Definitions:
Virtual Communities

“A group of people (and the social ‘place’ that they collectively create) that relies primarily (though not necessarily exclusively) on networked communication media to communicate and connect.” (NLLI Annual Meeting, January 26-28, 2003, Proposal Guidelines http://www.educause.edu/nlli/meetings/nlli031/cfp_guidelines.asp)

Virtual Teams

Workgroups with specific charges who, because of geographic dispersion, must carry out most of their work virtually. (Ibid.)

Virtual Learning Communities

Communities in which people are joined together by mutual interest to intensively examine a particular theme, are able to learn together and exchange existing knowledge, and work on aspects of problem solving together (Palloff/Pratt 2000). Learning communities are often implemented in a curricular context, associated with specific academic classes, cohorts, or programs. (Ibid.)

Virtual Communities of Practice

A special subset of learning communities, made up of “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interaction on an ongoing basis.” (Wenger/McDermott/Snyder, 2002, quoted in Ibid.)

“…people in communities of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems.”

There is a managerial paradox inherent in communities of practice:
• have been present, but have no name
• few companies ‘nurture’ these groups
• it is hard to build and sustain and integrate across an organization