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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Felt trust: Added baggage or added value? A critical review, constructive redirection, and exploratory meta-analysis

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Summary

After decades of scholarly focus on studying trust from the *trustor's* perspective, there has been a rapidly growing interest in understanding trust from the *trustee's* perspective, with a particular focus on felt trust (i.e., a trustee's perception of being trusted by a trustor). The fundamental assumption underlying this trustee-centric perspective is that it complements the dominant trustor-centric perspective and enables a more comprehensive understanding of how trust manifests and operates in the workplace. Unfortunately, our critical review of 121 felt trust studies reported in 87 manuscripts reveals major problems in multiple areas (conceptualization, measurement, theorizing, and research methods) that limit this field's ability to achieve this potential. To remedy this, we build on existing frameworks, best practices, and exemplars from the (felt) trust and meta-perceptions literature to outline a constructive redirection of the field. We subsequently empirically test the field's fundamental assumption by meta-analytically exploring the distinctiveness and incremental validity of felt trust beyond other trust concepts. Taken together, our envisioned redirection and meta-analytic findings enable the field of felt trust to live up to its promise and enrich our understanding of organizational trust.

KEYWORDS
Felt Trust, Trust, Meta-perceptions, Review, Meta-Analysis

1 | INTRODUCTION

Trust—defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another (Rousseau et al., 1998)—is a foundational aspect of organizational life that spans the full spectrum of work relationships (Dirks & De Jong, 2022). Besides being of central importance to many other literatures within Organizational Behavior, trust has continued to capture the interest of organizational scholars as a topic in its own right over the past decades, resulting in numerous studies, special issues, edited volumes, reviews, and meta-analyses (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2007; Costa et al., 2018; Dirks et al., 2009). Collectively, this "first wave" of trust research has produced a wealth of insight into its nature, nomological network, theoretical mechanisms, and boundary conditions (Dirks & De Jong, 2022). Despite this progress, one persistent limitation of this wave is its dominant focus on understanding trust from the *trustor*'s perspective (i.e., the party extending the trust), thereby treating the trustee (i.e., the party being trusted) as a party of secondary concern. Recognizing this limitation, a "second wave" of research emerged that started to examine trust from a *trustee*-centric perspective (Dirks & De Jong, 2022), with a particular interest in the notion of felt trust—the trustee's perception of being trusted by the trustor (e.g., Baer et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2014; Salamon & Robinson, 2008). This perspective's main promise is to

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complement trustor-centric approaches and enable a more complete and comprehensive understanding of trust that considers both the trustor and the trustee in the relationship (Brower et al., 2009; Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009).

Given the recent surge of scholarly interest in felt trust (see Figure S1), the time is right to take stock of whether this stream of research has lived up to its promise. Like other research areas (e.g., Gottfredson et al., 2020; Lemoine et al., 2019), its ability to do so rests on three assumptions: (1) the felt trust construct is well-defined and adequately measured; (2) research on felt trust is theoretically parsimonious, coherent, and offers insights that are unique to the focal phenomenon (i.e., that complement insights from related phenomena or perspectives); and (3) empirical research on felt trust is conducted in a rigorous manner, thereby allowing valid inferences to be made about the way it manifests and operates. One might think that the considerable research interest in felt trust would undoubtedly yield a positive answer to the question of whether the field has delivered on its promise.

Unfortunately, our critical review of the field—including some of our own research—reveals that these assumptions are largely unmet, thus calling into question its current trajectory. This does not mean that it has little to offer. On the contrary, we believe that *if done well*, felt trust research has considerable potential for advancing our understanding of trust. The key caveat and focus of our critique, however, is the "if done well" part. While critiques are often directed at taken-for-granted concepts in more mature fields (e.g., leadership; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), we feel it is important to offer a critique at this early stage of the field's development, so it can serve as a timely intervention and redirection and avoid unnecessary research waste. As a point to the contrary, consider research on cognition- and affect-based trust (McAllister, 1995). Despite being one of the most frequently used conceptualizations and measures of trust, its problems were not fully understood until Legood et al.'s (2023) recent critical review pointed them out more than 25 years later. This is precisely what we wish to avoid for felt trust.

Our paper does not only intend to merely criticize the field, however, but also to propose solutions to overcome these problems, and to contribute to actioning some of the proposed solutions (i.e., be part of the solution). Accordingly, our paper consists of three parts. We first critically review the felt trust literature with respect to the aforementioned assumptions, drawing on a sample of 121 studies.[1] Building on this critique, we then offer a constructive redirection, which outlines a path forward and points to potentially helpful frameworks, best practices, and felt trust study exemplars[2] that enable scholars to redirect their research along the lines we propose. Finally, we take initial steps towards actioning some of the proposed solutions by conducting an exploratory meta-analysis (Miller & Bamberger, 2016) into the distinctiveness and incremental validity of felt trust. In doing so, the key contribution of our paper is to provide the field with a timely and much-needed redirection that will allow it to reach its full potential. In terms of Dirks and De Jong's (2022) wave metaphor, we aim to help progress the second wave of trust research from its current "swelling stage" to the "crest stage".

2 | METHODS

Consistent with best practices (Harari et al., 2020; O'Boyle et al., 2023), we used a comprehensive set of search strategies to identify eligible studies for our review. We searched through multiple online databases (PsycInfo, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) for articles. In addition, we performed a forward search to identify studies that cited early work on felt trust (Lau et al., 2014; Lester et al., 2003; Salamon & Robinson, 2008) and performed a backward search to identify studies cited in either recent papers on felt trust or in reviews of the organizational trust literature (e.g., Dirks & De Jong, 2022; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). In addition, we searched through edited volumes on trust to identify relevant book chapters. We also searched through the programs of relevant conferences (e.g., the *Academy of Management Annual Meeting*, the *Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology*, and *First International Network on Trust*) as well as through ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Full-Text database to identify unpublished work. Finally, we used citation alerts to notify us of the latest papers appearing on the topic. Our search ran until September 2023. We included (1) conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative work; (2) both published and unpublished work; (3) papers that included felt trust either as their core variable of interest, a variable of secondary interest, or even as a control variable; (4) papers studying felt trust at any level of analysis; (5) papers using other labels for this variable than "felt trust" but that captured the same notion; and (6) studies treating felt trust as a either fixed variable (i.e., experimental manipulation) or a random variable (i.e., survey measure). Our search and inclusion criteria yielded a final data set of 121 studies, comprising 60 published and 27 unpublished manuscripts, three conceptual papers, three qualitative studies, and 115 quantitative studies. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/dnfaz/?view_only=32f18ab9d5894f219b2b592c46d57cf4.

3 | AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD'S EVOLUTION

In order to set the stage for our critical review and constructive redirection, we first provide a brief overview of the evolution of the field. Brower et al. (2000) was one of the first papers to hint at the notion of felt trust by distinguishing between "actuality" and "perceptions" of trust. Although the former term was used to refer to actual levels of trust a trustor has in a trustee (i.e., being trusted), the latter term was used to refer to the trustee's perception of the trustor's trust in them (i.e., felt trust). The authors argued that the two constructs are conceptually distinct, pointing out that trustee's perceptions may not accurately reflect the actual levels of trust held by the trustor. They

[1]A full reference list of the papers included in our review can be found here: https://osf.io/dnfaz/?view_only=32f18ab9d5894f219b2b592c46d57cf4.

[2]Please note that highlighted studies only serve as exemplars of the specific aspects we cite them for. They may however have weaknesses in other areas.

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also asserted that it is trustee's perceptions, rather than the trustor's actual trust levels, that drive trustee's attitudes and behavior. Finally, they attempted to integrate trustee perceptions into Mayer et al.'s (1995) Integrative Trust Model, proposing that trustee perceptions are primarily shaped by trustor's risk-taking behavior towards them, and that trustee's attitudinal and behavioral responses to perceived trust would feedback into the trustor's assessment of the trustee's trustworthiness.

A few years later, Lester et al. (2003) and Lau et al. (2007, 2008) started to examine some of Brower et al.'s propositions, focusing on the influence of trustor risk-taking behavior (e.g., delegation) on felt trust, and its subsequent effects on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, performance, and OCBs). These investigations lent initial support for these relationships and hence the credibility of the felt trust concept. Furthermore, these studies introduced empirical measures for the concept, thereby enabling felt trust to be examined on a wider scale. This sparked increased scholarly interest into the topic, resulting in several studies in top-tier management journals (Baer et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2014; Salamon & Robinson, 2008). Instead of building on existing trust models (as per Brower et al., 2000), however, these studies introduced novel theories and models (e.g., conservative of resource theory; the appropriateness framework), emphasizing the unique theoretical mechanisms through which felt trust operates.

The aforementioned publications lead to a surge of scholarly uptake and research interest in the topic, increasing from about one study appearing each year on average (between 2003 and 2015) to more than 14 studies a year (between 2016 and 2023). Contrary to early papers' focus on felt trust as their core variable of interest, however, this latest stream of research also involved studies into other Organizational Behavioral topics that incorporated felt trust to further advance understanding of their topics of interest. Collectively, these scholarly efforts gave rise to three sub-streams of felt trust research: one that treated felt trust as the focal independent variable, exploring its direct and indirect impacts on workplace outcomes (e.g., task performance, organizational citizenship behavior; Zheng et al., 2019); another that viewed felt trust as the focal dependent variable of interest, investigating antecedents influencing and shaping trustee's felt trust (e.g., risk-taking behavior; Hannah et al., 2019); and a third that treated felt trust as a further specification (e.g., mediator and moderator) of the relationship between other independent and dependent variables of interest (e.g., leadership style; Bush et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023). As part of the first strand of research, some scholars also developed a unique focus on the "dark side" of felt trust, examining its unintended negative impact of felt trust on productive outcomes (e.g., job performance; Baer et al., 2015) and its role in promoting dysfunctional behaviors within the workplace (e.g., compulsive organizational citizenship behavior; Wang & Huang, 2019).

Besides increased substantive differentiation (see also Figure 1), another striking feature of the field is the scholarly traction it gained among scholars from across the globe. As a testament to this, our sample of papers for this review includes studies from 18 different countries across three continents. Asia comprised 50% of the studies,

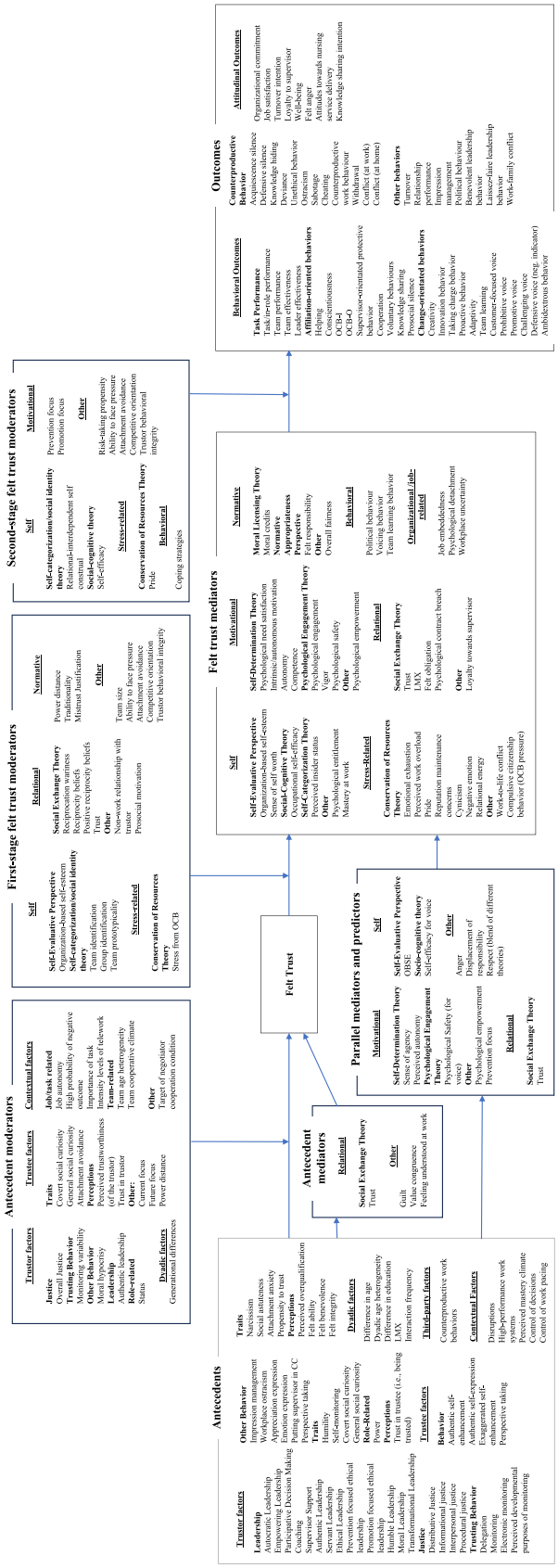

FIGURE 1 Nomological network implied by felt trust studies. An enlarged version of this figure can be found in the supplementary files and on OSF.

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followed by North America (36%) and Europe (13%, including the UK). This global interest in felt trust has resulted in an evidence base that is considerably less *WEIRD* than the mainstream literature on trust (Henrich et al., 2010). Finally, the field also witnessed rapid diffusion of felt trust research into numerous sub-domains, including (but not limited to) business ethics (Kim et al., 2018), tourism and hospitality management (Wang & Huang, 2019), employee relations (Guinot et al., 2021), and behavioral decision-making (Campagna et al., 2019).

Although one might interpret the rapid development and diversification of the field as positive signs, our critical review paints a more sobering picture of the current state of the field, revealing major problems with conceptual ambiguity and measurement deficiency, theoretical fragmentation and proliferation, a lack of integration with the trust literature, and methodological validity threats. In order for the field to live up to its promise of advancing understanding of trust, a fundamental redirection is therefore needed in each of these areas. In the following sections, we first review the aforementioned problems in more detail and then outline a constructive way for the field to move forward. We provide guidance on the direction of change required and point scholars to resources that should enable them to implement these suggestions and achieve the desired changes. Furthermore, acknowledging that some felt trust studies represent exemplary conceptual, theoretical, and empirical efforts in the right direction, we explicitly highlight these in our constructive redirections.

4 | CONCEPTUALIZATION

4.1 | Critical review

Scholars have identified multiple criteria along which construct clarity can be assessed. One criterion is whether the definition of the focal concept clearly specifies the higher-order category to which the concept belongs (the "genus") as well as the necessary and collectively sufficient set of attributes that differentiates the concept from related concepts within the same category (the "differentia"; Solinger et al., 2024). Another is whether definitions use affirmative terminology and refrain from using tautological and obscure terminology in conceptualizing the focal concept (Glasbeek et al., 2024). A third criterion is whether, in addition to defining what a construct is, conceptualizations should also specify what the focal construct is *not* and how it is different from related constructs (Suddaby, 2010). Finally, construct clarity can be assessed in terms of whether scholars consistently use the same label to denote the focal concept and refrain from using that label to denote other concepts (i.e., avoiding "jingle–jangle fallacies"; Kelley, 1927).

Unfortunately, reviewing extant conceptualizations of felt trust along these criteria reveals multiple sources of conceptual ambiguity. Seventeen percent of the studies failed to define felt trust (see Table 1). Furthermore, over a third defined felt trust in tautological terms—that is, in terms of trust or feelings—without defining the latter concepts (see Tables 1 and 2). In cases where trust was defined separately or integrated into felt trust definitions, many specified either vulnerability or positive expectations as defining elements of trust (i.e., the necessary and collectively sufficient attribute set), but not both. In addition, definitions that did include vulnerability failed to define it, thereby allowing for obscure terms to persist in their definitions.[3] Another observation that stood out to us is that most scholars have treated felt trust as a straightforward extension of trust, and in doing so have unsufficiently recognized that felt trust is also a meta-perception (see Campagna et al., 2020 for an exception). As such, they have tended to overdraw on the trust literature and insufficiently draw on the meta-perceptions literature in conceptualizing felt trust. Finally, while scholars commonly recognize that felt trust is distinct from related concepts (e.g., trust, being trusted), they typically did not provide sufficient detail about how it is distinct and/or were limited in the number of concepts against which felt trust was compared (see Table 2). Thus, extant conceptualizations suffer from a lack of clarity about what felt trust is *not* (Suddaby, 2010).

Terminological inconsistency across studies was also evident from the vast array of terms used to capture the "genus" of felt trust, including (but not limited to) a perception, belief, realization, feeling, or cognition (see Tables 1 and 2). Likewise, despite scholarly convergence around the term "felt trust" (59%), a variety of other labels were being used to denote the concept (e.g., felt trustworthiness, received trust, experienced trust, perceived trust), with some labeling it "being trusted," which represents a related but distinct trust construct (e.g., Lau & Lam, 2008; Williams, 2016). Although it seems reasonable to expect some terminological divergence early in a field's development, we observe that considerable terminological divergence persists even in recent research on the topic (e.g., Baer et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). Further complicating this picture is that most scholars use the term "felt trust"—which seemingly hints at an affective experience—but then define it as a cognitive perception (77%; e.g., Lau et al., 2014; Salamon & Robinson, 2008). This plethora of labels and terminology creates jingle–jangle fallacies that make it harder for scholars to communicate with each other and recognize each other's work as relevant to and consistent with their own. It also raises the question of whether these labels and terms capture meaningful differences, or whether this is all just semantics obscuring what is, in principle, scholarly consensus around the concept.

Another source of conceptual ambiguity concerns the assumed similarity of felt trust across referents and cultures. First, the vast majority of the studies in our review focus on leaders as the referents of felt trust (i.e., followers' perceptions of being trusted by their leader; 79%), and only a few have considered other referents, such as top management, the organization as a whole, co-workers, or followers (see Salamon and Robinson [2008] and Kim et al. [2023] for exceptions). Moreover, nearly all studies, including those examining other referents, have adopted a mono-referent approach (96%), and thus did not explicitly examine and compare whether felt trust effects generalized across referents. Given that relational vulnerabilities differ across work relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001), and some evidence exists for the differential effects of trust across referents

[3]The same is true for trust literature more broadly.

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TABLE 1 Breakdown of conceptualization and measurement characteristics across studies.

Conceptualization	%	Measurement	%
Concept label used		*Scale content*	
Felt trust	59%	Trust	58%
Feeling trusted	29%	Trustworthiness	9%
Felt trustworthiness	1%	Trust-trustworthiness mix	20%
Felt mistrust	1%	Trusting behavior	13%
Perceived trust	2%		
Perceived mistrust	1%	*Basis for measure*	
Trust meta perception	1%	*Pre-existing trust measure*	71%
Experienced trust	1%	Gillespie (2003)	33%
Received trust	1%	Schoorman et al. (1996); Mayer & Davis (1999); Mayer & Gavin (2005)	26%
Perception of being trusted	1%		
Perception of another's trust in them	1%	McAllister (1995)	4%
		De Jong & Elfring (2010)	3%
		Robinson & Rousseau (1994)	1%
Definitions provided		Other trust scale	4%
FT DEF + trust DEF	51%	*Pre-existing FT measure*	23%
No FT DEF	17%	Deutsch-Salamon and Robinson (2008)	13%
FT DEF, no trust DEF	32%	Lau et al. (2007)	10%
		Newly developed measure	6%
Key term in DEF			
Perception	77%	*Scale adaptation type*	
Belief	8%	Trust → FT	37%
Realization	3%	Trustor	27%
Awareness	3%	Trustee	16%
Feeling	3%	No. of items	13%
Cognition	2%	Collapse across dimensions	3%
Judgment	2%	Temporal specification	3%
Sense	2%	Manipulation	1%
Referents		*No. of adaptations made*	
Multiple	4%	0 adaptations	27%
Single	96%	1 adaptation	35%
Supervisor	79%	2 adaptations	27%
(top) management	3%	3 adaptations	8%
Subordinates	5%	4 adaptations	3%
Coworkers	4%		
Other	5%	*Role of trust in relation to FT*	
		Parallel IV	8%
Dimensionality		FT IV	8%
Uni-dimensional	63%	FT MED	16%
Multi-dimensional	18%	IV MED to FT	5%
Collapsed across dimensions	15%	Parallel MED	14%
Single dimension	4%	Interaction: FT MOD	5%
		Interaction: FT as trust MOD	3%
Level of analysis		Combined with FT into single variable	0%
Individual	93%	IV MOD	5%
Group	3%	Control variable	24%
Individual + group	3%		

Abbreviations: FT = Felt trust; DEF = definition; IV = Independent Variable; MED = mediator; MOD = moderator.

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TABLE 2 A sample of felt trust definitions and their defining elements.

Author/ article	Variable label	Actual definition	FT explicitly conceptualized as meta-perception?	Genus	Differentia: necessary + collectively sufficient?	Differentia: integrated in FT DEF?	Tautological terms?	Affirmative terms?	Obscure terms?	Beyond DEF: differentiate FT from what it is NOT?
Baer et al. (2015)	Feeling trusted	"The perception that another party is willing to accept vulnerability to one's actions" (p.1637)	No	Perception	Limited: Only vulnerability	Partially: Also separate trust DEF featuring vulnerability and +ve expectations	No	Yes	Yes: Vulnerability	Yes: FT vs. trust and "being trusted"
Baer et al. (2021)	Received trust	"The sense that another party accepts vulnerability to an individual's actions" (p.180)	No	Sense	Limited: only vulnerability	Partially: also separate trust DEF featuring +ve expectations	No	Yes	Yes: Vulnerability	Some: FT vs. "wanted trust"
Bush et al. (2021)	Felt trust	"The sense that another person has positive expectations of an individual's behavior and, accordingly, is willing to take relational risks with that individual" (p. 33)	No	Sense	Yes: both vulnerability and +ve expectations	Yes	No	Yes	Yes: relational risks	Some: FT vs. trust
Campagna et al. (2020)	Felt trust	"The degree to which one person believes that another person trusts them" (p.994)	Yes	Belief	No: none mentioned	No: but separate trust DEF featuring both vulnerability and +ve expectations	No	Yes	Yes: vulnerability (in trust DEF)	Some: FT vs. "being trusted" (or: "actual trust")
Kim et al. (2023)	Felt trust	"a focal person's perception of how much their coworkers trust him or her" (p. 949)	No	Perception	No: none mentioned	No: also no separate trust DEF	Yes: Trust	Yes	No	Some: FT vs. trust
Lanaj et al. (2018)	Felt mistrust	"Persons who feel mistrusted" (p. 546). No real definition.	No	Feeling	No: none mentioned	No: separate (mis)trust DEF mentioned; only featuring expectations	Yes: feeling	Yes	No	Some: FT vs. (mis)trust
Lau et al. (2014)	Felt trust + feeling trusted	"The realization of others' positive expectations and exposed vulnerability" (p.112)	No	Realization	Yes: both vulnerability and +ve expectations	Yes	No	Yes	Yes: vulnerability	Some: FT vs. trust
Mooijman et al. (2018)	Felt trust	"The belief that a person such as a leader is willing to be vulnerable to your actions based on the expectation that you take this person's interests into account, even when this is not necessarily in your interest and when you can get away with not doing so" (p. 5)	No	Belief	Yes: both vulnerability and +ve expectations	Yes	No	Yes	Yes: vulnerability	No
Rouzi & Wang (2021)	Feeling trusted	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author/ article	Variable label	Actual definition	FT explicitly conceptualized as meta-perception?	Genus	Differentia: necessary + collectively sufficient?	Differentia: integrated in FT DEF?	Tautological terms?	Affirmative terms?	Obscure terms?	Beyond DEF: differentiate FT from what it is NOT?
Salamon & Robinson (2008)	(collective) felt trust	A "shared group-level cognition" reflecting the extent to which "employees working together in the same organization come to agree on the extent to which they are trusted by management" (p.594)	No	Cognition	No: none mentioned	No: also no separate trust DEF	Yes: trust	Yes	No	Yes: FT vs. trust, perceived organizational support, and procedural justice climate
Williams (2016)	Perception of being trusted	"The perception that another individual is willing to rely on you given the risk of opportunism or harm" (p. 349)	No	Perception	Limited: only vulnerability	Partially: Also separate trust DEF featuring vulnerability and +ve expectations	No	Yes	No	Some: FT vs. trust
Zheng et al. (2023)	Felt trust	"The extent to which subordinates —in their role as trustees—feel that their supervisors are willing to be vulnerable to them" (p. 819)	No	Feeling	Limited: only vulnerability	Yes	Yes: feeling	Yes	Yes: vulnerability	No

Abbreviations: FT = Felt trust; DEF = definition; +ve = positive; −ve = negative; N/A = not available.

(Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), it would be naïve to assume generalizability of felt trust effects in the absence of evidence supporting this position. Likewise, even though felt trust has been examined across many different cultures by now, studies seem to adopt an *etic* approach—which assumes that the meaning of felt trust is essentially universal across cultures—and fail to consider the possibility of certain elements of felt trust being culturally specific (*emic*; Ferrin & Gillespie, 2010). Furthermore, the fact that studies tend to single out one country or culture at a time further prevents scholars from explicitly considering the cross-cultural (dis)similarities of felt trust. Given the existing evidence base for the emic elements of trust (Ferrin & Gillespie, 2010), the current lack of consideration of this issue in extant conceptualizations represents an important omission.

A final source of ambiguity is conceptual extensions of the basic felt trust construct. For instance, many studies draw on multi-dimensional conceptualizations of trust to conceptualize felt trust (37%; e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2019) but fail to specify how exactly these dimensions relate to the higher-order felt trust construct. This specification is critical because different types of multi-dimensional constructs exist that involve different assumptions of how dimensions relate to the higher-order construct, with important implications for empirical measurement and modeling (Law et al., 1998). And while one might assume that studies simply adopt the multi-dimensional assumptions underlying original conceptualizations of trust, we observe that some studies actually deviate from these by either collapsing across dimensions or focusing on a single dimension (15% and 4%, respectively; e.g., Gill et al., 2019; Skiba & Wildman, 2019), while providing limited justification for doing so. Besides multi-dimensional extensions, a few studies have extended felt trust to the group level of analysis (6%), but largely fail to clarify how this group-level phenomenon relates to and emerges from its individual-level counterparts (Chan, 1998), resulting in inconsistent group-level conceptualizations (e.g., collective felt trust and group felt trust asymmetry). Finally, rather than trying to resolve conceptual ambiguity around the basic felt trust concept, we instead observe a continuing growth of conceptual extensions, including notions of relative felt trust (Li, 2018), felt trust accuracy (Campagna et al., 2020), and wanted versus received trust congruence (Baer et al., 2021). However, introducing conceptual extensions may be premature without conceptual clarity around the basic concept.

4.2 | Constructive redirection

Given the current scholarly convergence around the term felt trust, it may not be helpful for the field to switch to an alternative (and arguably more appropriate) term at this point. To reduce jangle fallacies, we recommend that scholars stick with this term and avoid alternative labels going forward. That said, given the potential confusion introduced by this label, it is all the more critical that scholars clearly conceptualize what they mean by felt trust. Consistent with the aforementioned criteria, construct clarity can be improved in several ways. First and foremost, it is critical that scholars provide a definition

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of felt trust, and one that avoids tautologically defining felt trust in terms of "feelings" or "trust." Trust should be defined separately or integrated within the felt trust definition and should include both "differentia": vulnerability and positive expectations. Drawing on established trust definitions (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998) should ensure that this is the case. To further resolve obscure terminology, we propose that scholars also explicitly define the willingness to accept vulnerability. Conceptual clarifications of this are admittedly scarce but one example is Oc et al. (2020), who define it as the willingness to make oneself dependent on others, such that one could be easily hurt by them. Furthermore, making oneself vulnerable can take on different forms, including deliberately disclosing sensitive or personal information to others, or relying on others for help, feedback, or advice (Nienaber et al., 2015). Regarding the "genus," we propose that felt trust should be explicitly recognized as a meta-perception—defined as "a [party's] belief regarding the view another [party] holds of them, regarding a specific type of content" (Grutterink & Meister, 2022, p.330)—regarding trust. Combining this meta-perception definition with that of trust, we propose the following definition:

Felt trust is a meta-perception comprising a focal party's (trustee's) belief about another party's (trustor's) willingness to be vulnerable to them based upon positive expectations of the focal party's intentions or behavior.

Where "willingness to be vulnerable" is defined as stated earlier. Finally, scholars should also better clarify what felt trust is not (Suddaby, 2010). To this end, we present a comprehensive table comparing and distinguishing felt trust from nine related trust concepts across six attributes (Table 3). This comparison, for instance, reveals that felt trust represents a unilateral, trustee-centric approach, and that this makes it distinct from concepts that take a unilateral but *trustor*-centric approach (i.e., trust) as well as from concepts that take a trustee-centric but *bilateral* approach (e.g., trust meta-accuracy).

Clear conceptualizations of felt trust also require a specification of its focal level of analysis and referent(s). One way to achieve this is by extending Fulmer and Gelfand's (2012) levels-and-referent framework from a trustor- to a trustee-centric perspective (Figure 2). Doing so reveals that the roles of the trustor and trustee switch in determining levels versus referents, such that the level of analysis for felt trust is determined by the nature of the trustee (rather than the trustor), and the referent is determined by the nature of the trustor (rather than the trustee). Consider a dyad where the trustor is the team and the trustee is the leader. From a trustor-centric perspective, this represents a team-level manifestation of trust with the leader as the referent of trust (i.e., does the team trust the leader?). From a trustee-centric perspective, however, this same dyad represents an individual-level meta-perception of trust by the leader with the team as the referent of felt trust (i.e., does the leader feel trusted by the team?).

In addition, when conceptualizing felt trust as a multi-dimensional construct, scholars should specify the functional relationship between the dimensions and the higher-order construct. In this regard, Law et al.'s (1998) taxonomy of multi-dimensional constructs as based on a latent, profile, or aggregate model may prove useful in explicating this relationship. Additional best practice recommendations for multidimensional constructs can be found in Johnson et al. (2012). Regarding the selection of dimensions, scholars may want to reconsider using McAllister's (1995) dimensions of affect- and cognition-based trust, given the dimensionality issues identified by Legood et al. (2023). Fortunately, other alternatives, such as Gillespie's (2003) dimensions of reliance- and disclosure-based trust, are available and have been gaining popularity in felt trust research (e.g., Lau et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2019).

Similar to clarifying the relationship between lower-*order* dimensions and higher-*order* constructs, scholars also need to explicate the functional relationship between the higher-*level* construct and its lower-*level* counterpart when conceptualizing felt trust at the group level of analysis. This can be achieved by drawing on well-established group construct frameworks, such as Chan's (1998) taxonomy (i.e., additive, direct consensus, referent-shift, dispersion, and process models) and Kozlowski and Klein (2000) group construct continuum (ranging from shared group constructs to configural group constructs). The four defining characteristics of group emergent states discussed by Waller et al. (2016)—emerging but distinct from lower-level elements, relatively enduring and non-fleeting over time, recognized and experienced by team members, and irreducible to lower-level inputs—should also prove useful for clarifying felt trust as a group-level construct. In absence of a best practice exemplar from felt trust research, we point readers to De Jong et al. (2021) study as an exemplar of construct clarity of trust at the group level. Finally, in terms of prioritization, we recommend that the field first attends to improving conceptual clarity around the basic felt trust construct before introducing additional conceptual extensions.

5 | MEASUREMENT

5.1 | Critical review

Consistent with the conceptual assumption of felt trust as a straightforward extension of trust (see above), the dominant measurement approach involves taking a pre-existing trust measure and amending it to capture felt trust (71%; e.g., Baer et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2014). Unfortunately, the assumption of felt trust being a straightforward extension has not been robustly tested so far. Furthermore, the uncritical adoption of pre-existing trust measures has meant that their weaknesses have been imported into felt trust research as well. This includes the aforementioned problems with the multi-dimensionality of McAllister's (1995) trust measures and reliance on measures that claimed to capture trust but, in reality, capture trustworthiness (e.g., Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). A second set of studies (23%) draws on measures that were purposefully developed in early studies to measure felt trust (e.g., Lau et al. (2007); Salamon & Robinson, 2008). While these measures were very instrumental in enabling felt trust to be examined on a wider scale, some of these were not developed using rigorous scale development and validation procedures

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TABLE 3 Similarities and differences of trust concepts across attributes.

Concept	Definition	# of parties considered	Focal perspective	Nature of confident expectations	State or process?	Type of dyadic construct	Actual level vs. meta-perception
Felt trust	"A meta-perception comprising a focal party's (trustee's) belief about another party's (trustor's) willingness to be vulnerable to them based upon positive expectations of the focal party's intentions or behavior." (this paper)	Single; unilateral	Trustee	+ve	State	N/A	Meta
Trust	"A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p.395)	Single; unilateral	Trustor	+ve	State	N/A	Actual
Mistrust/ distrust	A psychological state comprising the intention to take protective actions based on pervasive confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct (Lewicki et al., 1998, p.439; Bijlsma-Frankema et al., 2015, p.1018; Min & Zickar 2023, p.1101)	Single; unilateral	Trustor	-ve	State	N/A	Actual
Being trusted	"A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p.395)	Single; unilateral	Trustee	+ve	State	N/A	Actual
Felt mistrust/ distrust	The extent to which a person feels mistrusted (Lanaj et al., 2018, p.546)	Single; unilateral	Trustee	-ve	State	N/A	Meta
Trust asymmetry	"The degree to which each party's trust in the other converges" (Tomlinson et al., 2009)	Dyadic; bi-lateral	Trustor	+ve	State	Dispersion	Actual
Mutual trust	"An emergent attribute of the dyad in which parties come to share a perception about the degree to which they trust each other" (Korsgaard et al., 2015, p.50)	Dyadic; bi-lateral	Trustor	+ve	State	Consensus	Actual
Trust reciprocity	"The iterative influence of one party's trust and trusting behavior on the other party's trust and trusting behavior" (Serva et al., 2005)	Dyadic; bi-lateral	Trustor	+ve	Process	Consensus	Actual
Felt trust accuracy	"The degree of alignment between one person's felt trust and a counterpart's actual trust [in the focal person]" (Campagna et al., 2020, p.995)	Dyadic; bi-lateral	Trustee	+ve	State	Consensus	Actual + meta
Felt trust asymmetry/ differentiation	"The degree to which parties differ in their perceptions of the level of being trusted by others" (Wang, 2021, p.272)	Dyadic; bi-lateral	Trustee	+ve	State	Dispersion	Meta

Abbreviations: +ve = positive; -ve = negative.

(Hinkin, 1998).[4] This has led to challenges in construct and content validity, whereby measures inadvertently capture behavioral antecedents (i.e., risk-taking behaviors by the trustor) rather than the essence of felt trust itself, or rely on nearly identically formulated items that artificially boost reliability at the expense of adequate domain coverage (Clifton, 2020). It is noteworthy that the original authors chose to use more rigorously developed measures in their subsequent research (e.g., Lau et al., 2014). We therefore caution against the continued use of these early measures.

Another construct validity issue concerns the pervasiveness of scale adaptations (73%), which include shifting from trust to felt trust, changing the trustor and/or trustee, changing the number of items, collapsing across dimensions, and translating scales in a different

[4]The same is true to for trust literature more broadly. The Editor justly pointed out that early felt trust measures are not alone in this and that other measures, including popular measures of trust, suffer from similar issues (Legood et al., 2023).

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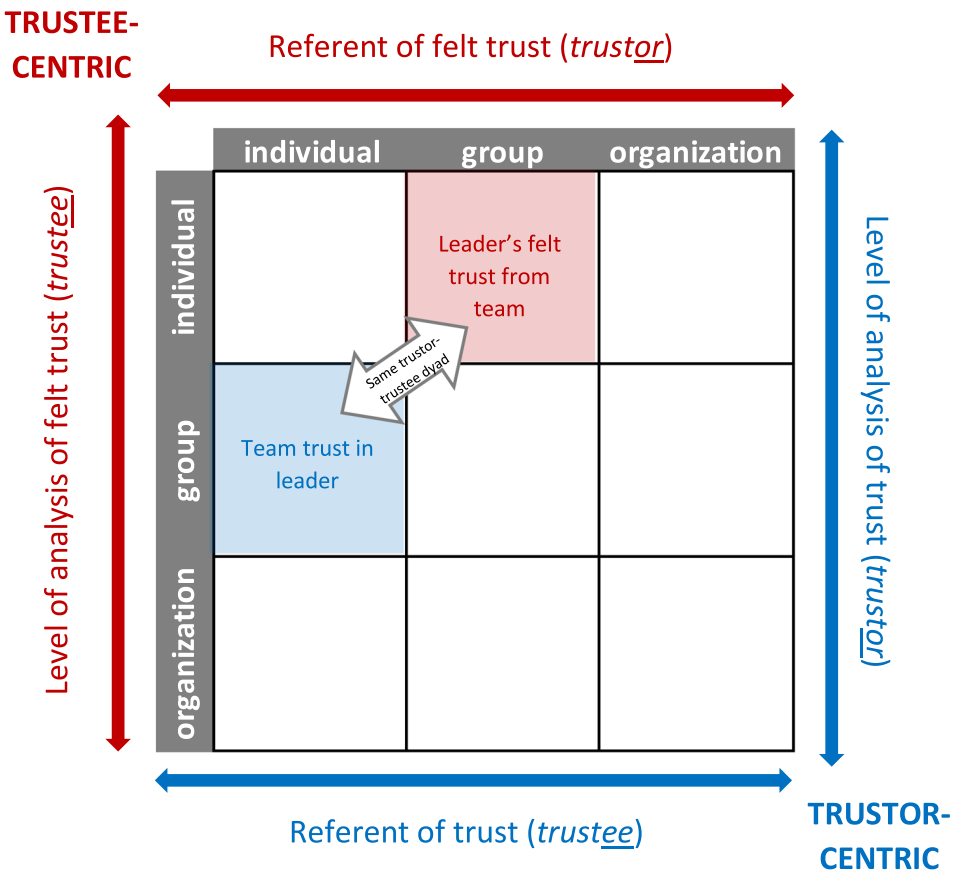

FIGURE 2 Extended levels-and-referent framework.

language (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Song et al., 2020). The more adaptations are made to original scales, the more the relationship between the latent variable and the scale score changes relative to the score of the original measure, which could threaten the validity of the adapted measure (Heggestad et al., 2019). While multiple a priori and *post-hoc* strategies are available for addressing this (Heggestad et al., 2019; Solarino & Buckley, 2023), most of the articles in our sample did not implement any of these except for back translation practices when scholars translated scales in a different language. Given the non-*WEIRD* nature of felt trust research, engaging in back translation practices is critically important. Unfortunately, in almost none of the instances where scales were translated, measurement equivalence between the original and the translated scale was tested, despite known problems with the measurement equivalence for established trust measures (e.g., Wasti et al., 2007).

A final problem in empirical research is a lack of scholarly attention for the discriminant and incremental predictive validity of felt trust above and beyond trust. Factors preventing examination of this included: a failure to include a trust measure alongside of felt trust, affording them different causal roles in conceptual models and empirical analyses (see more on this in the succeeding texts), and basing their measuring on different scales, resulting "apples and oranges" comparisons. Moreover, in cases where incremental predictive validity was assessed, empirical evidence has been mixed, with some showing a significant direct effect on outcomes for felt trust but not trust (e.g., Lester & Brower, 2003; Salamon & Robinson, 2008), others reporting significant effects for both (e.g., Kim et al., 2023), others reporting no significant effects for either (e.g., Kim et al., 2018), and still others showing variation in the (non-) significance of direct effects for both constructs across different outcomes (e.g., Skiba & Wildman, 2019).

5.2 | Constructive redirection

It would be helpful if our universal, theory-driven definition of felt trust was complemented by a more particular, context-specific understanding of the concept (Sollinger et al., 2024). As such, one key priority for future research is to use qualitative approaches to gain rich, in-depth insight into whether felt trust is simply a straightforward extension of trust or whether it is qualitatively different somehow. If the former is the case, then scholars are well-advised to take advantage of pre-existing trust measures (see McEvily & Tortoriello, 2011 for a [non-exhaustive] overview), select the most *valid* (rather than the most popular) ones, and amend them to capture felt trust. In doing so, they should take active steps to ensure the construct validity of their adapted measure, consistent with scale adaptation best practices (Heggestad et al., 2019). Given the variety of countries and cultures in which felt trust is studied, special care should be taken in translating scale items and ensuring measurement equivalence (Klotz et al., 2023; Solarino & Buckley, 2023). If felt trust is qualitatively different from trust, however, we recommend scholars develop and validate new felt

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trust measures based on rigorous scale development procedures and guidelines (Hinkin, 1998; Lambert & Newman, 2023) rather than relying on those developed in early research. A great example rigorous scale development is Lanaj et al.'s (2018) study on felt mistrust, in which the authors performed two-scale validation studies prior to using this new measure in their main study. Finally, to evaluate the distinctiveness and incremental validity of felt trust, scholars are encouraged to include related trust constructs alongside felt trust.

6 | THEORIZING

6.1 | Critical review

6.1.1 | Theoretical fragmentation and proliferation

Our review reveals that the nomological network of felt trust is highly fragmented and non-parsimonious. The first manifestation of this is the total number of variables studied. Our attempt at summarizing the nomological network (see Figure 1) still contains as many as 53 variable *types*, and this number increases even further when we consider the specific variables examined. To illustrate, the trustor-related antecedents we identified included four types of justice, two types of trusting behaviors, 13 distinct leadership behaviors, six "other" types of behavior, four traits, one role-related variable, and one social perception variable. In addition to these trustor-related factors, we also identified a variety of specific trustee, dyadic, third-party, and contextual variables as antecedents of felt trust as well. The second manifestation is the limited overlap of variables across studies. Studies tend to *single out* one (or a few) independent, dependent, moderating, and/or mediating variables in relation to felt trust, and each tends to focus on *different combinations* of these variables. For instance, in studies examining felt trust as a mediator between other variables of interest (e.g., Bharanitharan et al., 2019; Haesevoets et al., 2021; Nerstad et al., 2018), we found very little overlap in the independent–dependent variable combinations studied. In addition, only a handful of studies have also accounted for trust (as a parallel mediator) to ascertain whether it is really felt trust (rather than trust more generally) that explains the focal relationship (e.g., Kim et al., 2023). Similarly, moderators and mediators of felt trust effects or of felt trust antecedents vary widely across studies, and are often examined in isolation, without accounting for alternative moderators or mediators (e.g., Cho et al., 2021; Lanaj et al., 2018; Lau et al., 2014).

As a direct result of the number of variables studied and the limited overlap across studies, the third manifestation is the resulting complexity and non-parsimoniousness of the nomological network as a whole. At the front-end of the network, antecedents either impact felt trust directly (e.g., Williams, 2016) or indirectly via mediating processes (e.g., Mooijman & Kouchaki, 2018), and their impact may be unconditional (e.g., Lau et al., 2007) or conditioned by contingency factors (e.g., Zheng et al., 2023). While the same observation applies to the back-end of the model (i.e., the outcomes of felt trust), two issues that further compound the complexity of felt trust–outcome relationships are the multitude of mediating mechanisms proposed (e.g., Baer et al., 2015; see more on this below) and contingency factors shaping the strength of these relationships at different stages in the causal mediation chain (i.e., first-stage versus second-stage moderation). This raises the question of whether our current understanding of basic felt trust relationships is really solid enough to propose such complex models. Our review suggests that the answer to this question may be "no," as we identify a tendency to focus on one (or sometimes two) theories at a time at the expense of others (e.g., Baer et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2019). This, combined with different studies focusing on different theories, has led to considerable theory proliferation.

For instance, from our review, seven distinct types of mechanisms emerged (e.g., self, relational, and stress-related) for the relationship between felt trust and outcomes, which were further comprised of twelve distinct theories (e.g., social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory) and 37 mediating variables capturing their core mechanisms. The current practice of singling out theories within studies and theory proliferation across studies raises questions as to whether these theories are really complementary, or whether some are redundant and could be gotten rid of. Unfortunately, in support of the latter possibility, closer inspection of felt trust studies reveals several cases of problematic overlap, with similar mediating mechanisms being theorized and measured to capture distinct theories. For instance, the two closely related concepts of organization-based self-esteem and pride have been used to capture the self-evaluation perspective and conservation of resources theory, respectively (Baer et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2014). In addition, we also find considerable non-overlap in mediating mechanisms for the same theory, such as using trust, leader–member exchange, felt obligation, and psychological contract breach to capture social exchange theory (cf., Colquitt et al., 2014). While this theory is broad enough (and arguably too broad) to accommodate a range of mechanisms, the non-overlap between them limits the comparability of results and the accumulation of evidence. Finally, we also found inconsistencies across studies where in addition to serving as a mediator of felt trust effects (e.g., Lau et al., 2014), the same mechanisms were proposed as mediators of felt trust antecedents (e.g., Huang et al., 2023), as a parallel mediator alongside felt trust (e.g., Ye et al., 2021), or as a moderator of felt trust effects (e.g., Skiba & Wildman, 2019).

6.1.2 | Lack of integration with other literatures

In addition to theoretical fragmentation and proliferation, we also observe a lack of integration of felt trust research with other relevant literatures, including the trust literature. First, there is considerable inconsistency in how scholars have conceived of the relationship between felt trust and trust. The majority of the studies in our review do not theoretically account for this relationship and simply ignore the issue. Studies that do consider trust and felt trust in tandem are highly inconsistent in their assumption regarding their relationship (see both Table 1 and Figure 1), with some conceiving of them as

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parallel mediators of other independent variables of interest (Kim et al., 2023), while other studies assume they interact to impact outcomes (Lau & Lam, 2008), and still others assume that one is a direct consequence of the other (Huang et al., 2023). There is also inconsistency within these categories, with some studies theorizing that trust moderates (mediates) the impact of felt trust (e.g., Deng & Wang, 2009), while others theorize that felt trust moderates (mediates) the impact of trust (e.g., Lau & Lam, 2008).

While it is certainly possible for the same variables to play different roles across studies and models, this only makes sense when these choices are clearly grounded in and guided by an overarching theoretical framework. Unfortunately, the theoretical fragmentation and lack of an integrative framework constitute the root problems underlying the current inconsistent modeling of variables in felt trust research. While early work explicitly grounded felt trust in existing models and theories of trust (Brower et al., 2000), subsequent research has failed to engage with these models and theories. For instance, given the amount of research that has built on the integrative trust model (Mayer et al., 1995), and the fact that it has been meta-analytically validated (Colquitt et al., 2007), it would have made sense for scholars to take advantage of it and try to extend it to felt. Likewise, several models of dyadic trust dynamics—with the potential for integrating both trustor- and trustee-centric perspectives—have previously been developed in the trust literature (Ferrin et al., 2008; Zand, 1972) but have remained underutilized in felt trust research. Finally, besides interpersonal approaches to trust development—which assumes trust builds slowly and gradually through repeated interactions between parties—the trust literature has long recognized the importance of heuristics-based approaches that enable parties to quickly develop trust in others without having previously met them (Kramer, 1999; McKnight et al., 1998; Meyerson et al., 1996). It may therefore be reasonable to consider the possibility of heuristics playing a role in the development of felt trust as well (see Lau et al. [2007] for an example). Unfortunately, our review revealed very few attempts by felt trust scholars to incorporate or build on any of these trust models and approaches.

The inconsistency of the felt trust–trust relationship is even more problematic because the antecedents and outcomes studied across the two concepts show considerable overlap. Outcomes of felt trust include similar positive (negative) behavioral and attitudinal outcomes as those identified for trust (Figure 1, see also Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & De Jong, 2022) and are similarly assumed to be promoted (inhibited) by felt trust. With respect to antecedents, besides the obvious antecedent of being trusted, most research has been devoted to trustor behaviors (justice, leadership, and trusting behaviors), with nearly all studies theorizing a positive relationship. In terms of understudied antecedents, felt trust research parallels trust research in devoting relatively little attention to dyadic, third-party, and contextual variables. Given the conceptual overlap between felt trust and trust, one might find it reassuring that felt trust seems to "behave" similarly to trust in terms of its relationship with other variables. We, however, feel that this optimism is premature. Instead, we would argue that the alignment between their nomological networks further compounds the problem of the inconsistency in how their relationship has been modeled across studies, and the lack of common theoretical foundation that would otherwise guide our thinking of how to best position them relative to each other.

6.2 | Constructive redirection

Our first constructive redirection involves striving for theoretical parsimony and integration within the literature on felt trust. Felt trust scholars should resist the temptation of further expanding the nomological network by continuously introducing new variables and relationships (in an attempt to make a "novel contribution"). Instead, they should seek to advance understanding of current relationships implied within the network, with an emphasis on theoretical integration and pruning, as well as examine the underpinning theoretical mechanisms and boundary conditions of basic felt trust relationships. To ensure theoretical coherence and depth, scholars should start with theory in selecting their variables of interest (Shaw, 2017), and actively engage with the focal theory's key arguments, fundamental assumptions, and implied causal mechanisms, rather than merely paying lip service (Sparrowe & Mayer, 2011).

Theories should not only be coherent and make sense individually but should also make sense collectively (Aguinis & Cronin, 2022). Felt trust research should, therefore, become more parsimonious and integrative *across* theories. One approach to this is theory pruning (Leavitt et al., 2010), whereby researchers focus on multiple theories simultaneously, develop potentially competing hypotheses, and empirically pit the theories against each other (e.g., Skiba & Wildman, 2019). Such an approach could help combat theory proliferation and make the theoretical landscape of felt trust more parsimonious. This would be especially useful for those theories where their associated mediating mechanisms seem to overlap with each other (see critical review section). Another approach is to shift from considering "unit theories" to considering the "programmatic theory" of felt trust, which synthesizes and organizes supported unit theories into a coherent framework of understanding (Cronin et al., 2021). From a programmatic theoretical perspective, the value of a unit theory is not merely determined by whether the theory's predictions are supported by empirical data, but rather by the extent to which integrating this theory into the larger programmatic theory advances the latter's span and accuracy. This involves careful consideration of whether focal unit theories strengthen or blur the boundaries across theories—that is, theoretical differentiation: how distinct or redundant is the focal theory with other known theories—as well as the coherence across theories—that is, integration: how well does it align with and complement other theories (Cronin et al., 2021), including compatibility of its underlying assumptions with other theories (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). Given that programmatic theory can be both useful and usable, and provide valuable insights for scholars and practitioners alike, we call for more research that advances programmatic theory on felt trust.

Finally, felt trust theories—whether unit or programmatic—should, of course, not merely be developed but also tested. To move the field

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forward, felt trust researchers should raise the bar when testing their theory, including increasing the precision of their theoretical predictions and carefully considering what findings would constitute evidence against their focal theory (Edwards & Berry, 2010; Gray & Cooper, 2010). Even when done well, however, testing a theory only once should only inspire modest confidence in the focal theory. True increase in scholarly confidence requires programmatic research, in which felt trust theories are repeatedly subjected to replication and synthesis (Eden, 2002; Kraimer et al., 2023). Replications come in different forms, including independent replications—performed by different author teams across different projects—as well as internal replications—performed by the same author team as part of the same project. Examples of the latter include those conducted by Haesevoets et al. (2021) and Mooijman and Kouchaki (2018). Paralleling this distinction, meta-analytic syntheses can either be done retrospectively—integrating evidence from prior studies capturing (aspects of) the focal theory (or theories)—or prospectively—involving purposefully designed primary studies conducted by the meta-analysts themselves, the findings of which are subsequently meta-analytically integrated. Excellent guidelines for these more cumulative theory testing and integration approaches can be found in Köhler and Cortina (2021), Bettis et al. (2016), Bergh et al. (2016), and McShane and Böckenholt (2017).

Our second constructive redirection involves a better integration of felt trust research with other relevant literatures, particularly the literature on meta-perceptions (e.g., Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Applying social psychology models of meta-perceptions to felt trust (Figure 3), for instance, suggests that it does not operate independently of a party's own trust or of being trusted by another party. Instead, another party's trust (i.e., being trusted) determines the focal party's ability to obtain levels of felt trust that closely correspond to the actual level of trust by the other party (i.e., an *inter*personal source of *accuracy*; green diagonal arrows in Figure 3). At the same time, the focal party's own trust in the other party acts as a source of self-projection bias, whereby they use their own trust to make inferences about the other party's trust in them (i.e., an *intra*personal source of *bias*; purple vertical arrows). Further complicating this picture, trust and being trusted do not exist independently, but inform each other via processes of reciprocation (i.e., interpersonal process, blue horizontal arrow). Meta-perception research also suggests that the impact of self-projection bias tends to outweigh that of meta-accuracy due to the challenges involved in accurately assessing another party's trust, leading focal parties to rely instead on their own trust as a heuristic or proxy for inferring the other party's trust in them (Yuan et al., 2022).

In addition, the meta-perceptions literature distinguishes between different types of targets (Carlson & Kenny, 2012), which suggests that felt trust may pertain to beliefs about whether one is trusted by a specific target (e.g., one's leader) or by a generalized target (e.g., others within one's organization in general). So far, felt trust research has almost exclusively focused on the former, but the latter target seems relevant and raises the question of whether current felt trust insights generalize to generalized targets. Meta-perception research suggests that the answer may be "no" as parties tend to be more accurate in their meta-perceptions of generalized than of specific others. Independent investigation into felt trust of generalized others may, therefore, be warranted. Interestingly, the distinction between meta-perception targets parallels a distinction between (particularized, categorical, and generalized) trust referents recently proposed by trust scholars (Schilke et al., 2021), thus signaling the potential for fruitful integration of the two literatures. Finally, meta-perception research suggests that felt trust accuracy (i.e., the discrepancy between being trusted and felt trust) is moderated by several factors, including feedback from others, self-perceptions of traits, self-observations of behavior, and heuristics (e.g., assumed reciprocity and similarity; Carlson & Kenny, 2012).

Integrating insights and models from the meta-perceptions literature thus holds the potential to enhance our understanding of trust in several ways. First, the model offers insight into the intricacies among felt trust, trust, and being trusted, and in doing so provides a foundation for integrating trustor- and trustee-centric perspectives on trust. In addition, the model can serve as a "heat map" that shows which of its elements have received most attention so far (i.e., trust), which ones have received some attention (e.g., felt trust, and to a lesser extent, trust asymmetry and reciprocity), and which ones have remained (almost) completely unexplored (e.g., self-projection bias). Third, the meta-perceptions literature suggests alternative ways of thinking about targets (or: referents) of felt trust and provides building blocks for theorizing about contingency factors shaping felt trust accuracy.

7 | METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR

7.1 | Critical review

Substantive conclusions about felt trust are only as good as the validity of the methods used to obtain the empirical findings. Unfortunately, our review reveals methodological deficiencies that pose threats to construct, internal, statistical conclusion, and external validity (Cook & Campbell, 1979). We discussed construct validity threats previously (see the sub-section on "measurement") and therefore focus on the remaining three validity types below (see Table 4).

7.1.1 | Internal validity

After construct validity, the second largest validity threat we identified concerns internal validity. Quantitative research approaches vary in terms of their ability to establish causality,[5] with true experiments often considered highest in their internal validity potential, followed

[5]The three most well-established criteria for causality are (1) a meaningful observed relationship between the focal independent and dependent variable; (2) temporal precedence, such that the instance of the independent variable precedes that of the dependent variable; and (3) the absence of confounds, such that there are no alternative explanations for the observed relationship.

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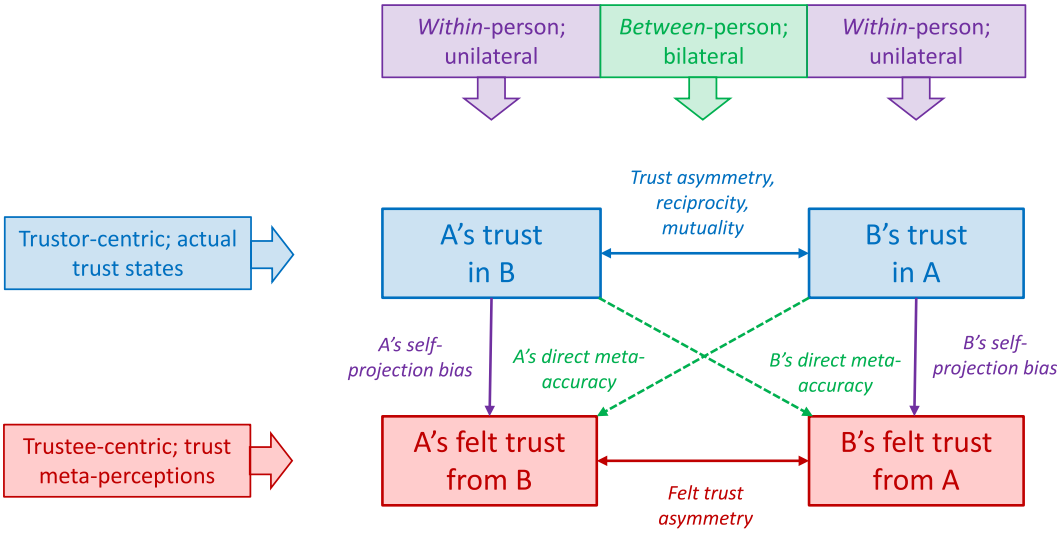

FIGURE 3 A meta-perceptions model of felt trust. Adapted from Yuan et al. (2022), Figure 9.

TABLE 4 Breakdown of internal, statistical conclusion, and external validity issues across empirical studies.

Internal validity	%	Statistical conclusion validity	%	External validity	%
Causal inference potential of research designs		*Types of CMV practices used**		*Multi-study approach*	
Lowest: qualitative	3%	Lagged data	40%	Mono-study/sample	76%
Low: non-experiments/correlational	79%	Multi-source data	50%	Multi-study/sample	24%
		Split sample	1%	two studies	19%
Higher: quasi/field experiments	0%	Separating variables + adding filler questions	1%	three studies	1%
Highest: true experiments	19%			four studies	1%
		Different response formats	1%	five studies	0%
Temporal directionality in survey designs		Harman single-factor test	7%	six studies	1%
Cross-sectional data	60%			seven studies	1%
Lagged data	36%	*No. of CMV practices used**			
Cross-lagged panel design	5%	0: cross-sectional, mono-source	27%	*Organizational sampling*	
		1: cross-sectional, multi-source	23%	None: lab study	18%
Endogeneity addressed		1: lagged, mono-source	12%	Mono-organizational study	25%
No	100%	2: lagged, multi-source	29%	Multi-organizational study	57%
Yes	0%	3	5%		
Control variables included		*Accounted for non-independence of observations*			
No	35%	No: but no nested data	58%		
Yes	65%	No: despite nested data	17%		
		Partially: only in hypothesis tests, but not in CFA	10%		
Analyses with and without controls					
No (only with controls)	91%	Yes: both in CFA and in hypothesis tests	15%		
Yes	9%				
		Examined statistical power			
		No	98%		
		Yes	2%		

Abbreviations: CMV = Common Method Variance; CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

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by quasi or field experiments, and finally, non-experimental (correlational) studies. Unfortunately, most studies are correlational and/or rely on cross-sectional data (50%) and thus suffer from low levels of internal validity. While the latter can be enhanced via temporal separation of variables, controlling for alternative explanations, and addressing endogeneity, most studies on felt trust either do not implement these well or at all. While some studies adopt a lagged design (36%), they often fail to adopt a cross-lagged panel design that would allow simultaneous modeling of both the predicted and the opposite causal directionality. Similarly, while the use of control variables is common (65%), most studies rely on sub-optimal control variable procedures, such as including non-meaningful control variables in their analyses (e.g., demographics) and failing to present their results with and without control variables (91%). Furthermore, we found no evidence of any survey studies taking active steps to address or alleviate endogeneity concerns, such as using instrumental variables. While experimental designs represent a viable way to address endogeneity bias (Lonati et al., 2018; Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019), our review also shows no quasi/field experimental designs and only a few true experiments being used in felt trust research.

While experimental studies can be powerful tools for establishing internal validity, we unfortunately observe that felt trust experiments often lack psychological realism (Colquitt, 2008) and mostly rely on either vignette-based (e.g., Hanna et al., 2019) or recall-based (Campagna et al., 2019) experimental manipulations. While both experimental designs are relatively simple, quick, and affordable to run, they are reliant on recall, hypothetical choices, and self-reported or symbolic outcomes that provide limited information about the magnitude of the effects of focal variables in "real life" (e.g., Lonati et al., 2018). In addition, most experiments manipulated antecedents of felt trust rather than felt trust itself (for exceptions, see Baer et al., 2021; Yang & Tsai, 2022), and thus contribute little to our confidence in the internal validity of findings outcomes and mediators of felt trust. This is particularly problematic since mediators and outcomes represent the dominant focus of felt trust research, and because mediation implies a causal chain of effects, thus heightening the importance of being able to test and draw valid inferences about this causal chain.

7.1.2 | Statistical conclusion validity

Threats to statistical conclusion validity can either increase Type I or Type II errors, which lead to erroneous conclusions about, respectively, the presence or absence of focal relationships. One reason why Type I errors are likely to occur is common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff et al., 2012), which is especially likely to inflate estimates of linear (e.g., direct and mediated) as opposed to nonlinear or moderated relationships (Evans, 1985; Siemsen et al., 2010). Unfortunately, we find that a considerable portion of the studies adopted either a cross-sectional approach (23%), or relied on same-source data (12%), or both (27%), which makes the results susceptible to CMV. Most studies tended to employ no or only a single technique (62%) at the expense of other recommended a priori or *post-hoc* strategies for alleviating CMV concerns (e.g., collecting data from different sources, using different response formats, the marker variable technique; Podsakoff et al., 2012). A second source of Type I errors involves not appropriately dealing with nested data structures, which produces downward biased standard errors, inflated test statistics, and a higher likelihood of finding statistically significant results (Bliese & Hanges, 2004). We found many instances where nested data were analyzed as if they were independent (42%), either in testing the hypotheses tests, or in confirmatory factor analysis of their measures, or both (27%). Other Type I error-boosting practices we identified include testing multiple outcomes without applying *p*-value corrections, using one-tailed significance tests, and misleadingly qualifying results as "marginally significant" (Wulff et al., 2023).

A major source of potential Type II errors are underpowered studies (e.g., Maxwell, 2004). Statistical power is (among others) a function of effect size magnitude, the number of parameters estimated, and sample size. In this respect, models that include interaction effects are well-known for being susceptible to statistical power issues, as interaction effects tend to be small in magnitude and involve multiple parameters that need to be estimated (Aguinis, 1995; Aguinis et al., 2005). Statistical power concerns also apply to mediation models, though, and are further compounded when models become more complex (e.g., multiple mediators, multiple moderators, and moderated mediation). Regarding model complexity, our review revealed that it is not uncommon for conceptual models to include more than one independent variable (34% of the studies, and up to seven independent variables), more than one dependent variable (42% and up to 10), one or more mediators (81% and up to five), and one or more moderators (43% and up to four). Overall, only 31% of the models sought to understand basic independent variable–dependent variable relationships, while 69% proposed more complex models involving one or more mediators (26%), one or more moderators (26%), or both (16%). Unfortunately, only a few felt trust studies in our review (e.g., Campagna et al., 2020; Hanna et al., 2019) conducted any form of power analysis of their tests (2%).

In addition to the complexity of many felt trust models, sample sizes across studies typically fell below established sample size benchmarks that would be required for testing those models with sufficient statistical power. Specifically, while the average sample size of 264 (SD = 143) would provide sufficient power for testing single mediator models comprised of relationships that are medium to high in magnitude, the same mediation model composed of weaker relationships or models involving multiple mediators easily requires sample sizes of 400 to 500 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Ma & Zeng, 2014). As such, reported non-significant findings in current studies may simply be methodological artifacts of weakly powered tests but might inadvertently lead scholars to incorrectly conclude that the theoretical predictions were invalid. Contrary to underpowered studies, we also identified several studies with huge sample sizes (e.g., Guinot et al., 2021), which rendered them

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overpowered and essentially guaranteed statistical significance of otherwise trivial effect sizes (Combs, 2010).

7.1.3 | External validity

While most felt trust research is conducted in one or more organizational settings, and includes a range of employees, industries, and countries, the generalizability of empirical findings is nevertheless weakened by several factors. Factors inhibiting the assessment of generalizability *across* organizational settings include the limited overlap in examined relationships across studies (see above) and the modest use of multi-study designs in which the same relationship is repeatedly examined within the same paper. Meanwhile, a major factor inhibiting the assessment of generalizability *to* organizations is the use of experimental research designs involving contrived settings and student samples. Finally, attempts to meta-analytically estimate generalizability have been lacking for those relationships that have been repeatedly examined across organizational settings.

7.2 | Constructive redirection

Our first constructive redirection involves encouraging methodological pluriformity. Designing studies involves making validity trade-offs, in that no study design can maximize on all types of validity, and each study design has its own validity strengths and weaknesses (McGrath, 1981). Overcoming this problem thus requires methodological pluriformity across studies, allowing studies to capitalize on each other's strengths and overcoming each other's weaknesses. Pluriformity can not only be achieved across papers but also within papers by using multi-study designs and multi- or mixed-methods approaches (Wellman et al., 2023). Haesevoets et al.'s (2021) felt trust study is a good example of a multi-method approach. The authors conducted six studies that utilized complementary deductive methods (both experimental and field studies) to counterbalance the weaknesses of individual methods and boost internal and external validity. Scholars should be mindful, though, that multi-study designs are not, by definition, superior to single-study designs. Unless they are methodologically rigorous, sufficiently powered, and integratively tested (e.g., via an internal meta-analysis), multi-study designs risk providing a false sense of credibility while really only adding underpowered studies to the literature and increasing capitalization on chance (Lakens & Etz, 2017; Schimmack, 2012).

Furthermore, we note a general paucity of qualitative and experimental research on felt trust and suggest this should be remedied in future research. As alluded to, we see an important role for qualitative approaches in exploring whether or not felt trust is a straightforward extension of trust, and in developing new measures if the answer to the former question is "no." We also advocate for the use of field or quasi-experiments. One of the key benefits of such designs is that they strike a balance between internal and external validity (Eden, 2017; Grant & Wall, 2009), allowing researchers to avoid some of the aforementioned validity trade-offs and make causal claims without sacrificing generalizability to organizational contexts.

7.2.1 | Internal validity

The strongest way to eliminate endogeneity bias—one of the main threats to internal validity—is by using experimental methods. While scholars can draw inspiration from recent felt trust studies (e.g., Campagna et al., 2019; Haesevoets et al., 2021), we remind readers that most of these used vignette- or recall-based designs and manipulated antecedents rather than felt trust itself. As such, researchers may want to instead take advantage of literature on best practice recommendations for designing rigorous experiments (e.g., Lonati et al., 2018; Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019). Another useful resource could be Schilke et al.'s (2023) recent review of experimental research designs for studying trust. Perhaps, there is scope to adapt some of the established trustor-centric designs to experimentally manipulate and study felt trust. While reducing endogeneity threats is more difficult in survey research, several steps can be taken, such as conducting sensitivity analysis, estimating fixed effects, and using instrumental variables (e.g., Bastardoz et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2021). In addition, felt trust researchers should improve their study's ability to meet established criteria for causality, for instance, by adopting cross-lagged designs (e.g., Salamon & Robinson, 2008), and adopting best practices in selecting and analyzing control variables (Becker et al., 2016; Spector, 2021). Finally, we would like to point out that cross-sectional designs are not completely without merit (Spector, 2019) but should be used more intentionally and selectively.

7.2.2 | Statistical conclusion validity

To reduce the risk of Type I errors, scholars should adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing CMV that includes previously underutilized a priori and *post-hoc* strategies. In addition, future research should make sure to appropriately deal with nested data structures using best practice recommendations and readily available syntax (Dyer et al., 2005; McNeish et al., 2017). We furthermore recommend that scholars avoid one-tailed tests and the use of marginal significance (Wulff et al., 2023), which could otherwise inflate Type I errors. To avoid Type II errors, scholars should perform a priori and/or *post-hoc* power analyses using readily available statistical tools (Faul et al., 2007). This, in combination with the effect size estimates obtained from our exploratory meta-analysis (see below), will help to ensure that hypothesis tests are adequately powered, avoiding non-significant findings being driven by methodological artifacts. Besides ensuring sufficient statistical power, stress testing null findings and reliying on alternative submission formats (e.g., registered reports) will furthermore help to ensure that valid null findings make their way into the published body of literature (Briker & Gerpott, 2024; Hill et al., 2020).

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7.2.3 | External validity

To improve the generalizability of findings from individual studies, researchers could take advantage of online panels (M-Turk and Prolific) to tap into readily available diverse samples. Given scholarly concerns about the data quality obtained through such panels (Barends & de Vries, 2019; Hydock, 2018), scholars should take advantage of best practice recommendations for avoiding and detecting careless responses (Aguinis et al., 2021; Niessen et al., 2016). Consistent with our plea for methodological pluriformity, though, scholars should also consider other options and avoid excessive "MTurkification" of felt trust research (Anderson et al., 2019). An alternative option to collecting primary data oneself could be relying on publicly available secondary data from diverse samples that have already been collected (Barnes et al., 2018; Cruz, 2021). Although such data sets can pose challenges for construct and internal validity, there is some precedence in trustor-centric research of using such datasets to study trust (e.g., Schulz et al., 2022). We refer felt trust scholars interested in using secondary data to Hill et al.'s (2022) recent comprehensive overview of secondary datasets for micro-OB scholars for inspiration on potential datasets they might be able to use. Finally, instead of simply assuming generalizability of results based on diverse samples, scholars should explicitly test this within and across studies using multi-level and meta-analytic techniques, respectively (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015).

8 | EXPLORATORY META-ANALYSIS

Besides identifying problems in the literature and suggesting potential solutions, we also intend to be part of the solution. To this end, we conducted an exploratory meta-analysis (Miller & Bamberger, 2016; Rosing et al., 2011) to address the fundamental premise underlying the field that felt trust is distinct from and has incremental validity beyond related trust constructs. Our meta-analysis includes three trust variables (felt trust, trust, and being trusted), four common outcome variables (task performance, affiliation-oriented behaviors [AOB], change-oriented behaviors [CHOB], and counterproductive behaviors [CPB]), and three common antecedents (moral leadership, relational leadership, and justice; Figure 1). All analyses were done using Schmidt and Hunter's (2015) psychometric meta-analysis approach, and were supplemented by various secondary analysis approaches in exploring felt trust's incremental validity (Oh, 2020). Study codings for this targeted meta-analysis, as well as meta-analytic estimates of the wider nomological network of felt trust, can be found on OSF.

Our first exploration examined whether felt trust is distinct from trust and being trusted by examining the meta-analytic corrected correlations of felt trust with the other two variables (Le et al., 2010). The meta-analytic correlations of felt trust with trust and being trusted (trust: $\rho = .46$; 95% CI [0.38, 0.54]; being trusted: $\rho = .33$; 95% CI [0.26, 0.40]; see Table 5) are well below and meaningfully different from the .90 threshold that would otherwise be indicative of construct redundancy (Shaffer et al., 2016). This is consistent with the notion that felt trust is related to yet distinct from these two constructs.

Our second exploration examined the incremental predictive validity of felt trust across four workplace outcomes above and beyond trust and being trusted using meta-analytic path modeling (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995). The first step in this procedure involved populating a correlation matrix with meta-analytic estimates for all pairs of variables included in the model. For the relationships of felt trust and being trusted with workplace outcomes, we estimated the meta-analytic correlations ourselves. Since our literature search strategy so far had only focused on felt trust, we performed an additional search for eligible studies on being trusted, identified seven studies for inclusion, and extracted the required statistics. We imported estimates from Choi et al.'s (2021) recent meta-analysis for the relationships of trust with workplace outcomes. Having populated the correlation matrix, we calculated the harmonic mean sample size across matrix cells (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995) and examined a series of additive models to test the incremental predictive validity of felt beyond trust and being trusted with respect to each outcome. Due to data availability constraints, we were not able to examine the being trusted–CHOB relationship.

The pattern of results was highly (though not entirely) consistent across outcomes (see Table 6). The effect size *sign* (i.e., positive vs. negative) and *significance* (i.e., statistically significant vs. non-significant) of felt trust was consistent with those of trust and being trusted across 86% of the analyses: all three trust constructs were positively related to productive outcomes (i.e., positive path coefficients [*B*] with CI lower limits exceeding zero) and negatively related to counterproductive outcomes (i.e., negative coefficients with CI upper limits below zero). In terms of differences in effect size *magnitude* (i.e., small vs. large; estimated by calculating a CI around the difference in effect sizes (cf., De Jong et al., 2016; Olkin & Finn, 1995), effect sizes for felt trust tended to be consistently smaller than those for trust and for being trust in 86% of the analyses, as indicated by negative effect size differences (ΔB) with CI upper limits below zero for productive outcomes, and positive effect size differences with CI lower limits exceeding zero for counterproductive outcomes. To further probe these effect size differences, we performed a Relative Weight Analysis on the same data (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). These results largely corroborated the aforementioned findings, showing relative weights (*W*) for felt trust that are consistently smaller than those associated with trust and being trusted for the same 86% of the analyses.

Our third exploration examined the incremental explanatory validity of felt trust as a parallel mediator alongside of trust between our three focal antecedents and four outcomes. Due to data availability constraints, we were not able to examine this for being trusted. To populate the correlation matrix, we calculated meta-analytic estimates for the antecedent–felt trust relationships ourselves and imported estimates for the antecedent–trust relationships from prior meta-analyses (listed in Online Appendix). We then used the matrix along with the harmonic mean sample size to test a series of mediation models, where felt trust and trust were modeled as parallel mediators between each antecedent and each outcome. The pattern of results was generally consistent with the ones we found for their direct

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TABLE 5 Meta-analytic estimates for relationships of felt trust with other trust concepts, workplace outcomes, and antecedents.

Variable	*k*	*N*	*r*	*SD r*	*ρ*	*SD ρ*	CI LL	CI UL	CV LL	CV LL	%Art
Trust variables											
Trust	31	7,993	0.41	0.21	.46	0.22	0.38	0.54	0.18	0.75	6.47%
Being trusted	10	2,163	0.28	0.09	.33	0.08	0.26	0.40	0.23	0.43	48.59%
Outcomes											
Task performance	31	8,819	0.21	0.15	.24	0.16	0.18	0.30	0.03	0.45	13.81%
AOB	21	6,362	0.19	0.23	.22	0.24	0.11	0.33	−0.09	0.53	6.10%
CHOB	16	4,410	0.33	0.17	.36	0.19	0.26	0.46	0.12	0.60	9.43%
CPB	12	4,160	−0.21	0.16	−.23	0.18	−0.33	−0.12	−0.45	0.00	9.06%
Antecedents											
Relational leadership	4	4,187	0.33	0.08	0.34	0.09	0.25	0.42	0.23	0.45	9.85%
Moral leadership	9	2,604	0.44	0.18	0.49	0.20	0.35	0.63	0.23	0.75	6.41%
Justice	7	1,482	0.46	0.14	0.50	0.15	0.38	0.62	0.31	0.70	13.58%

Abbreviations: AOB= affiliation-oriented behavior; CHOB = change-oriented behavior; CPB = counter-productive behavior; *k* = number of independent samples; *N* = cumulative sample size; *r* = mean observed correlation; *SD r* = standard deviation of *r*; *ρ* = mean true-score correlation; *SD ρ* = standard deviation of ρ; CI LL = lower level of the 95% confidence interval for *ρ*; CI UL = upper level of the 95% confidence interval for *ρ*; CV LL = lower level of the 80% credibility interval for *ρ*; CV UL = upper level of the 80% credibility interval for *ρ*; %Art = percentage of variance attributable to statistical artifacts. All meta-analytic results were generated using a random effects model.

TABLE 6 MASEM estimates of the incremental predictive validity of felt trust.

Outcomes	Trust variables	*B*	CI LL	CI UL	Δ*B*	CI LL	CI UL	W (abs)	W (%)	R^2
Task performance	Felt trust	0.15	0.13	0.17	−0.04	−0.06	−0.01	0.04	44.2%	8.6%
	Trust	0.19	0.17	0.21				0.05	55.8%	
	Felt trust	0.07	0.04	0.11	−0.43	−0.48	−0.39	0.03	10.9%	28.6%
	Being trusted	0.51	0.47	0.54				0.25	89.1%	
AOB	Felt trust	0.08	0.06	0.10	−0.23	−0.26	−0.20	0.03	22.2%	12.1%
	Trust	0.30	0.28	0.32				0.09	77.8%	
	Felt trust	0.03	−0.01	0.07	−0.68	−0.73	−0.62	0.02	4.7%	51.9%
	Being trusted	0.71	0.67	0.75				0.49	95.3%	
CHOB	Felt trust	0.25	0.23	0.27	0.02	−0.01	0.05	0.09	52.1%	17.3%
	Trust	0.23	0.21	0.26				0.08	47.9%	
CPB	Felt trust	−0.11	−0.14	−0.08	0.15	0.11	0.19	0.03	29.6%	10.6%
	Trust	−0.26	−0.29	−0.23				0.07	70.4%	
	Felt trust	−0.10	−0.16	−0.04	0.28	0.20	0.37	0.03	16.8%	18.6%
	Being trusted	−0.39	−0.45	−0.33				0.16	83.2%	

Abbreviations: AOB = affiliation-oriented behavior; CHOB = change-oriented behavior; CPB = counter-productive behavior; CI LL = lower level of the 95% confidence interval; CI UL = upper level of the 95% confidence interval; *B* = effect size estimate for the (felt) trust-outcome path; Δ*B* = absolute difference between the effect size estimates; W = relative weight; R^2 = percentage of variance explained.

relationships with outcomes (see Table 7). The *sign* and *significance* of the mediating effect of felt trust was consistent with that of trust across 92% antecedent–outcome relationships, with significant, positive mediating effects for both felt trust and trust with respect to productive outcomes (i.e., positive indirect effect [*ab*] coefficients with CI lower limits exceeding zero) and significant, negative mediating effects with respect to counterproductive outcomes (i.e., negative indirect effect coefficients with CI upper limits below zero). In terms of relative effect size *magnitude*, the mediating effect sizes of felt trust were consistently smaller than that of trust for 75% of the examined antecedent–outcome relationships, as indicated by negative indirect effect sizes differences (*Δab*) with CI upper limits below zero for productive outcomes, and positive indirect effect size differences with CI lower limits above zero for counterproductive outcomes.

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TABLE 7 MASEM estimates of the incremental explanatory validity of felt trust.

Antecedent	Outcome	Mediator	*a*	CI LL	CI LL	*b*	CI LL	CI LL	*ab*	CI LL	CI LL	Δ *ab*	CI LL	CI LL
Moral leadership	Task performance	Felt trust	0.49	0.47	0.51	0.14	0.11	0.17	0.07	0.06	0.08	−0.04	−0.06	−0.01
		Trust	0.63	0.61	0.65	0.17	0.13	0.20	0.11	0.09	0.13			
	AOB	Felt trust	0.49	0.47	0.51	0.02	−0.01	0.05	0.01	0.0002	0.02	−0.10	−0.13	−0.08
		Trust	0.63	0.61	0.65	0.18	0.15	0.21	0.11	0.09	0.14			
	CHOB	Felt trust	0.49	0.47	0.51	0.21	0.18	0.24	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.01	−0.01	0.04
		Trust	0.63	0.61	0.65	0.14	0.11	0.17	0.09	0.06	0.11			
	CPB	Felt trust	0.49	0.46	0.52	−0.04	−0.07	−0.01	−0.02	−0.04	−0.0004	0.06	0.02	0.09
		Trust	0.63	0.61	0.65	−0.12	−0.15	−0.08	−0.08	−0.10	−0.05			
Relational leadership	Task performance	Felt trust	0.34	0.32	0.36	0.15	0.12	0.17	0.05	0.04	0.06	−0.05	−0.07	−0.02
		Trust	0.64	0.62	0.66	0.15	0.12	0.18	0.10	0.07	0.12			
	AOB	Felt trust	0.34	0.32	0.36	0.07	0.04	0.09	0.02	0.02	0.03	−0.09	−0.11	−0.06
		Trust	0.64	0.62	0.66	0.17	0.14	0.20	0.11	0.08	0.13			
	CHOB	Felt trust	0.34	0.31	0.37	0.24	0.21	0.27	0.08	0.07	0.09	0.02	−0.003	0.05
		Trust	0.64	0.62	0.66	0.09	0.06	0.13	0.06	0.03	0.08			
	CPB	Felt trust	0.34	0.31	0.37	−0.11	−0.14	−0.07	−0.04	−0.05	−0.02	0.09	0.06	0.12
		Trust	0.64	0.62	0.66	−0.20	−0.24	−0.16	−0.13	−0.15	−0.10			
Overall justice	Task performance	Felt trust	0.50	0.47	0.53	0.14	0.11	0.18	0.07	0.05	0.09	−0.03	−0.06	0.002
		Trust	0.58	0.55	0.61	0.17	0.13	0.21	0.10	0.08	0.12			
	AOB	Felt trust	0.50	0.47	0.53	0.00	−0.02	0.03	0.00	−0.01	0.01	−0.11	−0.14	−0.08
		Trust	0.58	0.55	0.61	0.19	0.15	0.22	0.11	0.09	0.13			
	CHOB	Felt trust	0.50	0.47	0.53	0.32	0.29	0.36	0.16	0.14	0.18	−0.04	−0.07	−0.01
		Trust	0.58	0.55	0.61	0.34	0.31	0.37	0.20	0.17	0.22			
	CPB	Felt trust	0.50	0.47	0.53	−0.09	−0.13	−0.05	−0.05	−0.06	−0.03	0.09	0.06	0.12
		Trust	0.58	0.55	0.61	−0.23	−0.27	−0.18	−0.13	−0.16	−0.11			

Abbreviations: AOB = affiliation-oriented behavior; CHOB = change-oriented behavior; CPB = counter-productive behavior; CI LL = lower level of the 95% confidence interval; CI UL = upper level of the 95% confidence interval; a = effect size estimate for the antecedent-mediator path; b = effect size estimate for the mediator-outcome path; *ab* = indirect effect size estimate; Δ*ab* = absolute difference between indirect effect size estimates.

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8.1 | Implications and directions

Our exploratory meta-analysis represents one of the first attempts to statistically synthesize existing evidence on felt trust. We acknowledge that this meta-analysis is based on the very primary studies we criticized in our review and, thus, inevitably suffers from most (though not all[6]) of their weaknesses. Despite this important caveat, and hence the tentativeness of our findings, our meta-analysis yields several informative and interesting results, with important implications for felt trust research moving forward. First, and most importantly, our findings provide cumulative evidence supporting the fundamental premise that felt trust is distinct from and adds predictive validity beyond trust and being trusted. Our findings thus provide important legitimacy to future investigations into this topic. In addition, our findings speak to prior predictions about relative effect sizes. First, while Brower et al. (2000) predicted that the impact of felt trust (what they called "perception") would be greater than that of being trusted ("actuality"), our meta-analysis directly contradicts these predictions by showing a larger effect for being trusted. It should be noted though that most of the included studies relied on subjective ratings of the focal outcomes collected from the same source as the being trusted ratings (i.e., leaders). As such, we suspect the effect size differences between felt trust and being trusted can partially be explained by differences in common method variance between the two constructs. Future research should further investigate this. Second, our findings corroborate predictions from the social psychology model of meta-perceptions (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993) that the effect of self-projection on meta-perceptions is larger than that of meta-accuracy. Specifically, they indicate that the impact of focal party's own trust ($\rho = .46$; Table 5) on felt trust is larger than that of being trusted by the other party ($\rho = .33$; $\Delta\rho = .13$; 95% CI [0.03, 0.23]). Attesting to the presence of true effect size differences, a recent meta-perceptions study shows that methodological artifacts (i.e., CMV inflating self-projection effects) only play a modest role in explaining such differences in effect size (Yuan et al., 2022).

Our meta-analytic results also point to several directions for future research. For instance, our consistent finding that felt trust effects on outcomes are smaller in magnitude than that of trust (and being trusted) suggests that further investigation into the underlying reasons for this discrepancy is warranted. Is trusting others really more important (or: consequential) than feeling trusted by others? What factors could explain these differences? Alternatively, could there be outcome variables where we might expect felt trust to have stronger relationships than trust? We encourage future research to investigate this further and develop theoretical explanations for these differential effects. Second, our meta-analytic confirmation of several basic felt trust–outcome relationships provides a foundation for future investigations into the theoretical mechanisms underlying these relationships. Given the multitude of mechanisms proposed in the literature (see Figure 1), such investigations should adopt integrative approaches both theoretically and empirically (as discussed earlier). Third, the non-*WEIRD* nature of felt trust research raises questions about the cross-cultural implications of felt trust. Do felt trust–outcome relationships generalize across cultures or does national culture condition these relationships? We did not explore this in our own meta-analysis, but it should certainly be done in future research. Besides substantive implications, our meta-analytic results have methodological implications as well. Specifically, our meta-analytic estimates can be used as effect size benchmarks, allowing scholars to determine the sample size required to reliably detect felt trust effects with sufficient statistical power, and/or they can be used to add precision to hypotheses by specifying the smallest effect size of interest (Edwards & Berry, 2010; Lakens et al., 2018). In doing so, our findings contribute to the methodological rigor of future research.

[6]Although some of these weaknesses can be corrected for using meta-analytic techniques (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015).

9 | CONCLUSION

The sobering picture emerging from our critical review reveals the need for a fundamental redirection of felt trust research: one in which we strive towards construct clarity; measurement validity; coherent and integrative theorizing; and robust, cumulative empirical research. Instead of chasing after the next novel, counter-intuitive finding (Pillutla & Thau, 2013), what is needed is a "slow science" approach (Antonakis, 2023), where scholars take more time to thoroughly understand and build on the current knowledge base, and to obtain the conceptual clarity and theoretical depth needed to formulate informative hypotheses that are worth subjecting to rigorous empirical testing (Phaf, 2020; Scheel et al., 2021). Our exploratory meta-analysis further paves the way for future research by providing much-needed (preliminary) evidence of the field's fundamental premise: that felt trust is distinct from and offers insight beyond related trust concepts. We believe that our envisioned redirection and synthesized evidence will enable the field of felt trust to achieve its potential in complementing trustor-centric perspectives on organizational trust. If felt trust research pivots into this new direction, the future of the field will look bright indeed!

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/dnfaz/?view_only=32f18ab9d5894f219b2b592c46d57cf4.

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