SOCIAL ENGINEERING

By William H. Stoddard

Be More Social!

Since the dawn of time, humans have relied on social abilities to survive, thrive, and ensure the continuation of the species. However, these interactions have traditionally been addressed with far fewer rules than combat and other physical challenges. *GURPS Social Engineering* changes everything.

This supplement provides detailed rules for every type of common social interaction. Now it's easy to play a hero who's charming, deceptive, intimidating, or witty, even if *you're* not! In addition to an extensive overview on the possibilities of social interactions in a campaign, this supplement includes a detailed examination of social traits; systems for one-on-one interactions; an in-depth look at reaction rolls; details on deception; rules for building relationships; rules for hostile organizations; systems for influencing groups of people; and insight into more forceful measures.

Whether you're shaking down a punk for information, tricking your way into a high-powered office, courting the governor's daughter, or performing a vital diplomatic function, *GURPS Social Engineering* has rules and tools you can use. It's a social world; become part of it!

GURPS Social Engineering requires the GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition.

By **William H. Stoddard**   Edited by **Jason "PK" Levine**

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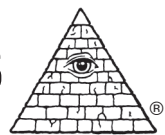
Social Engineering

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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About *GURPS*

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

INTRODUCTION

We call them *roleplaying* games for a reason . . .

Combat and other physical feats are a big part of most roleplaying games. Rules for action and conflict take up many pages, not just because their consequences are often a matter of life and death, but because players are *interested* in scenes of action and fighting. While a roleplaying game could be created for almost any fictional genre, the most popular genres and source material focus on physical action and danger.

But the best adventure series are also about the characters and their relationships: D'Artagnan and Milady, Holmes and Watson, Kirk and Spock, and many other pairs of friends or foes. Social situations, characterization, and dialogue can add flavor to a story, or provide the heroes with a reason to have adventures. For some heroes – detectives and spies, for example – social skills can be their most useful tools. It's even possible to run an entire campaign that's primarily romance, comedy, or some other genre where social interaction matters more than physical action.

GURPS provides rules and game mechanics for social interaction: reaction rolls, Influence rolls, and the character traits that affect them. And for many campaigns, those are enough. However, the same could be said about the rules for fighting in the **Basic Set** . . . and yet players looking for more detailed rules can turn to *GURPS Martial Arts* to explore the nuances of combat and make fight scenes more vivid. In the same way, *GURPS Social Engineering* expands the **Basic Set's** rules for social situations and behavior. All these expansions are optional, to be used at the GM's discretion; see *Throw Away This Book!* (p. 73) for further advice. Except as noted, they supplement the **Basic Set** rather than replacing it.

The opening chapter examines the different ways social interaction can fit into a campaign and explains the key idea of a *reference society*. The rest of the supplement brings the PCs to center stage. An expanded treatment of social traits in character creation is followed by detailed rules for influencing and building relationships with individuals, with formal organizations, and with crowds and entire societies. Last, *Social Engineering* explores the treacherous border that separates talking from fighting.

All these new rules provide standard ways for adventurers to carry out social transactions – but not the *only* ways. No one supplement could exhaust the possibilities. The GM should reward creative roleplaying! If it makes sense to apply a skill or modifier to a task in a way that *Social Engineering* doesn't point out, let the PCs have a try.

Whether your goal is to spend an entire campaign on soap opera or family saga, or simply to add an occasional scene of bribery, flirtation, or taunting to an action campaign, *Social Engineering* will give you new tools *and* new ways to use the tools that *GURPS* already provides.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Social Engineering is not based on any previous *GURPS* sourcebook. Primarily, it expands the material on social encounters, interactions, and skills from the **Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition*. It also draws on social mechanics from other supplements, restating or modifying many of their rules, and unifying and extending them to a general-purpose treatment. Important sources of ideas include *GURPS Action 1* and **2, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2, GURPS Horror, GURPS Mysteries, GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks, GURPS Transhuman Space: Changing Times,** and *GURPS Traveller: Interstellar Wars.* This expanded treatment of social interaction stands on its own, and can be used with any *GURPS* supplement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly books in fields ranging from aerospace technology to archaeology. Fortunately, he likes reading nonfiction; his research library is threatening to take over his apartment, and he regularly visits the nearest university library for supplemental reading. His other pleasures include cooking, reading science fiction and alternate history, and running and playing in roleplaying games; he has been doing the latter since 1975, when he first encountered **Dungeons & Dragons**. His previous work for Steve Jackson Games includes writing the latest editions of *GURPS Supers* and *GURPS Low-Tech*, as well as composing *Pyramid* articles on such subjects as formal dances and sexual situations in roleplaying games. He lives in San Diego with his cohabitant Carol, two cats, two computers, and far too many books!

It seems the minds of these people are so taken up with intense speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the discourses of others, without being roused by some external taction upon the organs of speech and hearing; for which reason, those persons who are able to afford it always keep a flapper (the original is climenole) in their family . . . . the business of this officer is, when two, three, or more persons are in company, gently to strike . . . the mouth of him who is to speak, and the right ear of him or them to whom the speaker addresses himself.

– Jonathan Swift, **Gulliver's Travels**

Variant Numbers of Ranks

For societies in most historical settings, and for imaginary future societies on the same scale, a single organization that operates everywhere can plausibly have eight ranks. But a smaller or bigger society needs a different number.

For an organization in a minisociety, Rank 4 is a good limit. For example, apprentices in a mages' guild could be Rank 0, journeymen Rank 1, and masters Rank 2-4 (for +1 imputed Status, p. 13); the syndics of a large guild would be Rank 3, and the guildmaster Rank 3 or 4. Don't use this limit with large, powerful city-states, especially if they have their own empires, like Rome or Baghdad; their organizations are big enough to justify Rank 8.

A macrosociety may support much larger organizations, allowing up to Rank 12; if so, Rank 11-12 gives +4 to Status. See *The Arithmetic of Rank* (below) for a more detailed approach.

Another option is finer divisions of Rank. The U.S. military, for example, has nine enlisted levels, five warrant officer levels, and 10 commissioned officer levels – a lot more than nine **GURPS** Ranks! The GM can define Ranks with in-between point costs; a Navy ensign might be Rank 3 for 15 points, a lieutenant junior grade Rank 3.4 for 17 points, and a lieutenant Rank 3.6 for 18 points. A very detailed system might have as many fractional ranks as there are distinct point costs!

Variant Costs of Rank

As an optional rule, the GM may define less respected forms of Rank with in-between level costs. Add up as many of the following as apply; if the sum is 0 or less, it's too trivial to count as Rank:

Nominal Hierarchical Position With Title: 1/level. This amounts to Courtesy Rank. *Every form of Rank must include it.*

Chain of Command: 1/level. This means having subordinates who take orders, and/or superiors who give them.

Large or Small Resources: 2/level for large resources, 1/level for typical resources (most organizations), 0/level for small resources (volunteer organization with little or no budget). See *The Benefits of Rank* (pp. 51-52).

Special Assets: 1/level. The organization can provide information using supernatural talents, obtain magical or high-TL gear, command spirit servitors, or the like.

Dominance or Uniqueness: 0/level for having it; -1/level for *not* having it. The organization is the only one of its type in its society or is much larger than its competitors.

Legitimacy: 2/level. The organization is regarded as serving society, the state, or the ruler or embodying ethical ideals, granting enhanced respect to those who work for it. Its members may have a Code of Honor, Sense of Duty, or Vow. *Prerequisite:* Dominance or Uniqueness; this prerequisite may be waived at the GM's discretion.

Total Control: 4/level. The organization is dominant or unique in all institutional domains – it *is*, or it controls, the government. *Prerequisite:* Dominance or Uniqueness.

Which of these options a form of Rank includes determines its relationship to Status:

● If an organization has total control, the Rank it grants *replaces* Status; each level of Rank has the same effects as a level of Status.

● If an organization lacks total control but has dominance or uniqueness, *or* has legitimacy without dominance or uniqueness, the Rank it grants provides imputed Status (p. 13), based on the point cost of the total Rank: no bonus for 0-9 points, +1 for 10-24 points, +2 for 25-39 points, +3 for 40-54 points, +4 for 55 or more points.

The Arithmetic of Rank

A more systematic treatment can be based on *span of control:* a leader or manager can keep track of about four or five subordinates, so each Rank should have that many subordinates at the next lower Rank. The GM can calculate Rank for the head of each unit suited to the number of men each named rank typically commands. For example, the U.S. Army's V Corps, planned to have 24,000 men in 2011, would have a commander of Rank 7, regardless of what the Army called him.

Rank	Command	Example
1	Up to 5	Fireteam
2	Up to 20	Squad or Section
3	Up to 100	Platoon or Small Company
4	Up to 500	Company or Small Battalion
5	Up to 2,000	Battalion
6	Up to 10,000	Regiment, Brigade, or Small Division
7	Up to 50,000	Division or Corps
8	Up to 200,000	Army
+3	×100	–

In this treatment, officers outside the line of command may have fewer subordinates than their nominal rank implies. If so, give them actual Rank based on the size of their command, and additional Courtesy Rank to make them nominally equal to line officers.

In principle, Rank could extend upward without limit; an interstellar empire's trillion-soldier army could have a Rank 18 commanding officer! But if any such society were a military dictatorship, with Military Rank replacing Status, the head of state would be six levels above the normal maximum Status 12 (see *Variant Status Ranges,* pp. 15-16). To avoid such incongruities, Rank should be limited to 12 levels. If the organization is bigger than the 100,000,000 personnel that normally go with Rank 12, there are two different ways to address it:

● Increase the average span of control. Ultra-tech societies may have enhanced management techniques that can support huge organizations. An average span of 10 would let a Rank 12 superior command a trillion Rank 0 subordinates.

● Subdivide rank into narrower gradations, and apply the span of control ratio between each two gradations. If Rank goes from 0 to 12 in steps of 0.2 (a total of 60 steps), a span of 4-5 for each *step* can accommodate 10 duodecillion subordinates at Rank 12 – equivalent to several million densely populated universes.

PERCEPTION AND COMMUNICATION

Nonhuman sensory abilities sometimes grant benefits to social perception.

Detect Brain Electrical Activity, a Rare condition (p. B48), grants +2 to Psychology (Applied *and* Experimental) on a successful IQ roll for *analysis,* or +5 on a critical success.

Discriminatory Hearing (p. B49), at the GM's option, can grant +4 to Detect Lies skill, but only for spoken lies.

Discriminatory Smell, with the Emotion Sense enhancement (p. B49), gives the same benefits as Empathy, but only when within 2 yards of the subject.

Hyperspectral Vision (p. B60) or *Infravision* (p. B60) grants +2 to Body Language, but only when used on a warm-blooded race.

Penetrating Vision (p. B74) negates penalties to Body Language from clothing (p. B181).

Sensitive Touch (p. B83) grants +4 to Body Language, but only in whole-body contact, skin to skin. Sheer, skintight fabric reduces the bonus to +2; any heavier material eliminates it.

Subsonic Speech (p. B89) gives +2 to Intimidation when used in *addition* to normal speech frequencies.

Telescopic Vision (p. B92) can zoom in to reveal pupil dilation or microexpressions at ordinary conversational distance (1-2 yards); *Microscopic Vision* (p. B68) does the same at very close range (1 foot or less). Either grants +1 to Detect Lies.

Different races may use ultrasonic or subsonic vocal ranges, or communicate by different means than voice: color changes, light flashes, pheromones, electric fields, etc. The GM may define a variant of Voice (p. B97) or Disturbing Voice (p. B132) that works with others who use that same channel. For example, a sapient cephalopod might have unusually symmetrical and sharply defined skin color patterns; this would give +2 to Artist (Body Art), in the same way that the usual version gives +2 to Singing.

If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.

– Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Philosophical Investigations

ALIEN REACTIONS

Many nonhuman races have social traits that cause them to react differently than humans do; **GURPS Space** offers an extensive list of such traits. Social traits often give rise to reaction modifiers. For example, members of a race with low gregariousness would have Loner (12) or (9) and react at -2 or -3 to anyone entering their personal space. Other traits prevent reactions entirely; for example, a race that reproduced asexually would have the Sexless quirk and would never respond to courtship or seduction.

These traits also affect Will rolls to resist influence. An attempt to influence a member of the race in a way his reaction modifiers *favor* decreases his Will to resist the influence; if his reaction modifiers *oppose* the action, they increase his Will to resist. For example, a member of a race with Loner (9) would resist being talked into a solo mission at Will-3, but would resist an invitation to join his allies in a night out at Will+3.

Races may also have mental disadvantages that automatically produce some specific form of behavior on a failed self-control roll, such as Berserk, Compulsive Behavior, or Phobias – or always, such as Callous or Paranoia. These may dictate their responses to some social encounters. Some of them also modify other races' reactions to them.

Nonhuman societies will be shaped by these traits! They'll avoid ways of doing things that go against their natural behavior pattern. Getting them to overcome this reluctance takes Influence rolls, or rolls against Leadership or other social skills. Societies with high CR may demand "unnatural" behavior more often than societies with low CR.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Things get interesting when members of different races have to interact socially. The standard modifiers for human beings with different backgrounds also apply between different species: penalties for limited mastery of a language (p. B24) or for unfamiliarity with a culture (p. B23). But physical and mental traits also have effects!

Physiology modifiers based on body structure (p. B181) affect Body Language. The same modifiers apply to Gesture, when used between individuals who have no common language.

Use of different communication channels limits social interaction. If one race can perceive another's channel, but doesn't use it, this limits the use of social skills over that channel in the same ways as for text communication (p. 33). Voice (or its analogs; see above) still grants benefits for purely aesthetic skills that don't require comprehension. For a race whose senses resolve the channel poorly, apply the modifiers for low-definition communication (*Voice to Voice,* p. 33). If one race can't even perceive the other's channel, they're limited to gestures or sign languages (possibly modified by physiology). Technology may create devices for text communication. Sufficiently advanced technology, psionics, or magic may allow communication in virtual reality (*Virtual Presence,* p. 32) or augmented reality (p. 33).

Psychological differences give modifiers comparable to physiology modifiers (p. B181), which apply when using Anthropology, Detect Lies, Linguistics, Psychology, and Sociology on members of dissimilar races. A successful roll against the relevant racial specialty of Psychology lets you avoid these penalties for the other affected skills. Modifiers are as follows:

Similar Mentality: -2 (human vs. another primate) to -4 (human vs. any sapient vertebrate species).

Very Different Mentality: -5 (human vs. sapient invertebrates).

Utterly Alien: -6.

RACIAL REPUTATIONS

It's possible for an entire *race* to have a Reputation, for good or bad, included on its racial template; e.g., for being highly rational or unpredictably violent. This normally means "how the race is regarded by other races in general" or "in the reference society" (p. 11); a Reputation that affects only *some* other races has a reduced point value. Such a Reputation may or may not be justified! An individual member of the race has the option of buying the Reputation off via his own personal accomplishments or failures.

POWER STRUGGLES

The top end of mass social engineering is the pursuit of political or economic power. An in-depth study of sources and forms of power is beyond the scope of this supplement, but it can look at power as the subject of social interactions.

THE THREE KINDS OF POLITICS

Government is an organization, but one with a peculiar standing. It claims to act on behalf of an entire society, and is generally accepted as doing so by most people – if not, it ceases to function as a government. Political theorists call this acceptance *legitimacy*. Governments can make Rank available to their employees or servants (*Status, Rank, and Society/Government Type,* p. 17); other organizations usually can do so only if they have special relationships with governments, such as established churches able to grant Religious Rank. Changes in government affect everybody and often are the focus of mass movements. Different sorts of politics create change on different scales.

Administrative Politics

All but the smallest governments act through bureaucracies with chains of command. People in a chain of command often try to influence higher-level decisions, both to advance their own careers (see *Promotion,* pp. 50-51) and to support policies they favor. This kind of politics doesn't change the people at the top, but tries to change their minds.

For minor issues, this calls for a reaction roll for a response to information (p. 28). If there are multiple senior staff members, a Per-based Administration roll can identify one who's likely to be receptive (*Approachability,* p. 25). At the GM's discretion, a modifier of -1 to -3 may be applied for a proposal that goes against current policies, or +1 to +3 for one that expands their scope (heads of bureaucracies tend to be empire-builders). An Influence roll can be substituted; Diplomacy is a good choice, as it lessens the risk of an unfavorable reaction. Failures tend to be dismissed as incompetent rather than dishonest, but a second roll is required after a Bad reaction, at -2. On a Poor reaction, the staff member faces an investigation; on a Bad or worse one, he faces continuing suspicion (*Internal Enemies,* p. 53).

Disputes between advocates of different policies are resolved as a debate (pp. 34-35), often based on Writing. Administration or Law can serve as a complementary skill (p. 21); so can knowledge of the subject of the policy. The rules for opposed complementary skills can apply.

A major policy change requires building trust (p. 40); this requires a series of Regular Contests of Diplomacy against the effective skill of the organization, as defined under *Going Through Channels* (p. 48). One attempt may be made per month.

All political systems have administrative politics, except for anarchies, some clan/tribal systems, and certain Athenian democracies. Political systems with CR5 or CR6 typically have *only* administrative politics.

Electoral Politics

Representative democracies elect the people who head their governments. Societies of other types make more limited use of elections; for example, Athens elected its generals, but chose most of its officials by lot!

An election extends over time, but ends with a single vote. This is treated as a Quick Contest of Politics, either between single candidates or between political parties or factions. The drama is in the build-up, especially the complementary skill rolls and other sources of bonuses or penalties – and, in an extended campaign, the skill rolls that enhance *those* skill rolls. The possibilities are endless, but here are some common methods:

● The candidate with the highest Status gets a bonus to Politics equal to the difference from the next highest Status.
● A public persona (p. 61) can give +1 to Politics.
● Propaganda often involves rival campaigns (*Advertising and Propaganda,* pp. 61-62) by the different candidates. A high-Status spokesman who is not the candidate provides the usual bonus to Propaganda.
● Making speeches (p. 59) allows Public Speaking to act as a complementary skill (p. 21). For a debate (pp. 34-35) between candidates, treat their skills as opposed.
● A campaign can better focus on public concerns if it's guided by evidence of what those concerns are. Use Expert Skill (Political Science) to conduct a poll (p. 57); use Sociology to sample the mass media (p. 58); or use Research to find applicable published results from either source. Treat any of these as complementary skills.
● "Dirty tricks" approaches can swing an election, especially a close one: paying off voters, hiring people to cast fraudulent votes, preventing likely unfavorable voters from getting ballots, handing out ballots already marked for one party's candidates, "mislaying" ballots, or forging ballots favorable to one party, for example. Treat any skill used to pull off such tricks as a manipulative skill (p. 37).

The mechanics of the actual election depend on how the vote is organized.

Candidate vs. Candidate

Some electoral systems give voters a choice between candidates for a single office. If there are two serious candidates, when the final Quick Contest of Politics takes place, the candidate who wins is elected.

If the candidates are tied, it's an unusually close election; the votes have to be recounted, and there may be legal disputes or other complications. Time for a recount depends on the TL and the culture; in present-day settings, a week is a reasonable delay. The recount calls for another Quick Contest of Politics; the winner is elected, but by a very narrow margin (1% of total votes cast or less). Further ties are unlikely and will probably be resolved in court.

If there are three or more candidates, all of them roll against Politics. What happens next depends on the results:

● If one candidate's margin of success (or failure) is at least 5 points better than any other's, he has a majority and is elected.

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You don't dress with the best of taste,
And nature didn't give you such a beautiful face,
But baby, you got what it takes.
— Marv Johnson, "You Got What It Takes"

Mind your manners, son! *I've got a tall pointy hat!* *Status, boy! You can argue with me, but you can't argue with status!*

– Elrod, in **Cerebus the Aardvark** *#4*

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