dissatisfaction.

- In addition, lecturers always try to maintain interactive and friendly relationships with students. Teaching is a respected profession in Vietnamese culture and tradition, so lecturers must behave properly in all situations to ensure strict professional ethical standards.

Finally, job satisfaction has a positive impact on employee creativity (β = 0.160, p = 0.031). This result is consistent with the conclusion of Mahdi et al.(2021) that job satisfaction has a significant impact on employees' creativity development at Tikrit University, Iraq.

5. Conclusion

The findings show employee creativity is positively affected by emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. Therefore, to motivate employees to be more creative, a working environment that fosters better satisfaction and emotion must be provided by the dean or rector. Besides, employees in Vietnamese universities also place their high hope in administrators that their contributions will be properly recognized.

Another result is that work stress negatively influences job satisfaction. To reduce pressures at work, it is necessary to recruit the right people and put them in the right positions. Also, procedures need to be improved to reduce "bottlenecks" during the operation. Despite that, the deans or rectors should also pose reasonable challenges for them. If they are happy with their job, challenges are their motivations rather than obstacles. It will force them to reach their full potential and boost their creativity.

Even though the results of this study broaden the existing knowledge, several limitations call for future research. Firstly, only three factors consisting of emotional intelligence, work stress, and job satisfaction are used to investigate their impacts on creativity. Others should be included in further research. Secondly, the study failed to explore the moderating influence on the previously mentioned relationship demographic components. Finally, the framework was examined and checked only in Ho Chi Minh – a big city in Vietnam. Thus, comparing and contrasting the results in various places, types, and forms of universities may be interesting.
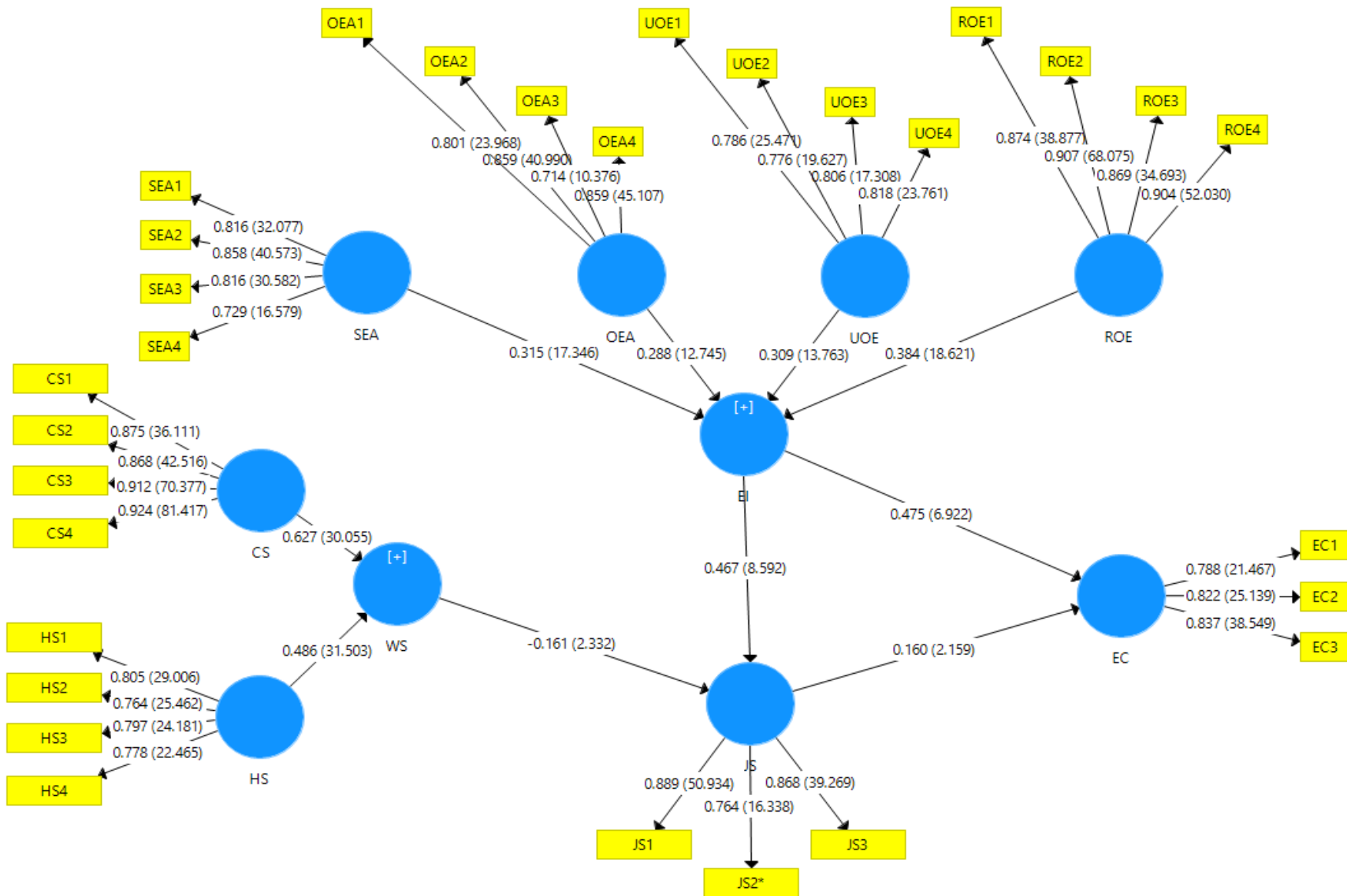
Figure 2. Results of the structural model

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