Problem setting. The domestic system of training, retraining and advanced training of civil servants and local government officials is going through period of radical changes now, as today the country needs leading staff who are ready for changes and innovation, are able to adopt promptly the most effective management decisions in situations of choice, predicting their consequences, are capable for cooperation, that have developed sense of responsibility for the implementation of initiated reforms and the fate of the country.

The need for continuous professional development of public servants is conscious in the context of instant access to information and mobility through new technologies and it leads to the emergence and dissemination of educational processes outside of formal education. As a response to the "complicated" economic and social reality, non-formal education plays a key role in the concept of lifelong learning, and its non-linearity and individuality address us to the problem of self-education of public servants in terms of knowledge management. This explains the role of virtual communities of practice, learning which is more spontaneous by nature of the interaction in the common understanding of the experience of the participants, analyzing the similar interests.

Recent research and publications analysis. In scientific studies of foreign scientists various research areas of web communities are presented. Scientists who consider the process of communication are K. Miller, J. Dewey; forming of web communities and content processing – G. Reinhold. Authors E. Taylor, K. Korhonen, N. Davies, M. Rakotemna and others reckon virtual communities as means of communication and education. The term "community of practice" or «community of sharing knowledge» was first used by J. Luv and E. Wenger.
N. Kristakys and J. Fowler on the analysis of social networks show that network activity is productive because the network as a whole makes it possible to integrate the efforts of participants, and the cumulative effect of normal communication is far exceeding. Various theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of the establishment and operation of e-platform "Innovations and best practices of local self-government" are studied in the works of Mamatov T., Tertyshna O., Katernyak I., Kireeva O., N. Aliushyna and others. Existing types of virtual communities and their features are thoroughly examined in the works A. Peleshchysyn, Y. Serov and R. Kravets. O. Tymovchak-Maksymets analyzes in details the features of communicative interaction in virtual communities based on web forums as platforms of polilohic communication and generalized deployment scenario of thematic debate, which aims to meet the information needs of initiator.

The objective of this research is to determine the specific properties of the virtual communities of practitioners as means of professional development of specialists in public sphere.

Paper main body. Today mostly the reproductive methods of learning are replaced by productive and creative ones. Members of learning not only master complete knowledge, but construct their own knowledge in the process of active interaction in professional environment. The effectiveness of this interaction depends largely on the degree of development of virtual professional environment, quality and variety of tools that provide productive interaction of the educational process, constituting a virtual community of practice.

The bounds between open distance learning courses and virtual professional communities likely explain the transition from spontaneous interaction in virtual learning community practices to society, which is self-organizing in the classroom study course.

Thus on the electronic platform «Community of practitioners: innovations in local governance» and the Ukrainian Association and village councils (UAVC) supported by the Swiss-Ukrainian project «Decentralization Support in Ukraine»
(DESPRO) through training on open distance learning courses for registered members of the community of practice, implement the development of live, synergistic, active environment where the capacity of community members who are able to create new knowledge is constantly increasing. Participants have the opportunity to discuss a Web forum topical issue of territorial development, decentralization, local communities and associations in the team interaction generate new ideas together for local development and acquire new competencies through training in the UAVC.

Information society requires the necessity of transfer of technology management through regular inspections and recommendations for technologies that promote educational and cognitive activity of specialist in public sphere. The required transition from formal discipline to problem-active type of training that is possible through virtual communities of practice and a massive open distance learning courses, training (though it has a kind of natural interaction in the common understanding of the experience of the participants), actualizes similar interests, creating synergy effect in the development of new approaches and knowledge.

Conclusions of the research. Learning in virtual communities of practice is one of the means of professional development of public servants. The article reveals the essence of the term «virtual community of practice». Virtual community practices can be defined as a group of people united by common goals, which operates using different types of cooperation both within the community and beyond through advanced Internet technology to create and develop live, synergistic, active environment where diversity of opinions is respected, the emergence of new opportunities for knowledge is supported, thereby increasing the potential of all members of the community, who are able to create new knowledge.

It deals with the successful experience of virtual communities of practice electronic platforms: Ukrainian Association and village councils «Development of rural communities and local government» and «Community of practice: innovation in local government» supported by the Swiss-Ukrainian project «Decentralization
Support in Ukraine» (DESPRO). It is considered that a virtual community of practice is the movement from spontaneous learning interactions to a society that organizes itself in accordance with common interests. It considers the importance of local and national issues.