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## An Integrated Approach to Policy Transfer and Diffusion

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article reviews the existing literature on policy transfer and diffusion and offers a more integrated theory for examining the spreading of policy. Typical studies have treated each as separate, yet they are similar in many respects. For example, both involve many of the same agents and processes involved in the spreading of policy. This article integrates the two literatures by developing a theoretical continuum upon which varying degrees of policy diffusion occur.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In a world of heightened globalization, where many nations share similar problems across many fields, it is becoming more common for policies, programs, innovations, ideologies, or information to spread from one entity to another. Accordingly, during the past 30 years, significant scholarship has been devoted to how and why policies spread from one governmental unit to another. Two areas of research have paid particular attention to the spreading of policy: policy transfer and diffusion studies. Policy transfer typically involves cases in which one nation or government imports knowledge of policies or programs that exist abroad (see Rose, 1991; Bennett, 1991a; 1991b; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). Diffusion research focuses on how innovations, policies, or programs spread from one governmental entity to another (see Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Savage, 1985; Berry and Berry, 1990; Rogers, 1995).

In this article, the two literatures are brought together in a way that reconciles the differences and offers a more unified theory for the spreading of policy. Notably,

many of the same agents are involved in both areas, and geographic and internal characteristics of adopters are present in both literatures. Policy content is important in both literatures, and both involve a similar process. The main objective of the manuscript is to present a continuum upon which policy transfer and diffusion lie. Diffusion is a more general term, often encompassing cases where structural or modernizing factors account for policy adoption. Policy transfer is a more specific form of policy diffusion, referring only to cases where conscious, external knowledge of a policy, program, or idea is utilized in developing domestic policy. However, policies resulting from structural and modernizing factors should not be discounted so readily in policy transfer research.

## **POLICY TRANSFER LITERATURE**

To Dolowitz and Marsh, policy transfer: "refer[s] to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another time and/or place" (1996,344). Most policy transfer research has been conducted in the United Kingdom and Europe and the focus is typically upon convergence of policies among nations (see Bennett, 1991 a; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). The literature identifies a number of terms related to policy transfer, including lesson drawing (Rose, 1991), policy convergence (Bennett, 1991 b; Dolowitz, 1998), emulation (March and Dolowitz, 1996), and even systematically pinching ideas (Schneider and Ingram, 1988). Distinction should be made among these terms as policy transfer and policy convergence are general terms, while lesson drawing and emulation are more specific. In comparative political analysis, policy convergence involves the growing similarity in public policy, structures, and processes among nations or other governments (Bennett, 1991b). This encompasses convergence in policy goals, content, instruments, outcomes, and style. In addition to the transfer of policies, there are a number of other objects of transfer including institutions, attitudes or ideas, ideologies, and negative lessons (Dolowitz, 1998; Stone, 1999). This is increasingly evidenced in the policy harmonization found in much of the globalization literature.

As Rose (1991) identifies, transfer results as governments search for remedies to problems. Remedies may involve appropriating more funds for an existing program, looking at how that nation dealt with a problem in the past, or searching elsewhere to determine how others have dealt with the problem (see Stone, 1999). The discussion of policy transfer and lesson drawing focuses primarily on this last component.

Typically, policy transfer is either voluntary or coercive (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Voluntary transfer often occurs as a result of dissatisfaction with existing policy (Rose, 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Dolowitz, 1998). When there is satisfaction with the status quo, there is usually no impetus for change in existing policy. However, when dissatisfaction occurs, policy makers search for existing solutions to alleviate the dissatisfaction (see Dolowitz, 1997).

A typical component of policy transfer involves emulation, whereby knowledge of policy innovations is borrowed from other entities. This may result when past or present solutions are not found at home. Similarly, lesson drawing involves examining policies or programs elsewhere to determine what has been done to solve problems (Rose, 1991; see Bennett, 1991b). According to Bennett: "There is a natural tendency to look abroad, to see how other states have responded to similar pressures, to share ideas, to draw lessons and to bring foreign evidence to bear within domestic policy-making processes" (1991b, 220). Robertson (1991) finds that lesson drawing is a political process, whereby actors may manipulate the policy process. Lesson drawing serves as a shortcut to problem solving that attempts to avoid reinventing the wheel where solutions to problems may already exist. Looking across borders often provides potential solutions to problems in many areas and also provides a way of dealing with the problem quickly and at lower cost (Stone, 1999).

Positive lesson drawing occurs in cases where entities search for solutions in places where a problem has been dealt with successfully (Rose, 1991). However, lesson drawing does not require policy adoption or behavior change. Negative lessons are drawn when an entity decides not to adopt a particular policy or program after reviewing what has been done elsewhere (Dolowitz, 1998; Rose, 1991). Stone (1999), for example, suggests that negative lessons may have been drawn from the BSE scare in Britain.

A number of researchers have identified cases of policy transfer, demonstrating where and how lessons were drawn by reviewing what has been done in other nations or governments (see Bennett, 1991; 1997; Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). Dolowitz (1997; 1998) finds that, during the 1980s, British employment policies established during the Thatcher Government were modeled on many of the policies of the Reagan Administration in the United States. Information on these policies traveled

in both directions, as both nations learned from each other. Britain also looked to Sweden, as well as the United States, in formulating welfare policy. In another example, British child support policy was modeled after the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program in the United States. Bennett's (1997) cross-national study finds lesson-drawing, interaction, and information sharing responsible for the diffusion of ombudsman, freedom of information legislation, and data protection laws.

Media sources are prominent in exchanging information from one government to another (Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). As Dolowitz argues: "Media coverage of the American welfare system was so extensive it could be argued that the design of the American state and local welfare-to-work programs was common knowledge among a large portion of British political elite" (1998; 76). Time and The Economist magazines also published articles on the subjects, as did many British newspapers. A documentary on the BBC's Panorama was mentioned by several Members of Parliament during Parliamentary debates, indicating the importance of television in spreading information on these policies.

Additional information on American welfare-to-work policy was conveyed in conferences, reports, papers, and statements by British officials (Dolowitz, 1998). In Britain, officials from the Department of Employment,<sup>( n1)</sup> Department of Social Security, and the Manpower Service Commission visited to the United States to study existing policies.

A number of factors further facilitate policy transfer including a common language, similar ideologies, relationships among personnel, and the existence of think-tanks and policy entrepreneurs (Dolowitz, 1998; Dolowitz, Greenwold, and Marsh, 1999). The United States and the United Kingdom share many of these factors, offering some explanation for the transfer between these nations.

In addition to the cases of voluntary policy transfer discussed above, transfer may also be coercive, either directly or indirectly (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Direct coercive policies are uncommon, but they do occur and usually involve regulatory policies. For example, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have direct coercive power and can force policy on their members.<sup>( n2)</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, the IMF and World Bank tried to force neo-liberal economic and social policies on post-communist governments requesting financial assistance (Dolowitz,

1998). Further evidence of coercive policy transfer is suggested by Majone (1991), who writes of the significant impact American regulators had on European anti-cartel legislation.

There are more extreme examples of coercive policy transfer among nations. The United States drafted the Japanese Constitution and was involved in developing Germany's Constitution following World War II (Dolowitz, 1998). Stone writes of the coercive policy transfer that occurred in imperialist times: "the era of imperialism in the last century resulted in significant coercive transfers of legal codes, parliamentary institutions, currencies, and bureaucratic structures in the European colonies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (1999,55).

There is, however, a middle ground between voluntary and coercive policy transfer (Dolowitz, 1998). A country may adopt a policy in order to avoid falling behind other nations which have already adopted the policy. Hoberg (1991), for example, argues that Canada was indirectly coerced into adopting environmental regulatory policy as a result of pollution flows from the United States. Moreover, the international community often pressures nations into policy adoption (Dolowitz, 1998; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996), as was the case when Norway was pressured into adopting workfare policies, even though such policies were not needed in that country (Dolowitz, 1998).

Finally, it is important to note that there are varying degrees to which lessons can be drawn (see Table 1). Rose identifies: copying, emulation, hybridization, synthesis and inspiration (1991; see also Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Copying involves adopting existing policy without alteration. It may involve using the exact wording of legislation in developing policy and assumes consistent institutional and contextual variables. Emulation assumes a standard basis starting point for best policy, but it allows for adjustment to suit varying needs of the adopter. It may also involve subtle improvements in the original program or policy. Hybridization involves merging two components from different places. Rose (1991) offers the example of using a program from one place and employing different administrative means to suit an adopter with a different political system. Synthesis is similar to hybridization but involves elements taken from three or more different places. It often involves combining a number of components into a new setting. Inspiration stimulates the creativity of policy after examining problems in a different setting or context. It is not an example of lesson drawing, but rather an alternative way in which policy makers may deal with problems.

The policy transfer literature offers a focused view on how nations look across borders to solve problems. The following section presents a review of the diffusion of innovation literature which presents an alternate, albeit similar, way of examining the spreading of policies.

**TABLE 1: VARIETIES OF LESSON DRAWING**

<b>Copying:</b>	Adoption more or less intact of a program already in effect in another jurisdiction.
<b>Emulation:</b>	Adoption, with adjustment for different circumstances, of a program already in effect in another jurisdiction.
<b>Hybridization:</b>	Combine elements of programs from two different places.
<b>Synthesis:</b>	Combine familiar elements from programs in effect in three or more different places.
<b>Inspiration:</b>	Programs elsewhere used as intellectual stimulus for developing a novel program without an analogue elsewhere.

Source: Rose, Richard. 1991. "What is Lesson-Drawing?" *Journal of Public Policy*. 11:3-30. p22.

## **DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION LITERATURE**

Most diffusion studies have been conducted among American states and concern the process by which innovations spread from one unit, individual, or entity to another (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Savage, 1985; Berry and Berry, 1990; Rogers, 1995). Rogers (1995) suggests there are four components of the diffusion process: the innovation; communication channels through which the innovation spreads; the social system within which this occurs; and the time required for the innovation to diffuse. An innovation is an idea or program which is new to an entity, even if it exists elsewhere and other entities have already adopted it (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Rogers, 1995). Communication channels involve the creation and exchanging of information in a way that connects innovation adopters with potential adopters (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Rogers, 1995). In many cases, ideas spread because potential adopters read the same journals, magazines, and newspapers, or attend the same conferences or meetings.

Many participants hasten the spread of policy, programs or other innovations. These policy entrepreneurs or agents: "invest their resources-time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money-in the hope of 'future return'" (Kingdon, 1995, 122). Their presence can help put an item on the government agenda and, potentially, increase the rate of diffusion (Mintrom, 1997).

Walker (1969) categorizes adopters using a "tree branch" analogy in which pioneering adopters are located at the top of a tree and as new entities adopt an innovation, more branches form on the tree. He also calculates an innovation score by comparing adopters based on the amount of time that passes between the first and last adopter. Thus, the first to adopt a given policy are termed "leaders," while those who adopt last (or much later) are considered "laggards." Welch and Thompson (1980) measure the number of years required for a policy to diffuse to 25, 50, and 75 percent of the population. When adopters are plotted against time, a graphical "S"-shaped curve results (Gray 1973, Feller and Menzel, 1978; Rogers, 1995).

Diffusion studies typically focus on three models mapping the spread of policy. First, organizational diffusion deals with people and groups who spread policy through interaction in meetings, conferences, and other networks (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Savage, 1985; Rogers, 1995). States or other entities are more likely to adopt a given policy when their officials interact with officials in states who have already adopted a given policy (Gray, 1973; Mintrom and Vergari, 1998). Walker finds organizations such as the Council of State Governments, the [Federal] Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, and the Citizen's Conference on State Legislatures improve communication between states. They bring officials together, allow for the exchange of information, and facilitate the transfer of personnel between states.

Organizational analysis has provided a number of interesting findings in respect to the diffusion of policies and programs. For example, larger organizations are typically more innovative, in part, because of greater resources in terms of staff and money (Rogers, 1995; Scott, 1995). These organizations may be more innovative because their employees are highly skilled technically. Moreover, policies and programs which are adopted by a large number of different organizations are likely to become institutionalized (Scott, 1995).

Second, geographic or regional diffusion models are aimed at determining what effect geography has on adoption of an innovation. According to Berry and Berry, geographic or "regional diffusion models emphasize the influence of nearby states, assuming that states emulate their neighbors when confronted with policy problems" (1990,396; also see Walker, 1969, Gray, 1973; Rogers 1995). Walker (1969) suggests it is common to look to other states that are dealing with similar problems. Adopters are often found clustered geographically, and contiguous states are likely to adopt provided their neighbors have already done so (Foster, 1978; Berry and Berry, 1990).

Third, the internal determinant model( n3) examines political, economic, and social characteristics in order to predict likely innovators (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Savage, 1985). Innovators are typically characterized by indicators of wealth such as excess resources, per capita income, and expenditures (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Rogers, 1995). Urbanization, larger governments (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Newmark, 1999), higher education levels, higher literacy rates, and greater upward mobility (Rogers, 1995) are other characteristics of adopters. Walker, (1969) finds that the following internal characteristics have a cumulative effect in predicting innovation: per capita income; interparty competition; legislative professionalism; and percentage of urban population.

Using event history analysis, Berry and Berry (1990) organize their data in a way that considers both geographic influences and internal characteristics. Employing this methodology, it is possible to predict the likelihood of adoption at a specific time given information on the number of neighbors adopting a program and certain internal characteristics. Their results suggest that both are important in predicting adopters of state lotteries in the United States.

Policy content, or more specifically the particular program in question, also affects which policies diffuse and how quickly this will occur. Walker was criticized for grouping many policy areas in his 1969 study and thus subsequent researchers sought to correct this problem in their studies. Contrary to Walker, Gray (1973) contends that simply because a state is an innovator in one policy area does not mean the state will be a leader in another. Policy content, therefore, is important in determining which entities will adopt and how quickly they will do so.



The following section will elucidate the distinction between policy transfer and diffusion. There are inherent differences, but considering them together provides a stronger theoretical way in which policies may be examined.

## **INTEGRATING THEORIES: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

A significant gap exists in the respective policy transfer and diffusion literatures in acknowledging the utility of the other. One reason for this gap can be attributed to differences in research traditions or epistemological positions in each area (see Table 2). These differences reflect the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Yet, neither policy transfer, nor diffusion, are superior in terms of examining the spread of policy.

**TABLE 2: COMPARISON: POLICY TRANSFER AND DIFFUSION**

	<u>Policy Transfer</u>	<u>Diffusion</u>
<b>Cases</b>	Few cases	Many cases
<b>Methodology</b>	Qualitative	Quantitative
<b>Generalizability</b>	Low degree	High degree
<b>Modeling</b>	Little	Complex/Mathematical
<b>Prediction</b>	None	High degree

Policy transfer studies typically involve studying a limited number of cases. Analysis is conducted qualitatively, relying on specialized examination of nations or governments on both sides of the transfer. Since policy transfer involves a much more detailed analysis, the researcher seeks to uncover the specifics of what was transferred, who was involved in the transfer, and how transfer occurred. The cost of this type of analysis is that there are fewer conclusions as to how a given policy may transfer elsewhere. Results may be less generalizable than in diffusion studies. Modeling is typically not used in the analysis of policy transfer, and there is no predictive ability.

Another notable weakness in the policy transfer literature is that it may be overly theorized, hypothesized, and conceptualized (Bennett, 1997). Difficulties also lie in proving that knowledge of external policy is employed in developing domestic policy. Although authors have sought to determine the degree to which policies are transferred (see Rose, 1991), this type of categorization is problematic.

Diffusion research, however, examines a much larger number of cases, involving quantitative techniques and complex mathematical modeling. These techniques are used to count and predict adopters derived from information such as the proximity to other adopters and internal characteristics of the state, nation, or government. Results are much more generalizable than in policy transfer studies. The strength of diffusion studies lie in their predictive ability to determine what factors, whether organizational, geographic, or internal, will lead to program or policy adoption. As critics point out, diffusion focuses on adopters and not enough on process (see Rose, 1991). Further, diffusion researchers may assume that policies should diffuse, when perhaps it is best that they do not (Rogers, 1995).

## **INTEGRATING POLICY TRANSFER AND DIFFUSION**

### *Multi-dimensional and Multi-level Transfer*

Although studied primarily in American political science, diffusion research is not limited to the United States and, more importantly, the diffusion process is an international and multidimensional phenomenon. It is a common assertion that the diffusion of innovation literature often involves studying innovations in American states (see Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973). However, Rogers (1995) and Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) provide examples of diffusion from many nations in many fields including economics, sociology, education, and business. Technology diffusion is also an international phenomenon. It occurs within and across nations, and in private and public communication fields, industry, and the military (Gee, 1981).

Similarly, policy transfer is also multidisciplinary and occurs among many different entities, organizations, and governments (see Evans and Davies, 1999). Truscott (1996) demonstrates the multidimensional nature of policy transfer in her discussion of how health and social workers in North America and Canada export conceptions of elder abuse to other countries. Evans and Davies (1999) suggest a multidimensional approach to policy transfer consisting of global, international, and

transnational levels; the domestic level; and inter-organizational levels. The multi-level aspect of policy transfer is further exemplified by Majone (1991), who finds regulatory policy making results from both foreign and domestic sources, and by Rose (1991) who finds lesson drawing occurs between cities, states, and nations. Moreover, there are numerous pathways through which policies may transfer. Dolowitz (1998) identifies 30 permutations of various governmental levels involved (See Table 3). These are applicable to both policy transfer and diffusion of innovation, as both literatures recognize the multiplicity of governments and actors involved in the spreading of policy.

**TABLE 3: POSSIBLE PATHWAYS OF TRANSFER**

International →	International	State	→ International
International →	National	State	→ National
International →	Regional	State	→ Regional
International →	State	State	→ State
International →	Local	State	→ Local
National →	International	Local	→ International
National →	National	Local	→ National
National →	Regional	Local	→ Regional
National →	State	Local	→ State
National →	Local	Local	→ Local
Regional →	International	Inter. Past	→ International
Regional →	National	National Past	→ National
Regional →	Regional	Regional Past	→ Regional
Regional →	State	State Past	→ State
Regional →	Local	Local Past	→ Local

Source: Dolowitz, David P. 1998. *Learning From America: Policy Transfer and the Development of the British Workfare State*. Sussex Academic Press Brighton. P.23

Note: Dolowitz includes five pathways which involve learning from the past. These examples have been left in the table because looking to the past is an important aspect of problem solving; however they are also outside of the scope of this paper.

Information on existing policy may travel in a number of different ways: within international organizations; from nation to nation; from region to region; from state to state; from locality to locality; or in any combination of the above. The federal system in the United States, for example, provides a multitude of opportunities for policy transfer and diffusion (Dolowitz, Greenwold, and Marsh, 1999). In a country with more than 86,000 governments, including federal, state, and local units, policy transfer is not only abundant, it occurs in a number of different directions, both vertically and horizontally. In addition to policies transferring or diffusing downward from the federal government to the states, policies may spread from states to the national government, from state to state, or from department to department within the bureaucracy. Policies may also transfer or diffuse from any of these entities to other governments internationally.

## **GEOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AGENTS, AND MEDIA**

There are a number of similarities between policy transfer and diffusion that need greater recognition in their respective literatures. First, geographic or regional influences are usually cited as factors promoting diffusion, but they are infrequently discussed in the policy transfer literature. Second, and cited to some extent in both literatures, are mass media sources which serve as conduits through which policy information is conveyed from one entity to another. Since geography plays a key role in: the frequency of meetings and degree of interconnectedness within organizational networks; and the shared media markets of neighboring regions, they will be examined together.

Organizations play a key role in policy transfer, lesson drawing, and diffusion research. Rose (1991) discusses networks involved in facilitating the lesson drawing process. For example, emulation occurs in scientific meetings, educational conferences, or when medical personnel read the same medical journals. In researching welfare policy in the 1980s, British officials met with American academics in conferences and other organizational settings (Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). Educational innovations diffuse, in part, because officials attend the same conferences, interact in Parent Teacher Associations/ Organizations, and read the same academic literature (Newmark, 1999). It logically follows that policies will spread more readily when officials interact more often. The same process involving networks is cited in both literatures (see Rose, 1991; Rogers, 1995).

## **AGENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Both literatures identify the importance of agents; indeed, many of the same officials play a key role in the transfer or diffusion of policy. Elected officials, professionals, policy entrepreneurs, administrators, bureaucrats, political parties, think tanks, pressure groups, academics, international organizations, and experts are discussed at length in the diffusion and policy transfer literatures alike (see Dolowitz, 1998; Stone, 1999; Rogers, 1995). Many of these agents are members of organizations that facilitate the exchange of information on policies and programs.

Although organizational diffusion is recognized as a means of information transfer in both literatures, the policy transfer literatures underestimate the impact of geography on networking. According to Dolowitz and Marsh: "When lesson drawing across nations, geographic propinquity does not equate with policy transfer because ideological and resource similarities are necessary preconditions to adapt lessons from one country to another and neighboring countries do not always meet these preconditions" (1996: 353).<sup>( n4)</sup> Characteristics such as ideology and resources are important for policy transfer, yet they are not the only preconditions for transfer to occur. Organizational interaction facilitates policy transfer, and this transfer is much more likely between countries where distance is less of a hindrance on contact among officials. Accordingly, French and German officials should more likely interact with each other than with the United States.<sup>( n5)</sup> Moreover, regional organizations such as the European Union increase the frequency of interaction. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was formed clearly to facilitate trade among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico for geographic reasons.

Globalization has also presented numerous opportunities for policy diffusion and transfer. The growing number of international organizations has served as a means of international policy harmonization (see Bennett, 1991b). Organizations such as the OECD, IMF, and WTO are involved in policy co-ordination across the globe. As the globe becomes more interrelated, this trend should continue. On the other hand, it is also possible that policy transfer leads to globalization.

Geography plays a key part, at least indirectly, in the transfer of environmental policies between the U.S. and Canada (see Hoberg, 1991). Pollutants such as acid rain, water pollution and toxic substances are exchanged between the two nations, and geography plays a key part in lesson drawing of solutions to these problems. Without close geographic proximity, many of the problems would not have existed and lesson drawing of solutions would not have been necessary.

When the United States banned pesticides, EDB in 1983-84 and Alar in 1989, Canada soon followed. Hoberg (1991) reports the significant media attention surrounding the awareness of each of these pesticides. Geography is important in these examples because bordering areas in each nation share similar media markets, and information on these issues can flow unhindered.

Policies and innovations spread via communication channels, whether from nation to nation, nation to state, state to state, or any other combination. Rogers (1995) reports that the quickest and most efficient means of communicating innovations are mass media channels. As indicated, innovations spread largely, because potential adopters read the same journals, newspapers, and magazines, especially within a given field (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). A recent study of school uniform program diffusion in Florida finds that these media sources and publications are key vehicles for gathering information on the innovation (Newmark, 1999). The following media outlets are essential information sources: over 87 percent of the respondents indicated newspapers as crucial sources; 72% indicated television news; 55% reported news magazines; and 44% indicated radio.

Regional media sources serve as additional vehicles through which information is conveyed. For example, Time and Newsweek magazines each have European versions to complement their publications in the United States. CNN's Internet site has regional sites and this information can be provided in eight languages with the click of a mouse button.

Overall, geography, organizational networks, and media markets play an integral role in the spreading of policy. Agents play an important role in communicating information on policy, facilitating transfer and diffusion. This is consistent regardless of whether the process is viewed as policy transfer or diffusion.

## **INTERNAL DETERMINANTS**

Internal characteristics of states, nations, or other governmental entities often indicate who will adopt a given policy. These characteristics, measured by the internal determinants model in the diffusion literature (see Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Savage, 1985), are also present in nations involved in policy transfer (see

Heclo, 1974; Rose, 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). For example, big governments are typically more innovative and are more likely to adopt policy than smaller governments (Walker, 1969; Rogers, 1995; see also Bennett, 1997). Rose (1991) finds bureaucratic size and efficiency key adopter characteristics. Heclo, (1974) reports a number of factors which often lead to the adoption of a given policy: social security spending; a nation's history; geography; expenditures; and the particular program.

The latter two are worthy of further discussion. Greater expenditures are found commonly among policy adopters (see Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Heclo, 1974; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Dye (1976) finds wealthier states are more likely to experiment with innovations. Similarly, nations with slack resources should be more likely to experiment with new policies. One explanation is that entities view certain innovations as luxuries, and wealthier entities are more likely to consider these policies than those with fewer resources (Feller and Menzel, 1978).

## **POLICY CONTENT**

Since most policy transfer studies examine a limited number of governmental units, it is not surprising that policy content is emphasized in these studies. Rose suggests a key difference between lesson drawing and diffusion (1991: p. 9):

Nearly all studies of the diffusion of measures, whether public programs or agricultural or pharmaceutical products, assume that not only are there common problems but also a common response, regardless of partisan values or political cultures. The emphasis is upon the sequence of diffusion, rather than concentrating upon what is transferred. Diffusion studies seek to identify states or countries that are leaders and laggards in adopting programs, and to account for the difference.

Although the policies studied in diffusion research are often similar, (a fact that is attributed, in part, to studies conducted among American states), diffusion research recognizes variations in policies (see Clark, 1985; Rogers, 1995). This point was, perhaps, best exemplified by the deviations in Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programs across communities. When the program was initially developed, it

was assumed that all DARE programs would not vary from the Los Angeles program that initiated the innovation to the educational arena (Rogers, 1995). This, however, falsely assumed that all communities adopting the innovation had similar conditions to those in Los Angeles. Ultimately, 42 percent of DARE adopters modified the original program to suit their locality. Rose (1991) recognizes that lesson drawing often involves adapting policies to the recipient, but he fails to accept that this applies to diffusion studies as well. Although diffusion research is concerned with the process, it does not neglect policy content.

This also suggests that there are differences in adopter characteristics whether the analysis involves nations, states, or localities. This refutes any conception that policy diffusion occurs within the United States because states have perfect knowledge of a given policy, share identical resources, or are ideologically, geographically, or politically interchangeable.

Although diffusion studies suggest that innovators are atypically wealthier and better educated than non-adopters, there is little evidence suggesting that simply because an entity is more innovative in one policy, it will be more innovative in all policy areas (see Gray, 1973). This point applies equally to policy transfer research. Britain and Sweden have been more innovative in social programs (see Heclø, 1974); however this does not indicate they will be more innovative in every policy area. Certain states or nations may be considered policy leaders at specific times depending on policy area. Sweden, for example, is one of the leading innovators in active labor policies.

## **SIMILAR PROCESS**

When lesson-drawing begins, nations often look across borders in order to examine how other entities have dealt with certain policy problems. Both literatures clearly establish that entities look across borders for ready-made solutions to problems (see Walker, 1969; Bennett, 1991 a). Typically, there is some need for problem solving in the potential adopter of a given policy. Diffusion research also demonstrates this fact. Further, officials in any nation or state considering a policy solution will examine the costs involved in administering such a policy (see Gee, 1981). Other important determinations are the feasibility of the policy and an analysis of potential benefits of policy implementation.



Finally, policies, whether copied, borrowed, "pinched" (Schneider and Ingram, 1988), synthesized, or emulated must be engineered and adapted to the entity implementing the policy. As established, it is common to alter policy to suit the needs of the adopting agent (Rogers, 1995; Newmark, 1999). If a policy is not adapted in this manner, policy failure may result (see Dolowitz, 1998). This is consistent across the policy transfer and diffusion of innovation literatures.

Recently, Evans and Davies (1999) have offered a model of the policy transfer and diffusion process. Stages include: recognition of a problem needing attention; searching for potential solutions; contact by agents with "elites" elsewhere; the emergence of a network in which information feeds through; cognition, reception, and the development of a transfer network; cognitive and elite mobilization to provide information on the policy or program; interaction among agents to facilitate exchanges of information; evaluation of the information; policy decisions; processes; and outcomes.

Despite the aforementioned differences in methodology between policy transfer and diffusion, there are certain similarities in process that are also apparent methodologically in both areas. Comparative politics typically involves studying policy after the fact; however this usually does not apply to lesson drawing (Rose, 1991). Diffusion studies typically occur while an innovation is spreading. Since interviews are a common means of conducting diffusion research, it is best to conduct them while the innovation is spreading in order to reduce respondents' recall problems (Rogers, 1995). These analytical considerations are applicable to nations, states, or any entity considering policy adoption.

## **STRUCTURE AND AGENCY: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES(n6)**

Structural and agency-centered accounts of policy transfer and diffusion offer insight into the constraints and opportunities for policies to spread (see Wolman, 1992; Stone, 1999; Evans and Davies, 1999).( n7) Simply because similar policies exist in multiple places does not necessarily indicate that policy transfer or diffusion has occurred. Policy transfer excludes cases where multiple governments adopt policy at the same time without having prior knowledge of the policy or program.( n8) Having established this point, it is necessary to define the parameters of what should be considered cases of policy transfer and what should be considered examples of diffusion. In order to confirm the existence of policy transfer, Bennett

has established a number of guidelines focusing on either structure or agency (1997,215; see also Stone, 1999):

1. It can be demonstrated that idiosyncratic domestic factors are not independently responsible for the policy adoption.
2. It can be demonstrated that the adoption is not the result of the effects of similar modernizing forces having the same, but separate, effects in different states.
3. It can be demonstrated that policy makers are aware of the policy adoptions elsewhere.
4. It can be demonstrated that this overseas evidence was utilized within domestic policy debates.

The first two guidelines emphasize structural factors that permit the opportunity for policy convergence rather than lesson drawing to occur (Stone, 1999; see also Wolman, 1992). According to the literature, policy transfer, or more specifically lesson drawing, does not occur when domestic and modernizing structural factors account for policy adoption. Policy transfer also excludes instances where nations, states, or other governments develop similar policies without establishing that agents were aware of foreign policy and utilized this evidence. This is a key distinction between the typical policy transfer and diffusion or convergence literatures, as diffusion may occur with or without these structural factors.

However, there are problems in excluding cases involving structural or modernizing factors from policy transfer. For simplification, henceforth, this is termed structural policy development and includes cases where policies develop due to structural factors without agents. Some policies, for example, arise in different places, despite the fact that information is not conveyed from one governmental unit to another. In *Politics and Markets*, Lindblom (1977) offers a structural explanation for the origins of poverty. Omitting cases of structural policy development results in three limitations in policy transfer research. Policy transfer typically examines only cases where transfer occurs and not cases where it fails. Excluding cases of policy adoption due to structural factors reduces any analysis of cases where policy transfer fails. Policy failure is as important as policy success because it offers insight into what factors may inhibit policy transfer or diffusion. Additionally, excluding these cases is also problematic because of the difficulty in proving that

knowledge of external policy was utilized in policy development at home. Therefore, cases may be excluded when in fact policy transfer did occur. Finally, by narrowing the focus to only those cases including awareness and utilization of external evidence, it is difficult to generalize the results beyond the few entities in the study. Thus, despite the contributions to the literature of many policy transfer studies, they are case studies, whose processes may or may not apply to other cases.

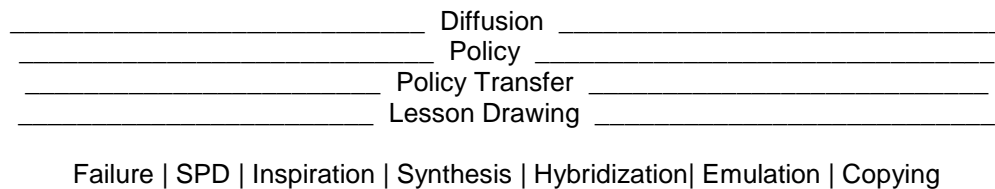
This does not suggest that cases of structural policy development should automatically fall under the label of policy transfer. However, failure to examine these cases will result in the above problems.

The third and fourth of Bennett's (1997) propositions focus on agents who facilitate the spread of policy through their awareness of the policy elsewhere and application of this knowledge in the policy process at home. As indicated, agents are discussed, at length, in both policy transfer and diffusion literatures? However, there is an apparent greater role for agents in the policy transfer literature, because of the limited use of structural explanations. Policy transfer studies also involve fewer entities, thus it is possible to examine in greater detail the role of agents in facilitating the spread of policy. Diffusion, however, should not be viewed as transfer without an agent. It may not be the case that agents have a lesser role in policy diffusion, rather less attention may be paid to their role in the process. A number of recent articles in the diffusion literature have been devoted to the role of agents or policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom and Vergari, 1998; see also Kingdon, 1995). The findings suggest that the presence of these actors increases the likelihood of diffusion.

Traditional views of the literature suggest that rigid cases of policy transfer involve the exact copying of policy or legislation and less specific forms of transfer involve (in descending order of degree), emulation, hybridization, synthesis and inspiration (Rose, 1991; see also Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Expanding on Rose's gradation of the level of policy transfer, this article incorporates lesson drawing, policy convergence, policy diffusion, and cases of structural policy development. Accordingly, Figure 1 presents a diffusion continuum. In many respects, diffusion should encompass all points on our continuum due to a more lenient standard for recognizing this type of policy development. Thus, policy transfer always involves diffusion; however diffusion does not necessarily indicate policy transfer because of the difference in accepting structural factors responsible for policy adoption. Cases falling anywhere between copying and synthesis are considered examples of policy

transfer, however as we move down the continuum, our examples begin to look less like policy transfer. At a certain point, policy transfer no longer occurs, yet we are still within the realms of diffusion and policy convergence.

**Figure 1: DIFFUSION CONTINUUM**



SPD = Structural Policy Development

Diffusion and policy convergence are, therefore, the broadest terms denoting the spreading of policy. They include policy transfer and lesson drawing and encompass cases ranging from structural policy development, as well as, specific cases of policy copying. Policy failures, however, are not included under the rubric of diffusion or policy convergence, as these should be examined separately. Although they do not fit either term, they are worthy of attention.

Policy transfer is a more specific form of policy diffusion accounting for only those cases where conscious knowledge of policy is used in policy development elsewhere. As indicated, Bennett's (1997) guidelines are useful in establishing cases of policy transfer. Rose (1991) suggests that the varying levels of lesson drawing fall within the subcategory of policy transfer.

It is apparent at this point that our categorizations and subcategorizations along the continuum are vague and classifying policy transfer is problematic. Revealing cases of copying is relatively easy given that these cases usually result in verbatim legislation or some other form of explicit, and unequivocal, evidence of policy transfer. However, further down the continuum, it is more difficult to classify the transfer, especially given the human element present in these categorizations. Policy makers may be reluctant to reveal the extent to which lessons may be drawn for reasons political or otherwise. For example, officials might exaggerate claims that they looked elsewhere to support their position or downplay the search to suggest the idea or policy was a more original solution (see Dolowitz, 1997).

Without delving too deeply into this psychological, and in many respects political issue, this fact makes problematic any attempt to categorize the level of transfer.

Policy failure can occur in many places in the policy process. Some policies never reach the agenda, while others fail during the formulation, legitimization, organization, or implementation stages of the policy process (see Peters, 1986). Other policies may fail due to lack of funding or other budgetary problems. These present particular vexing problems in both diffusion and policy transfer studies, since failure may occur resulting in policies that do not spread.<sup>( n10)</sup> On the other hand, failure may occur in any point along our continuum. Failure may also occur after a certain time has passed since the policy diffused or was transferred, resulting in cancellation of the policy. Clearly, some policies are not transferable (see Dolowitz, 1998; Stone, 1999), despite the fact that most policies are tailored to the adopter rather than copied directly. On our continuum, policy failure does not necessarily fall under the rubric of diffusion, nor policy transfer, yet these cases are no less important in either analysis.

In spite of the possible over-theorized literature, in many ways policy transfer and diffusion warrant a more standardized theory. At the very least, a number of concerns must be addressed in subsequent research. Greater emphasis should be placed upon examining how policies adapt to change, or rather, how agents adapt borrowed policies when creating domestic policy. It is also important to recognize that policies, particularly those from overseas, exist in an environment that may be very different from the environment at home. The policy maker must understand and translate the policy elsewhere, prior to any attempt to adapt it domestically. The domestic environment must also be considered in determining whether it is the appropriate time for policy adoption. A lesson should be taken from Dahl and Lindblom (1953) who suggest that political and economic factors must be considered for social action. Kingdon's (1995) discussion of policy windows is certainly relevant as well. When Kingdon's (1995) policy, problem, and politics streams converge policy transfer and diffusion is more likely.

Copying may not be the answer, because language and cultural differences may hinder successful transfer. Even when transfer or diffusion occurs between similar entities, the policy or program must consider the adopter. Thus, policy hybrids may be more successful in spreading and achieving objectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Current research has demonstrated that policy transfer may lack generalizability and excludes cases where policies develop for structural reasons. Diffusion research has been criticized for paying too little attention to policy content. This manuscript has presented a framework for a more integrated theory to be utilized in policy transfer and diffusion research. Accordingly, the continuum developed in this article begins with diffusion, which is the broadest term for describing the spread of policy. Policy transfer is a more specific type of diffusion, while lesson drawing is a more specific kind of policy transfer.

Policy transfer studies should not discount so easily cases in which policies arise from structural or modernizing factors. By definition, these cases are not examples of policy transfer, but they do offer insight into the structures of the policy process. These structural accounts of the policy process, in addition to organizational, geographic, and internal determinant factors, suggest how a given policy may transfer elsewhere or how other policies may transfer among the same entities.

It is now established that cases of policy transfer emphasize how conscious knowledge of external policies, programs, or ideas are used in developing domestic policies, programs or ideas (see Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). However, the more vague examples of policy transfer and diffusion require more attention. These include cases of hybridization, synthesis, inspiration and structural policy development. These examples are more difficult to establish and they prove much more difficult for the policy researcher.

Policy failure is another area largely neglected in both literatures. Policy transfer studies usually reject these cases outright, and diffusion studies have largely neglected failure. Part of the problem is that policies and programs may fail at many stages of the policy process. Policies may fail before policy transfer or diffusion takes place, or they may fail sometime after policy implementation. In order to avoid policy failure, hybrids may result as policies are adapted to an adopting entity.

The theory now requires policies, programs, or other innovations. For the student of policy studies, the unified theory provides a better tool for examining the ways in which policies, programs, and innovations spread from one government to another.

The diffusion continuum provides the opportunity to examine the degree to which a policy has spread relative to other policies or programs. Comparative analysis might also offer the ability to examine the extent to which a given innovation has diffused across a number of different countries. Future research on the spreading of policy should incorporate the advantages of both policy transfer and diffusion. This should provide a broad view in terms of generalizing the results to other entities or other policies, and it should provide a focused view in terms of what was transferred, who transferred it, and how it transferred.

## **ENDNOTES**

(n1) According to Dolowitz (1998), a team from the British Department of Employment also spent a year in Sweden researching welfare policy.

(n2) Members of organizations such as the European Union (EU) may be "obligated" to comply with directives rather than coerced (see Dolowitz and Marsh 1996).

( n3) The internal determinants model is sometimes viewed as an alternative to diffusion.

(n4) It should be noted that Heclo (1974) illustrates Sweden and Britain's relatively homogenous populations with common cultural and racial characteristics in his study of social politics between the two nations.

(n5) Language and ideological similarities may be more important than geography. However, geography should not be discounted in policy transfer research.

(n6) For further discussion of the factors that constrain policy transfer, see Rose (1993) or Dolowitz and Marsh (1996). Rose (1993) suggests policies or programs transfer more easily when: they have single goals as opposed to multiple goals; they are aimed at simpler problems; the problem and solution are directly related; there are "fewer perceived side effects;" agents have more information on the policy or program; and outcomes are more predictable.

(n7) For further discussion of structure and agency, see Hay (1995).

(n8) This point is more debatable in diffusion research. Although most diffusion studies suggest knowledge of an innovation is a key part of the diffusion process, adopters are often included in analyses even when knowledge and utilization of external policy is not proven.

(n9) See Kingdon (1995) and Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) for discussions of policy entrepreneurs and their role in promoting the spread of policy.

(n10) For a discussion on diffusion failure, see Daniels and Darcy (1985).

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