

**Isomorphism and Policy Diffusion
in Local Jurisdictions:
Explaining the Spread of Drug
Courts Across Four States**

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Abstract

This paper explores and builds theory on how innovations spread across local units of

government. We use elite interviews to examine the diffusion of drug courts across the trial court systems of Arizona, Missouri, New York, and South Carolina. Our findings reveal that the proliferation of the drug court reform was driven largely by isomorphic forces. Our work adds to isomorphic theory in two ways. We show that 1) these forces are effective at bringing about organizational change when they are applied at three key points in the organizational reform process; and 2) that there is a differences between centralized and decentralized isomorphism and that centralized isomorphism is more effective at promoting policy diffusion across local units of government. These findings should enable advocates of locally targeted reforms to better formulate adoption and implementation strategies.

Introduction¹

Scholars acknowledge that innovative public policies and programs are frequently adopted outside of the jurisdictions where they were implemented originally (see McVoy 1940; Walker 1969). The dissemination of program innovations is commonly referred to as *policy diffusion*, of which, most of what we know comes from studies of state government innovations. Over time, these studies identified reasons for why innovations spread across states as well as a number of factors affecting the rate and likelihood of diffusion. Unfortunately, scholars know little about how innovations diffuse across governmental units at a more local level. We fill in some of this gap by showing how DiMaggio and Powell's (1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1999) theory of isomorphism can be used to explain local diffusion.

One important innovation in American trial courts is drug courts, which provide intensive monitoring and treatment of drug offenders. After being adopted in a few courts during the late 80s and early 90s, the number of drug courts grew rapidly to over 1,200 by 2005 (National Association of Drug Court Professionals 2006). We examine the proliferation of drug courts across the trial court systems in four states and use our findings to make generalizations about how policy diffusion occurs at the local level. Local trial courts, however, do not necessarily work under the auspices of local government officials. Instead, they often work under the jurisdictions of both state and local actors. We do not believe this is problematic given the relative autonomy trial courts have from state officials. We explain below how trial courts operate under similar circumstances as local governments. We select them for analysis because of the particular difficulty judicial reform advocates have had spreading their reforms across trial court jurisdictions (also explained below). As a result, we believe our results should apply to both trial courts and local governments.

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We interviewed officials in Arizona, Missouri, New York, and South Carolina. We find that each of the isomorphic forces identified by DiMaggio and Powell (normative, mimetic, and coercive) played an important role in diffusing drug courts across the states. Our results also add theoretically to past studies of isomorphism and diffusion. Isomorphic forces tend to be effective at bringing about organizational change when they are applied at three key points in the process of reform. We also find that isomorphism and diffusion are different in centralized and decentralized policy settings and argue that centralized isomorphism is more effective at promoting policy diffusion across trial courts.

Policy Diffusion

By and large, scholars recognize that the quest to find effective ways of dealing with policy problems (i.e. social learning) and economic competition between jurisdictions are the driving forces behind policy diffusion in the states (Boehmke and Witmer 2004). For the drug court reform it is more appropriate to focus on the former because the adoption of the program does nothing to improve the competitive advantage of one jurisdiction over another. Diffusion due to social learning in the states has been found to be influenced by factors both external and internal to each state (Berry and Berry 1990). External pressures generally originate from other states and the federal government. The sheer number of adopters (Gray 1973) as well as the close proximity of adopting states (Walker 1969; Berry and Berry 1990, 1992) increase the likelihood that a particular state will decide to implement an innovation. This is true simply because states are more likely to notice an innovation if the number of adopters is large or if neighboring states have implemented it. Additionally, innovations gain legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers, and are therefore seen as viable solutions to problems, when they are adopted in other states (Jensen 2003). The fact that other states are utilizing and benefitting from an innovation make even politically contentious reforms more palatable to citizens and therefore easier for politicians to sell (Berry and Berry 1992; Jensen 2003). The federal government, for its part, can promote

diffusion by providing a mix of fiscal and non-financial incentives (Welch and Thompson 1980).

No matter how strong external pressures may be, they often are insufficient by themselves to ensure a state's adoption of a reform. For example, Berry and Berry (1990) found that the influence of neighboring states on lottery adoptions was strongest "...when the internal characteristics of a state [were] themselves favorable for innovation." (411). Internal factors found to play a role in diffusion include the presence of policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom 1997; Mintrom and Vergari 1998), the strength of ties between state officials and professional groups and policy networks promoting the reform (Walker 1969; Mintrom and Vergari 1998; Mossberger 1999), the degree of party competition within a state (Gray 1973), and state wealth (Gray 1973; Berry and Berry 1990). Interestingly, scholars have found that the relative influence of the various factors (both external and internal) can change over time (Mooney 2001; Jensen 2003). This is due largely to the learning process. In effect, as innovations are implemented public officials learn more about them. Learning can both change the level of uncertainty surrounding a reform and raise its perceived legitimacy, thus changing the conditions that are necessary for successful adoption.

Markedly fewer studies have examined diffusion at the local level. This is unfortunate since the huge number of local jurisdictions presumably makes large scale diffusions more difficult. Despite this problem, evidence suggests that a surprising degree of diffusion does occur across local governments (Feller and Menzel 1978). What little research has been done at the local level confirms some of what has been learned about diffusion in the states. Close neighbors play a role in influencing a city's decision to adopt innovations. When neighbors successfully adopt reforms, cities are likely to follow suit (Crain 1966; Martin 2001). Furthermore, large cities tend to be "innovation leaders", possessing a particularly strong influence over regional governments' decisions to adopt reforms (Crain 1966). Being connected to relevant policy networks has also been found to encourage local governments to implement innovations (Martin

2001).

Perhaps the most interesting findings regarding local diffusion focus on the reasons local governments choose to adopt innovations and the role of state governments in encouraging local innovation. Tolbert and Zucker (1983) examined the adoption of civil service reforms in cities and found that, much like in the states, the reasons for adopting reforms change over time. In particular, they found that early adopters did so for technical reasons—they believed the reforms would improve performance or solve employment problems. Later adopters, however, did so because they believed they needed to reform their civil service systems in order to maintain legitimacy. Tolbert and Zucker concluded:

When some organizational elements become institutionalized, that is, when they are widely understood to be appropriate and necessary components of efficient, rational organizations, organizations are under considerable pressure to incorporate these elements into their formal structure in order to maintain their legitimacy. (26)

In the later stages of diffusion, therefore, cities adopt reforms not because they seek improved performance, but to satisfy symbolic needs. In regards to state involvement in local diffusion, both Tolbert and Zucker (1983) and Rowan (1982) found that reforms diffuse more widely and more rapidly at the local level when state governments support the innovations.

Court Reform: What Makes it so Difficult?

The scholarship on innovation and reform in trial courts shows it to be a complex and difficult problem. Trial courts are decentralized policy settings that can promote the freedom and power of judges and court administrators to innovate. At the same time, there are wide social networks of judges, attorneys, and court administrators that produce opportunities to learn about reforms and can lead to the diffusion of court innovations. Despite this, past studies show that reforms like unifying court structure, bail reform, the improvement of caseflow management, sentencing reform, alternative dispute resolution, and pretrial diversion programs have met with

resistance and have been difficult to diffuse and institutionalize (Baar and Henderson 1982; Caldeira 1982; Feeley 1983; Hays 1978; Stookey 1982). Malcolm Feeley (1983) explains that court reforms fail because their advocates all too often have a poor understanding of the policy environment of judicial systems, and therefore have unrealistic expectations about what the courts can do. Additionally, planned change is hindered because reformers consider neither the historical nature of the problem they are trying to remedy nor the complexity of the court system they are trying to change. Others have noted that reforms offered to change the structure of courts are based on traditional and even outdated assumptions about organizations (Baar and Henderson 1982; Saari 1976; Gallas 1976).

State trial courts, naturally, are part of state judicial systems, but have local legal and organizational cultures that define how policy is implemented. While the administrative authority within each state court system rests with either the chief justice of the court of last resort, the court of last resort as a body, or a judicial council, that authority is far from absolute. Trial courts frequently are provided with a lot of discretion over rule making and administration, allowing them to subvert attempts by the higher court to impose its will regarding administrative and procedural issues (Baar and Henderson 1982; Dahlin 1993; Hays 1978). Local culture and tradition, for example, in many courts provide individual judges with a considerable amount of power, making it essential to gain their support for innovation and change (Provine and Seron 1995; Terry 1999b).

Judicial funding structures further complicate achieving and diffusing reform. Trial courts obtain substantial resources either directly from the state legislature or from local governments, forcing them to give weight to legislative and local preferences when making administrative and policy decisions (Tobin 1999). Additionally, local governments control many of the agencies that the trial courts must work with during the day to day operations of the court system (e.g. court clerks, local district attorneys, indigent defense, probation offices, etc.). Even

when judges are convinced of the merits of a reform effort, these actors must be brought on board because they generally hold veto points that can derail or delay innovations (Hays 1978; Feeley 1982; Jacob 1997; Tobin 1999). Unfortunately for courts, the ability of judicial leaders to sanction or provide incentives to these groups in order to gain their support is limited (Hays 1978; Baar 1980; Jacob 1997; Tobin 1999). Therefore, persuasion and the mobilization of political support is a key component to any attempt to promote change in the judiciary.

State courts, then, operate in an organizational structure that is extremely fragmented and decentralized (Hays 1978; Feeley 1983; Tobin 1999). In many ways, trial courts operate much like local governments in regards to their discretion over their administrative structures. This is an important consideration when analyzing the extent to which reforms, like drug courts, diffuse across trial courts. Because trial courts are imbedded state and local government systems, the innovations adopted by some courts may be ignored completely by neighboring courts in the same state (Douglas and Hartley 2004). It is essential when studying diffusion across local judiciaries to treat each trial court as a semi-autonomous unit. A failure to do so runs the risk of producing unreliable findings which distort our understanding of how change occurs in courts.

Isomorphism and Local Policy Diffusion

The internal and external mechanisms that drive diffusion provide great knowledge about how policy changes are adopted and spread. However, a look across disciplines provides more knowledge to help us better understand the best path for adopting, implementing, and spreading reform, especially in local settings. The internal and external mechanisms that shape diffusion are remarkably similar to what sociologists have told us about institutional change. This is particularly true when we examine the theory of isomorphism, which gets at the fact that those who adopt policies often adopt similar organizational structures as others. Combining what we know about policy diffusion and isomorphism provides useful propositions to test about the institutionalization of reform in local settings.

Isomorphism Defined

DiMaggio and Powell (1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1991) established isomorphic theory as a means to explain why institutions tend to share similar organizational structures, policies, and practices. They assert three mechanisms of organizational change that produce similarities across institutions: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Each of these mechanisms is not necessarily independent, and may act in concert with one another as forces for institutional change. First, *coercive* isomorphism refers to formal or informal pressures on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent. Coercive forces result in isomorphic change by force, pressure, or other invitations for collusion among individuals and organizations. In this respect, then, authorities coerce organizations into reforming or adopting similar institutional forms by "sticks" (force) or by "carrots" (rewards).

A second isomorphic pressure on institutional change is that of mimicry or *mimetic* processes. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizations mimic others when uncertainty exists in technology, in goals, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty. Organizations, then, model others that they wish to be like (e.g., those that are more prestigious, legitimate, and those that are viewed as a "model"). Therefore, as Alchian (1950) observed, innovators are copied, copiers innovate, and others copy them (cited from DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 69). Policies may institutionalize and spread in this manner to other jurisdictions and, therefore, remain relatively similar in organizational structure. It is important to note that while organizational processes and programs may be mimicked, the implementation of the program and its impact may still be different due to variations in local organizational and legal cultures (Kraatz and Zajac 1996; Stryker 2000).

The last condition for isomorphism is that of *normative* pressures that stem from professionalization. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) view this as a "collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work to control the production of producers, and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy

(70)." There are two aspects of this normative, or professional driven, isomorphism: 1) formal education to legitimize the cognitive base of individuals surrounding the institutional change; and 2) growth and elaboration of professional networks across which new models of institutions diffuse. Here they discuss professional trade organizations, professional associations, and training institutions in universities as vehicles for developing organizational norms, rules, and structures that are important to the profession.

In summary, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) predict that organizations within a particular field (such as trial courts) will adopt similar changes to existing organizational structures because of coercive isomorphism (e.g. persuasion, grant funding, or authority), mimetic isomorphism (mimicking other organizations that are prestigious and are doing interesting new things) and normative isomorphism (where a professional class creates an organizational field that promotes the organizational change).

Theory and Methods

Why Local Jurisdictions are Different

Studies of policy diffusion focus primarily on the states. This is understandable given the relative small number of state governments as well as the important role states play in our federated system. Findings concerning the states are likely to be at least somewhat generalizable to local units of government. However, local units of government do function under different conditions than states, two of which are of particular importance regarding policy diffusion. First, the large number of local units of governments should make large scale diffusion more difficult than in the states. The large N, obviously, makes it harder for local units to find out about innovations that have been adopted in other jurisdictions, especially if the distance between jurisdictions is great. The large numbers also increases the likelihood that any particular jurisdiction will disregard an innovation because it is viewed as incompatible with local conditions. For example, innovations adopted by large cities may be deemed inappropriate to solve problems in rural jurisdictions.

Second, state and local governments have some discretion in how they can respond to federal incentives to adopt specific innovations. If the federal government does not have the constitutional authority to dictate the reform be adopted, state and local officials can ignore federal requests to take action. Local governments, however, do not have the option of ignoring state mandates. As creatures of the states, local governments must comply with their state's orders to institute reforms. This coercive force does not, obviously, extend across state lines. As a result, the degree to which local governments adopt an innovation is a function of the level of support given the reform by their parent state.

Isomorphism, Diffusion, and Local Governments: New Propositions

We argue that DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theory of isomorphism can be used to explain policy diffusion across local governments and trial courts. Isomorphism has been found to be effective at institutionalizing change across various types of organizations (Morrill and McKee 1993; Orru et al 1997; Scott 2001; Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1989; Greve and Taylor 2000; Dacin 1997). Both private and public sector organizations can be subject to its influences. Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004), however, argue that government organizations are more susceptible to isomorphic pressures than other types of organizations. This is true because they have multiple stakeholders and lack an effective way to measure performance. Frumkin and Galaskiewicz maintain that these conditions cause public organizations to be more willing to yield to external (isomorphic) pressures in order to gain external legitimacy. In short, uncertainty about outcomes, in conjunction with the need to appear to be using legitimate means to solve problems, causes governments to more readily accept innovations being either utilized or promoted by external actors (i.e. federal agencies, other state governments, other local governments, policy networks, professional groups, etc.). We argue further that isomorphism may be particularly important to the large-scale diffusion of innovations across local governments because of the huge number of local jurisdictions and the lack of a centralized command and control structure over those jurisdictions as a whole. To determine the relationship

between isomorphic pressures and diffusion at the local level we test a series of research propositions. Our first research proposition examines whether isomorphism plays a role in local level diffusion.

RP₁ Isomorphic forces lead to the diffusion of policy innovations across local jurisdictions.

It is not sufficient to simply show that the presence of isomorphic forces led to the adoption of a reform in a jurisdiction. Isomorphism is a complicated process, more complicated than is often depicted in the literature. We argue that there are three important points at which isomorphic forces can influence the institutionalization of an organizational change; the discovery phase, the learning phase, and the decision to implement phase.² *The discovery phase* is the point at which organizational actors become aware of the prospective reform. In order for discovery to have an impact, organizational members must perceive the change to be appropriate for their organization (See discussion of diffusion in Scott 2001: 161-170; Rogers 2003). Obviously, without discovery there is no hope that a reform will be adopted. *The learning phase* involves the studying of the reform by organizational members in order to find out what its potential benefits and costs are, how it is structured, and what is required to put it into operation. Learning leads to program similarity across organizations as they observe common practices and determine whether innovations are compatible with their interests and capabilities (Baez and Abolafia 2002; Scott 2001: 162 on learning). The discovery and learning stages are likely to overlap in many cases (Scott 2001). Finally, *the decision to implement phase* is the point at which organizational members elect to put a reform into operation. The decision to go ahead is contingent on many factors including enthusiasm for the reform and the availability of resources (See Rogers 2003; Scott 2001: 161-170). The decision to implement can occur during the discovery and learning stages as information is brought to bare that influences organizational

²This is similar to Rogers' (2003) argument that the diffusion process can be broken down into five states; awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption.

members. To show that isomorphism plays a role in each of these key stages, we test our second research proposition.

RP2 Isomorphic forces promote the discovery, understanding, and implementation of innovations across local jurisdictions.

The diffusion literature makes clear that the reasons institutions adopt innovations can change over time (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Mooney 2001; Jensen 2003). The influence isomorphic forces have on change has also been found to vary across time (Dacin 1997). It is therefore reasonable to assume that isomorphic forces can evolve in both form and effect when applied to local government units. Furthermore, the local diffusion literature, what little of it there is, suggests that when state governments become involved in pushing for change, innovations are more likely to be adopted at the local level (Rowan 1982; Tolbert and Zucker 1983). As a result, we posit that isomorphic pressures can work in different ways and have differing effects upon local government units depending on where isomorphism originates. In particular, we are interested in the role of state governments in generating isomorphic pressures that lead to policy diffusion among their local units.

We argue, in the case of local government units,³ isomorphism can be either centralized or decentralized.⁴ Decentralized isomorphism in this context occurs when coercive, mimetic, and/or normative forces are applied to local government units by external sources other than the state government, like from professional networks or even from federal grants to encourage adoption. Figure 1 illustrates the expected effect of decentralized isomorphism on local diffusion. Under conditions of decentralized isomorphism, we should see relatively low levels of diffusion

³Given the similarities between trial courts and local governments, we use the term *local government units* to identify either type of institution.

⁴We recognize that other aspects of isomorphism can change over time, but we focus here on the centralized vs decentralized nature of isomorphism because we believe it is especially important given the semi-autonomous nature of local government units within our federal system of government.

as some local units receive sufficient isomorphic pressures to induce them to adopt an innovation, while others receive insufficient pressure and therefore do not adopt.

Centralized isomorphism for local government units occurs when coercive, mimetic, and/or normative forces are applied by the state government. Figure 2 reveals that under conditions of centralized isomorphism we expect to see higher levels of diffusion across local units within a state. This is so because state governments can exert pressure on all their local units equally, and can offer financial, technical, legal, and symbolic (i.e. legitimacy) inducements which can make the difference in determining whether a local unit subject to isomorphic pressures will choose to adopt an innovation (see Rowan 1982; Tolbert and Zucker 1983).

State governments, however, do not operate within a vacuum when deciding whether to push their local units to adopt reforms. Local units can serve as laboratories for their states, inducing them to push for reform statewide. In such cases, decentralized isomorphism may be a necessary condition for centralized isomorphism to occur. Figure 3 shows this two-stage process where decentralized isomorphism induces some local governments to adopt an innovation. The presence of the reform as well as its performance causes state officials to take note. If state policy makers become sufficiently convinced that the reform is beneficial, they use centralized isomorphism to convince their remaining local units to adopt it. Wherever the state gets the idea to promote the reform, we argue that centralized isomorphism will produce relatively high levels of diffusion across local government units. This leads to our final research proposition:

RP3 Centralized isomorphism is more effective at diffusing innovations across local government units than decentralized isomorphism.

Thus, as the literature suggests, it is possible that isomorphic forces can evolve over time in both the form they take and the effect they have upon local diffusion.

Research Setting: The Drug Court Movement

In order to test our propositions of diffusion and isomorphism in local governments, we describe and design a study to analyze the innovation and institutionalization of drug courts in American trial courts. Drug courts are specialized courts that provide an intermediate sentence for substance abusers that involves a combination of drug treatment, screening for drugs, and a reward/punishment system for those who enter the program (Feinblatt, Berman, and Fox 2000; Feinblatt, Berman, and Denckla 2002; Nolan 2001; Terry 1999). The focus of the drug court process was "first developed in response to the growing number of drug cases overcrowding America's criminal court calendars" (Nolan 2001: 5). Drug courts, and other specialized courts, are considered to be major changes to traditional court practices (Baar and Solomon 2000; Feinblatt, Berman, and Denckla 2002; Nolan 2001; Tobin 1999). They provide a more active and intensive role for the judge, and they are less adversarial in that they require prosecutors and defense attorneys to collaborate in order to treat defendants' addictions, and the connect courts to non-profit and government social resources.

The first drug court in America was established in 1989 by members of the court community in Miami (Dade), Florida (Goldkamp 1999). Former Attorney General Janet Reno, then a prosecutor, was very much involved in its establishment and implementation. Spurred by the creation of this initial court, local judges and teams of other officials in the justice system began to start-up courts in other jurisdictions (Goldkamp 1994; Terry 1999a). Many of the early drug courts that followed Miami formed in large cities such as Oakland, Fort Lauderdale, Kansas City, Phoenix, and Portland.⁵ After the formation of these drug courts, the movement gained some popularity at the national level. Former Attorney General Janet Reno essentially brought the idea with her to Washington, D.C. and (with other drug court advocates) fought for the establishment of a program in the Department of Justice (DOJ) to initiate drug courts around the country. With the passage of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Title V, Public Law 103-322)⁶ the Drug Court

⁵See case studies on most of these early drug courts in the edited volume by Terry (1999).

⁶The Drug Court Program Office in the Department of Justice was terminated during the Bush

Program Office was established in the DOJ and given the authority to administer grants for the development of drug courts in the states.

The combination of both federal assistance and local initiatives (Feinblatt, Berman, and Denckla 2002, Nolan 2001) enabled drug courts to expand from 42 in 1994 (United States General Accounting Office 1997) to over 1200 by the year 2005 (National Association of Drug Court Professionals 2006). In addition, the drug court model was expanded to other types of cases (e.g., family violence and alcohol/DUI). Its scope has also expanded to include juveniles and to “treat” entire families (Feinblatt, Berman, and Denckla 2002; Nolan, 2001). Obviously, drug courts represent a significant change in how the courts do business, emphasizing cooperative over adversarial relationships. Despite the magnitude of the change, these reforms to local governments proliferated throughout the states. This makes drug courts ideal for studying how reforms spread across trial court systems and more broadly about the diffusion of policies in local governments.

Data and Methods

In order to provide a theoretical explanation for why reforms are adopted and institutionalized in state judiciaries, we offer a comparative study of drug courts in the states of Arizona, Missouri, New York, and South Carolina. We employ a multiple-case, embedded case study design (Yin 1994). This is an appropriate research design given that each case includes multiple units of analysis (drug courts). Furthermore, states vary in regards to whether they establish centralized structures to help administer their drug courts. Because it is likely that the existence of such structures affects the adoption and institutionalization of drug courts (see RP₃) it was necessary to conduct studies of states that differ along this dimension (see Yin 1994). We

Administration. However, the grant programs still exist under the title “Drug Court Discretionary Grants” and are administered and offered by the DOJ’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. While the grant programs have been expanded to other similar specialized courts (e.g., DUI courts, Tribal Drug Courts), Belenko (2004) noted that during the Bush administration the overall funds for grants have decreased. The lack of a dedicated federal office and decreases in grants could adversely affect the movement unless states take more of the responsibility for their funding and support.

chose Missouri and New York because both had centralized administrative structures dedicated to supporting the drug court reform. We chose Arizona and South Carolina because neither had a centralized administrative structure capable of supporting the reform at the trial court level.

In each state, we conducted elite interviews with officials who would know the most about the adoption and implementation of specific drug courts. Drug court administrators/coordinators were the most common interview subjects. In some cases, however, drug court judges were interviewed because they started a program or even administrated it. Additionally, to gain background information not available in the court specific interviews, statewide officials were consulted. In South Carolina, we interviewed the Director of Grants Administration for the State Department of Public Safety. In Arizona, we interviewed the drug court policy specialist for the State Administrative Office of the Courts. In Missouri, we interviewed two officials that were instrumental in establishing and administrating the Missouri Drug Court Coordinating Commission. In New York, we interviewed a budget analyst in the Office of Court Administration and an administrator in the Office of Drug Treatment Programs.

We interviewed 12 officials in Arizona and 8 in South Carolina. At the time of the interviews these officials were responsible for administering all of their states' drug courts. Because both Missouri and New York had in excess of 70 drug courts each, it was not possible to interview all of their drug court administrators. We, therefore, randomly selected 20 administrators from each state. Of these, 16 in Missouri and 17 in New York agreed to be interviewed. Most (35 of 53) of the drug court officials we interviewed administered only one drug court. Several (18 of 53), however, administered more than one court. For example, the Gila County drug court office in Arizona administered the activities of one juvenile and one adult drug court, while the drug court office operating out of Beaufort County, South Carolina administered 3 adult drug courts. The extreme case occurred in New York City where 1 official was involved in the administration of 7 separate drug courts. The 53 drug court officials interviewed in these states administered 54 adult, 18 juvenile, and 7 family drug courts. The

drug courts varied in their age, ranging from 10 years old to the planning stages.

The interviews in Arizona and South Carolina were conducted both by phone and face-to-face from June 22nd to July 23rd in 2002. The interviews in Missouri and New York were conducted by phone from July 24th to August 15th in 2003. One additional interview was conducted in the summer of 2004. We asked interviewees a number of questions about how drug courts were planned, adopted, implemented, funded (initially and over time) and questions about their perceptions of challenges facing their courts, the future, and strategies for keeping their drug courts afloat (see Appendix A for a list of primary interview questions).

The Diffusion of Drug Courts: Isomorphic Forces at Work

Arizona

The diffusion of drug courts occurred via decentralized isomorphism in Arizona. No state mechanism existed to organize, coordinate, or support the establishment and maintenance of drug courts within the state. Local courts, therefore, were left on their own to both decide whether they wanted to initiate the drug court reform and to locate resources to finance the reform effort. At the time of the interviews, 15 drug courts had been established in Arizona.

Discovery in Arizona

Because of the decentralized nature of the drug court movement in Arizona, discovery was entirely in the hands of local officials working within each trial court. For each of the 15 drug courts established in Arizona, one or two local actors brought the drug court idea to the attention of their local court systems. Trial court judges were the most likely actors to discover the reform, leading to the establishment of 10 of Arizona's 15 drug courts. Other local actors who happened upon the drug court idea included court administrators (4 drug courts), a probation official (1 drug court), and a family services director in the local police department (1 drug court).

Decentralized isomorphism led to discovery in all of the local jurisdictions which established drug courts in Arizona. The type of isomorphic force responsible for discovery,

however, varied by jurisdiction. Normative forces played a role for 6 drug courts. For each of these courts, a local official learned about the reform at a professional conference. Interviewees reported that 5 judges and 1 probation officer attended various judicial conferences where they witnessed presentations or sat in on panels discussing the drug court reform. The information they learned at these conferences prompted them to push for drug courts in their local jurisdictions.

Mimetic forces led to discovery for 8 drug courts. In all of these cases, local officials got the idea for drug courts from other jurisdictions already implementing the program. For 6 of these courts, the idea came from other courts within Arizona. Local officials either became aware of drug courts when visiting these jurisdictions or were told about the reform by officials they knew in other jurisdictions. The idea for the other two drug courts came when local officials discovered the reform in courts outside the state. One local judge read an article about the Nation's first drug court in Dade County, Florida. The other heard about Dade County, but "...really took the idea from discussions with a colleague at a drug court in Washington DC."

Finally, coercive forces led to discovery for 1 drug court in Arizona. This occurred when a court administrator was searching for federal grants that the local court might be able to apply for. At the time, DOJ was providing grant money to encourage local trial courts to implement drug courts. During her search, the court administrator came across these DOJ grants, and therefore become more aware of the drug court reform.

Learning in Arizona

Once local officials identified drug courts as a potential reform for their jurisdictions, it was necessary for them to learn more about how to run drug courts. Isomorphic forces provided this much needed information. As with the discovery stage, which forces played a prominent role in learning varied by jurisdiction. In many cases more than one isomorphic force contributed to learning. Normative forces educated local officials for 8 of Arizona's drug courts. In these cases, officials went to drug court conferences and/or training sessions where they were taught the nuts

and bolts of drug court operations. Mimetic forces were present for 13 drug courts in Arizona where local officials learned by observing drug courts in action in other jurisdictions (both within Arizona and in other states).

Coercive force played a more indirect role during the learning stage in Arizona. DOJ offered planning grants to jurisdictions in order to help local officials learn about how to put together a drug court program. The grantee was required to create a drug court team or task force that was made up of representatives from all parts of the justice system such as judicial officers, defense, prosecution, law enforcement, probation and parole, and treatment providers. The idea behind these teams/task forces was to get the various organizations working within the judicial system to “buy into” rather than obstruct the reform effort. The grants provided money for these teams to attend drug court conferences and training sessions, and demonstrations or observations of other programs in order to learn the model. Therefore, coercive force took the form of a financial “carrot”, which served as an incentive for local courts to learn more about the drug court reform. The actual learning, however, was provided through normative and mimetic forces. Eight drug courts in Arizona applied for and received DOJ planning grants.

The Decision to Implement in Arizona

The decision to implement a drug court in any particular jurisdiction in Arizona was largely a function of two things; 1) enthusiasm for the reform, and 2) the availability of funding. The degree of enthusiasm a jurisdiction had for a reform was generally developed during the learning stage. If, after attending trainings and visiting operational drug courts, local officials were sufficiently convinced that drug courts offered a viable solution to their jurisdiction’s drug problems, then they sought to implement the idea. This was the case for all of the drug courts we examined. However, as one drug court administrator pointed out, the decentralized nature of Arizona’s drug court system means that local enthusiasm must be maintained over time if drug courts are to be implemented successfully. This administrator worried about the long-term sustainability of his drug court because the new presiding judge in his local court system was not

a big supporter of the program.

Finding money to fund new drug courts was a serious problem for court officials in Arizona. Because no centralized pot of money existed for drug courts at the state level, local officials had to tap into a wide variety of funding sources, many of which could not be counted on over the long-term. Such instability makes program start-ups difficult, thus threatening program adoption. Fortunately for many jurisdictions, coercive isomorphic forces offered at least a short-term solution. In addition to planning grants, DOJ offered 3-year implementation grants in order to encourage local jurisdictions to start new programs. These grants are designed to provide stable funding over the short-term that enable drug courts to get on their feet and prove their worth so that they can attract longer-term funding. The problem for drug courts in Arizona is that there is no guarantee that longer-term funding will be available once their grants runs out. Indeed, one drug court had shut down because it could not find funding once its DOJ implementation grant came to an end. Additionally, 8 of the 12 directors interviewed from Arizona reported serious concerns about long-term funding issues. At the time of the interviews, 6 drug courts had received DOJ implementation grants and 1 was in the application process. Isomorphic forces were not a factor during the “decision to implement” phase for the remaining 8 drug courts. Court officers in each of these jurisdictions were able to convince state and/or local elected officials to provide the necessary funding.

South Carolina

Like Arizona, the adoption of drug courts in South Carolina was the result of decentralized isomorphism. The state government offered no centralized mechanism devoted to the establishment and maintenance of drug courts. Therefore, the decision to implement and the responsibility to finance drug courts fell largely to local officials. The administration of drug courts was carried out at the circuit court level (trial courts in South Carolina are organized by circuit). Whenever multiple drug courts operated within a single circuit, their administration was overseen by a centralized office within the circuit. At the time of the interviews, 15 drug courts

in 8 circuits were up and running in South Carolina. Eight of these courts were located in just two circuits.

Discovery in South Carolina

Decentralized isomorphic forces led to discovery in South Carolina in much the same way they did in Arizona. For each of the 8 circuits with drug courts, one or two local officials discovered the idea and brought it to the attention of their jurisdictions. These officials included 3 judges, 3 solicitors, 1 court administrator, 1 district attorney, and 1 municipal grant writer. Normative forces played a role in discovery for 5 drug courts. For three of these, local officials heard about the idea at professional conferences. A solicitor in one circuit found out about the drug court reform through the Solicitor's Association. The idea for the fifth court was given to a local solicitor by officials in the state's Department of Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

Mimetic forces led to discovery for 6 drug courts, but worked somewhat differently in South Carolina than they did in Arizona. The idea for only 2 drug courts came from observations of drug courts in other jurisdictions. For the remaining 4 courts, other drug courts had already been established within their circuits. Local officials liked how well their older courts were working, so they increased the number of drug courts in order to expand coverage within their circuits.

Coercive force led to discovery for one court when a local grant writer attempting to acquire a DOJ policing grant added a drug court component to the proposal because he had learned that DOJ was pushing for new drug courts. He hoped that the drug court component would increase his jurisdiction's chances of landing the grant. DOJ's willingness to provide funding for drug court programs, therefore, served as a coercive "carrot" encouraging reform.

Learning in South Carolina

As occurred in Arizona, many local officials in South Carolina sought out additional information about drug courts beyond what they had learned when they first discovered the reform. Officials in South Carolina, however, relied less on planning grants (coercive

isomorphism) than their counterparts in Arizona. Only two South Carolina drug courts received planning grants. Despite this deficiency in external planning funds, officials from 4 drug courts attended conferences and training sessions to learn more about the reform (normative isomorphism), while officials from 7 courts visited existing courts in other jurisdictions (mimetic isomorphism). Additionally, mimetic isomorphism led to learning for the 4 courts established as a result of the success of other drug courts in their circuits (discussed in the previous section). For these courts, officials were able to learn about drug court operations merely by observing the older courts in their jurisdictions.

The Decision to Implement in South Carolina

As in Arizona, once sufficient enthusiasm for drug courts existed in a jurisdiction, the decision to implement was heavily dependent upon the availability of funding. Because no centralized funding source was offered by the state, local officials were left to their own devices to acquire the resources necessary to put drug courts into operation. Once again, DOJ implementation grants played an important role in getting many drug courts going. Seven courts drew upon this funding source to begin their operations. These grants served as a coercive force to encourage local jurisdictions to establish drug courts. Such force, however, was not always necessary to convince local officials to implement the reform. As in Arizona, a mix of state and local funding provided for the establishment of the 8 remaining drug courts. Also, like in Arizona, funding is a major concern for drug court administrators. They complain that their funding sources tend to be inadequate or unstable. One official stated that two of her drug courts were in danger of shutting down due to a lack of funding.

Missouri

Decentralized isomorphism led to the adoption of all of Missouri's drug courts prior to 2001. The first such court was adopted in 1993 in Jackson County (Kansas City), Missouri by local officials who heard about the first American drug court in Dade County, Florida. Other drug courts were then adopted around the state in a piecemeal fashion, largely due to the

activities of local officials and through the use of grant funds like those offered by DOJ.

Beginning in 2001, the state took a more active role in pushing for the diffusion of drug courts, thus establishing centralized isomorphism as the predominant force behind drug court adoptions. The apparent success of the reform in several jurisdictions caught the attention of state officials. State agencies working on the drug problem (the Office of State Court Administration, the Department of Corrections) became convinced that drug courts could play a large role in reducing recidivism due to drug dependency. As a result, they lobbied the state legislature to create the Missouri Drug Court Coordinating Commission (DCCC) and Fund in order to promote the reform across the state. Both were established by the legislature in 2001. The DCCC was authorized to provide funds for the initiation and implementation of drug courts in Missouri's state trial court system. The DCCC manages the fund and employs a director who administers the program's activities and lobbies for drug courts to be adopted around the state. The fund is used to provide grants for drug courts around the state, functioning as a coercive "carrot" to encourage drug court adoption as well as to provide operational funds to drug courts whose grants run out. The DCCC, however, does not have the authority to order trial courts to implement the reform (i.e. the state does not wield a coercive "stick").

Between the creation of the first drug court in Jackson County in 1993 and the establishment of the DCCC in 2001, 25 drug courts were adopted across Missouri. This number rose dramatically to 67 by 2004, with another 49 in the planning stages. The 16 officials we interviewed in Missouri stated, without exception, that the increased rate of diffusion was caused by the activities of the DCCC and the funding provided in the DCCF. These officials represented 22 drug courts, 12 of which were established after the creation of the DCCF.

Discovery in Missouri

Decentralized isomorphism in the form of mimetic and normative forces was the cause of discovery for most of the drug courts we examined in Missouri. Of the 16 drug court officials that we interviewed, mimicry was mentioned by 11 as a source of discovery. In each of these

cases, a local official (judge, probation officer, or city council member) heard about the reform after witnessing or reading about a drug courts in another jurisdiction, and then introduced the idea to their local circuit. Three of the interviewees explained that mimicry in their jurisdictions did not stop there, but that successful drug courts in their circuits led to an expansion of the program (i.e., multiple drug courts) within their jurisdictions.

Six officials in Missouri stated that normative forces led to discovery for their drug courts.⁷ One heard about the drug court reform at a judicial conference, another at a judicial training center, and a third from professional literature. After the establishment of the DCCC and Fund in 2001, the remaining three jurisdictions discovered the drug court concept from the executive director of the program. The director began promoting the concept around the state and was considered by these officials to be a major resource for starting programs. The small number of officials claiming to have learned of the program through the DCCC's director, however, reveal that decentralized isomorphism tended to play a more important role than centralized isomorphism during the discovery stage.

Learning in Missouri

Decentralized isomorphism was the cause of learning for all of the drug courts we studied in Missouri. As in Arizona and South Carolina, coercive forces played an indirect role during the learning phase. Planning grants, offered by DOJ provided a coercive “carrot” to entice jurisdictions around the country to learn more about drug courts. These grants provided funds to attend trainings, conferences, and to visit other “model” drug court programs in operation around the country. The planning grant program also required courts to create a local drug court planning task force. As a result, the grants provided a political foundation for new programs as well as created important sources of mimetic and normative isomorphic forces to spur learning. Eleven of the 16 drug court officials that were interviewed in Missouri mentioned receiving a planning grant from DOJ prior to implementing their drug court.

⁷One official in Missouri indicated that both mimetic and normative forces led to discovery in his jurisdiction.

Whether a drug court received a federal planning grant or not, normative forces were important in most jurisdictions. Thirteen of the 16 respondents mentioned that conferences and training programs were attended by local drug court officials or their task forces. Eleven of the officials experienced these normative opportunities as a result of federal planning grant requirements. Mimetic isomorphism, of course, was also an important force for learning. These forces came in the form of trips to visit other “model” drug court programs for observation and training. Again, 11 of the 16 interviews produced evidence of mimetic forces either by direct mention or through evidence of having received a federal planning grant, which required such trips.

Interestingly, there was little difference in how drug courts learned after the DCCC was established. Officials we interviewed made no mention of any special training put on by the state to teach the concept nor any planning grants provided by the DCCC’s fund to promote learning. Additionally, DCCC officials reported that courts were encouraged to start their drug court programs with DOJ funds whenever possible. DCCC resources were, therefore, not used to help in planning efforts, but only given once DOJ funds ran out.

The Decision to Implement in Missouri

Once officials in Missouri became convinced of the utility of drug courts, they began a search for funding sources. During the decentralized isomorphism stage in the state, a mix of funding sources were used by drug courts. Six of the ten pre-commission courts acquired DOJ implementation grants (coercive force) which they supplemented with resources from local governments. The remaining four courts depended exclusively on local funding. Funding was a major concern for each of these courts until the creation of the DCCC. Officials responsible for these courts reported that a lack of sufficient stable funding made it difficult to maintain adequate service levels.

With the establishment of the DCCC came centralized isomorphism. The funding provided by the DCCC’s fund (coercive force) made it much easier for trial courts sold on the

drug court idea to adopt the reform. Without the existence of the fund, too much uncertainty existed over how to sustain drug courts over time. As a result, court officials were often reluctant to implement them. Two members of the DCCC claimed that the fund was set up because the variety of funding sources for the state's early drug courts made it difficult for them to plan for the future. One stated that "Some [trial courts] write grants well and some do not. Some get grants and some don't." As a result, the fund was intended to provide a guaranteed source of revenue to ensure the viability of drug courts over time. While not all drug courts receive funds from this office (some receive sufficient funds from grants and other sources), all of the officials interviewed noted that it was important to the movement in Missouri. One official remarked that "Without it we would only have 5 or 6 drug courts in Missouri. It helped spread them into other counties."

In conclusion, the decision to implement in Missouri was influenced in large part by coercive forces. When these forces were the product of decentralized isomorphism, only those willing to risk the uncertainty of temporary funding or lucky enough to attain it decided to adopt the drug court program. However, when coercive force was the result of centralized isomorphism, trial courts became more likely to initiate the reform.

New York

As in Missouri, New York's first drug courts were established in much the same way as Arizona and South Carolina's drug courts. Little centralized support was offered for the reform, so the creation of drug courts was entirely a local initiative influenced by decentralized isomorphism. New York's first drug court was founded in Rochester in 1995. By the year 2000, the reform had grown to 31 courts throughout the state. During this time period, drug courts caught the attention of Chief Justice Judith Kaye, the chief executive officer of the judicial branch in the state. In 1999, she put together a blue ribbon panel (the New York State Commission on Drugs and the Courts) to study the drug court reform and assess its suitability for adoption statewide. The Commission interviewed over 200 professionals involved in the drug

court movement both nationally and within New York, and visited numerous operational drug courts. It concluded that the reform was an effective tool against drug addiction and recommended that it be adopted statewide. In response, Chief Justice Kaye created the Office of Court Drug Treatment Programs within the judicial branch in October 2000 and mandated that at least one drug court be established within every judicial jurisdiction within New York's unified court system, thus establishing centralized isomorphism as the primary source of diffusion. Additionally, she lobbied the legislature and convinced it to appropriate money to the judicial branch to finance the drug court system. As a result of the creation of a centralized mechanism to support drug courts within the state, by the time of the interviews 94 drug courts were up and running in New York, with an additional 60 in the planning states.

Discovery in New York

Prior to 2001, normative and mimetic forces resulting from decentralized isomorphism led to discovery in New York just as they had done in Arizona and South Carolina; local officials found out about the idea either at professional conferences or by noticing drug courts in other jurisdictions. Of the 27 drug courts we examined in New York, 11 discovered the reform via at least one of these paths. Interestingly, officials from 5 of these courts reported that their initial discovery of the program did not lead to implementation. In these cases proponents could not garner enough local support to establish drug courts in their jurisdictions. The idea went no further until the state mandated the reform.

Centralized isomorphism in the form of coercive force led to discovery for the remaining 16 courts we examined in New York. The state mandate forced officials in these jurisdictions to learn of the reform and begin plans to implement it. Thus, they discovered drug courts via an order from above. However, it is important to note that mimetic forces had an indirect effect on discovery for these drug courts. This is so because state-level officials only became aware of the reform after they took notice (mimetic force) of several local drug courts established in the state. This mimetic force was the impetus for the chief justice to commission the blue ribbon panel to

study drug courts. Decentralized isomorphism, therefore, led to the creation of several drug courts in New York which, in turn, led to discovery by the state government. This discovery then led to the application of centralized isomorphism by the state, which led to discovery for the remaining trial courts in the state.

Learning in New York

As with discovery, learning for New York's early drug courts followed the same pattern (decentralized isomorphism) as Arizona and South Carolina's drug courts. Of the 27 courts we studied in New York, 6 had been established prior to 2001. Five of these received planning grants (coercive force) which required them to visit existing drug courts (mimetic force) and attend drug court conferences and training sessions (normative force) in order to learn the drug court model. The sixth court learned by sending local officials to observe the state's two oldest drug courts in Rochester and Buffalo.

Mimetic and normative forces also played a key role for learning at the state level. As discussed above, the chief justice's blue ribbon panel sought the counsel of over 200 judicial and drug treatment professionals (normative force) nationwide. The panel also studied existing drug courts (mimetic force). As occurred during the discovery stage, these isomorphic pressures led to learning at the state level. This learning eventually guided the decision to implement the program statewide, which brought about centralized isomorphism in the form of coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures to induce learning at the local level (see below).

Beginning in 2001, the Office of Drug Court Treatment Programs began training sessions in conjunction with the Center for Court Innovation. The Office of Court Administration for New York's unified court system expects local officials participating in new drug court planning teams (usually made up of judges, attorneys, court administrators, and other local officials) to attend these sessions. Therefore, centralized actors within the judicial branch are applying coercive pressure upon local officials to get them to learn the drug court model. The training sessions include both normative and mimetic elements to promote learning. First, professionals

(normative force), especially judges, working within existing drug courts participate in the training sessions. Second, participants visit existing drug courts to watch them in action (mimetic force). As a result, for post-2000 drug courts, learning is achieved by applying coercive force to pressure local officials to expose themselves to normative and mimetic forces. In addition to state sponsored learning, several (11) drug courts in New York also received DOJ planning grants, which required further exposure to normative and mimetic learning.

The Decision to Implement in New York

Coercive isomorphism played a more important role influencing the decision to implement at the local level in New York than it did in either Arizona, South Carolina, or Missouri. As with those states, enthusiasm for the reform had to be built up or a lack of enthusiasm had to be overcome, and resources had to be available if the decision to implement was to move forward. Also, like the previous three states, enthusiasm was generated largely through normative and mimetic forces during the discovery and learning stages, while coercive force in the form of DOJ implementation grants provided at least a short-term solution to the funding problem (all of the 6 pre-2001 courts received DOJ grants). However, these forces by themselves are often insufficient to induce local action. This is obvious by the fact that officials in several jurisdictions had discovered the reform prior to 2001 but had been unable to convince other local actors to initiate the program (see above). In New York, the decision to implement was not made in these and many other jurisdictions until greater coercive force was applied.

The decision of Chief Justice Kaye to mandate the adoption of drug courts throughout the state's unified court system combined with the appropriation for drug court operations generated coercive pressures (due to centralized isomorphism) that proved decisive in New York. The state mandate overcame the need to garner enthusiasm among local actors for the reform. Once Chief Justice Kaye gave the order, local officials no longer had a choice in the matter. The appropriation provided a stable source of funding which virtually guaranteed the maintenance of the state's drug courts over the long-term. It is always possible that the legislature will lose

interest in drug courts and cut the funding some day. However, for the time being the legislature remains an enthusiastic supporter of the reform, hoping it will lead to lower social service and corrections costs in the future. High level judicial officials expressed no concern that the drug court appropriation would be drastically cut back. In fact, they pointed out that during the budget crunch of 2001-2, the drug court program was one of the few in the state to escape budget cuts of any kind. This money has taken the pressure off local administrators to continually search for funding for their drug courts in order to keep them in operation. Directors whose drug courts had been established prior to 2001 stated that the existence of substantial state funding enabled them to focus more on planning and implementation. Only one of the administrators we interviewed in New York voiced concerns about having to slow down operations due to uncertainty over funding. This official administered a town drug court which did not qualify for state funding because town courts are not part of New York's unified court system.

The introduction of state-centered coercive forces diminished the importance of DOJ implementation grants. Many drug courts continued to apply for and receive these grants after the year 2000. Indeed, state-level officials pushed them to do so, promising to replace federal money with state money once the grants ran out. However, because local courts were required to create drug courts and received state money to operate these courts even if no grants were applied for, the grants no longer served as a coercive pressure to encourage the implementation of the reform except in the case of town courts (which were ineligible for state money).

The discussion above explains that normative and mimetic forces due to decentralized isomorphism were not strong enough to induce the widespread adoption of drug courts throughout New York. However, these forces were instrumental in stimulating state-level actors to push for the implementation of the reform statewide. Coercive forces had no impact upon the decision to implement at the state level, but were used by state-level actors (centralized isomorphism) to compel local officials to establish drug courts. Therefore, as was true at both the discovery and learning stages, normative and mimetic forces due to decentralized

isomorphism had an important indirect effect upon the decision to implement at the local level.

Discussion

The diffusion of drug courts across Arizona, South Carolina, Missouri, and New York support all three of our research propositions. First, the evidence suggests that isomorphic forces (normative, mimetic, and coercive) do contribute to policy diffusion across local jurisdictions (RP₁). Our interview data show that all 79 of the drug courts we examined were exposed to isomorphic forces which influenced their adoption. Professional conferences (normative), regional drug courts (mimetic), and financial support (coercive) were particularly important at helping to spread the reform. Given the repeated claims made by the interviewees about the role these isomorphic pressures played in the adoption of drug courts in their jurisdictions, it is reasonable to conclude that the absence of isomorphism would have had a detrimental effect on the diffusion of the reform.

More specifically, our data indicate that isomorphic forces do promote discovery, learning, and implementation of innovations across local jurisdictions (RP₂). All 79 of the drug courts we examined were discovered via isomorphic forces. Under conditions of decentralized isomorphism, normative and mimetic forces played the largest role during the discovery phase. This was also true under centralized isomorphism in Missouri where the state used coercive force in a somewhat passive manner, providing support for the reform (coercive “carrot”) but not imposing it upon trial courts. Coercive forces were more important at promoting discovery in New York because the state mandated that drug courts be adopted and, therefore, forced (coercive “stick”) trial courts to become aware of the reform if they had not already done so.

During the learning phase, there was considerable overlap between the various isomorphic pressures. Each of the 79 jurisdictions was exposed to isomorphic forces during this phase. However, mimetic forces were observed most often (52 drug courts), while normative (38 drug courts) and coercive forces (39 drug courts) appeared almost an equal number of times. For almost all of the drug courts in New York, each of these isomorphic forces contributed to

learning. This was due largely to the centralized control mechanism which required trial courts to participate in training programs and observe existing drug courts in action. It is not surprising that mimetic forces should occur most often at the local level during this phase given that state mimicking has been found to be a powerful source of policy learning at the state level (Berry and Baybeck 2005).

The impact of isomorphic forces during the decision to implement phase was a bit more complicated. This is because attaining sufficient enthusiasm for the reform is a function of the information brought to bare during the learning phase. If isomorphic pressures applied during the learning phase convinced local officials that the reform was worth doing then, naturally, those pressures contributed to the decision to implement. For the 79 drug courts we examined, we assume this to be the case since they would not have adopted the reform had they not been convinced that doing so was a good idea during the learning stage. The next question that needs to be addressed when deciding to implement is whether adequate resources exist. The effect of isomorphic forces on this issue was more easily observed directly. Coercive force was the only isomorphic pressure that affected the availability of funding. Coercive pressure in the form of DOJ grants and state funds in Missouri and New York played a prominent role, helping 59 of the 79 drug courts (almost 75%) to finance their operations. Such coercive pressure clearly was not a necessary condition for adoption—local jurisdictions with the resources to start up programs on their own did not need it. However, the existence of the isomorphic force definitely contributed to the diffusion of the reform, as most of the trial courts in our study did not institute drug courts until external funding was provided.

Finally, our analysis shows that centralized isomorphism is more effective at diffusing innovations across local government units than decentralized isomorphism (RP₃). The diffusion of drug courts began largely due to decentralized mechanisms in each of the states we studied (see again figure 1). Local trial courts were left to their own devices to identify, analyze, and implement the reform. As a result, diffusion occurred at a relatively slow rate. Once the reform

had been established in several Missouri and New York trial courts, state officials took notice and developed centralized mechanisms to promote drug courts further (see again figure 3). Centralized isomorphism in these states was far more effective at spreading the reform across local jurisdictions, increasing the number of drug courts in Missouri by 464% (from 25 to 116, including courts in the planning stages) and by 497% (from 31 to 154, including courts in the planning stages) in New York. No growth of this magnitude occurred in either Arizona or South Carolina.

We do find that centralized isomorphism tends to take the form of coercive pressures. When these pressures were passive (encouraging rather than mandating), as in Missouri, they tended to be most effective at the decision to implement phase, providing funding to jurisdictions that had developed enough enthusiasm to create a drug court. In contrast, coercive forces in New York took the form of state mandates as well as resources. Thus, centralized isomorphism in New York played a role during each of the important phases; discovery, learning, and the decision to implement. It remains to be seen which approach will yield better results, but at least on the surface it appears that using both coercive “carrots” as well as coercive “sticks” will have a more lasting impact on the diffusion of drug courts. We believe this will likely be the case not simply because all trial courts are required to adopt the reform in New York, but also because they are mandated to participate in trainings and observe the operations of successful drug courts. These actions should build a stronger understanding of the reform so that it will be better implemented and diffused within each jurisdiction.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the spread of the drug court reform in Arizona, South Carolina, Missouri, and New York yields three major conclusions. First, isomorphic theory helps explain the diffusion of the drug court reform. State trial courts are part of a largely uncoordinated and decentralized justice system. As a result, instituting reforms on a broad scale is difficult at best. We have shown how isomorphic forces, as described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), both

encouraged and pushed court officials to adopt a reform that required them to perform tasks that lie outside the boundaries of traditional judicial duties (see Baar and Solomon 2000). Isomorphic forces, therefore, appear to be mechanisms by which reforms can be adopted throughout the 50 separate state judiciaries, where no central authority can effectively force the acceptance of organizational change. Additionally, because local governments find themselves operating under similar conditions, it is likely that isomorphic forces can also explain policy diffusion across all types of local jurisdictions. This finding by itself is important because of the difficulty of spreading reforms across the thousands of local entities that exist, and the lack of understanding regarding how local level innovations (whether local governments or trial courts) diffuse. We believe that the study of isomorphic theory and its forces can be used as a guide for successfully spreading reform efforts.

Our research also has broad implications for isomorphic theory, adding to it in significant ways. DiMaggio and Powell explain that isomorphic forces lead to the adoption of similar organizational forms. They do not, however, say anything about the important role isomorphic pressures play at the various phases of organizations' decision making processes; the discovery phase, the learning phase, and the decision to implement phase. We reveal the importance of applying these pressures at three critical points; the discovery phase, the learning phase, and the decision to implement phase. Our analysis suggests that when isomorphic forces fail to apply sufficient pressure at any one of these stages, adoption of the new organizational form may be less likely. This may explain why drug courts were successfully implemented in some jurisdictions, but never got off the ground in others. In some jurisdictions local officials were simply unaware of the reform. In others, local officials were not convinced by the information brought to bare that drug courts were a good idea. In still others, not enough coercive "carrots" (money) were available. This finding is important because it reveals why the mere presence of isomorphic forces does not guarantee, as DiMaggio and Powell's isomorphic theory suggests, that similar organizational forms will be institutionalized across organizations. Instead, many

organizations may either remain ignorant of the reform or opt to ignore it.

Our final major conclusion also adds to isomorphic theory by furthering the notion that the point from which isomorphic forces are applied affects their ability to cause organizational change. Our analysis shows that organizations can be exposed to isomorphic forces in a centralized and/or a decentralized manner. This is particularly true in a federated system where local jurisdictions (such as trial courts) command a good deal of autonomy as separate organizational entities but remain at least partially answerable and responsive to centralized actors at the state level. As explained above, centralized isomorphism was more effective than decentralized isomorphism at spreading the drug court reform. In the case of Missouri and New York, centralized isomorphism only developed after the drug court idea filtered its way up through their localities (see again figure 3). Given the greater effectiveness of centralized isomorphism, DOJ might have had more success promoting the reform if it had targeted its efforts at state-level actors rather than individual trial courts. This could have more quickly encouraged states like Missouri and New York to exert centralized isomorphic force upon their local courts, and may have gotten states like Arizona and South Carolina to create centralized mechanisms of support as well (see again figure 2). If in fact centralized isomorphism is more effective than decentralized isomorphism, then following such a strategy might have led to a greater expansion of drug courts throughout the states. However, it is also possible that the acceptance of the reform by state actors in New York and Missouri would not have occurred without the establishment of the early programs within each state. This would certainly support Galaskiewicz and Wasserman's (1989) contention that organizations are more likely to mimic other organizations they have some special ties to and, therefore, trust to a high degree. Early courts provided evidence of the usefulness and effectiveness of the drug court reform. Relying on such evidence from their local units can prevent states from supporting ill-conceived, ill-considered, and ineffective reforms statewide. Therefore, decentralized isomorphism offers important benefits even if it is more likely to result in organizational forms being adopted in an

uneven manner initially. The larger point here is that isomorphic forces can be applied in either a centralized or decentralized manner within our federal system of governments. Which form is used will affect the extent to which innovations diffuse across local jurisdictions.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

1. Why was the court established? When? How does it work? Adult or juvenile?
2. Whose idea was it? Where did the idea come from?
3. Was there any resistance to starting the court? Continuing it?
4. Where did initial funding come from? How much? Percent from each source?
5. In your mind, what is the future of drug courts in your area? In America?
6. What is the caseload for the drug court? How has this affected the caseload of other courts?
7. What is the impact of the drug court?
8. What was the impact of State drug court funding (or the state fund)?