Chapter 8.10
Boundaries in Communities

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This article suggests a way of complementing the notion of boundary objects from communities of practice to enable learning: That of extending the notion of boundary objects to account also for boundary people. There are some people whose participation in a community could provide benefits for them and the community. Although it has been suggested that in a community of practice there are different types of membership, little is mentioned about how learning could be fostered by developing inclusive membership. This could be a way of bringing relevant experience to the attention of a community.

BOUNDARIES AND MEMBERSHIP

In a community of practice, there are two main elements that constitute learning: experience and competence (Wenger, 1998). A community can be seen as a recurrent encounter between people who share interests with this permanency generating their competence, participation, and own identity. The community feeds itself from the experience of its members, including newcomers.

According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002), cultivation of communities of practice requires establishing first a domain of competence, something that members care about. Nurturing this requires organizing activities of a community and roles for participants. It also requires establishing ways of dealing with contingencies (i.e., conflict). The result of this will be generating knowledge, which can be explicit (i.e., documents).

Although in the theory of communities of practice, it is acknowledged that communities have boundaries that define who is in and who is not part of it, there is very little guidance on how communities can deal with the resulting exclusion of individuals. It is assumed that members share interests that lead them to become part of a community and to define their engagement. Indi-