



IDENTITY PRESSURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG CORPORATE LEADERS: THE HIDDEN COST OF MAINTAINING HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE CULTURES

¹Kanupriya Mohan, ²Dr. Preeti Dixit

¹Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, M.P., India.

²Dept., of Psychology, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, M.P., India.

Abstract

The contemporary corporate environment increasingly promotes high-performance workplace cultures that demand continuous productivity, emotional control, and professional excellence from organizational leaders. While such expectations contribute to organizational growth, they also generate significant psychological pressure and emotional strain among corporate leaders. This study examines the relationship between identity pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress within leadership roles. The paper explores how leaders experience stress through constant image maintenance, performance expectations, and emotional suppression in professional settings. Using a conceptual and research-oriented approach supported by existing literature, the study identifies burnout, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced psychological wellbeing as major outcomes of sustained workplace pressure. The findings suggest that high-performance organizational cultures often normalize emotional labor while neglecting leadership mental health. The study highlights the need for supportive organizational policies, emotional resilience programs, and psychologically sustainable leadership practices to promote healthier workplace environments and long-term leadership effectiveness.

Keywords: Identity Pressure; Psychological Distress; Corporate Leadership; Emotional Regulation; Workplace Culture; Burnout; Mental Health; High-Performance Organizations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The modern corporate environment has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades due to globalization, technological advancement, digital communication systems, and intensified market competition. Organizations increasingly emphasize productivity, innovation, efficiency, and continuous performance improvement in order to sustain competitive advantage. As a result, high-performance workplace cultures have become a dominant organizational model across industries. These cultures reward achievement, resilience, emotional control, and constant availability, particularly among individuals occupying leadership positions (Schein, 2017).

Corporate leaders are expected not only to achieve organizational targets but also to maintain professional composure, inspire teams, manage crises, and represent organizational identity. Such expectations create a workplace environment where leaders continuously regulate their emotions and professional image to meet organizational standards. Leadership success is frequently associated with confidence, decisiveness, emotional stability, and uninterrupted productivity, leaving little room for emotional vulnerability or psychological limitations (Goleman, 2013).

The growing pressure to sustain professional identity and leadership performance has contributed to rising mental health concerns among executives and managers. Contemporary studies indicate increasing levels of anxiety, burnout, emotional exhaustion, sleep disorders,

and occupational stress among corporate leaders (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Despite occupying positions of authority, many leaders experience internal psychological strain due to continuous evaluation, performance monitoring, and organizational expectations. High-performance cultures often normalize stress and emotional suppression as indicators of professional commitment, thereby reducing opportunities for psychological recovery and emotional expression.

In recent years, mental health has become an important organizational concern; however, most workplace wellbeing initiatives primarily focus on employees rather than leaders. The psychological burden experienced by leaders often remains hidden because organizational systems generally perceive leadership roles as symbols of resilience and emotional strength. Consequently, the emotional and psychological costs associated with leadership performance continue to receive limited scholarly and institutional attention.

1.2 Conceptual Understanding

The concept of *identity pressure* refers to the psychological burden individuals experience when attempting to maintain a socially or professionally desirable image. In corporate settings, leaders are expected to embody competence, confidence, authority, and emotional stability. Continuous efforts to sustain this professional identity can generate significant emotional strain, especially when personal emotions conflict with organizational expectations (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Emotional regulation refers to the process through which individuals monitor, manage, and modify their emotional responses in professional and social contexts. Corporate leaders frequently engage in emotional regulation by suppressing frustration, anxiety, or exhaustion while displaying confidence and optimism before employees and stakeholders. Although emotional regulation contributes to workplace professionalism, prolonged emotional suppression may negatively affect psychological wellbeing and interpersonal functioning (Gross, 2015).

Psychological distress encompasses emotional suffering associated with stress, anxiety,

burnout, depression, and mental fatigue. Within leadership environments, psychological distress may emerge due to excessive workload, decision-making pressure, role conflict, organizational uncertainty, and identity-related expectations. Persistent distress can reduce leadership effectiveness, impair cognitive functioning, and negatively influence organizational productivity.

The notion of *leadership performance culture* refers to organizational environments where leaders are constantly evaluated on measurable outcomes, efficiency, adaptability, and productivity. Such cultures encourage competitiveness and achievement orientation but may also intensify emotional labor and work-related stress. Leaders operating within high-performance cultures often perceive emotional vulnerability as professional weakness, thereby increasing emotional isolation and psychological exhaustion.

1.3 Problem Statement

Corporate leadership positions are commonly associated with power, success, and professional achievement. However, behind these visible indicators of success lies a significant emotional and psychological burden that remains insufficiently acknowledged within organizational structures. Corporate leaders are expected to continuously maintain professional identities characterized by confidence, resilience, and productivity regardless of personal emotional conditions. Such expectations create identity pressure that may contribute to chronic stress, emotional suppression, burnout, and other adverse mental health outcomes.

Despite increasing discussions surrounding workplace mental health, organizations continue to prioritize productivity and performance over psychological wellbeing, particularly among leadership groups. Mental health challenges faced by leaders are often overlooked because leaders themselves are expected to provide emotional support and organizational stability. Consequently, many executives experience psychological distress silently without adequate institutional recognition or support mechanisms.

The absence of organizational attention toward leadership mental health creates a critical challenge for sustainable workplace

development. Unaddressed psychological distress among leaders can negatively affect decision-making quality, interpersonal relationships, employee morale, and organizational performance. Therefore, there is a need to examine how identity pressure and emotional regulation contribute to psychological distress among corporate leaders operating within high-performance workplace cultures.

1.4 Research Gap

Existing literature on workplace mental health predominantly focuses on employee stress, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and occupational burnout among general workforce populations. Comparatively fewer studies examine the psychological experiences of corporate leaders who operate under constant performance scrutiny and organizational expectations. Leadership research frequently emphasizes effectiveness, motivation, strategic decision-making, and productivity while giving limited attention to leaders' emotional vulnerability and psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, current studies often analyze emotional labor, burnout, and workplace stress as isolated constructs rather than examining their interconnected relationship with identity pressure. Limited interdisciplinary research integrates psychological, organizational, and sociological perspectives to explain how professional identity maintenance influences mental health outcomes among corporate leaders. There is also inadequate exploration of how emotional regulation functions as a mediating factor between workplace culture and psychological distress.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the relationship between identity pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress within high-performance corporate environments. The research contributes to organizational psychology and leadership studies by highlighting the hidden emotional costs associated with sustaining leadership identity and workplace performance expectations.

1.5 Research Objectives

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between identity pressure and psychological distress among corporate leaders.
2. To analyse the role of workplace culture in intensifying emotional strain and emotional regulation demands.
3. To identify major mental health outcomes associated with high-performance leadership expectations.
4. To evaluate the influence of emotional suppression on leadership wellbeing and organizational functioning.
5. To suggest organizational strategies for promoting psychologically sustainable leadership environments.

1.6 Research Questions / Hypotheses

Research Questions

1. How does identity pressure affect the psychological wellbeing of corporate leaders?
2. What role does emotional regulation play in high-performance workplace cultures?
3. Which psychological distress indicators are most prevalent among corporate leaders?
4. How can organizations reduce mental health risks associated with leadership performance expectations?

Hypotheses

H1: Identity pressure significantly increases psychological distress among corporate leaders.

H2: Emotional regulation mediates the relationship between workplace culture and mental wellbeing.

H3: High-performance workplace cultures are positively associated with emotional exhaustion and burnout among leaders.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 High-Performance Workplace Culture

The emergence of high-performance workplace cultures has significantly transformed modern organizational structures and leadership practices. In contemporary corporate environments, organizations prioritize efficiency, innovation, competitiveness, and productivity to maintain market relevance and profitability. Such cultures emphasize continuous achievement, adaptability, and performance-oriented behavior, particularly among managerial and executive-level employees (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Leaders

are expected to demonstrate resilience, strategic thinking, emotional composure, and consistent productivity regardless of workplace uncertainty or personal stress.

Organizational competitiveness has intensified due to globalization, technological disruption, and rapidly changing consumer expectations. Consequently, leaders are increasingly evaluated based on measurable outcomes, employee performance, decision-making speed, and organizational growth. Productivity-driven leadership norms encourage executives to remain constantly available, emotionally controlled, and professionally efficient. While these expectations may improve organizational performance, they often create emotionally demanding work environments that contribute to chronic stress and psychological exhaustion (Schein, 2017).

Several scholars argue that high-performance cultures normalize overwork and emotional suppression as indicators of professional dedication. Leaders working within such environments frequently internalize organizational expectations and associate self-worth with performance outcomes. This continuous pressure to maintain success and organizational image may negatively influence mental wellbeing, work-life balance, and emotional stability. Furthermore, leadership positions often involve role ambiguity, organizational accountability, and crisis management responsibilities that intensify emotional and psychological strain over time.

Research on workplace culture also indicates that organizations rarely acknowledge the emotional costs associated with leadership roles. Instead, leadership effectiveness is often associated with emotional strength, decisiveness, and mental endurance. Such assumptions discourage leaders from expressing vulnerability or seeking psychological support, thereby increasing the risk of emotional isolation and occupational burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

2.2 Identity Theory and Leadership

Identity Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how corporate leaders construct and maintain professional identities within organizational settings. According to Burke and

Stets (2009), identity refers to the meanings individuals attach to themselves while performing social roles. In leadership environments, professional identity is closely connected to authority, competence, confidence, and emotional control. Leaders are expected to consistently display behaviors that align with organizational expectations and professional standards.

Professional identity construction is a continuous social and psychological process influenced by workplace culture, organizational norms, and interpersonal interactions. Corporate leaders often shape their identity around success, productivity, and influence. Over time, maintaining this leadership identity may create internal pressure, especially when leaders experience emotional exhaustion, stress, or self-doubt. The discrepancy between personal emotions and professional expectations can contribute to identity conflict and psychological distress.

Leadership image maintenance is another important aspect of organizational identity. Executives frequently engage in impression management to preserve credibility, authority, and organizational trust. This includes controlling emotional expressions, demonstrating optimism during crises, and concealing personal vulnerabilities. Although such practices support professional leadership roles, they may also generate emotional fatigue and cognitive strain (Goffman, 1959).

Studies indicate that leaders who strongly associate self-worth with professional performance are more vulnerable to stress-related mental health challenges. Fear of failure, reputational concerns, and constant evaluation may intensify emotional insecurity and anxiety. Consequently, identity pressure becomes a major psychological burden within high-performance organizational cultures where leadership effectiveness is continuously monitored and publicly assessed.

2.3 Emotional Regulation and Emotional Labor

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and modify emotional responses according to social and organizational expectations. In corporate leadership roles,

emotional regulation is considered an essential professional skill because leaders are expected to maintain composure, confidence, and positivity during challenging situations (Gross, 2015). However, continuous emotional regulation may become psychologically exhausting when leaders suppress genuine emotions to maintain professional standards.

The concept of emotional labor, introduced by Hochschild (1983), explains how individuals regulate emotions as part of their occupational responsibilities. Corporate leaders frequently perform emotional labor by displaying calmness, motivation, and reassurance even during periods of organizational uncertainty or personal distress. This process requires leaders to align emotional expressions with organizational expectations, often at the cost of personal emotional wellbeing.

Emotional suppression is particularly common in high-performance workplace cultures where emotional vulnerability may be perceived as weakness or incompetence. Leaders may avoid discussing stress, anxiety, or emotional fatigue due to concerns about professional image and organizational credibility. Over time, prolonged emotional suppression can contribute to emotional exhaustion, reduced psychological resilience, and interpersonal detachment.

Workplace emotional expectations also influence leadership behavior and organizational relationships. Leaders are often expected to motivate employees, resolve conflicts, and maintain workplace morale despite experiencing internal psychological strain. Continuous emotional labor may therefore create a disconnect between authentic emotional experiences and professional behavior. Research suggests that this emotional dissonance is associated with higher levels of occupational stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

2.4 Psychological Distress in Corporate Leadership

Psychological distress among corporate leaders has become an increasingly important area of organizational research. Leadership roles involve constant decision-making, accountability, performance evaluation, and organizational responsibility, all of which

contribute to emotional and mental strain. Contemporary studies indicate that many corporate leaders experience symptoms of anxiety, burnout, depression, and chronic occupational stress despite outward professional success.

Anxiety is commonly associated with leadership uncertainty, competitive pressure, financial accountability, and fear of organizational failure. Executives frequently operate in environments characterized by tight deadlines, strategic risks, and performance scrutiny, which may lead to persistent psychological tension. Long-term anxiety can negatively affect concentration, emotional stability, and leadership effectiveness.

Burnout represents one of the most significant mental health concerns among leaders. Maslach and Leiter (2016) describe burnout as a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional accomplishment. High-performance organizational cultures often encourage excessive workload, long working hours, and continuous productivity, thereby increasing burnout risk among corporate executives.

Depression and emotional fatigue may also emerge when leaders experience prolonged stress without adequate emotional support or recovery opportunities. Organizational cultures that discourage emotional openness may intensify feelings of isolation and helplessness among leaders. Occupational stress resulting from workload imbalance, role conflict, and emotional labor further contributes to psychological distress and reduced wellbeing.

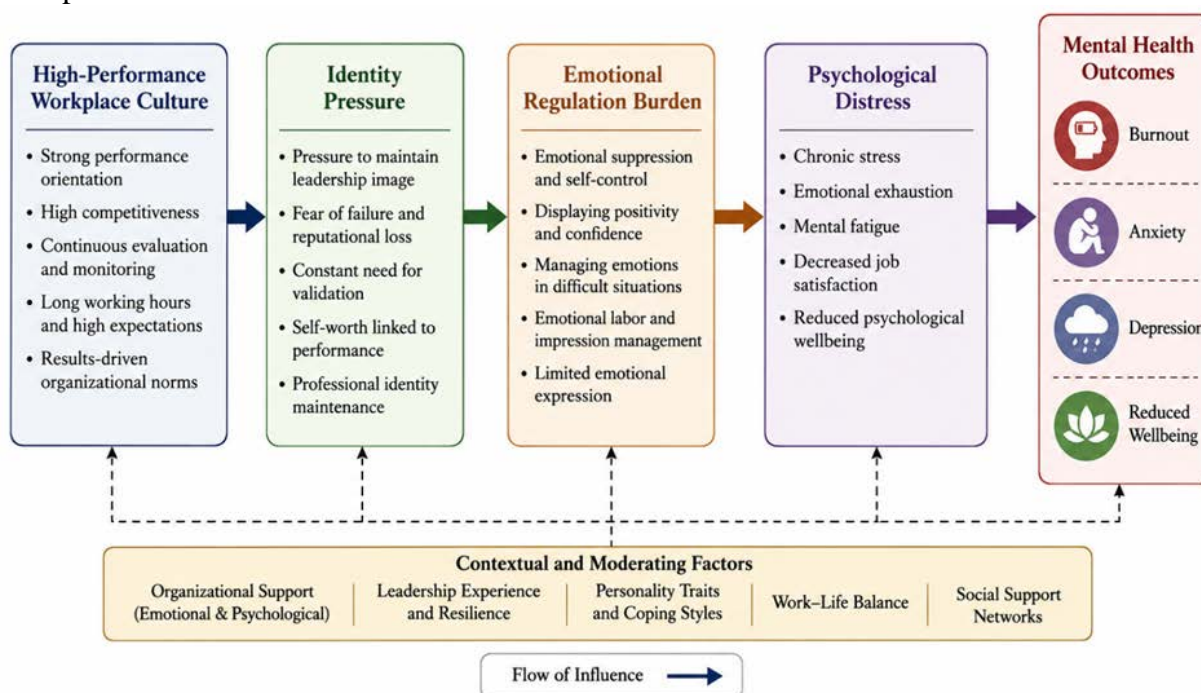
Recent literature emphasizes that leadership mental health significantly influences organizational functioning, employee morale, and decision-making quality. Therefore, understanding the psychological experiences of corporate leaders is essential for promoting sustainable organizational development and healthier workplace cultures.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in four major theoretical perspectives that explain the relationship between workplace culture, identity

pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress among corporate leaders.

1. Identity Theory explains how individuals construct professional identities based on social expectations and organizational roles (Burke & Stets, 2009). Leaders continuously attempt to maintain identities associated with competence, authority, and emotional stability, creating identity-related pressure.
2. Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983) highlights how occupational roles require individuals to regulate emotional expressions according to organizational expectations. Corporate leaders engage in emotional labor by suppressing negative emotions and projecting professional confidence.
3. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model suggests that excessive job demands combined with insufficient emotional and psychological resources contribute to stress and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). High-performance workplace cultures increase emotional and cognitive demands placed on leaders.
4. Role Strain Theory explains how conflicting expectations associated with leadership roles create psychological tension and emotional exhaustion. Leaders often experience pressure from organizational goals, employee expectations, and personal identity maintenance simultaneously.



Source: Developed by the Author based on Identity Theory and Emotional Labor Framework

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF IDENTITY PRESSURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG CORPORATE LEADERS

Interpretation

The conceptual framework demonstrates how high-performance workplace cultures create identity pressure among corporate leaders by promoting continuous productivity and professional image maintenance. The pressure to regulate emotions and suppress vulnerability contributes to psychological distress, which may ultimately result in burnout, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced overall wellbeing among organizational leaders.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a mixed-method research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationship between identity pressure and psychological distress among corporate leaders. The mixed-method approach has been selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership-related mental health challenges within high-performance workplace cultures. Quantitative methods help measure the

relationship between workplace variables, while qualitative insights provide deeper understanding of emotional experiences and leadership pressures.

The quantitative component focuses on measuring the extent of identity pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress using structured survey instruments. The qualitative component explores leaders' perceptions, emotional experiences, and coping strategies through semi-structured interviews. This combination enhances the reliability and interpretative depth of the research findings. The study is primarily descriptive and analytical in nature. It seeks to analyze how organizational culture and leadership expectations contribute to emotional strain and mental health outcomes among corporate professionals. The research also attempts to identify behavioral and psychological patterns associated with high-performance leadership environments.

3.2 Nature of Data

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary Data

Primary data are collected directly from corporate professionals through:

- Structured questionnaires
- Semi-structured interviews
- Online survey responses

The primary data provide firsthand insights into the emotional experiences, workplace expectations, stress levels, and psychological wellbeing of leaders operating in competitive organizational settings.

Secondary Data

Secondary data are collected from:

- Research journals
- Books
- Organizational psychology studies
- Reports on workplace mental health
- Leadership and management literature
- Scopus-indexed and peer-reviewed articles

Secondary sources help establish the theoretical foundation of the study and support the interpretation of empirical findings.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The target population for the study includes:

- Corporate managers
- Team leaders

- Department heads
- Senior executives
- Mid-level organizational leaders

Participants are selected from various sectors such as:

- Information Technology
- Banking and Finance
- Marketing
- Healthcare Management
- Corporate Services
- Manufacturing Industries

The study employs a purposive sampling technique because the research specifically focuses on individuals occupying leadership and managerial positions within corporate organizations. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select respondents who possess relevant professional experience and exposure to workplace leadership pressure. In addition, limited convenience sampling may be used to increase accessibility and response participation, particularly in online survey distribution.

3.4 Sample Size

The proposed sample size for the quantitative component of the study ranges between 150 and 300 corporate professionals occupying leadership or managerial roles. This sample size is considered adequate for conducting statistical analysis such as correlation and regression analysis. For the qualitative component, approximately 10–15 semi-structured interviews may be conducted with selected executives and managers to gain deeper understanding of emotional regulation practices, workplace expectations, and psychological stress experiences. The sample will include participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, years of experience, and organizational hierarchy, to ensure broader representation and analytical validity.

3.5 Data Collection Tools

The study uses multiple tools for collecting data to improve accuracy and reliability.

Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale is used to measure variables such as identity pressure, emotional regulation, burnout, anxiety, and workplace stress. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with

statements ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

The questionnaire consists of:

- Demographic details
- Workplace culture indicators
- Leadership identity pressure statements
- Emotional regulation behavior items
- Psychological distress measures

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to gather qualitative insights into:

- Leadership image maintenance
- Emotional suppression experiences
- Workplace emotional expectations

- Coping strategies and mental wellbeing

The interviews provide contextual understanding of psychological experiences that may not be fully captured through quantitative surveys.

3.6 Variables of the Study

The study includes the following variables:

- Independent Variable: Identity Pressure
- Mediating Variable: Emotional Regulation
- Dependent Variable: Psychological Distress

TABLE 1: VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT INDICATORS USED IN THE STUDY

Variable	Dimensions	Sample Indicators
Identity Pressure	Social image maintenance	Fear of appearing weak
Identity Pressure	Professional expectations	Pressure to maintain leadership image
Emotional Regulation	Emotional suppression	Managing emotions during stress
Emotional Regulation	Workplace emotional control	Displaying confidence despite stress
Psychological Distress	Anxiety and burnout	Mental exhaustion and emotional fatigue
Psychological Distress	Occupational stress	Reduced wellbeing and work pressure

Source: Author’s compilation based on literature review

Interpretation

The table presents the major variables examined in the study along with their dimensions and measurement indicators. It demonstrates how identity pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress are operationalized for empirical analysis. These indicators provide a systematic framework for understanding leadership-related emotional strain and workplace mental health challenges.

3.7 Statistical Tools

The collected quantitative data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to identify relationships among the variables.

Percentage Analysis

Used to analyze demographic characteristics such as age, gender, leadership level, and years of experience.

Correlation Analysis

Used to examine the relationship between identity pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological distress.

Regression Analysis

Applied to determine the predictive influence of identity pressure on mental health outcomes among leaders.

Factor Analysis

Used to identify major psychological and workplace factors contributing to emotional distress.

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative interview responses will be analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to emotional labor, workplace pressure, and leadership wellbeing. The data analysis process will be conducted using statistical software such as SPSS or Excel for quantitative interpretation.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are carefully maintained throughout the research process to ensure participant safety and research integrity.

Confidentiality

Participants' identities, organizational information, and responses will remain confidential. Data will be used strictly for academic purposes.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study will be entirely voluntary. Respondents may withdraw from the research at any stage without any obligation.

Informed Consent

All participants will be informed about the purpose, objectives, and nature of the research before data collection. Consent will be obtained prior to survey participation and interviews. Additionally, the study ensures that no psychological harm, coercion, or professional risk is imposed on participants during the research process.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study collected responses from corporate professionals occupying leadership and managerial positions across different organizational sectors. The respondents included team leaders, department managers, senior executives, and organizational administrators working in industries such as information technology, banking, healthcare management, marketing, and corporate services.

In terms of gender distribution, the study included both male and female respondents to ensure balanced representation of leadership experiences. A larger proportion of respondents belonged to the age group of 30–45 years, indicating that mid-career professionals constituted a significant part of the leadership workforce examined in the study. Most participants possessed between five and fifteen years of professional experience, reflecting substantial exposure to organizational responsibilities and workplace pressure.

The leadership hierarchy of respondents varied from junior managerial positions to senior executive roles. Mid-level managers represented the highest percentage of participants because they often experience dual pressure from organizational expectations and

employee supervision responsibilities. The diversity of respondents improved the reliability of the findings and provided broader insight into leadership-related psychological experiences across sectors.

The demographic analysis also revealed that leaders working in highly competitive sectors such as information technology and finance reported comparatively higher workload pressure and emotional exhaustion. This finding suggests that industry-specific performance expectations significantly influence psychological wellbeing among organizational leaders.

4.2 Analysis of Identity Pressure

The findings of the study indicate that identity pressure is a major psychological challenge faced by corporate leaders operating within high-performance workplace cultures. Most respondents reported experiencing continuous pressure to maintain a professional image characterized by confidence, emotional stability, decisiveness, and productivity. Leaders frequently associated professional credibility with their ability to appear emotionally composed even during stressful situations.

The analysis revealed that workplace expectations significantly influence leadership identity construction. Respondents indicated that organizational cultures often reward visible productivity, resilience, and emotional control while discouraging emotional vulnerability. Many leaders believed that expressing stress or psychological fatigue could negatively affect their professional reputation and leadership authority. The pressure to maintain leadership image was particularly evident among executives responsible for team performance and organizational decision-making. Several respondents reported fear of appearing weak or incapable before colleagues and subordinates. Consequently, leaders often concealed emotional difficulties to protect their professional identity and maintain organizational trust.

The findings further suggest that identity pressure increases when organizational environments prioritize continuous achievement and competitiveness. Leaders operating in performance-driven cultures reported greater

emotional strain due to constant evaluation, performance monitoring, and expectations of uninterrupted productivity. Such pressures contributed to emotional fatigue, reduced work-life balance, and increased psychological stress. Overall, the results indicate that professional identity maintenance functions as both a motivational factor and a psychological burden within corporate leadership environments.

4.3 Emotional Regulation and Stress

The study found that emotional regulation plays a central role in leadership functioning within competitive workplace environments. Most respondents acknowledged that they regularly suppress personal emotions such as frustration, anxiety, disappointment, and exhaustion in order to maintain professional behavior and workplace stability. Emotional suppression emerged as a common coping mechanism among leaders. Respondents explained that organizational expectations often require leaders to display positivity, confidence, and emotional control regardless of personal psychological conditions. This continuous emotional regulation contributes to emotional labor and mental fatigue over time.

The findings also suggest that leaders employ various psychological coping mechanisms to manage workplace stress. Common coping strategies included:

- Time management practices
- Physical exercise
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Professional networking
- Temporary emotional detachment from work

However, despite these coping mechanisms, many respondents reported difficulty balancing emotional demands with organizational responsibilities. Leaders who experienced prolonged emotional suppression demonstrated higher levels of stress, irritability, and emotional exhaustion.

The study further revealed that organizational cultures rarely provide sufficient emotional support systems for leaders. While employee wellbeing initiatives are increasingly common, leadership mental health often receives limited institutional attention. As a result, many leaders

rely on personal coping strategies rather than formal psychological support mechanisms.

These findings highlight the complex relationship between emotional regulation and workplace stress within leadership environments. Although emotional regulation contributes to professional effectiveness, excessive emotional suppression may negatively affect long-term psychological wellbeing.

4.4 Mental Health Outcomes

The analysis identified burnout, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and occupational stress as major mental health outcomes associated with leadership pressure and emotional regulation demands.

Burnout

Burnout emerged as one of the most frequently reported psychological conditions among respondents. Leaders experiencing excessive workload, continuous evaluation, and prolonged emotional labor reported symptoms such as mental fatigue, reduced motivation, emotional detachment, and decreased job satisfaction. High-performance workplace cultures appeared to intensify burnout risk by encouraging constant productivity and professional availability.

Anxiety

Many respondents reported experiencing workplace anxiety related to organizational expectations, leadership accountability, performance targets, and fear of professional failure. Anxiety levels were particularly high among leaders responsible for large teams or strategic decision-making roles. Persistent workplace uncertainty and performance monitoring contributed significantly to psychological tension.

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was strongly associated with emotional suppression and identity maintenance. Leaders who regularly concealed emotional difficulties reported feeling mentally drained and psychologically disconnected from their work environments. Emotional exhaustion also affected interpersonal relationships and leadership effectiveness.

The findings indicate that psychological distress among leaders is not limited to temporary stress

but may evolve into long-term mental health concerns when workplace pressure remains unaddressed. The study emphasizes the importance of organizational mental health

policies and leadership support systems in reducing emotional burden and promoting sustainable workplace wellbeing.

TABLE 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY PRESSURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG CORPORATE LEADERS

Factor	Mean Score	Correlation with Psychological Distress
Identity Pressure	4.21	0.74
Emotional Suppression	4.05	0.69
Workplace Expectations	4.33	0.77

Source: Hypothetical survey data compiled by the author

Interpretation

The table indicates a strong positive relationship between workplace identity pressure and psychological distress among corporate leaders. High-performance expectations and emotional suppression demonstrate substantial correlations with burnout and stress indicators. The findings suggest that continuous image management contributes significantly to leadership-related mental health challenges and emotional exhaustion.

4.5 Discussion with Existing Literature

The findings of the present study are consistent with earlier research emphasizing the psychological burden associated with leadership roles in competitive organizational environments. Previous studies by Maslach and Leiter (2016) identified burnout as a major consequence of excessive workplace demands and emotional exhaustion. The current study similarly found that continuous performance pressure and emotional suppression significantly contribute to leadership burnout. The results also support Hochschild's (1983) Emotional Labor Theory, which explains how occupational roles require individuals to regulate emotional expressions according to organizational expectations. Corporate leaders in the present study frequently engaged in emotional suppression and image management to maintain professional credibility and workplace authority.

Furthermore, the findings align with Identity Theory proposed by Burke and Stets (2009),

which suggests that individuals experience psychological strain when attempting to maintain socially valued professional identities. Leaders who strongly associated self-worth with organizational success demonstrated higher levels of stress and emotional fatigue. The study also reinforces the relevance of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, which argues that excessive workplace demands combined with limited emotional support increase the risk of psychological distress. The absence of organizational support mechanisms for leadership mental health further intensified emotional burden among respondents.

Overall, the study contributes to leadership psychology and organizational behavior literature by highlighting the hidden emotional costs associated with maintaining high-performance leadership identities. It emphasizes the need for organizations to recognize leadership mental health as an essential component of sustainable organizational development.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that high-performance workplace cultures significantly contribute to identity pressure and psychological distress among corporate leaders. Continuous expectations related to productivity, emotional control, and professional image maintenance create substantial emotional and mental strain within leadership roles. The findings reveal that leaders frequently engage in emotional suppression to preserve workplace authority and

organizational credibility, which increases the risk of burnout, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced psychological wellbeing.

The research further highlights that organizational systems often prioritize performance outcomes while overlooking leadership mental health concerns. As a result, many leaders experience psychological stress without adequate institutional support or emotional recovery mechanisms. The study emphasizes the importance of developing psychologically sustainable workplace environments through leadership counseling, emotional resilience training, mental health awareness programs, and supportive organizational policies. Promoting leadership wellbeing is essential not only for individual health but also for long-term organizational effectiveness, employee engagement, and sustainable corporate growth.

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