

Anthropological Overview

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“Big Man” is a type of leadership exhibited in certain tribal communities. On the other hand a chiefdom is an organized territory ruled by a chief who heads a kin-based community with retributive economy and a prestige ranking. These leadership structures provide different challenges to groups intending to operate in their areas. This essay provides an anthropological overview and subsequent recommendation for engineers, agronomists, and economists intending to work in the regions.

“Big man” society is a type of leadership typical in Melanesia of New Guinea as well as other Islands south of the Pacific. The Big Man amalgamates interest in his society's welfare with immense calculation and cunning for his individual gain. The big man bestows power on himself as he has no political office and is not elected (Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride, 2005). The prestige of a Big Man political leader results from his strategic activities, which ascends him over the other tribe members. In the process, he attracts devoted followers who depend on and benefit from his success. The Kapauku exemplify this kind of leadership in New Guinea's West Central highlands. The Big man is called the “tonowi” (rich one). The organization of the group is such that the Big Man has to be male, eloquent, wealthy, and generous. The tonowi acts as the head of the village in many different situations beyond and within the community. He mediates in the dealings between his group and outsiders and negotiates in disputes among the followers (Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride, 2005). Moreover, he attains political power through advancing loans to his followers. A tonowi who declines to advance money to other members may be ridiculed, shunned, or in other cases killed by warriors. These unfavorable repercussions ensure that personal economic wealth is distributed in the entire community.

The Samoans exhibit a chiefdom kind of leadership. In this organization, the people closest to the chief are accorded reverent treatment and this is due to their association with the chief. The chief's office is usually for life and normally hereditary. Generally, the chiefdom leader is an authority figure who has power to settle disputes, command reward, and punish (Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride, 2005). Chiefdoms have a well-known hierarchy comprising of minor and major authorities, which moderate various subdivisions. Among the Samoans, the chief controls the economic activities of his subjects. In the leadership, there are systems of redistribution with the chief controlling the surplus goods and in other cases the labor force of the community (Marcus & Fischer, 1999). Cattle, luxury goods, and land can be gathered by the chief and comprise his power base.

An analysis of the organization of these groups concludes that in the Big Man system is the most suitable culture to assist farmers to move into the 21st century. This is because in this system, when a big man loses wealth and subsequently his power, another individual gains it and therefore becomes the tonowi. Therefore, one cannot hold power for a very long period and this is likely to generate more accountability in the ruling class. Establishing these developments in a chiefdom is disadvantageous because chiefdoms are comparatively unstable social organization forms. They are susceptible to collapse and renewal cycles within their various units.

In conclusion, engineers, agronomists, and economists are likely to succeed in the Big Man society given the favorable dynamics of leadership within the structure. This is likely to happen with minimal interference of the local community's way of life.

References

Haviland, W. A., Prins, H. A., Walrath, D., & McBride, B. (2005). *Anthropology: The human challenge*. New York: Cengage Learning.

Marcus, G. E., & Fischer, M. M. (1999). *Anthropology as cultural critique: An experimental moment in the human sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.