

M.P. Hoenderboom, LL.M, M.A.
Department of Public Administration & Organization Science
VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands
e-mail: MP.Hoenderboom@fsw.vu.nl, Tel: 020-5986907

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Panel 1: Public Values: the next step

*Values in early modern administration:
Cornelis Schrevelius and the 18th century practice of bestowal of office.*

The way in which a magistrate obtained an office in the 18th century differed greatly from present-day conventions. Rules regarding seniority and rotation of office were manifold as well as payment to obtain a much sought after position. Historical research into the development of values associated with the bestowal of office can therefore further our insight into (changing) values and conceptions of ethical behavior in (early modern) administration.

Administrative values were by no means rigid and unconditionally valid. Perspectives on desirable behavior were constantly evolving and often contradictory, not only over an extensive time period, but also as a result of a random occurrence. During moments of crisis and unrest shifts in the values underpinning early modern administration could come to the surface. Therefore, a case study has been selected from the middle of the 18th century, focusing on upheaval regarding the bestowal of office between two prominent magistrates in the Dutch city of Leiden.

Events in this Dutch city serve to illustrate changing conceptions on the proper way to obtain an office in early modern administration. Through mutual consultation the magistrates often concluded contracts to prevent possible strife with colleagues if offices became vacant. Yet consensus on the practice of agreements regarding seniority and rotation of offices eventually diminished. As a result a debate developed about the proper way to bestow positions, closely linked to the desirable behavior of a magistrate trying to obtain office. Shifts in values underpinning early modern bestowal of office could thus have a profound impact on what behavior was deemed ethical (or unethical), thereby defining a magistrate's desirable conduct, his qualities and characteristics.