



U.S. Department of Defense

Factor Rating Interpretation Guide Passive Leadership

What is Passive Leadership?

Passive Leadership measures the perception that leaders avoid decisions, do not respond to problems, fail to follow up, hesitate to act, and are absent when needed. This is also known as *laissez-faire leadership*.^{4,5}

The DEOCS asks participants to rate their unit commander or organization leader and senior enlisted leader on *Passive Leadership*. The following items are used to assess *Passive Leadership* using a five-point response scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*:

- My unit's commander will not take action until negative behaviors become bigger problems.
- My unit's commander does not address problems brought to their attention.
- My unit's senior NCO/SEL will not take action until negative behaviors become bigger problems.
- My unit's senior NCO/SEL does not address problems brought to their attention.

Note: Survey questions may differ depending on whether the organization is a military unit, Military Service Academy, or civilian organization. Please see the sample survey for each population on the Assessment to Solutions web site (<https://www.defenseculture.mil/Assessment-to-Solutions/A2S-Home/>) for exact wording.

Why is it important?

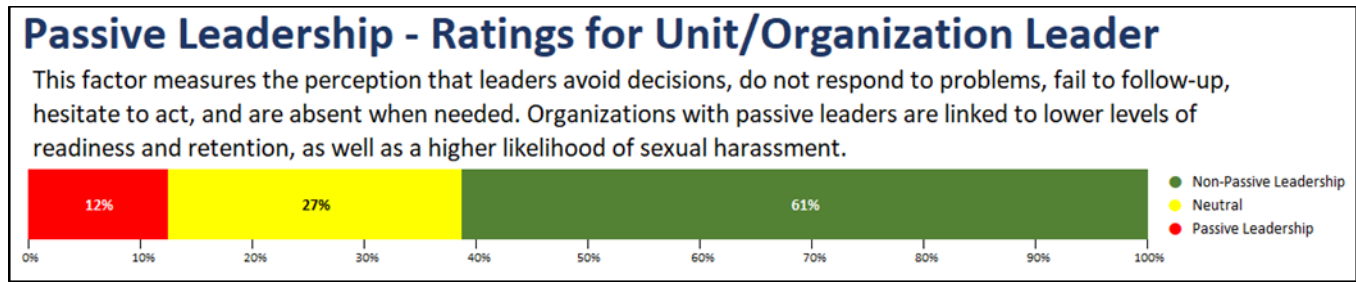
Studies have shown a link between *Passive Leadership* and lower readiness and retention, and higher risk of sexual harassment. For example, *Passive Leadership* has been associated with multiple negative outcomes such as reduced performance, increased burnout, and, ultimately, increased turnover.¹ Similarly, a 2016 study found that firefighters who demonstrate *Passive Leadership* had detrimental impacts on subordinates' perception of safety climate which was correlated with lower safety behaviors, lack of compliance and diminished participation in safety.^{2,3} A study of platoon leaders also found that passive-avoidant leadership was negatively related to platoon performance and negatively impacted group cohesion. The authors concluded that being a passive leader and waiting for problems to arise was counterproductive in terms of enhancing unit performance.⁴ Finally, a survey of full-time working employees in various U.S. organizations found that *Passive Leadership* was positively related to observed workplace hostility, which was positively related to increased incidences of sexual harassment. The authors concluded that leaders who demonstrate a "*Passive Leadership*" style leave subordinates at higher risk for sexual harassment, particularly for female employees who work in a male-dominated organization.⁵

For more information on how to review your DEOCS results with these key outcomes in mind, please see the "Strategic Target Outcome Guide" in the Quick Links menu of the DEOCS dashboard.

How do I read my factor ratings?

The DEOCS dashboard displays results for *Passive Leadership* in a stacked bar graph showing ratings for **Passive Leadership**, **Neutral**, and **Non-Passive Leadership**. If your unit/organization has a senior enlisted leader/senior NCO, you may also see an additional

stacked bar graph with ratings for this individual. Because *Passive Leadership* is a factor that is measured by multiple questions, you should interpret the results as “X% of responses” (not participants). An example is shown below:



Unfavorable rating: 12% of responses indicated the unit/organization leader is a **passive leader**.

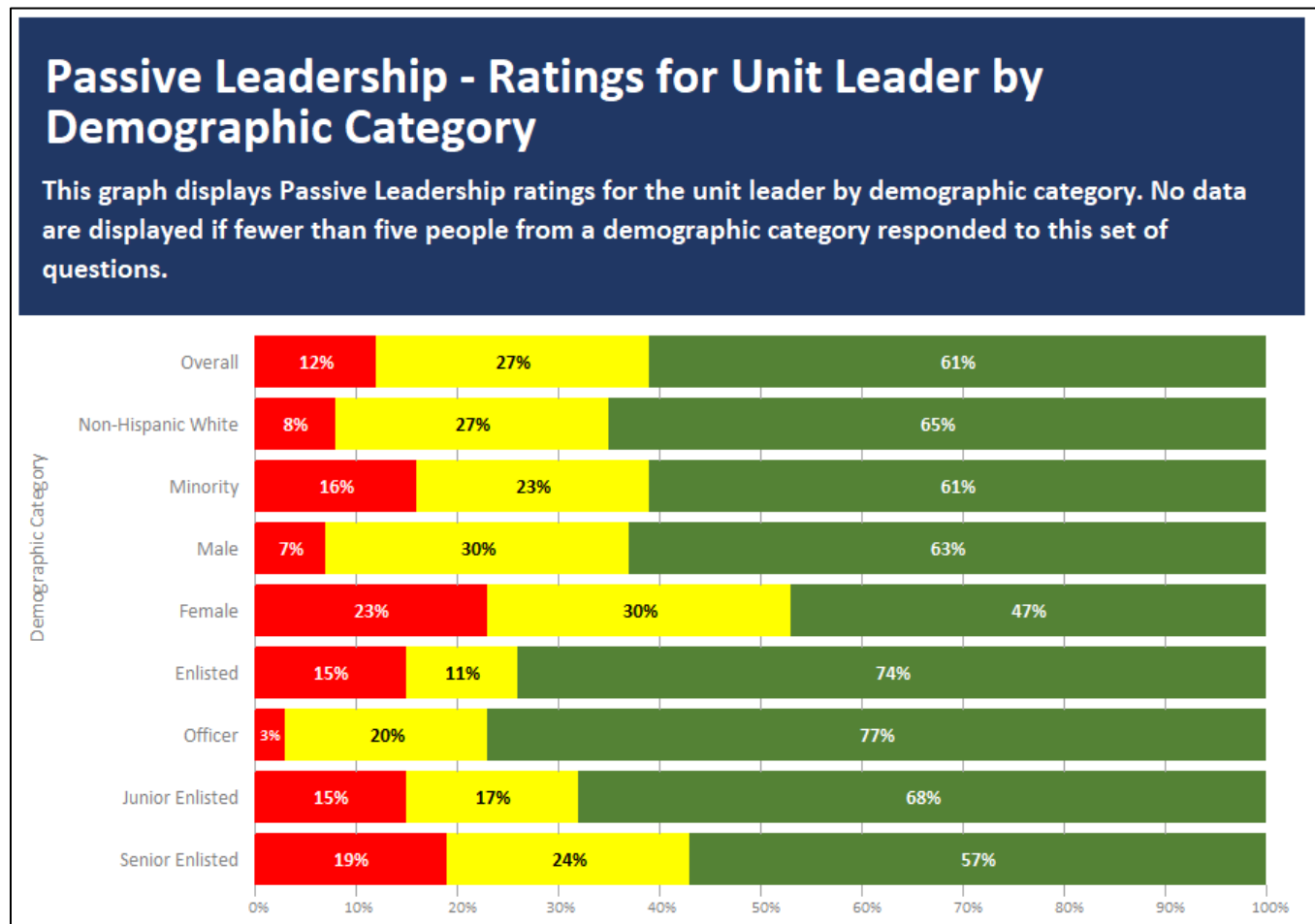


Neutral rating: 27% of responses indicated the unit/organization leader is **neither a passive nor non-passive leader**.



Favorable rating: 61% of responses indicated the unit/organization leader is **not a passive leader**.

For the graph showing results by demographic categories, the percentages represent the percentage of responses from each demographic category that were unfavorable, neutral, or favorable.



The first bar will always show the overall results and will be the same percentages that are shown in the stacked bar graph. The next bars will represent various demographic categories

for your organization. These results can help determine whether some groups of people in your organization have particularly high or low perceptions of climate factors. In addition, you may have different categories than in the example above. If your organization did not have any participants from a particular demographic category or had fewer than five participants from a particular category, you would not see those categories in your graph. For more information on how the demographic groups are created, please see the “Data Overview” in the Quick Links menu of the DEOCS dashboard.

In this example, the unfavorable ratings (marked in red) can be interpreted as:

- 8% of responses from non-Hispanic White participants indicated the unit leader is a passive leader, while 16% of responses from minority participants indicated the unit leader is a passive leader;
- 7% of responses from male participants indicated the unit leader is a passive leader, while 23% of responses from female participants indicated the unit leader is a passive leader;
- 15% of responses from enlisted participants indicated the unit leader is a passive leader, while 3% of responses from officers indicated the unit leader is a passive leader;
- 15% of responses from junior enlisted indicated the unit leader is a passive leader, while 19% of responses from senior enlisted indicated the unit leader is a passive leader.

The neutral ratings (marked in yellow) can be interpreted as:


- 27% of responses from non-Hispanic White participants indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive, while 23% of responses from minority participants indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive;
- 30% of responses from male participants indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive, and 30% of responses from female participants indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive;
- 11% of responses from enlisted participants indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive, while 20% of responses from officers indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive;
- 17% of responses from junior enlisted indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive, while 24% of responses from senior enlisted indicated the unit leader is neither passive nor non-passive.

The favorable ratings (marked in green) can be interpreted as:


- 65% of responses from non-Hispanic White participants indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader, while 61% of responses from minority participants indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader;
- 63% of responses from male participants indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader, and 47% of responses from female participants indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader;
- 74% of responses from enlisted participants indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader, while 77% of responses from officers indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader;
- 68% of responses from junior enlisted indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader, while 57% of responses from senior enlisted indicated the unit leader is not a passive leader.

You may also see trends over time for your *Passive Leadership* unfavorable ratings if there are previous surveys with the same unit identification code (UIC) and the same commander/leader.



When applicable, trends over time are available in the dashboard by clicking on this icon: . They also appear in the PDF reports as a table. Even if your report includes trends over time, the results may not be comparable in certain circumstances. First, the questions used to measure this factor changed from the DEOCS 5.0 to the current version, DEOCS 5.1. There were slight wording changes between versions. Use caution when comparing trends from DEOCS 5.0 to 5.1 for this factor in particular. Second, it is important to understand differences in roster size and roster composition at different time points as these items may also impact comparability of trend results. Take a close look at the number of participants registered, surveys returned, and the response rate for any surveys for which trends are available to report; use caution when comparing trends over time if there are big differences in these numbers between surveys. Other things, such as deployments or changes in policy, may also make trends less comparable. For more information on factor rating trends, please see the “Data Overview” in the Quick Links menu of the DEOCS dashboard.



Finally, you may see an alert  for your *Passive Leadership* ratings for the unit/organization leader and/or the senior enlisted leader. This means that your unfavorable rating for *Passive Leadership* for the specified leader type is **very high** compared to the other unfavorable ratings for this factor from all other units/organizations that completed a DEOCS. When applicable, this alert icon appears in the dashboard inside the “Risk Factors – Unfavorable Ratings” heading; click on the icon to see if *Passive Leadership* for a specified leader type is listed in the table. The alert icon may also appear in the *Passive Leadership* sections of the PDF reports. To identify whether your *Passive Leadership* ratings receive an alert, cut-off scores were created by rank-ordering all unfavorable ratings for this factor. Separate cut-off scores were used for the unit/organization leader and the senior enlisted leader. If your unfavorable rating for *Passive Leadership* for the unit/organization leader and/or the senior enlisted leader is above the cut-off score, this icon will appear in your report. There are unique cut-off scores for each factor. Because of this, you may notice that some of the factors for which you have an alert have very different ratings. For more information on how these alerts are created, please see the “Data Overview” in the Quick Links menu of the DEOCS dashboard.

How are my unit's/organization's ratings created?

Passive Leadership ratings for the Unit/Organization Leader and the Senior NCO/Senior Enlisted Leader are created by combining responses to two questions from a five-point *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* scale, as shown in the example below.

Passive Leadership Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
My unit's commander will not take action until negative behaviors become bigger problems..	6% (5)	6% (5)	27% (21)	37% (29)	23% (18)	100% (78)
My unit's commander does not address problems brought to their attention.	4% (3)	7% (5)	28% (21)	38% (29)	24% (18)	100% (76)
	Non-Passive Leadership		Neutral	Passive Leadership		Total responses 154
	$(5+5+3+5) / 154 =$ 12%		$(21+21) / 154 =$ 27%	$(29+18+29+18) / 154 =$ 61%		

The table above displays the percentage of responses (and number of responses in parentheses) for each question across the five response options (*Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, *Agree*, and *Strongly Agree*). For the first question, five participants selected *Disagree*; this represents 6% of participants that responded to this question ($5 / 78 = .064$ or 6%).

Note that percentages are calculated out of the total number of participants responding to that question and not the total number of participants taking the survey. Participants can skip questions, so you may notice that total responses to questions vary. In the above example, 78 people responded to the first question so all percentages in this row use 78 as the denominator. Only 76 people responded to the second question, so all percentages in this row use 76 as the denominator. In addition, factor ratings may not always add to 100% due to rounding.



- The **favorable** rating, named **Non-Passive Leadership**, is a combination of all responses of *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree* from **both** questions in the *Passive Leadership* scale.
 - For this example, five people strongly disagreed with the first question, while five disagreed. In addition, three people strongly disagreed with the second question and five disagreed. In total, 18 responses were either *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* to these two questions ($5+5+3+5 = 18$).
 - To produce an overall score for **Non-Passive Leadership** representing favorable reactions to these two questions, the total number of responses (18) is divided by the total number of people who responded to both *Passive Leadership* questions. 78 people responded to the first question, and 76 the second, for a total of 154 responses to both questions. **This produces a Non-Passive Leadership rating of 12% ($18 / 154 = .1169$).**
- To create the **Neutral** rating, the same process above is followed, except the

score is created from only one response option. The *Neither Agree nor Disagree* responses are added from both questions.

- For this example, there are 42 *Neither Agree nor Disagree* responses across both questions ($21+21 = 42$). This total is divided by the total number of responses to all of the questions ($42 / 154 = .2727$). **This rounds to a Neutral rating of 27%.**
- To create the **unfavorable** rating, named **Passive Leadership**, the *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* responses are combined.
 - For this example, that is $29+18+29+18 = 94$ total responses of either *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. This total is divided by the total number of responses to all of the questions ($94 / 154 = .610$). **This produces a Passive Leadership rating of 61%.**

How do I know if my factor ratings are good or bad?

The DEOCS team is working on a data-driven approach that will help you understand what a rating means for an organization's likelihood of positive or negative outcomes. In the meantime, we recommend using the following strategies to help put your *Passive Leadership* ratings into context and understand whether actions should be taken to address high unfavorable ratings:

1. If applicable, review the information in the alert icon  to see if your *Passive Leadership* ratings for the unit/organization leader and/or the senior enlisted leader are called out. This icon would appear in the dashboard and in the PDF reports if your unit's/organization's unfavorable rating for *Passive Leadership* for the specified leader type is very high compared to all other units/organizations that completed a DEOCS. You should consider taking action to lower this rating.
2. Look at the Item Summary table on the *Passive Leadership* details page for each leader type to understand which questions may be driving your unfavorable ratings. This factor is created from two questions, so for each leader type, compare the percentage of participants who selected *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* to each question. If there are questions that have a higher percentage of participants who selected *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*, these questions are driving a higher unfavorable rating and could help you pinpoint more specific actions to decrease your unfavorable rating for *Passive Leadership*.
3. Examine the bar graphs showing the overall unfavorable rating for *Passive Leadership* for each leader type and the unfavorable ratings by various demographic groups. Look at each group's rating in relation to the overall unit/organization rating. If any groups have particularly high unfavorable ratings for *Passive Leadership*, this could help you plan actions to decrease your unfavorable rating in specific areas of your organization.
4. If applicable, review your *Passive Leadership* unfavorable rating trends over time for each leader type. You can view these trends by clicking on this icon  in the dashboard; they also appear as a table in the PDF reports. Take note if your ratings are going up over time. You may need to take action to reverse this trend.

Scientific Research References on Passive Leadership

1. Fosse, T. H., Skogstad, A., Einarsen, S. V., & Martinussen, M. (2019). Active and

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2. Smith, T. D., Eldridge, F., & DeJoy, D. M. (2016). Safety-specific transformational and passive leadership influences on firefighter safety climate perceptions and safety behavior outcomes. *Safety Science*, 86, 92–97.
3. Kelloway, E. K., Mullen, J., & Francis, L. (2006). Divergent effects of transformational and passive leadership on employee safety. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 11(1), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.11.1.76>
4. Bass, B.M., Avolio, B.J., Jung, D.I., & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(2), 207-218.
5. Lee, J. (2018). Passive leadership and sexual harassment: Roles of observed hostility and workplace gender ratio. *Personnel Review*, 47(3), 594–612.