

The Mediating Role of Organizational Belonging in the Effect of Hospital Food on Employee Motivation

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the effect of public and private healthcare professionals' perceptions of hospital food on their motivation and to identify the mediating effect of organizational belonging in this relationship. The sample of the study consists of 503 public and private healthcare professionals reached through simple random sampling. The study first examined the literature and the relationships among the variables; subsequently, normality, validity and reliability tests were carried out to assess the suitability of the collected data for analysis. A correlation test was then conducted through the SPSS program to examine the relationships among the variables, and structural equation modeling was performed through the AMOS program to test the research hypotheses. When the analyses conducted within the scope of the research are examined, it has been determined that healthcare professionals' perception of hospital food has a significant positive ef-

fect on employee motivation, that hospital food has a significant positive effect on organizational belonging, and that organizational belonging has a significant positive effect on employee motivation. The results of the structural equation modeling carried out for the primary aim of the research revealed that organizational belonging mediates the relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation; however, it has been seen that this mediating effect is "partial." The partial mediating effect of organizational belonging demonstrates that it indirectly increases healthcare professionals' perception of hospital food and their motivation and serves as a catalyst within this dual process.

Keywords: Hospital, Food, Motivation, Organizational Belonging, Structural Equation Modeling.

JEL Codes: D23, I11, M54

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1. Introduction

Health complexes, by virtue of their structure, are among the leading organizations that involve dynamic processes and that, owing to the nature of the service they provide, must be managed through strategic processes in which human resources are of the utmost importance. The high level of labor, productivity and focus of healthcare professionals directly shapes the quality of the health services provided as well as patient and public health. It is therefore possible to mention that the identification and development of the factors shaping the motivation of the individuals who carry out workflow processes in the working environment constitute a current field of research in the management, health, gastronomy and organizational behavior literature. Employee motivation involves not only macro factors such as financial, material and career opportunities but also micro factors such as the order, quality and comfort of the working environment (Yanık & Yılmaz, 2011). At this point, the food services that support healthcare professionals and help sustain their energy throughout the day are assumed to be one of the most concrete examples of these micro factors.

The quality, variety and hygiene of the food services offered in health complexes are among the leading factors that make the individual carrying out workflow processes feel valued. The increase in the motivation level of an employee who receives quality food services also develops, over time, their commitment and belonging to their institution. As a concept, organizational belonging is the employee's internalization of the aims and goals of the organization and their perception of themselves as a part of that group (Dönmez & Çılgınoğlu, 2022). In this context, alongside the direct effects of hospital food on employee motivation, the bridging role assumed by organizational belonging in the background of this relationship will make an in-depth contribution to the health management, organizational behavior and gastronomy literature and to this multidisciplinary field of study.

Proceeding from this, the following research questions will be addressed within the scope of the study:

- (1) Does the perception of hospital food affect employee motivation?
- (2) Does the perception of hospital food affect organizational belonging?
- (3) Does organizational belonging affect employee motivation?
- (4) Is there a mediating effect of organizational belonging in the relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation?

In the first section of the study, the relevant literature concerning the concepts of the perception of hospital food, employee motivation and organizational belonging examined within the scope of the re-

search has been reviewed. In addition, the theoretical background concerning the relationships among the research variables has been examined, and the research hypotheses have been formulated in this context.

The second section of the study presents information such as the method preferred in the research, the research model, why and how the sample group was selected, the scales used to collect data, and the demographic outputs of the participants.

The third section of the study presents the findings and interpretations concerning the analysis of the data set obtained from the participants. In this context, skewness, kurtosis, mean and standard deviation values are given in order to determine whether the collected data conform to a normal distribution. Cronbach's Alpha, KMO, Bartlett's test of sphericity and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results are given in order to test the reliability and validity of the scales used in the research. In the final part of the third section, path analysis results are presented for the testing of the hypotheses established within the scope of the research, and the acceptance/rejection results of the hypotheses are given.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. The Concepts of Perception of Hospital Food, Employee Motivation and Organizational Belonging

2.1.1. The relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation

In today's management approach, which may be characterized as postmodern, motivation comes at the forefront of the fundamental factors affecting the productivity and performance level of human resources. In the health sector, which contains factors such as high labor, intense work tempo, uncertainties and stress, making motivation sustainable is a very important point for both individual and public health. When the motivation processes of healthcare professionals are examined today, it is understood that not only traditional approaches such as wages, promotions and rewards but also elements that strengthen and support the workflow processes and the working environment have a determining effect. Specific to the health sector, one of these strengthening and supporting elements is the food services offered within the hospital.

Hospital food constitutes one of the most important sources of motivation and energy for healthcare professionals in the work environment. Indeed, a study in the literature has determined that a connection exists between the satisfaction healthcare workers

derive from staff food services and their perceptions of and motivational approaches toward the institution (Dönmez & Çılgınoğlu, 2022, p. 1472). It has similarly been observed that, in health complexes procuring food services through outsourcing, the staff's perception of food services is associated with their perception of comfort and motivation in the working environment (Yanık & Yılmaz, 2011, p. 132).

The attitude of healthcare professionals toward the food services offered in the hospital environment directly affects their performance levels. When the employees' perception of the food services and the surrounding environment offered in the hospital setting is examined systematically in the literature, it is revealed that the quality of the food offered and the physical conditions of the dining environment represent a transformative power over employees' motivation, work quality, job satisfaction and institutional perceptions (McSweeney et al., 2025, p. 14). Proceeding from this, the correct analysis of phenomena such as taste, hygiene, atmosphere, food variety and service quality, which constitute the quality of food services in health complexes, involves a strategic process for the sake of managing the motivation processes of healthcare professionals (Akbaş, 2019, p. 78).

When the food-and-beverage and gastronomy literature is examined in addition to the health and organizational behavior literature, it is seen that studies support the motivational effect of presentation and service standards on the individual. Research on the motivation of kitchen staff in open-kitchen-concept gastronomy enterprises shows that a transparent working environment directly increases intrinsic motivation (Mutlu & Seçim, 2025, p. 1715). Addressing the motivational processes of consumers or human resources regarding food processes constitutes a basis for determining how individuals' level of happiness and satisfaction with the service offered to them shapes their perceptions of work processes and their institutions (Semerci & Akbaba, 2018, p. 48).

The food services offered in health complexes are not merely an operational continuity process but also a strategic output reflecting institutional quality and sustainability. The food services offered in complexes assume a critical role in the quality of the food, hygiene standards and the prevention of malnutrition (Akbulut & Yılmaz, 2016, p. 35). In light of all these data, it is possible to mention that the perception of the food services offered in health complexes is a phenomenon that regulates and activates the motivation sources of healthcare professionals. In light of this literature, the first hypothesis of the research has been formulated:

H1: A favorable perception of hospital food has a positive effect on employee motivation.

2.1.2. The relationship between the perception of hospital food and organizational belonging

In today's working life, there are many environmental factors that determine the levels of organizational outcomes such as organizational identification, workplace happiness, organizational commitment, belonging and loyalty of the individuals who carry out workflow processes. Organizational belonging, one of these, enables employees to see themselves as an important member and part of the institution or organization in which they are located; the formation and shaping of this feeling is directly related to the quality of the supportive material and moral services offered in the workflow processes and the workplace environment. When the relationships among service quality, satisfaction, contentment and commitment mechanisms specific to the health sector are examined, it is seen that service quality is directly related to the individual's belonging and commitment to their institution. In this context, the quality of the food service offered to healthcare professionals in health complexes is regarded as a "value" given to employees by the institution and is envisaged as a strategic approach that strengthens institutional bonds (Özeltürkay & Orel, 2016, p. 62).

The food service offered in health complexes and the positive approach of the individuals who sustain workflow processes toward these services constitute a fundamental step in the construction of a sense of belonging by increasing satisfaction and contentment in the working environment. Studies in the literature (Yanık & Yılmaz, 2011; Dönmez & Çılgınoğlu, 2022) show that the food services offered in the hospital environment are directly related to organizational belonging. One of the most important dimensions through which a positive perception of hospital food increases organizational belonging is the social integration, community and social networks that mealtimes bring with them. The communal eating together of all healthcare professionals in the hospital environment (physicians, nurses, technical units, administrative units, cleaning service units, etc.) builds an "institutional community" and an "organizational culture" (Masood et al., 2026, p. 8). While the phenomenon of eating together strengthens the social interaction and capital among individuals within the organization, it also allows for the presence of a collective sense of belonging to the institution. As a result, the "togetherness-bringing" state of hospital food is a critical managerial leverage that constitutes healthcare professionals' adoption of their institution and their organizational commitment.

Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the research has been formulated:

H2: A favorable perception of hospital food has a positive effect on organizational belonging.

2.1.3. The relationship between organizational belonging and employee motivation

In today's employee-management approach, the phenomenon of motivation has become an inseparable part of organizational belonging (Tanrıverdi & Oktay, 2001). In the relevant literature, belonging and motivation come at the forefront of the strategic concepts that affect the performance of individuals carrying out workflow processes through their perceptions of their work. The concept of organizational belonging can be defined as the individual's psychological internalization of the organization or community in which they are located; motivation, in turn, can be defined as the driving force that transforms this belonging into action. Research shows that individuals' belonging to the organization in which they are located positively affects their motivation (Demir, 2019; Basır, 2025).

The sustainability of the phenomenon of organizational belonging involves a dynamic process management that activates the motivation processes of the individuals operating in the organization. In the health sector, organizational belonging expresses a strategic importance in work processes that require high productivity, performance and coordination. A healthcare professional with a high sense of belonging participates in workflow processes with stronger motivation (Türkeli, 2024, p. 403).

Studies examining the effect of motivational phenomena on organizational commitment in organizational life show that work motivation is one of the most important antecedents of positive psychological outcomes such as organizational belonging, dedication, satisfaction and happiness (Salleh et al., 2016, p. 141).

The individual's acceptance by the group or organization in which they are located and their feeling of belonging are inevitable for the sustainability of the phenomenon of motivation in today's work processes. Organizations that can realize the phenomena of diversity and justice take into account that, when they provide their employees with a sense of belonging to the organization, work motivation toward institutional goals also rises (Brown et al., 2025). In summary, organizational belonging and employee motivation express a symbiotic relationship that mutually nourishes one another and are critical components that enable the individual to internalize organizational goals and that form the basis of organizational effectiveness. As a result, when the domestic and foreign literature is examined, it is seen that belonging to the institution and employee motivation affect one another. In light of the literature, the third hypothesis of the research has been formulated:

H3: *Organizational belonging has a positive effect on employee motivation.*

2.2. The Mediating Role of Organizational Belonging

In the organizational behavior and modern organizational management literature, the role of mediating variables is frequently examined when the physical and environmental variables present in the working environment explain the psychological outcomes of individuals. Organizational belonging (the feeling of commitment), in turn, constitutes a bridge between the structural supports in the working environment and work outcomes. While research in service enterprises examines the effects of intrinsic factors on performance, it demonstrates the significant mediating effect of the phenomenon of organizational belonging on this process, alongside the direct relationship among the variables (Seyhan, 2021, p. 421).

The mediating effect of the phenomenon of organizational belonging expresses a central position in shaping and directing the organizational attitudes and approaches of employees. Some studies emphasize that the sense of belonging is a key mediating function and transforms institutional perceptions into positive outcomes (Chummar, 2024, p. 45). In addition, it is seen that the phenomenon of organizational belonging also mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and the intention to share knowledge (Seo, 2023, p. 387). In particular, when the organizational commitment of young individuals newly participating in working life is examined, it is thought that instilling a sense of organizational belonging is a carrying mediating effect in the relationship between individual performance and organizational goals (Botezat et al., 2020, p. 78).

The services and support provided to staff in health complexes are not only a fundamental element affecting patient care and hospital quality but also a dynamic that shapes the organizational processes and productivity of employees. Indeed, satisfaction studies on hospital food services in the literature directly and positively affect the satisfaction perceptions of both the service recipients and the individuals within the institution (Dall'Oglio et al., 2015, p. 572). The food services healthcare professionals receive in the hospital environment express an important meaning that shapes psychological outcomes beyond a simple physiological need. The food service offered to healthcare professionals in health complexes thus serves as a bridge with respect to the level of integration the employee feels toward institutional culture. When all this information is examined, it is possible to mention that hospital food serves as a fundamental leverage that activates the motivation levels of healthcare workers, increases job satisfaction and contentment, binds them to the institution and develops the sense of belonging. Accordingly, the main hypothesis within the scope of the research has been formulated:

H4: *There is a mediating effect of organizational belonging in the relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation.*

The basis of this research established regarding the mediating effect of organizational belonging in the relationship between hospital food and employee motivation is explained through Belonging Theory. As a concept, Belonging Theory is a theory that explains the importance of belonging in organizations and the individual's being accepted and valued within a group, community or social network (Mumcu, 2024). Groups or organizations are structures in which the individuals operating within them are satisfied not only with material resources but also with moral resources, namely social and psychological needs. A concrete input such as hospital food services is regarded as a direct indicator of the value given to healthcare professionals and the care shown to them. In the employee who feels that they are valued by the institution and that their basic physiological needs are cared for, organizational identification, commitment and sense of belonging to the institution increase positively. This positive perception creates a strong sense of organizational belonging in the individual, and as a result of this perception it serves as a motivator that raises motivation levels.

In other words, the quality and nature of the physical opportunities offered evolve into a psychological trust and ownership formed in the employee's mind, and this feeling in turn brings about productivity, performance and motivation regarding work. Therefore, in the context of Belonging Theory, it is possible to mention that belonging to the institution expresses an integrative and performance-increasing triggering mediating effect.

3. Method

This section of the study presents the method of the research, its model, the population and sample, the scales used for data collection, and the statistical methods used in the analysis of the data.

3.1. Research Model

As a result of the review of the relevant literature, the research model formulated to determine the mediating effect of organizational belonging in the relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation is given in Figure 1 below.

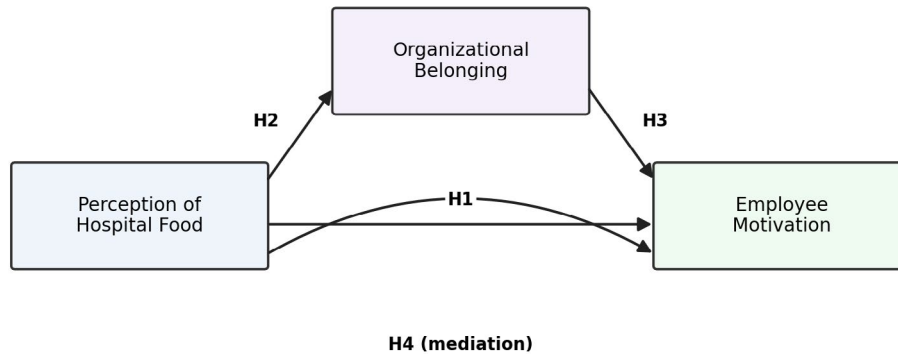


Figure 1. Research Model

3.2. Population and Sample of the Research

The research covers the private and public healthcare workers operating in health complexes in the province of İstanbul. The research was initiated with the "Ethics Committee Approval Document" of the Kastamonu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee. The main reason for selecting the boundaries of İstanbul province as the population within the scope of the research is that it represents the center with the highest healthcare-personnel employment in Türkiye, its accessibility, the presence of public-private sectoral diversity, and its being more reliable in terms of the sample's representation of the population. Simple random sampling was used in the research. In the research, participants were reached through face-to-face surveys and Google Forms, and a total of 550 survey

forms were distributed. After removing surveys that were deemed to be flawed, biased, or incomplete, 503 survey forms were considered correct and valid, and the analysis began.

According to the data, it has been reported that healthcare workers operating throughout Türkiye number 878,373 in the public sector and 1,436,000 when private institutions are included. The province of İstanbul constitutes almost 30% of this total, and it is known that the total number of public-private employees is over 200,000 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Health, 2024). Therefore, within the scope of the research, this number was taken as the basis for determining the minimum number of questionnaires required by the research, and the following formulation was used (Özer, 2004):

$$n = (N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q) / [(N - 1) \cdot d^2 + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q]$$

In structural equation modeling in the field of social sciences, in cases where the population is not exactly known, with Cochran's (1977) "infinite population" formula, a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error, the sample size value is accepted as 384.16 (384 or 385). This sample size is generally accepted in the literature as the "gold standard," and it is assumed that the representational capacity of the research is thereby ensured (Westland, 2010). Therefore, within the scope of the research, it is assumed that population-sample compatibility is ensured (Cohen et al., 2013).

Of those operating in health institutions who participated in the research, 303 are women and 200 are men. Of the participants, 120 are in the 18–29 age range, 118 in the 30–39 age range, 115 in the 40–49 age range, and the remaining 150 participants are in the 50-and-over segment. In terms of marital status, 346 of the participants are married and 157 are single. Only 58 of the participants are high school graduates, while the rest hold associate, undergraduate and graduate education levels.

3.3. Scales of the Research

The statements on the questionnaire were determined with a 5-point Likert-type scale. In the first section of the questionnaire, questions concerning

demographic variables were asked; in the second section, the scale items derived by Bıyıklı (2018) in a doctoral dissertation were used in order to measure healthcare workers' perceptions of hospital food. The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.92 in the dissertation study.

In the third section of the questionnaire formulated within the scope of the research, the "work motivation" scale developed by Blais et al. (1993) and validated by Yılmaz (2012) was used in order to measure the motivation of healthcare workers. The reliability found by the researchers is 0.81.

In the fourth section of the research, the "organizational belonging sub-dimension" of the "organizational belonging perception scale" developed by Tatar and Uzun (2023) was used in order to measure healthcare workers' levels of belonging to the institution. The reliability of the "organizational belonging" scale was found to be 0.92 by the researchers.

4. Analysis and Findings

For the testing of the data collected within the scope of the research, first the analyses and findings concerning the normality test of the data (minimum, maximum, skewness, kurtosis) were examined, their suitability was verified, and the relevant results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis Values

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perception of Hospital Food	503	1.00	4.52	-.016	-.160
Employee Motivation	503	1.00	5.00	-.078	-.761
Organizational Belonging	503	1.00	4.71	-.065	1.97

As seen in Table 1, the skewness/kurtosis coefficients of the scales used in the research are given. According to a view used in the literature, skewness/kurtosis being between [-2 and +2] indicates that it is within acceptable limits and conforms to the assumption of normal distribution (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). The values concerning the perception of hospital food, employee motivation and organizational

belonging show conformity to a normal distribution. A correlation analysis was conducted within the scope of the research in order to determine the relationship among the variables and to ascertain its direction. The findings concerning the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Perception of Hospital Food	2.648	0.630	(.892)		
2. Employee Motivation	2.980	0.799	.243**	(.812)	
3. Organizational Belonging	2.729	0.480	.483**	.378**	(.765)

** p < .001. Values in parentheses are Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

As seen in Table 2, the variable with the highest mean within the scope of the research is employee motivation. The standard deviation values being close to one another shows that the general distribution of the responses is stable and balanced. When the correlation relationships among the variables are examined, it is seen that all variables are positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$). The perception of hospital food and employee motivation ($r = .243$) represent a positive but low-level relationship, while the perception of hospital food and organizational belonging ($r = .483$) represent a moderate positive relationship. Organizational belonging and employee motivation ($r = .378$) show the presence of a moderate positive relationship. The correlation values among the variables being moderate, and the values not rising to very high levels ($r < .90$), shows that there is no multicollinearity problem and that the variables measure different concepts from one another (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Correlation analysis fundamentally reveals only whether the relationships among variables show co-variation, or the relationship of movement, and does not indicate any cause-and-effect relationship. In order to determine the cause-and-effect relationship in question, regression and path analysis are generally needed (Cohen et al., 2013).

In studies designed by preferring structural equation modeling, the statistical validity and reliability of the

established model constitute the basis for proving the values of the measurement tools used. The two values that constitute this basis in the SEM model are the Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) calculations. In the literature, the CR value being greater than 0.70 and the AVE value being greater than 0.50 reveals the representational power of the values (Hair et al., 2019). The calculation formulas are given below:

$$CR = (\sum \lambda_i)^2 / [(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda_i^2)]$$

$$AVE = \sum \lambda_i^2 / [\sum \lambda_i^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda_i^2)]$$

In addition, in order to check the reliability of the measurement tools used in the research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Sphericity (BS) were examined. It is known that a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 is the lower limit of acceptability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). It is emphasized that a KMO value above .70 is at a "good" level for the sample size (Field, 2018). Furthermore, the significance of the Bartlett test values also shows that the sample is suitable for analysis (Bartlett, 1950).

The findings concerning the Cronbach's Alpha, CR and AVE values and the KMO and Bartlett's Sphericity tests are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients and CR–AVE Validities

Scale	No. of Items	KMO	Bartlett	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Perception of Hospital Food	25	.950	8478.328 ($p = .000$)	.89	0.812	0.578
Employee Motivation	27	.917	6309.851 ($p = .000$)	.76	0.738	0.596
Organizational Belonging	7	.924	2640.399 ($p = .000$)	.81	0.804	0.622

The findings obtained in Table 3 above show that the measurement tools used in the research are reliable and valid.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to test the construct validity of the model and measurement tools established within the scope of the research, as well as the fit of the model with the collected data. Confirmatory factor analysis aims to measure the fit of the relationship between predefined observed variables and latent variables. This method, one of the fundamental building blocks of the structural equation model, statistically evaluates the fit between the model and the data through goodness-of-fit values such as Chi-square, AGFI, IFI, CFI and TLI (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014; Brown, 2015).

The CFA results conducted in order to test the construct validity of the measurement tools and the measurement model used within the scope of the research are given in Table 4. As a result of the analysis, no item was removed from the perception-of-hospital-food and organizational-belonging scales; in the employee-motivation scale, "Item 3" was removed from the model because it remained below the 0.50 threshold value. After the removal of this item due to low factor loading, the convergent validity of the scale increased in the subsequent analyses, and an increase was observed in the goodness-of-fit statistics (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4. Goodness-of-Fit Statistics of the Scales

Goodness-of-Fit Values	CMIN/DF	AGFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Perception of Hospital Food	3.118	.904	.898	.908	.902	.074
Employee Motivation	2.996	.912	.924	.910	.916	.066
Organizational Belonging	1.996	.946	.944	.952	.948	.048
Measurement Model	2.992	.914	.918	.932	.930	.058

As a result of the analyses conducted in order to determine the goodness-of-fit levels of the model established within the scope of the research, it has been seen that the fit indices of the model are generally at an acceptable level. The comparative fit indices and the RMSEA value being within acceptable limits according to the literature shows that the model is in harmony with the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). It has been observed that there is an incremental fit index (IFI = .898) in the model; however,

when evaluated together with the other fit indices, it has been determined that this situation is acceptable and does not harm the overall fit values of the model (Marsh et al., 2004).

4.1. SEM Model Results

The results concerning the findings obtained regarding the path analysis formulated for the research are presented in Figure 2.

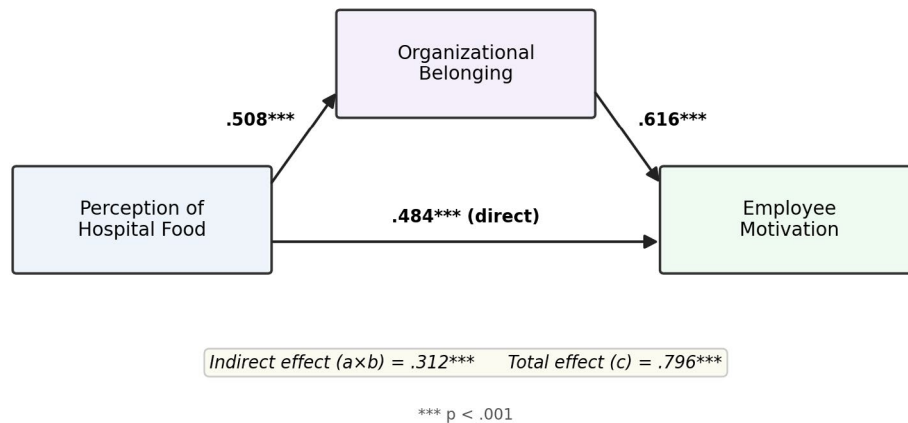


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model Results

The figure above shows the standardized regression coefficients. The H1, H2, H3 and H4 hypotheses concerning the model established within the scope of the research were tested, and their results are presented in Table 5 below.

In order to determine the relationships among the research variables, the direct, indirect and total effects were examined. While the direct effect examines the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (c'), the indirect effect examines

the effect of the independent variable on the mediator and the effect of the mediator variable on the dependent variable ($a \times b$). The total effect, in turn, is composed of the direct and indirect effect ($c = c' + a \times b$) (Hayes, 2017). In order to test the reliability of the indirect effect, the "bootstrapping" method, which is assumed to be more current in the literature and to contain strong results, was used (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

Table 5. SEM Analysis Results

Tested Path	β	SE	95% CI (Upper)	95% CI (Lower)
Perception of Hospital Food → Employee Motivation	.484	.042	.65	.24
Perception of Hospital Food → Organizational Belonging	.508	.064	.78	.38
Organizational Belonging → Employee Motivation	.616	.032	.82	.48

Total Effect (c)	.796*	.028	.96	.60
Direct Effect (c')	.484*	.044	.65	.36
Indirect Effect (a×b)	.312*	.036	.40	.22

* $p < .001$.

As a result of the analysis conducted using structural equation modeling, it is seen that the perception of hospital food has a significant and positive effect on employee motivation ($\beta = .484$, $p < .001$), that the perception of hospital food has a positive effect on organizational belonging ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$), and that organizational belonging has a positive effect on employee motivation ($\beta = .616$, $p < .001$). According to these results, the H1, H2 and H3 hypotheses of the research have been accepted.

In order to be able to speak of a mediating relationship among the research variables, the VAF (Variance Accounted For) value needs to be calculated (Kara et al., 2023). Within the scope of the research, the VAF value (Indirect Effect / [Indirect Effect + Direct Effect]) was calculated in order to show the portion of the indirect effect within the total effect. As a result of the analysis, the VAF value was calculated as $0.312 / (0.312 + 0.484) = 0.391$. According to the classification made, the VAF value being greater than 0.20 indicates a partial mediating effect (if $VAF > 0.80$, full mediation; if $0.20 \leq VAF \leq 0.80$, partial mediation; if $VAF < 0.20$, no mediating effect) (Nitzl et al., 2016). Therefore, a partial mediating effect of organizational belonging was determined in the relationship between the perception of hospital food and employee motivation, and the H4 hypothesis has been accepted.

5. Conclusion

This research was conducted in order to reveal the relationship among healthcare professionals' perception of hospital food, employee motivation and organizational belonging and, in addition, to determine the mediating effect of organizational belonging. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that the variables of hospital food, employee motivation and organizational belonging have been researched as separate variables on different sample groups. It is seen that studies concerning the variables of the perception of hospital food, employee motivation and organizational belonging in health complexes, which directly concern individual and public health, are few, and that there is no study in which these three variables have been examined together. In this context, this research conducted on 503 healthcare professionals operating in the province of İstanbul stands at an important point, since it fills this gap seen in the literature and is an original study directed toward healthcare professionals.

Some analyses were conducted in order to test the structural validity and reliability of the scales used within the scope of the research. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were found to be .892 for the perception of hospital food, .812 for employee motivation and .765 for organizational belonging. It is known that these values are within acceptable limits (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Sphericity tests, which are the other tests conducted for reliability and applied to the scales, are also seen to be reliable, as shown in Table 3. When the confirmatory factor analyses are examined, it has also been seen that the research scales and the measurement model are within good and acceptable limits. The goodness-of-fit statistics of the scales used and the research model established within the scope of the research are given in Table 4.

The results of the path model established within the framework of structural equation modeling (SEM) show that hospital food has a significant and positive effect on employee motivation ($\beta = .484$, $p < .001$), that hospital food has a positive effect on organizational belonging ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$), and that organizational belonging has a positive effect on employee motivation ($\beta = .616$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the hypotheses established within the scope of the research (H1, H2, H3) are supported. As a result of the mediation analysis, the VAF value was calculated as $0.312 / (0.312 + 0.484) = 0.391$ (Kara et al., 2023). According to the classification made, the VAF value being greater than 0.20 (if $VAF > 0.80$, full mediation; if $0.20 \leq VAF \leq 0.80$, partial mediation; if $VAF < 0.20$, no mediating effect) shows that there is a partial mediating effect (Nitzl et al., 2016). Therefore, the H4 established regarding the mediating effect within the scope of the research has been accepted.

In this research, it was investigated whether healthcare professionals' perceptions of hospital food have an effect on employee motivation and whether there is a mediating effect of organizational belonging within this relationship. Within the scope of this research, examined empirically in the context of organizational belonging theory, the findings obtained have revealed results indicating that hospital food services are not only a physical need but also shape the sense of organizational belonging and employee motivation.

When the effect of food services on employee perception is addressed, the findings obtained show similarity with existing research in the literature. McSweeney et al. (2025) emphasize that the food

environment and services formed in health complexes have an effect on healthcare professionals' perceptions and that this effect is an integral component of the workplace experience. The research conducted by Dönmez and Çilginoğlu (2022), on the other hand, emphasized that the quality of the food services offered is a very critical factor in terms of employee satisfaction. Therefore, it is possible to mention that a positive perception of hospital food is a direct factor affecting the motivation factors and belonging of healthcare professionals.

The mediation analysis, which constitutes the most fundamental aim of the research, is explained through organizational belonging theory. Belonging Theory holds that the individual's feeling of being a part of the organization in which they operate directly affects their behavioral and psychological positive outcomes (Mumcu, 2024). Demir (2019), who examines the factors affecting organizational belonging, emphasizes that the concept of organizational belonging is composed not of a single dimension but of multiple processes, and that the physical and social factors in the organizational environment trigger the sense of belonging. The "partial mediation" effect obtained within the scope of the research, in turn, shows that hospital food increases organizational belonging by triggering healthcare professionals' feeling of being valued by the institution, and that increased belonging gives a strong impetus to motivation. As a result, the food services offered in health complexes positively affect healthcare professionals' belonging to the institution, and organizational belonging, in turn, successfully realizes the model established within the scope of the research by increasing employees' motivation.

As in every research, the study conducted in order to determine the mediating effect of organizational belonging in the relationship between hospital food and employee motivation has limitations to be developed in future research. Since the data collected within the scope of the research were collected within a certain time frame and include only healthcare professionals working in health complexes, this constitutes a limitation on the geographical and institutional generalizability of the results. Another limitation is that the structural differences of the food services offered in health complexes were not taken into account (being carried out with hospital resources or through outsourcing, etc.), and they were evaluated only through a single service structure.

At this point, some suggestions can be made for both practitioners and future researchers in line with the empirical results obtained and these limitations. From the perspective of health-complex managers and practitioners, it is important that, in order to increase the motivation levels of healthcare professionals, a focus be placed not only on medical and administrative processes but also on the physical,

social and sensory quality of the hospital food environment, in which the necessary investments should be made. It is recommended to measure staff satisfaction with food services at regular intervals and to produce quick and constructive solutions for the disruptions detected. In addition, it is thought that it is necessary not to overlook the fact that food services are a strategic tool that nourishes the perception of "being valued by the institution" among employees and thereby triggers organizational belonging.

The following suggestions can be offered for future studies. In future research, comparative analyses can be conducted between health complexes that provide food services within their own structure and health complexes that use outsourcing, in terms of employees' levels of belonging and motivation. Furthermore, in order to increase the explanatory power of the empirical model, the mediating role of organizational belonging can be retested within a broader framework by adding different organizational behavior dimensions such as satisfaction, commitment and workplace happiness, or the general well-being of healthcare workers, to the model alongside the existing variables.

Ethical Approval

Ethics committee approval was received from Kastamonu University (dated 02.07.2026 and numbered 2600079711).

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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