

# Perceived job insecurity, facades of conformity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement



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**Orientation:** Job insecurity is a pressing concern for many and is known to have negative outcomes for organisations and individuals. It is important to understand how employees respond to job insecurity and the effectiveness of these strategies.

**Research purpose:** The study aimed to examine the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between job insecurity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement, drawing on the job demands-resources theory.

**Motivation for the study:** One coping strategy for dealing with perceived job insecurity is to use facades of conformity. Facades of conformity are a relatively new concept and there is very little research on them in the context of job insecurity. Although there are a few studies in Southern Africa that refer to facades of conformity, none had been found at the time of writing that specifically focused on them.

**Research approach/design and method:** The cross-sectional survey involved 139 employees from various organisations in Southern Africa. Purposive and snowball sampling were used and online questionnaires were completed. Correlations and mediated regressions were calculated.

**Main findings:** Job insecurity and facades of conformity were related to emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Facades of conformity mediated the relationship between job insecurity and both emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Interventions should be aimed at individuals, teams and organisations to reduce facades of conformity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

**Contribution/value-add:** The study contributes to research creating a compelling case for encouraging employees to be authentic and an understanding of how job insecurity leads to burnout.

**Keywords:** job insecurity; facades of conformity; burnout, emotional exhaustion; disengagement; job demands-resources.

## Introduction

Job insecurity is a concern for many employees because of constrained economies, automation, technological advances, organisational restructuring and precarious forms of work that provide little assurance of continued income. This is likely to be aggravated in countries such as South Africa and Botswana where there are also large market disparities, mismatches between employees' skills and those required by organisations, large informal sectors and high levels of unemployment (Odili, 2022). There are many negative consequences to perceived job insecurity, including reduced organisational commitment, distrust of management, resistance to change, decreased performance, reduced organisational citizenship behaviour (De Witte, 2005), psychological stress (Shoss, 2017) and burnout (Bosman et al., 2005). One strategy for coping with job insecurity is for employees to try to increase their chances of retaining their employment by presenting themselves in a manner that is likely to be perceived positively by decision-makers (Huang et al., 2013). Such impression management may involve employees creating false representations of themselves that are aimed at creating the impression that they support organisational positions and values (Hewlin et al., 2016). These false representations are referred to as facades of conformity (Hewlin, 2003).

Facades of conformity may assist employees in improving their image and demonstrating their fit with the organisational culture by indicating agreement with dominant organisational views and approaches (Akhtar et al., 2023). However, facades also have unintended negative consequences

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(Hewlin, 2009). While the decision to use facades of conformity represents an agentic, proactive response, the inauthenticity involved in facades and the suppression of personal values creates internal tension. In both authenticity (Van Den Bosch et al., 2019) and facades of conformity research (Akhtar et al., 2023), this tension has been demonstrated to result in negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion.

As both job insecurity and facades of conformity have negative outcomes for individuals and organisations, it is important to understand the processes involved and to develop strategies to deal with them. Facades of conformity have mostly been examined in Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (WEIRD) countries although publications from countries such as China (e.g., Ma et al., 2023), Pakistan (e.g., Akhtar et al., 2023) and Taiwan (Chou et al., 2020) have been increasing. However, no published studies from Africa that focused specifically on facades of conformity had been found at the time of writing although a few studies have examined impression management in South Africa or mentioned facades of conformity in their literature reviews (e.g., Delpont et al., 2022; Kock, 2020). This study contributes to decreasing this gap.

Although there is a large amount of research on job insecurity and burnout, relatively few studies have treated facades of conformity as a mediator. Among the exceptions is the study by Hewlin et al. (2016), which examined facades of conformity as a mediator in the relationships between job insecurity, intention to leave and affective commitment. The current study extends this research by focusing on the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between job insecurity and burnout (emotional exhaustion and disengagement) in a sample of Southern African employees. This is important because of the implications of both job insecurity and the use of facades of conformity for mental well-being and engagement.

Because perceived job insecurity is a work stressor that has been related to burnout (De Witte, 2005; Vander Elst et al., 2014), the current study is positioned within the job demands-resources model (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). This model proposes that high job demands (e.g., work overload, insecurity) create strain and that job resources (e.g., social support, inclusive leadership, autonomy, feedback) lead to increased motivation and performance. In the current study, the conceptualisation of job insecurity as a job demand and the focus on facades of conformity as a mediator provides the opportunity to contribute to research on the job demands-resources theory by understanding the process whereby a job demand results in burnout.

## Job insecurity

Perceived job insecurity refers to perceptions of job instability and the fear of job loss (Van Wyk & Pienaar, 2008) and can be viewed as a job demand. Job demands are the physical, social and organisational aspects of jobs that require effortful

responses and which incur physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). They are known to induce a stress response and interact with job resources to predict either work engagement or burnout (Bakker et al., 2023). An inability to recover from job demands leads to burnout and decreased work performance.

Employees respond in various ways to job insecurity (Shoss, 2017), including behaviours related to stress (e.g., strain, poor performance, emotional exhaustion, Van Wyk & Pienaar, 2008; burnout, De Witte, 2005), social exchange (e.g., breach of relational psychological contract), proactive coping (e.g., networking, job seeking) and job preservation (e.g., increasing organisational citizenship behaviour, working longer hours, accepting pay cuts, presenteeism and impression management (Shoss & Probst, 2012)). The use of facades of conformity is related to the need for job preservation and represents an effort to deal proactively with the threat of job loss. Job preservation mechanisms are aimed at presenting oneself in a favourable light to managers through behaviours that are likely to be noticed and valued to increase one's chances of surviving in the organisation.

## Facades of conformity

As with other impression management strategies, facades of conformity involve inauthenticity. Authenticity at work is a state of congruence between the experiences, awareness and behaviour of an employee (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). It is determined by the employee's ability to communicate and act in accordance with their internal experiences in the workplace (Roberts et al., 2009). Impression management is also a form of inauthenticity. It involves ensuring favourable outcomes, such as positive performance appraisals, by displaying valued characteristics and skills in dyadic relationships, such as supervisor and subordinate interactions (Hewlin, 2003). Emotional regulation, a form of impression management, involves strategically displaying acceptable emotions in specific work contexts, for example, the surface acting involved in faking a smile when relating to customers to appear friendly and helpful. A key difference between facades of conformity and other forms of inauthenticity is the focus on the internal tension that results from the person-value conflict based on the conflict between personal and expressed values (Hewlin, 2003). This conflict is deeper than those experienced in other impression management strategies because it concerns values that are important to the individual and not mere surface behaviours, such as smiling at customers (Hewlin, 2003).

By appearing to conform to organisational values, employees create the impression that they support organisational initiatives and approaches in situations where they experience incongruence between their own values and those of the organisation. They do this through behaviours, gestures and verbal statements (Hewlin, 2003). For example, they might appear to accept certain views about other groups of people or express views that differ from those they hold, in order to be seen to fit in. When this happens, they are suppressing

their own values and parts of their identities and are expressing values they do not support (Hewlin, 2009). Value differences could relate to matters such as the style of dress required by the organisation, the expression of emotions, the treatment of employees, attitudes towards others, interpersonal relationships and ways of conducting business.

Job insecurity tends to lead to feelings of alienation that disrupt employees' sense of belonging in the organisation (Hewlin et al., 2016). Consequently, employees may respond by pretending to fit in with the dominant values of the organisation and thereby increase the appearance of belonging and fitting in (Hewlin et al., 2016). The finding that employees use facades of conformity to establish their social legitimacy in organisations (Hewlin, 2003, 2009; Stormer & Devine, 2008) supports this. The use of facades of conformity is likely to render employees more acceptable in the eyes of management (Hewlin, 2003) and could therefore be beneficial to job preservation. In the face of perceived job insecurity, facades of conformity represent a response to the risk of losing one's job (Hewlin et al., 2016).

This led to the first hypothesis:

**H1:** *Perceived job insecurity is positively associated with facades of conformity.*

## Emotional exhaustion and disengagement

Research has established that both job insecurity and facades of conformity result in psychological distress (e.g., Akbar & Akhtar, 2018; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hewlin et al., 2016). With facades of conformity, this is likely to occur in a similar manner to that involved in surface acting, where people fake or suppress their emotions (Cha et al., 2019). The effort and constant self-monitoring involved in surface acting deplete emotional, cognitive and physical resources. Although socially acceptable emotions are displayed through facades of conformity, Hewlin (2003) proposed that these displays are inauthentic and that negative emotions remain. The ongoing strain that results is likely to further deplete resources. When this occurs, individuals are more likely to engage in maladaptive cognitions and behaviours (e.g., self-undermining thoughts) that decrease job performance (Bakker et al., 2023).

Over time, this can result in a loss spiral whereby maladaptive behaviours, strain and job demands increase. It is not clear in previous research whether facades of conformity represent a positive or maladaptive response to job insecurity. While employees probably intend to use facades to increase their chances of retaining their jobs, the internal tension created by the conflict between their values and those expressed by the facades is likely to create distress. This suggests that although facades of conformity may achieve the user's goal of increasing the chances of preserving their job, they could also have the disadvantage of creating cognitive dissonance and internal tension (Hewlin et al., 2016). This is supported by research findings that facades of conformity are related to adverse employee outcomes such as psychological distress,

emotional exhaustion (Akhtar et al., 2023; Hewlin, 2003; Phillips et al., 2016), work disengagement (Hewlin et al., 2017), intention to leave (Hewlin et al., 2016), anxiety, depression, absenteeism (Doblhofer et al., 2019) and the reduction of affective commitment (Hewlin et al., 2016), job satisfaction (Chou et al., 2020) and task performance (Cheng et al., 2023).

In the current study, psychological distress was operationalised as emotional exhaustion and disengagement, based on the two-factor model of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Burnout refers to feelings of emptiness, being overtaxed and distancing oneself from one's work (Viljoen, 2005). Emotional exhaustion refers to a chronic sense of being drained and emotionally overextended by job demands (Rice & Reed, 2021). Disengagement is the tendency of employees to experience negative attitudes to work and to distance themselves from it (Demerouti et al., 2001). In South Africa, several studies have reported a relationship between job insecurity, burnout and work engagement (e.g., Bosman et al., 2005) although these studies did not examine facades of conformity. Discrepancies between individual and organisational values have also been found to result in increased levels of burnout (Dyląg et al., 2013), suggesting that the values conflict in facades of conformity could be related to aspects of burnout. This has been supported by reports of relationships between the use of facades of conformity with emotional exhaustion (Akhtar et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2016) and disengagement (Hewlin et al., 2017).

This led to the second and third hypotheses:

**H2a:** *Perceived job insecurity is related to emotional exhaustion.*

**H2b:** *Perceived job insecurity is related to disengagement.*

**H3a:** *Facades of conformity are related to emotional exhaustion.*

**H3b:** *Facades of conformity are related to disengagement.*

## Facades of conformity as a mediator

While relationships between job insecurity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement have been found in previous research (e.g., Bosman et al., 2005), we examined the mechanism whereby this occurs. This is important because there is some dispute as to whether the use of facades of conformity necessarily leads to cognitive dissonance and internal tension as proposed by Hewlin (2003). Hewlin and colleagues (2003, 2009, 2016) argued that the internal conflict created by the discrepancy between outward behaviours and inner values creates cognitive dissonance which in turn leads to emotional exhaustion and disengagement. However, Stormer and Devine (2008) distinguish between general facades and facades for conformity and argue that only facades of conformity involve internal tension. They dispute the notion that the use of facades necessarily involves internal tension or conflict. They argue that individuals experience cognitive consonance instead of cognitive dissonance when the potential reward or punishment justifies acting against one's beliefs or values. This could apply when jobs are perceived to be insecure, and facades are used as a strategy to

survive in the organisation. In this case, the perceived benefits of using facades to secure the job could outweigh potential strain, with the result that the individual would not necessarily experience internal tension. If this were the case, the use of facades would not mediate the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion and disengagement. However, it is not clear whether cognitive dissonance or consonance occurs, or how large discrepancies between internal values and outward behaviours need to be to create internal tension. In constrained economies, perceived job insecurity is likely to last for extended periods and we argue that the ongoing use of facades of conformity is likely to lead to strain that would be experienced as emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

This led to the following two hypotheses:

**H4a:** *Facades of conformity mediate the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.*

**H4b:** *Facades of conformity mediate the relationship between perceived job insecurity and disengagement.*

## Research design

### Method

A cross-sectional survey design was used. This approach was used because we needed to test mediation as an explanation of relationships.

### Sample

The sample consisted of 139 employees (67.6% female, mean age was 31 years, 91.4% university graduates). Participants were employed in Southern Africa, with most in Botswana (63.3%) and South Africa (30.2%). The majority identified as being black African (88%). Over half the participants had 2 years' work experience or less (55.9%). Purposive and snowball sampling were used. The inclusion criteria were that participants should be employed in an organisation and not self-employed, unemployed or working in the informal sector.

### Procedure

The researchers posted an invitation link and participant information sheet on social media platforms. (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn). The original intention was to include participants from several organisations operating in South Africa, but permission could not be obtained from organisations. As individuals on social media are not representative of the general population (Culotta, 2014), this is a limitation of the study as it decreases the generalisability of the results.

### Measuring instruments

The following questionnaires were used:

*Job insecurity* was measured using the shortened version of the Job Insecurity Inventory (Pienaar et al., 2013) that assesses the cognitive and affective dimensions of job insecurity. This is an eight-item, five-point type Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 was reported for the

scale (De Witte, 2005). Examples of items are: 'I am very sure that I will be able to keep my job' (cognitive insecurity) and 'I fear that I might get fired' (affective insecurity). All four items measuring cognitive job insecurity are reverse scored (e.g., 'There is only a small chance that I will become unemployed') (Tumelo, 2021).

*Burnout* was measured using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) developed by Demerouti (1999, cited in Demerouti & Bakker, 2008). This consists of 16 items on a four-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with two subscales that measure emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Research in South Africa found the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the two subscales, respectively, to be 0.82 and 0.80 and found the overall Cronbach's alpha for the OLBI to be 0.93. Example questions from the scale are: 'After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary' (exhaustion subscale) and 'Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work' (disengagement subscale). For both subscales, four items are reversed (e.g., 'I get more and more engaged in my work' (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008).

*Facades of conformity* was measured using Hewlin's (2009) six-item, Likert type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Example items include 'I suppress personal values that are different from those of the organisation.' and 'I withhold personal values that conflict with organisational values' (Chou et al., 2020). In addition, item 4, 'I don't play politics by pretending to embrace organisational values' was rephrased to read 'I play politics by pretending to embrace organisational values' to reduce the likelihood of confusion as English is not the mother tongue of many people in Southern Africa (Tumelo, 2021). Hewlin (2009) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

### Data analysis

Data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25. To check whether distributions for participants from Botswana and South Africa were similar, t-tests were conducted. As there were no significant differences, the data from these countries were combined into one sample. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlations and mediated regression. The alpha for statistical significance was 0.05. A mediator is a variable that intervenes in the relationship between the predictor variable and outcome variables in a causal manner (David & Sava, 2015). Prior to conducting the mediated regressions, assumptions (linearity, homoscedasticity, absence of multicollinearity, normal distribution of residuals, independent residuals and the absence of outliers and influential cases, Field, 2009) were tested and met. Mediation was tested using Hayes's (2019) PROCESS Macro Model V3.3 for mediated regression. This approach examines the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator in a causal chain (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). Mediation is examined via the product of paths a and b. Path a represents the relationship between the independent and mediator variables, and path b represents the association between the mediator and dependent variables. A bootstrap confidence

interval based on 5000 randomly resampled data points from the original data is used to evaluate the indirect effect. If the bootstrap confidence interval is entirely above or below zero and does not straddle zero, mediation is present.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand with reference number MAORG/20/010. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The landing page for the electronic questionnaire included the participant information sheet and an item indicating informed consent that participants were required to check before the questionnaire became available. To ensure data confidentiality, data were stored on a password protected computer.

## Results

Acceptable Cronbach alphas above 0.80 were obtained for all scales. All variables were considered normally distributed (Table 1). Moderate levels of job insecurity and facades of conformity and moderate to high levels of burnout (including emotional exhaustion and disengagement) were reported.

### Direct relationships between variables

The significant positive correlation between job insecurity and the use of facades of conformity (Table 2) indicate support for H1 that perceived job insecurity is positively associated with facades of conformity. Similarly, the significant correlations support the relationships between job insecurity and facades of conformity with emotional exhaustion and disengagement. This supports hypotheses 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b, regarding the relationships between perceived job insecurity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement and between facades of conformity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

### Facades of conformity as mediator

The correlations above (Table 2) provided evidence of significant relationships between all variables, as required for mediation.

**TABLE 1:** Descriptive statistics.

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alpha
Job insecurity	20	7	8	37	0.58	-0.35	0.86
Facades of conformity	15	5	6	29	0.11	-0.37	0.83
Burnout (total)	42	8	23	59	-0.00	-0.68	0.88
Emotional exhaustion	21	4	10	32	-0.08	-0.13	0.83
Disengagement	20	4	11	32	-0.07	-0.41	0.82

M, mean; SD, standard deviation; Min, minimum; Max, maximum.

\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ .

**TABLE 2:** Pearson correlations.

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Job insecurity	1	0.43**	0.40**	0.45**
2. Facades of conformity	-	1	0.43**	0.57**
3. Emotional exhaustion	-	-	1	0.67**
4. Disengagement	-	-	-	1

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Two sets of mediation analyses were conducted. The first focused on the mediating role of facades of conformity on the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion and the second used disengagement as the outcome variable.

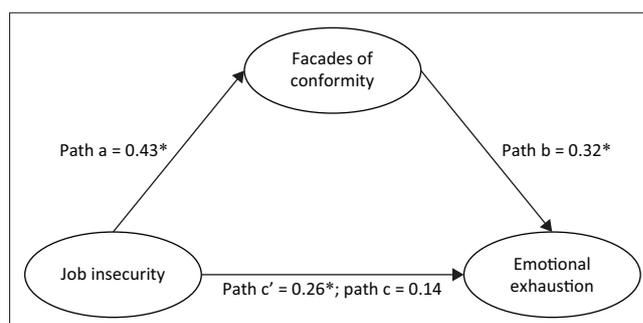
Figure 1 displays regression statistics for the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as mediated by facades of conformity (H4a).

The standardised regression coefficient between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was significant (path  $c' = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as was the standardised regression coefficient between perceived job insecurity and facades of conformity (path  $a = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Similarly, the standardised regression coefficient between facades of conformity and emotional exhaustion was significant (path  $b = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Furthermore, perceived job insecurity accounts for approximately 16% ( $R^2 = 0.16$ ) of the variance in emotional exhaustion and the standardised indirect mediation effect was 0.14 ( $0.43 \times 0.32 = 0.14$ ). This provides initial support for hypothesis 4a, that facades of conformity mediate the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

Unstandardised indirect effects were computed for 5000 bootstrapped samples. Bootstrapping is done by resampling the sample data repeatedly to create numerous samples, thus enabling inferences to be made about a population from sample data (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). The bootstrapped unstandardised indirect effect was 0.08 and the 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.04 to 0.14. This excluded zero and provided formal support for H4a. Therefore, facades of conformity mediate the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion (estimate = 0.08, 95% CI [0.04, 0.14]).

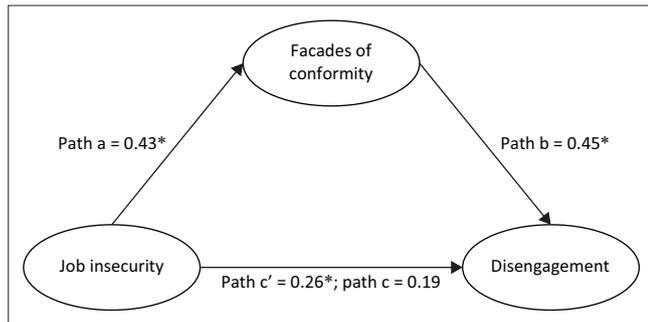
The second mediation analysis examined the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between perceived job insecurity and disengagement (H4b) (Figure 2).

The standardised regression coefficient between perceived job insecurity and disengagement was significant (path  $c' = 0.26$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), as was the standardised regression



\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; 0.14 indicates the indirect (mediation) effect.

**FIGURE 1:** Standardised regression coefficients for emotional exhaustion.



\*,  $p < 0.05$ ; 0.19 indicates the indirect (mediation) effect.

**FIGURE 2:** Standardised regression coefficients for disengagement.

coefficient between perceived job insecurity and facades of conformity (path  $a = 0.43, p = 0.00$ ). Similarly, the standardised regression coefficient between facades of conformity and disengagement was significant (path  $b = 0.45, p = 0.00$ ). Furthermore, perceived job insecurity accounted for approximately 20% ( $R^2 = 0.20$ ) of the variance in disengagement and the standardised indirect (mediation) effect was 0.19 ( $0.43 \times 0.45 = 0.19$ ). This provides initial support for H4b.

Unstandardised indirect effects were computed for 5000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped unstandardised indirect effect was 0.13 and the 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.07 to 0.19, thus excluded zero and provided formal support for H4b. Therefore, facades of conformity mediate the relationship between perceived job insecurity and disengagement (estimate = 0.13, 95% CI [0.07, 0.19]).

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between perceived job insecurity and burnout in a sample of Southern African employees. This is relevant in view of the negative effects of job insecurity on organisations and individuals (Bosman et al., 2005; De Witte, 2005; Shoss, 2017) and the challenge of dealing with these in uncertain economic climates. Because job insecurity can be regarded as a job demand (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011), the inclusion of facades of conformity as a mediator has the potential to contribute to explaining how job demands can result in burnout and the processes involved in the job demands-resources theory. In addition, there is a debate as to whether facades necessarily create internal conflict and negative outcomes for the employee and whether it is only when such conflict arises that this impression management strategy should be referred to as facades of conformity as opposed to a more general concept of facades (Stormer & Devine, 2008).

### Relationships between variables

The first hypothesis examined the relationships between job insecurity and the use of facades of conformity. A significant relationship was found and is supported by Hewlin et al.

(2016). This indicates that job insecure employees are likely to use facades of conformity to enhance their social legitimacy and appearance of fitting in with the organisation in an effort to increase their chances of being retained in the organisation (Stormer & Devine, 2008). The second hypothesis examined the relationship between job insecurity and components of burnout – emotional exhaustion and disengagement. These relationships were significant and supported by the well-established relationship between perceived job insecurity and components of burnout (e.g., De Witte, 2005; Vander Elst et al., 2014). This is consistent with the premise in the job demands-resources model that job demands lead to strain (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

The third hypothesis examined the relationship between the use of facades of conformity and emotional exhaustion and disengagement. These relationships were significant and are supported by similar relationships between facades of conformity and emotional exhaustion (Akhtar et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2016) and work disengagement (Hewlin et al., 2017). This provides initial support for the notion that the inauthenticity and cognitive dissonance involved in facades of conformity create internal tension and strain for employees as proposed by Hewlin (2003). Stormer and Devine (2008) proposed that cognitive consonance occurs when the reward justifies acting against one's beliefs or values. In the case of job insecurity, the reward would be retaining one's job. While this is no doubt an important outcome, the use of facades of conformity is related to the negative outcomes of emotional exhaustion and disengagement. This suggests that in this case, cognitive dissonance occurred, and the reward did not outweigh the cost of behaving inauthentically.

The key contribution of this study concerns the fourth hypothesis, which examined the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between perceived job insecurity and emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Results indicated that facades of conformity mediated these relationships. This is consistent with the mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationships between job insecurity, intention to leave and affective commitment (Hewlin et al., 2016). The perceived risks involved in losing one's job create the need for facades of conformity, which in turn lead to emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The mediating role of facades of conformity explains the process whereby job insecurity leads to both the emotional exhaustion and disengagement components of burnout. It is paradoxical that while one of the reasons for using facades of conformity in the face of perceived job insecurity is to create the impression that one supports the organisation's values and thereby secure one's employment, the effects on energy levels, cynicism and engagement could in turn negatively influence job performance. This is based on previous findings that chronic strain leads to maladaptive behaviours and loss spirals (Bakker et al., 2023). This would be counterproductive to the purpose of facades of conformity as it could inadvertently create negative perceptions of the employee and reduce their chances of retaining their job. The second contribution of the

study is the explanation that facades of conformity provide for the process whereby a job demand (i.e., job insecurity) leads to strain (i.e., emotional exhaustion and disengagement) as part of the job demands-resources theory.

## Limitations

The limitations of the study include the cross-sectional design, small sample size and exclusion of job resources. Sampling via social media introduced bias as discussed previously. In addition, the facades of conformity scale (Hewlin, 2009) measures the use of facades of conformity but not the degree of internal tension experienced. Although this would be a useful addition to the scale, the relationship between facades of conformity, emotional exhaustion and disengagement suggests that internal tension was present in this sample.

## Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations for future research emerged from this study. It would be useful to clarify how facades of conformity influence the chances of retaining one's job over time and how retrenchment policies moderate this process. It is not known whether employees who use facades of conformity in response to job insecurity are aware of their negative effects and whether they make further adjustments in their responses to deal with these. It is also not clear how employees decide whether to use facades of conformity in the face of job insecurity and whether they consciously engage in a trade-off between the perceived benefits and negative consequences of using facades of conformity. Longitudinal studies would contribute to understanding the development of facades of conformity, their effects on team dynamics and whether inauthentic expressions become internalised and authentic over time. The inclusion of both job demands and resources and the interactions between strain and positive outcomes would be useful. The development of a scale that directly measures internal tension when using facades of conformity would be valuable.

## Implications for organisations

Several practical implications emerged. While the focus of the current study was not on identifying interventions aimed at reducing perceived job insecurity, little research has examined ways of reducing perceived job insecurity (Koen & Van Bezouw, 2021). However, perceived job insecurity is difficult to eradicate, especially in contexts with high unemployment, constrained economies, the gig economy and in organisations where downsizing is likely to occur. There is some evidence that planned organisational efforts can assist in managing job insecurity (Abildgaard et al., 2018). For example, within the job demands-resources theory, Jiang et al. (2021) found that increasing personal and organisational resources is more effective than attempting to reduce job insecurity. These resources include, among others, self-esteem, personality, employability, organisational justice and trust in management. Psychological empowerment has a

positive effect on the work engagement of job insecure employees (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). Although potential job loss is a sensitive matter, communicating with employees and providing support can be beneficial (Charoensukmongkul & Suthatorn, 2022). Likewise, participatory management may influence how employees experience job insecurity (Abildgaard et al., 2018). Where possible, interventions such as re-training employees and facilitating proactive career behaviours could reduce the negative effects of job insecurity (Koen & Van Bezouw, 2021). It seems logical that if job insecurity is reduced, employees might use facades of conformity less. However, this may be influenced by various factors, such as income and minority status. Further research is needed on this.

It is recommended that organisations address issues that are likely to increase the use of facades of conformity and reduce the risks associated with authentic self-expression. A systemic approach is likely to be useful, where issues at the organisational, team and individual levels are addressed. Organisational policies and procedures should be fair and transparent. This includes aspects such as performance management, remuneration and career development systems. Organisational culture and leadership styles that encourage inclusivity, the expression of diverse views and that foster psychological safety are likely to reduce the risks involved in authentic self-expression (Cha et al., 2019).

Lastly, systematic reviews have found that various individual and organisation level interventions reduce burnout (e.g., Awa et al., 2010; Panagioti et al., 2016; West et al., 2016). Examples of interventions that organisations could consider are stress management, mindfulness, counselling, recreational music making, developing healthier lifestyles, professional skills training and shorter work hours. While interventions aimed at individuals for preventing and reducing burnout are relevant (e.g., coaching), they are likely to have less success when relevant organisational issues are not addressed. This is in line with Panagioti et al.'s (2016) finding that individual level intervention programmes for burnout had small benefits, which could be boosted by organisation level approaches. Although burnout is experienced by individuals, it is pertinent to the overall organisation in terms of many factors that contribute to it (e.g., job design, organisational culture) and its negative consequences.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to research regarding the job demands-resources theory, job insecurity, authenticity and burnout. The mediating role of facades of conformity in the relationship between perceived job insecurity and burnout assists in explaining how job insecurity, a job demand, leads to burnout. It highlights the importance of authenticity in the workplace, the need to encourage different views and to foster a working environment where employees have a sense of belonging. Facades of conformity are likely to deprive organisations of debates regarding approaches and practices that could improve organisational performance and which

could be particularly important during organisational change or times of economic constraint. At these times, employees are likely to use facades of conformity to try to increase their chances of preserving their jobs. Paradoxically, this places additional strain on employees and is related to emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

The research formed part of T.T.'s Masters research report, which was supervised by F.D. F.D. wrote the original article, which was reviewed by T.T. F.D. also added in additional literature and checked the data analysis.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not openly available because of reasons of sensitivity and are available from the corresponding author, F.M.D. upon reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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