

**Abstract:** The survey and interview-based mixed methods research presented in this compilation dissertation explores how licensed aircraft maintenance engineers in Sweden, Norway and Portugal experience working under the vertical chain of hard and soft law that makes up the European Union regulation of this sector. By focusing on occurrence reporting and the certification and release of aircraft into service, as two regulated phenomena directly shaping the everyday working lives of these maintenance engineers, the research ultimately found that a sectorial legal consciousness emerged that is characterised by normative pluralism and a shared professional cultural allegiance to a norm of putting safety first. From a bottom-up perspective, this normative commitment to upholding “safety- first” was found to both compliment and conflict with top-down “law-first” understandings of compliance and non-compliance. Building on Ewick and Silbey’s critical and empirical approach to legal consciousness research, modulated derogation is a devised concept in this thesis that explains the prevalence of deviance in everyday work situations as a resistance against overly complex rules, and captures how these professionals displace law-first meanings of compliance by amending a compliance/non-compliance binary code to that of a safe/unsafe code which puts safety first. Key findings from the survey-based research show that differences emerged concerning how aircraft maintenance engineers in the three studied countries experience legal accountability when reporting occurrences and/or certifying the release of aircraft. It was also found that just culture, explored as a procedural justice-infused legal intervention, commonly enhances legitimacy among the LAMEs for the rules and authorities, and legal anxiety not found to significantly affect that relationship. Against the backdrop of a gap between hard law requirements and the soft law application of same in aircraft maintenance organisations, the uniformity and adequacy of European Union regulations for releasing aircraft into service was found to depend on where the hard law lands, by whom the soft is applied, and the extent to which competent authorities enforce both.