Define your status markers (On Track (green), At Risk (yellow), Off Track (red))

Have you ever heard of **Watermelon status reporting**? It's a contagious form of fake news that happens in the workplace, but it can be cured by setting up a social contract among all teams for when and why to change your project's status.

How to set it up

Step 1. If available, grab some old status reports, ideally as recent as possible and some sequential reports where projects statuses have changed.

Step 2. As time allows, interview a handful of project owners who shared changes in their project status over the course of the historical reports. If old reports are not available, simply send a survey or ask project owners and stakeholders the following questions:

- Sample interview questions for project owners: 1) What prompted you to change your status from (RED/YELLOW/GREEN to YELLOW/GREEN/RED), 2) Define each status in 10 or less words; green, yellow, red. 3) On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how safe do you feel choosing a status that is not green? 4) On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how confident are you that you are scoring your status consistently with how other project owners are scoring?

- Sample survey questions for stakeholders: 1) What do you hope to learn from reading a project status report? 2) Define each status in 10 or less words; green, yellow, red. 3) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do trust today's status reports? (1 = do not trust at all, 5= trust a lot)

Step 3. Summarize the inputs from project stakeholders and owners. Use the status definitions to draft proposed standard definitions of each status marker. Use the results of the scale rating questions as input into to share why defining status markers is important when you announce the definitions.

Step 4. Share your proposed status definitions to an appropriate champion/decision maker for feedback. Iterate and finalize.

Step 5. Record and share status markers in a shared document and embed in all status reporting process documents and reporting tools.

Step 6. Repeat the project owner and stakeholder surveys with the same participants 3-6 months later to assess how confidence, safety and trust have improved since the change and why or why not.