Best practices in geosciences: universal or geographically bound?

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Most courses for starting project managers focus on official and western-oriented methodologies like Prince II. As one gains more experience from various projects in different countries involving different sectors, you develop a more practical skill set to actually achieve results within your projects. This may be based on soft skills, people and expectation management, communication and common sense knowledge.

Most starting project managers in Europe will develop this practical skill set within a European context such as H2020. When distance is an issue, communication can be implemented by regular skype calls or a meeting half-way such as near an airport. Many projects open their activity with a kick-off event where people can get acquainted on a personal level.

However, distance can be even more challenging for projects in developing countries. Issues such as (lack of access to) electricity and internet connection can sometimes become major factors which can jeopardize the project success. As well as infrastructure obstacles, cultural differences can also play a role in maintaining project momentum. This may include anything from ethical differences, procedures and permits, financial handling, way and means of communicating, to everyday details such as food and drinks. For example, for geoscience projects the researchers may need to bring equipment to the field. Without proper knowledge of how things are done in other countries, the procedures may cause delays of up to a year to a project.

In this presentation, we will discuss to what extent a western-oriented project approach can be successful in projects in developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia. We will compare successful approaches in previous projects in Computer Science and Geoscience, and how these were defined by the environment in which the projects took place. We will explore which aspects may translate to Geoscience projects in developing countries.