Qualitative Analysis of ModernThink top 10 and bottom 10 items

Top 10 Institutional Strengths

1. I understand how my job contributes to this institution's mission - 90% favorable / 3% unfavorable.

The comments strongly reinforce this result. Employees across employment categories frequently describe their work in terms of its impact on students, whether through teaching, advising, direct service, administrative support, or creating the conditions that allow others to serve students successfully. Faculty particularly describe teaching, mentoring, research, and helping students develop professionally as meaningful contributions. Employees also reference Missouri State's public affairs mission and its role in providing an accessible education and serving the region. Even respondents who express substantial concerns elsewhere often remain strongly committed to students and the educational mission. The qualitative responses therefore suggest that connection to mission is a durable institutional strength and, for many employees, an important reason they remain committed to Missouri State.

Sample comments:

- “I appreciate my role and the effect it has on students.”
- “The people and our shared mission of helping students.”
- “Working with colleagues who care about achieving the teaching mission of the university.”
- “Being able to make a difference in the lives of students.”
- “The public affairs mission also reflects our commitment and shared goal towards community engagement and global citizenship development. I can also see myself and my work reflected in the mission.”

2. In my department, we welcome people of all backgrounds - 90% favorable / 4% unfavorable.

Open-ended comments generally support a positive experience within employees' immediate work environments. Respondents frequently describe departments and teams as welcoming, supportive, collegial, friendly, and even family-like. Some specifically value inclusion and belonging, while others describe environments in which they feel accepted and able to collaborate with people across different roles and backgrounds. At the same time, comments concerning inclusion at the broader institutional level are more mixed, particularly where respondents discuss institutional decisions or changing priorities. The distinction is important: employees appear especially positive about belonging and inclusion within their immediate departments and relationships, which may help explain why this department-level item is among the institution's highest-rated measures.

Sample comments:

- “I feel accepted at Missouri State, and I feel like my Department and College give me moral support and want me to be here.”
- “My current department is more welcoming and has a close family unit feel to it.”
- “The staff culture at MSU is very welcoming as a whole.”
- “The inclusion and belonging of the big work family.”
- “The various opportunities to further my own education and experiences as a staff member. There is a welcoming spirit for all.”

3. This institution actively contributes to the community - 82% favorable / 4% unfavorable.

Employees frequently express pride in Missouri State's role in Springfield, the region, and the communities it serves. Comments reference the public affairs mission, community partnerships, outreach, relationships with schools and other organizations, and the university's broader regional reputation. Faculty comments in particular connect community engagement with teaching and professional expertise, describing opportunities to take their work beyond the classroom. Other employees describe representing the university in the community as a source of pride. The comments suggest that Missouri State's identity as a public-serving institution is meaningful to employees and contributes positively to how they view the university.

Sample Comments:

- “I appreciate the opportunity to give back to the Springfield community.”
- “I appreciate the public affairs mission that affords the support and incentive for faculty to take their expertise out of the classroom or lab into the community.”
- “I love our public affairs mission and our desire to be a community-anchored institution. I love our emphasis on student success.”
- “The emphasis on community engagement makes my role feel more purposeful above and beyond being able to teach students.”
- “I appreciate working for an institution that is focused on serving students, the community and the greater region. I feel like I'm part of something bigger and more meaningful than meeting some never-ending bottom line. I can see the impact that my work has in my community. I work with people who care deeply about the people we serve and the people we work with. I have the chance to contribute to big conversations that affect the institution, my community, my state and my country.

4. The work I do is meaningful to me - 81% favorable / 4% unfavorable.

Meaningful work is one of the clearest themes in the comments. Employees repeatedly discuss satisfaction from helping students, teaching, mentoring, solving problems, supporting colleagues, improving university operations, or contributing to the institution's mission. Many comments that are otherwise critical still begin or end by emphasizing how much the respondent values their work, students, or colleagues. This is particularly notable because it suggests employees can simultaneously be dissatisfied with aspects of their employment while remaining deeply invested in the substance of what they do. The

work itself, and especially its impact on students, is a significant source of employee engagement.

Sample comments:

- “My job has meaning to me.”
- “The culture and work is rewarding, and meaningful.”
- “Meaningful work with great benefits.”
- “The work I do is meaningful.”
- “The opportunity to do meaningful work as part of a high-energy team.”

5. My supervisor/department chair supports my efforts to balance my work and personal life - 79% favorable / 11% unfavorable.

Flexibility is among the most frequently mentioned positive aspects of working at Missouri State. Employees appreciate flexible schedules, leave, autonomy over how work is completed, and, where available, remote or hybrid arrangements. Several comments specifically credit supervisors for making flexibility possible or describe supervisors responding compassionately to personal or family circumstances. There are exceptions, and flexibility is not experienced consistently across all positions, but the overall qualitative picture supports the quantitative result. Immediate supervisors appear to play an especially important role in employees' ability to achieve work-life balance and, consequently, in their overall job satisfaction.

Sample comments:

- “The people you work with and also the Work Life balance.”
- “My current department is great with promoting worklife balance, as well as asking for input and implementing the input given to the department.”
- “The leadership in my department and their focus on balancing work and life for their employees.”
- “The flexibility my department gives me to take a day or multiple days off with little to no warning.”
- “My supervisors have always been very good at offering different options for working in times when I have been dealing with crises or family events.”

6. I am given the responsibility and freedom to do my job - 79% favorable / 7% unfavorable.

Autonomy emerges repeatedly as something employees value. Faculty discuss freedom in teaching, research, scheduling, and professional pursuits, while staff and administrators describe being trusted to make decisions, solve problems, and manage their responsibilities without excessive micromanagement. Some respondents explicitly identify the absence of micromanagement as one of the things they appreciate most about working at Missouri State. Employees also connect autonomy with professional growth and engagement. The comments suggest that trust and flexibility at the departmental or supervisory level are important components of the positive employee experience.

Sample comments:

- “Ability to do your job without being micromanaged.”
- “Freedom to make my own decisions.”
- “I appreciate being able to do my job freely.”
- “There is freedom and trust for me to do my job without micromanagement.”
- “Flexibility is key! I very much appreciate the flexibility I have in my work. The people I work with make my day-to-day enjoyable.”

7. At work, I know where to go for help with my mental or emotional well-being - 76% favorable / 11% unfavorable.

The open-ended responses provide less direct evidence for this specific item than for several of the other Top 10 measures, so this finding should primarily be interpreted through the quantitative result. Where well-being does appear in comments, employees mention health and wellness opportunities, benefits, leave, supportive colleagues, and compassionate supervisors as positive aspects of employment. More broadly, comments suggest that employees often view their immediate supervisor and coworkers as important sources of support. The comments are consistent with an environment in which support resources and interpersonal support are valued, although they do not provide enough evidence to identify a particular resource or program as the primary driver of this result.

Sample comments:

- “I appreciate that my supervisors genuinely care about my mental health.”
- “MSU has so much to offer staff and faculty including recreation sports, entertainment Broadway shows, quality medical care womens clinic, networking opportunities, discounted mental health counseling CCCC, employee wellness programs, and more!”
- “The outstanding wellness programs, especially yoga offerings.”
- “The benefits to me, are VERY good and reasonably priced. I feel like many people support staff and faculty when they are dealing with sickness and go out of their way to offer help and ensure everyone knows what resources are available.”
- “I feel very supported by my direct supervisor and team. We care about each other as people, not just employees.”

8. This institution's benefits meet my needs - 75% favorable / 8% unfavorable.

Benefits are one of the most frequently identified tangible advantages of working at Missouri State. Employees mention health insurance, retirement, tuition benefits, vacation and sick leave, wellness opportunities, and other employment benefits positively. Importantly, respondents frequently contrast benefits with salary: an employee may describe the benefits as good while immediately noting that compensation is inadequate. This helps explain the substantial difference between this Top 10 item and the fair-pay item at the very bottom of the results. Employees generally view the overall benefits package as a strength, but benefits are not perceived as compensating fully for concerns about salary.

Sample comments:

- “Our benefits are outstanding!! I love coming to work everyday.”

- “The benefits and wellness programs are quite good and can add dramatically to the retention and longevity of staff and faculty.”
- “The tuition waiver, earned time off and healthcare are all incredible benefits.”
- “The benefits package is wonderful compared to corporate entities.”
- “2 weeks off over winter break. Generous vacation/sick time. Access to the health clinic, health and wellness programs for staff, campus dining options. Beautiful grounds.”

9. My supervisor/department chair shows genuine interest in my well-being - 75% favorable / 11% unfavorable.

The comments provide substantial evidence of positive relationships with immediate supervisors. Respondents describe supervisors as supportive, compassionate, communicative, flexible, trusting, and personally invested in their employees. Some explicitly attribute their job satisfaction to their supervisor, while others describe departmental leadership as one of the best aspects of their employment. Negative supervisory experiences certainly appear as well, but they are not the dominant qualitative theme. As with work-life balance, the immediate supervisor appears to be a significant positive influence on employee experience and can substantially shape how employees experience the institution.

Sample comments:

- “My supervisor has honestly had the biggest impact on my job satisfaction.”
- “I have a great supervisor.”
- “My direct supervisor is a wonderful mentor and encourages collaboration and growth.”
- “I feel very supported by my direct supervisor and team. We care about each other as people, not just employees.”
- “I have a kind supervisor. The people who are in my reporting chain do good work.”

10. At this institution, we value people of all backgrounds - 74% favorable / 8% unfavorable.

Employees frequently describe Missouri State and their colleagues as welcoming, friendly, and inclusive, and some explicitly identify diversity, inclusion, or belonging as aspects they value. However, the comments are somewhat more mixed when the discussion moves from departmental climate to the institution as a whole. Some respondents express concern about whether institutional actions and priorities consistently reflect values of inclusion. That distinction may help explain the difference between the 90% favorable department-level item and the 74% favorable institution-level item. Overall, the comments support inclusion as an institutional strength while suggesting employees experience it most consistently through their immediate workplace relationships.

Sample comments:

- “Missouri State University has a significant number of employees who genuinely care about their students. Overall, the campus is friendly and welcoming to all students, faculty and staff.”

- “There are also people from different backgrounds studying and working at the institution, reflecting an appreciation for difference.”
- “The friends and relationships across campus with people of all ages and backgrounds and ethnicity.”
- “The benefits are beyond appreciated in many ways, health, mental, personal etc,. I have a wonderful Director and supervisor. They are extremely understanding with needed time off, illness or anything else. Diversity is valued in our department and inclusion.”
- “Missouri State University is a special place for students, staff, and faculty. We have a culture of care, respect, and kindness.”

Bottom 10 Opportunities for Attention

1. I am paid fairly for my work - 28% favorable / 47% unfavorable.

Compensation is the clearest and most pervasive concern in the open-ended responses and strongly reinforces this result. Employees across categories describe salaries as below market, insufficient relative to workload and responsibilities, or failing to keep pace with inflation and the cost of living. Respondents discuss compression, inequities between new and long-serving employees, differences across positions or units, and frustration when responsibilities increase without corresponding compensation. Some explicitly contrast Missouri State's strong benefits, flexibility, colleagues, and mission with inadequate pay. Compensation therefore appears to be both a stand-alone concern and a lens through which employees evaluate whether their contributions are valued by the institution.

Sample comments:

- “Higher wages, especially for the staff in facilities, would be helpful as these employees work odd hours, frequently get called in even when the university is closed since they are considered essential employees, and have the dirtiest jobs.”
- “What workers make at the university is much less than what they would make as a worker for a privately owned company doing the same job.”
- “I am very much underpaid for my education level and expertise as compared to similar positions in industry.”
- “The unequal amount of PTO for lower level staff than upper level staff continues to breed feelings of inequality.”
- “Wages have stagnated and it seems like my salary has stalled…while I love working here, I have to make more money soon or I will not make it.”

2. Promotions in my department are based on a person's performance - 42% favorable / 35% unfavorable.

The comments suggest broader concerns about advancement, career pathways, and whether increased responsibility or strong performance leads to meaningful professional or financial progression. Employees describe limited opportunities to advance, inconsistent approaches across units, and situations in which additional duties do not result in changes in title or compensation. There are also comments suggesting that relationships, organizational structures, or available resources can matter as much as individual performance. However, the open-ended responses do not consistently

distinguish formal promotion processes from broader concerns about career growth. The qualitative evidence therefore supports a concern about perceived opportunities and fairness in advancement more strongly than it identifies one specific problem with the promotion process itself.

Sample comments:

- "I dont see many opportunities for growth at Missouri State beyond applying for different jobs within the university."
- "Ideally, I would like to stay in my office while still having opportunities for growth and being rewarded for hard work."
- "Ability to be promoted based on merit, in practice, not just in theory."
- "More opportunities for staff to promote into positions they are qualified for based on work history and experience."
- "My area lacks promotional opportunities. There should be a better internal promotion structure."

3. Issues of low performance are addressed in my department - 40% favorable / 32% unfavorable.

Accountability appears in comments as frustration about uneven workloads and perceptions that dependable or high-performing employees are sometimes expected to absorb additional work when others do not perform adequately. Some employees describe consequences for poor performance as inconsistent or believe that longstanding performance issues remain unresolved. This can contribute to workload concerns and perceptions of inequity, particularly among employees who feel additional responsibilities repeatedly fall to the same people. At the same time, comments do not provide enough information to determine how widespread individual performance-management problems actually are. The recurring perception is nevertheless that employees want greater consistency in accountability and do not want strong performers to bear the consequences of unresolved performance issues elsewhere.

Sample comments:

- "Hold everyone accountable for work performance."
- "Holding people to actual standards."
- "There is a noticeable disparity in performance expectations."
- "A significant portion of staff consistently go above and beyond in their roles however, a small percentage routinely perform at a minimum level, and this does not appear to be addressed."
- "We need more accountability for supervisors and directors."

4. There's a sense that we're all on the same team at this institution - 38% favorable / 31% unfavorable.

This item illustrates one of the most interesting contrasts in the qualitative data. Employees frequently describe their own team or department as collegial, collaborative, supportive, and close-knit, while institution-level comments refer to silos, competition, uneven treatment among units, and disconnects among different parts of the university. Some

employees describe strong cross-campus relationships, so the experience is not universally negative, but the comments suggest that the sense of "team" is often stronger locally than institutionally. Missouri State appears to have many strong teams; the challenge reflected in the comments is creating the same sense of shared purpose across organizational boundaries.

Sample comments:

- “If everyone would work to together no matter if faculty or staff or higher up.”
- “Less departmental division silo thinking territorial protection, and political positioning.”
- “Less silos…the university is working on it and our primary mission vision is clear, but sometimes money energy are not evenly distributed amongst all parts of the university.”
- “More centralized processing. Everyone is in their own silos too much.”
- “To have a work place culture shift to the rest of the institution. Our department is amazing and supportive, but the institution as a whole is very siloed, self-serving, and out of touch.”

5. Senior leadership provides a clear direction for this institution's future - 39% favorable / 30% unfavorable.

Comments concerning senior leadership frequently focus on uncertainty about institutional direction, changing priorities, organizational changes, and whether employees understand the rationale behind major decisions. Some respondents express optimism about change or recognize the difficult environment facing higher education, but others describe uncertainty about where the institution is headed or concern that priorities have shifted away from areas they consider central to Missouri State's mission. Leadership transitions and organizational changes appear to contribute to this uncertainty. The qualitative responses suggest employees are looking not simply for a strategic plan, but for a clearer connection between institutional decisions, stated priorities, and a coherent long-term direction.

Sample comments:

- “We need leadership at the top that communicates about things that matter.”
- “Senior leadership does not show vision on where we should go as institution and how we will get there.”
- “More cohesiveness across the campus - sometimes it feels like we are not always on the same page or playing from the same playbook.”
- “I feel at times that the goal or focus set be leadership is not very clear.”
- “There is no vision for where we are going and how each and every member of the unit contributes to that destination.”

6. Senior leadership communicates openly about important matters - 40% favorable / 29% unfavorable.

Communication and transparency are recurring themes in suggestions for making Missouri State a better place to work. Employees want earlier communication about significant decisions, clearer explanations of why decisions are being made, and greater transparency around institutional priorities, budgeting, organizational changes, and processes that

affect their work. Some comments indicate that employees feel they learn about decisions after they have largely been made or do not understand how input influenced an outcome. Others acknowledge that communication has improved or praise communication within their own units. The overall theme is that employees are asking for communication that provides context and rationale, not simply more messages.

Sample comments:

- "There is very little if any communication that occurs, so most of the information we stumble upon often feels like rumor."
- "I really appreciate transparency, even when it comes to difficult topics."
- "More communication from the higher ups before and during the process of changes that affect everyone or the specific departments."
- "More communication from the top down. It is sometimes difficult to discern what the University priorities are."
- "Open communication and fair treatment of all - not just the senior faculty and administrators."

7. Our recognition and awards programs are meaningful to me - 44% favorable / 29% unfavorable.

The comments indicate that employees value appreciation and recognition, but they often describe meaningful recognition in interpersonal rather than formal terms, being thanked by a supervisor, respected by colleagues, trusted with responsibility, compensated appropriately, or having their work acknowledged. Some responses suggest that formal recognition can feel less meaningful when employees have simultaneous concerns about compensation, workload, advancement, or whether contributions are valued in everyday decision-making. The qualitative evidence does not point to one particular awards program as problematic. Rather, it suggests that employees may define meaningful recognition more broadly than formal awards, with day-to-day appreciation, equitable treatment, and tangible acknowledgment carrying considerable weight.

Sample comments:

- "Invest in your people instead of recognition for higher ups and athletics."
- "If they showed appreciation to all staff including custodial…"
- "The university assumes that being presented to the rest of staff every 5 years and a popularity award is enough to actually show appreciation for our work."
- "More appreciation, compensation, and opportunities for non-tenure track faculty."
- "This institution could be a better place to work by offering competitive pay, clear advancement opportunities, regular recognition for employees efforts and genuine care and support from senior leadership and HR."

8. There is appropriate recognition of innovative and high-quality teaching - 48% favorable / 29% unfavorable, faculty only.

Faculty comments demonstrate considerable pride in teaching and in their relationships with students, and many identify teaching as one of the most meaningful parts of their work. At the same time, some faculty perceive tension between the institution's teaching

mission and other expectations or priorities, particularly research, service, enrollment pressures, and workload. Comments also suggest that high-quality teaching involves significant effort that may not always be visible or rewarded proportionately. The open-ended responses provide stronger evidence of faculty's commitment to teaching and concern about how teaching fits among competing expectations than they do about any particular teaching-recognition program.

Sample comments:

- "It is a delicate balance of research v. teaching but lately it seems more emphasis is being placed on research to the detriment of teaching."
- "At the end of the day, were a teaching university and our promotion and tenure policies should reflect that."
- "Lack of recognition and support for non-tenure track faculty."
- "There is a great deal of extra effort to support students outside of the classroom that does not get fairly compensated."
- "More recognition and promotion opportunities for instructors."

9. There is a good balance of teaching, service and research at this institution - 54% favorable / 29% unfavorable, faculty only.

This is an especially important example of why "Bottom 10" should not be equated with a negative result: a majority of faculty responded favorably. The comments themselves are similarly mixed. Some faculty explicitly praise the balance among teaching, research, and service and value having opportunities to pursue all three. Others describe workload pressures, increasing expectations, service demands, or difficulty protecting sufficient time for research and teaching. Experiences appear to vary considerably by department, discipline, role, and individual workload. The qualitative data therefore suggest that the institutional model works well for many faculty but is not experienced consistently, making this more nuanced than a straightforward area of dissatisfaction.

Sample comments:

- "The work I do inside the classroom, with students, and in my own research is what keeps me going."
- "We also need to be able to balance out service, teaching, and research better."
- "It feels like there is tons of service requirements and we almost never have time to do the research."
- "Reducing the teaching load to allow more time for scholarship."
- "Leadership needs to recognize that the true magic of the university is in the interactions between students and faculty."

10. Senior leadership shows genuine interest in the well-being of faculty, administrators and staff - 43% favorable / 28% unfavorable.

This result provides perhaps the clearest contrast with the Top 10 supervisor item: 75% say their immediate supervisor shows genuine interest in their well-being, compared with 43% saying the same of senior leadership. Open-ended comments reinforce that distinction. Employees frequently describe caring and supportive supervisors, coworkers, chairs,

directors, and departments while expressing greater distance or skepticism toward senior-level decision-making. Concerns about compensation, workload, staffing, organizational change, communication, and how decisions affect employees can become interpreted as evidence of whether leadership values employee well-being. The issue therefore appears to extend beyond wellness programs themselves. For some employees, institutional decisions and the way those decisions are communicated are important signals of whether senior leadership understands and values their experience.

Sample comments:

- "I often feel like administration and more senior colleagues are less interested in supporting and developing faculty and staff than in wringing out maximum effort from those who work for them."
- "Upper administration is very out of touch with the daily operations of the areas they supervise and ask for more work with less people, rewards, recognition, and no way to advocate to raises, promotions, or any kind of benefit."
- "Treat staff, faculty, and students all as the number 1 citizen group."
- "Making staff feel more appreciated. We are are underpaid and overworked as there are job lines eliminated or frozen but the work gets put on other peoples workloads for no additional compensation."
- "This institution could be a better place to work by offering competitive pay, clear advancement opportunities, regular recognition for employees efforts and genuine care and support from senior leadership and HR."