Our January *Discourse* investigated the idea of “trust.”

Matt began the evening by relaying a personal experience he had in 1994-1995 as he developed a relationship with Pétur Kidson Karlsson of Reykyavík, Ísland. The story recounts Matt taking extraordinary effort to help transport Mr. Karlsson’s personal effects to Hove, Britain after Mr. Karlsson moved back to Britain after having lived in Ísland for many years. When Matt arrived with the materials, weighing more than a half a ton, Mr. Karlsson had shown that he was certain that Matt would have arrived. In essence, Karlsson had trusted Matt. Matt asked the rhetorical questions of, “Why?”.

The members of the *Discourse* noted that many candidates urge voters to trust them. And in American society generally, citizens accept the need to build trust, as an article of faith. The more trust we have, the thinking goes, the better off we are.

We examined trust by discussing a trust model that Feely proposed (below).

The first order of business was to discuss the element of the Trust Model at the far left hand as presented on a two dimensional surface – trustworthiness. This portion of the salon was conducted in a way that was akin to a university lecture, where Feely defined each element and then explained that each of the three elements of trustworthiness is a prerequisite. Furthermore, each of the elements is a necessary, but insufficient condition for an entity to be deemed trustworthy. All three prerequisites have to exist simultaneously. Members of the *Discourse* appeared to accept the premise, although the term “benevolence,” representing aligned values, led to some discomfort. Very few participants accepted that benevolence represented the idea of aligned values, although no one offered an alternative vocabulary word to represent the concept.

*Discourse* members accepted that potential “trustors’ perceptions” are determined or influenced by outcomes they experienced from having given trust to a specific entity or entities in general. A potential trustor whom had given trust to an entity only to be let down, might be less likely to trust even an inherently trustworthy entity.

Participants also accepted that the “perceived risk” articulated in the model was necessary to give a context, a meaning to the model. It made no sense to speak about trust if the (potential) trustor had no risk, in other words, had nothing to lose. It is altogether easy for a potential trustor to claim trust in a trustee if the trustor has nothing to lose from trusting the entity.

The next two blocks in the model, “trust” and “risk taking in the relationship’ refers to the notion that the degree to which the trustor gives his or her or its trust to the trustee is manifested in the willingness of the trustor to take the risk – in other words, to make themselves vulnerable to the trustee.

The salon next discussed now the model might be interpreted in light of the political context.

The first major point members made revolved around the idea that that trust is not inherently desirable. Only properly placed trust is desirable. It makes no sense, on other words, to try to enhance trust towards an entity (which could be an individual person or a group of persons or a political party or a political campaign) which is not trustworthy. Feely drove home the point, by showing a TED talk given by Baroness Onara O’Neill who used the story of Bernie Madoff, who made-off with the money of those who gave him their trust (and savings). We mentioned other examples, and concluded that blind trust, whether in a business partner or a political leader, is not desirable. Bluntly stated, building trust for the sake of having more trust, we concluded, is a stupid goal.

Members of the *Discourse* postulated, as a result, that campaigns could be better off by espousing the trustworthiness of a candidate – assuming the candidate does indeed represent ability, benevolence, and integrity..

We recognized also that trust is something that people or organizations bestow upon others; it is not something a person or organization can rightfully demand. The trust model implies a relationship between a (prospective) trustee and a (prospective) “trustor,” whereby the prospective trustee must present reason for the prospective trustor to bestow her or his trust. The reason for a (prospective) trustor to trust is, in summary, found in the (prospective) trustee’s trustworthiness influenced by the perceptions that they developed. Furthermore, the salon participants concluded that there would need to be a way to influence the electorate’s perceptions.

Thus, it appeared clear to most participants that a political candidate and a political campaign could reasonably aim to increase the trust that the electorate has in a candidate. And finally, we recognized – although we didn’t require much discussion – that having the trust of constituents would be helpful to a candidate or to an organization to get things done. Having the trust of others is empowering. Having the trust of many bestowed upon a political entity would likely aid that entity in achieving political success.

The discussion helped us to acknowledge (and probably reach consensus on) three ideas.

* We ought not desire to trust more per se.
* We ought to direct our trust intelligently, to those whom are trustworthy.
* Political entities, cannot demand trust, but they can and ought to act to build and maintain trustworthiness and ensure that their trustworthiness is known to all possible constituents or, in other words, prospective trustors.

The March 2017 *Discourse* will concentrate on discussing “benevolence.” *What ought be the values of the major political parties, and how ought they be communicated and operationalized?*