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Industrial Commissioning of the SKA: Learning from the ALMA, EVLA and MeerKAT experiences

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The Square Kilometer Array will be a radio telescope with roughly one million square metres of collecting area designed to study the universe with unprecedented speed and sensitivity. Effectively commissioning an array of instrumentation that will support the SKA design goals will be a daunting task both in terms of the timescale needed to bring new equipment on-line and in terms of developing the competence and organizational framework needed to support this effort. To reduce the schedule risk and meet this challenge head on, we are developing a commissioning model from the earliest deployment stages of the project with rapid commissioning in mind. ALMA and EVLA commissioning projects are in full swing and we have applied key components of their commissioning models to the KAT-7 array, the precursor to the MeerKAT pathfinder. MeerKAT will bring 80 antennas on line in 2012 and 2013 at a rate of just over 3 antennas/month – a good test of potential SKA commissioning concepts. In this talk I will describe the development of the MeerKAT industrialized commissioning process and how this could be applied to the SKA.

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