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Neo-Stoicism and Complex Social-ecological Systems: Ethical Practices in Contemporary Workplaces

Chrystie Watson[1] · **Peter Case**[2,3] · **Josephine Pryce**[4] · **Carol Jarvis**[2] · **Wendelin Küpers**[5]

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Abstract
This paper presents an empirical study examining how professionals in contemporary workplaces interpret and apply Stoic philosophy to shape their ethical conduct. Conceptualised as 'Neo-Stoic' philosophy, the study contributes to scholarly understanding of how an ancient ethical tradition informs contemporary social-ecological systems (SES) thinking and practice. The exploratory study included a mixed qualitative/quantitative survey of professionals practicing Stoicism in their work setting, with more detailed follow-up interviews with participants recruited through the survey. Drawing on these data, the paper presents instances representative of the intention, contribution and ethical guidance of Stoic philosophy in professional practice through the reported experiences of practitioners navigating workplace challenges. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: 'being Stoic' in a contemporary workplace; contribution to a 'common good'; and providing guidance to others. The findings reveal how the ancient philosophy of Stoicism has been adapted to contemporary workplaces, particularly through the attention paid to the broader SES implications of (Neo-) Stoic practitioners' pursuit of the common good. Neo-Stoic practices are seen to promote a 'beyond compliance' ethics-as-practice and aspire to address SES sustainability issues, particularly in circumstances of unrest and crisis, such as experienced through the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper demonstrates how Neo-Stoic practices can inform professional workplace responses to SES sustainability imperatives.

Keywords Beyond compliance ethics · Neo-Stoicism · Stoic philosophy · Ethics-as-practice · Common good · Social-ecological systems sustainability

✉ Chrystie Watson
chrystie.watson@cdu.edu.au

[1] Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia

[2] Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

[3] James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

[4] Organisational Behaviour and Associate Dean Research Education in the College of Business, Law and Governance at James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

[5] Institute of Strategy and Management of Corvinus University of Budapest in the Department of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Development, Budapest, Hungary

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Introduction

Ethical dilemmas of societal and human interactions have been considered through a Stoic lens in the recent works of Whiting et al. (2018), Usher (2020), Müller (2023), and Watson et al. (2024), among others. These contemporary interpretations of Stoic ethics practices are redolent of modern 'social-ecological systems' (SES) perspectives (Biggs et al. 2015). Recent work establishes that Stoic practice aligns with SES perspectives by addressing the complex interdependencies within shared systems (Watson et al. 2024). As a contribution to this field of study, we ask whether lived Stoic practices cultivate *practical* common-good reasoning under contemporary SES conditions.

The study examines how what we characterise as 'Neo-Stoic' ethics are practiced in contemporary workplaces, particularly in response to the interconnectedness of human and environmental elements within workplace SES, which had not previously been studied empirically. Most previous research on ancient philosophical practices in professional ethics has been theoretical, with limited empirical investigation into their effectiveness (Islam and Greenwood 2021; Premeaux 2004; Steyl 2020). This study presents Stoicism in response to calls for more practical, descriptive, and imaginative approaches in business ethics literature (Islam and Greenwood 2021, p. 2–3) through an empirical contribution that complements and further develops the theoretical treatment of ancient philosophical practices, specifically Stoicism, as these have evolved within contemporary professional ethics.

Importantly, the study does not pursue or represent a purist reconstruction of ancient Stoicism in antiquity; rather, it examines contemporary reinterpretations and the evolving ethical resonances that Stoic thought evokes among modern practitioners. Accordingly, our approach is historically informed and contextually adaptive rather than doctrinally purist, acknowledging that Stoic ideas derive ethical vitality from ongoing reinterpretation across historical and socio-cultural contexts, including contemporary organizational practice. As ethical force today arises through such adaptive translation into professional and organizational contexts, we employ the term *Neo-Stoicism* to denote a contemporary, practice-anchored expression of Stoic ethics within complex social-ecological systems.

This study builds on Flynn's (2008) argument that virtue ethics offers a suitable framework for managers during social change and political crises. It also draws on Whiting et al. (2018), who highlight the focus of Stoicism on harmony with nature and societal contributions. The aims of this study are twofold: (1) to narrow the divide between normative and empirical research (Macklin and Mathison 2018) in relation to contemporary workplace ethics practiced through Neo-Stoicism, and (2) to explore Neo-Stoic alignments with SES perspectives which foster ethical practices within contemporary workplaces; both of which are undertaken through the adoption of a philosophical perspective that explores questions raised by workplace experiences and assessed through reason[1] (Camenisch 1986).

[1] In German philosophical discourse, a distinction is made between *Vernunft* (reason as practical, ethical, and orienting) and *Verstand* (rational understanding or instrumental intellect), reflecting divergent orientations toward moral action and interest. Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism relate and align more with *Vernunft* than with *Verstand* because they conceive reason not as a calculative or instrumental faculty (*Verstand*), but as a formative, ethical, and cosmically attuned capacity that orders life according to virtue and harmony with nature. *Vernunft* denotes this integrative, practical rationality—concerned with self-governance, moral insight, and participation in a larger rational order (*logos*). In contrast, *Verstand* corresponds to analytic, interest-driven reasoning, which separates means from ends and treats passions as obstacles to rational control. Stoicism, however, transforms passions (*pathē*) through reflective understanding rather than mere suppression, cultivating *eupatheiai*—rightly ordered emotions guided by reason. This orientation resonates with Elster's (1999)

From this perspective, professional ethics is fostered from within one's own sensibilities concerning the desirability of social equilibrium, rather than a reliance on imposed authoritarian ethicality; the latter being vulnerable to the abuse of power (Harper 2021) and a culture of self-interest and injustice (Hirschauer et al. 2018, p. 44). A Stoic approach acknowledges that much may be outside of one's control and that agency can be exercised in relation to one's own feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions (Annas 2007; Staniforth 1976) performing differently (Power 2019). Indeed, acting for the good is an ultimate concern (Case et al. 2011, p. 248).

As ethical issues and dilemmas in complex contemporary workplaces are often pervasive, everyday occurrences, the need for ethics enacted as a practice, rather imposing transcendental, regulatory norms, provides the rationale for Stoic philosophy to be explored as an immanence-based practice. In this study, we identify ethical intentions within complex SES empirically through participants' attention to interdependence, resilience, and forms of reasoning oriented toward the commons, all grounded in contemporary practices of ancient Stoic principles. This participatory philosophy of life, enacted through individual agency across diverse workplace circumstances, resonates and aligns closely with the imperatives of contemporary social-ecological systems.

The paper begins with an introduction to Stoic ethics and its relevance to contemporary professional contexts. This contextualisation of Stoic ethics linked to contemporary SES terms (i.e. Neo-Stoicism) is followed by an exposition of the study methodology and design as well as analysis of qualitative data deriving from interpreted experiences of Stoicism practised in diverse contemporary work settings. Subsequently, theoretical contributions and practical implications of applications of the practice of Stoicism within professional ethics contexts, supportive of SES sustainability are discussed.

Neo-Stoic Philosophy

Usher (2020) offers an important perspective on contemporary interpretations and workplace practices of Stoicism which connects the philosophy directly to the concerns of SES sustainability. Consider, for example, his assertion that:

> "[…] oikeiōsis concerns the sustainable interaction of individual organisms with their physical ecosystems and cognitive/social landscapes." (Usher 2020, p. 145).

The Stoics considered ethics in terms of how we should live our lives, in contrast to utilitarian imperatives of tackling ethical dilemmas by judging whether actions taken are (or would be) right or wrong based on the consequential impact on others (Brennan 2010). The Greek term *oikeiôsis* refers to how actions are informed by a concern for the welfare of others and placing the individual in relation to the larger community (Brennan 2010) and natural world (Whiting et al. 2018). *Oikeiôsis*, therefore, "describes a cognitive activity whereby agents

and Hirschman's (1977) analyses of how moral and political thought has negotiated the tension between passions and interests: both authors trace how modern rationality emerged from attempts to domesticate passions through self-discipline and reflective moderation. Stoicism anticipates this moral economy, but grounds it in *Vernunft* as ethical reason—the capacity to align desire, duty, and understanding—rather than in instrumental rationality or strategic interest.

make something their own; they make it oikeion, "familiar," and respond to stimuli in a certain way because it is in their nature to do so" (Usher 2020, p. 145).

Stoicism holds that reason – understood as practical, ethical, and orienting faculty – guides choices through reflective and impartial judgement, enabling decisions that foster a harmonious coexistence within social-ecological systems. Stoic philosopher, Epictetus (50–135 BCE), encouraged his disciples to create their 'own merit' in all circumstances through a concerted effort toward and acknowledgement of 'self', in the first instance (Epictetus 1995 translation, p. 65). Following such an approach, student of Stoicism and Roman Emperor (161–180 BCE), Marcus Aurelius, undertook extensive self-reflection, journaling his contemplations on appropriate actions under various circumstances, which were later published as *Meditations* (Aurelius 1976, 2003 translations; Bowden 2012). Stoic self-efficacy practices, applied to interconnected social and natural systems, are foundational to understanding Neo-Stoic experiences in contemporary SES.

Lawrence Becker's work, *A New Stoicism* (2017), exemplifies a self-declared 'Neo-Stoic' position, that is placing Stoic philosophy into the context of contemporary moral psychology, while Sellars (2019) and Sorabji (2012) have produced work that directly connects Stoicism to contemporary philosophical and political contexts. Moreover, Gill (2016, 2022) indicates there are Stoic themes emerging within contemporary Anglo-American ethical philosophy linked to virtue ethics, the theory of happiness, and ethical psychology to practical ethics.

The findings of this study reveal perspectives on the practicality of Stoicism, in contemporary terms, aligning with SES sustainability concerns regarding the need for greater attention toward social equilibrium (Müller 2023; Usher 2020; Whiting et al. 2018). Core Stoic principles and the attention given to "one's own moral integrity and authenticity" (Wettstein 2015, p. 176) appear, through the study findings, to be important drivers of Neo-Stoic workplace practices.

Ancient Stoic Interpretations of Contemporary SES Principles

Developing a greater sense of one's own contributions to a common good is a central tenet of a Stoic perspective on contemporary professional ethics, aligning with SES sustainability. The Stoics understood SES principles that acknowledge we are all interconnected and are not only part of but also called to contribute to one common system (i.e. the cosmos or universe) (Biggs et al. 2015; Jones, 2010). It is this understanding of interdependencies which invokes the need for a sense of community (*polis*) to gain perspective on the wider implications of one's own actions.

Stoicism emphasizes three interconnected tenets—physics, logic, and ethics—that enable practitioners to accept their place in nature and develop wisdom. In ancient Greek language, *êthikê* (ethics) refers to the "development of one's character" (*êthos)* (Robertson 2018, p. 25) associated with a greater awareness of how to conduct oneself to engender *polis*, or a sense of community, and, thereby, an awareness of one's contribution to a common good (Jones 2010; Pigliucci 2017). The facets of Stoic philosophy complement each other because ethical choices require logic and an understanding of one's (physical, conditioned) context. Stoics practiced the verification of knowledge and convictions through the expertise of peer and collective judgement functioning as one interconnected system, emphasizing the alignment with SES.

Stoic ethics, as the primary focus of this study, is, in part, derived from Aristotle's insight that "moral virtue […] is a disposition by which one chooses what is good" (*ethics*) and therefore, the Stoics argued, one must be capable of reason to inform rational decision-making (*logic*) (Rist 1969, pp. 2–3). Stoic ethics is a practice of virtues (Sharpe 2013) guided by logic. To these two elements Zeno, the founder of the school of Stoic philosophy (circa 300 BCE), added understanding of the processes of the natural world that we are a part of and, with this, the intent to live in accordance or "harmony with nature" (*physics*) (Rist 1969, pp. 2–3). These themes were later explored in depth by Seneca and set out in *Natural Questions* (2014) and *Letters on ethics* (2015) from the perspectives of the natural world and social interconnectedness, respectively.

Neo-Stoic ethics, recognizing the interconnectedness of Stoic elements (Usher 2020), offers a unique perspective to contemporary professional practice. Of particular interest are engagements with Stoic philosophy by practitioners exposing efforts toward management of self (Bowden 2012) through the development of broader social-environmental awareness under a variety of contemporary workplace circumstances. The findings here illuminate how the concept of 'commoning', aligned with Stoic views and pursuit of a 'common good', is interpreted through an awareness of one's place within the broader SES.

The Stoical Contribution to a Common Good

The notion of what is 'good', from a Stoic perspective, is described by Seneca (2015, p. 474) as "what is in accordance with nature" [12]. Accordance with nature in and of itself, however, can be either 'good' or 'bad'; and, in this regard, Seneca contends that "nothing can be good unless it contains something honorable, and the honorable is certainly good" [10]. Seneca further explains that "the honorable and the good are inferred through observation and comparison of repeated actions […] they are understood 'by analogy'" (p. 479[4]). A contribution to a common good from a Stoic perspective is achieved through *philautia* (often translated as 'care of the self' or 'self-love') (Depew 2016; Hadot 2002).

Robertson (2018) further clarified this point of self-interest in a common good by stating that:

> "According to the Stoics, 'natural affection' towards others […] forms an integral part of our own supreme Happiness and fulfilment [*eudaimonia*] in life, and our self-interest is synonymous with altruism or a *qualified* interest in the welfare of others." (p. 34, original emphasis).

The notion of a common good has received attention of late within various contemporary contexts, including finance (Rocchi et al. 2021), leadership (Cabana 2021), and diversity (Frémeaux 2020). In contemporary terms, 'commoning' has been theorised to re-imagine and re-construct business and society as a social practice that allows for greater responsibility and wiser, more sustainable, systems to emerge (Küpers 2022). Commons organizing refers to communities working together to promote various dimensions of pursuing common goods (Albareda and Sison 2020, p. 728). Commons then "create the conditions for the long-term resilience of community self-organization while transforming the all-encompassing systems: the capital, state, commons and ecological systems" (Albareda and Sison 2020, p. 731).

Küpers (2022) postulates the need to understand the dynamics of a common good in relational terms and the outcomes of interactions at different levels: team, organisation, community, institution, or society. According to the Stoics, all such relational interaction is embodied within and contributes to the constitution of the cosmos. Further, the Stoics actively diverged from Aristotelian views that women and the underprivileged in society were unable to comprehend or engage with virtuousness (Asmis et al. 2014; Epictetus 2011). The Stoics instead argued that "to act virtuously was not contingent on social status, gender or anything that can be ascribed externally to a person's progress towards virtue" (Whiting et al. 2018, p. 477).

Before presenting the findings of this study, it is important to draw attention to Stoic philosophy as a way *of* life, not an expedient accessory *to* life (Hadot 1995). This connection of Stoic philosophy as a way of life guided the methodological approach and design for this study, with the intention of exploring how *be(com)ing* Stoic has been interpreted and practised by professionals within contemporary workplaces. 'Being Stoic' is considered here from an SES sustainability perspective that "does not come down to a legally or politically binding set of ascribed deeds, but rather an impression of what is good, to know that it is in fact good and the ability to act accordingly" (Whiting et al. 2018, p. 485). In this study, we understand *being Stoic* through three core practices: assent habits or routines, affect regulation, and attention to the dichotomy of control. We then show, empirically, how these practices collectively orient practitioners toward the salience of the common good.

Our analysis focuses on participants' societal intentions and ethical orientations within their workplace contexts, rather than on broader human–environment interactions, though we acknowledge the significance of examining those dimensions as well.

Methodology

This study explores self-reported practical applications of Stoic philosophy within contemporary workplace contexts, analysed from a professional ethics perspective within an SES context. The following research question was posed:

> In what ways is Stoic philosophy being interpreted and practised in contemporary workplaces and to what effect in relation to ethics?

The methodological posture of the study reflects Stoic practice as an epistemological approach of continual reflection and deliberation on the practice and consideration of the main facets of logic, ethics, and physics and the sharing of these experiences.

The research design employed for this study is represented in Fig. 1, commencing with a quantitative and qualitative online survey as the first phase of the study.

The human research ethics committee (HREC) of the lead author's university employer approved an information sheet that accompanied the online survey, outlining the study's purpose and participants' rights, including voluntary participation, withdrawal, confidentiality, anonymity, and use of data for publication.

The online mixed qualitative/quantitative survey (Terry and Braun 2017) sought initial insights into study participants' understanding and practice of Stoic philosophy. Survey respondents were subsequently invited to participate in an in-depth semi-structured inter-

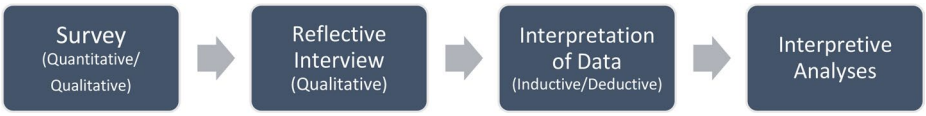

Fig. 1 Flow chart outlining the phases of the study design, including quantitative/qualitative survey followed by reflective qualitative interviews, interpretation of data through inductive/deductive process, and interpretive analysis

Table 1 A list of the stoic philosophy focused social media groups engaged with for this study, including approximate group member numbers noted at the time of the study

Group Name (FB – Facebook)	Approx. # of Members
Stoicism Group [Stoic Philosophy] – FB	67,000
Stoicism Group [Stoic Philosophy] – LinkedIn	1,700
The Psychology of Stoicism, Buddhism & Epicureanism - FB	29,000
Applying Stoicism – FB	8,000
The Practical Stoic Mastermind – FB	4,000
Stoicism – FB	26,000
The Stoic Professional - LinkedIn	614
Stoicism and Psychology – FB	2,000

view designed to encourage reflection on their Stoic practice and associated work-related experiences. The qualitative data from the survey and interview stages of the study were then interpreted through inductive and deductive processes to identify key themes before undertaking a further round of interpretive analyses of the findings (Jebb, Parrigon and Woo 2017; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013).

Sample and Data Collection Methods

Participants were recruited through social media groups dedicated to the practice of Stoic philosophy, as summarised in Table 1, with social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn used as a method for promoting the study purposively to a large group of potential study participants who could provide insights into their own experiences of practicing Stoic philosophy in their workplace contexts.

The social media groups used in this study, ranged from being organized by knowledgeable administrators to being open to general contributions from all or any group members with minimal administrative oversight. The administrators of these social media groups, formed for the purpose of engaging members in Stoic philosophy discussions and sharing of ideas, were contacted in March 2020 to seek approval for the first author to engage with group members. Through posts to these groups, members were invited to participate in the study, initially through the online survey. Information on, and a link to, the online survey were posted several times on these group sites between March and May 2020.

Between March and May 2020, 55 participants from 17 countries completed the online survey. Responses to the two open questions on the survey which asked participants: "Please briefly describe the main challenges you faced in applying Stoic philosophy in the workplace" and "Please briefly describe the main benefits you experienced in applying Stoic phi-

losophy in the workplace" contributed to the analyses for this paper. Participants who took part in the online survey were invited, at the end of the survey, to participate in an online, reflective interview (conducted in April and May 2020), with 19 participants from eight different countries completing this phase.

The interviews were conducted online using a semi-structured reflective approach in line with the Stoic learning approach practiced within the school of Stoic philosophy whereby disciples were encouraged to practice the principles and then reflect upon and share their experiences, i.e., to engage in *epistēmē* (Jedan 2009; Staniforth 1976). The structure of interview questions was guided by and adapted from Gibbs' Reflective Learning Cycle (Gibbs 1988) to emulate this Stoic approach and reflexivity. Interview questions encouraged participants to reflect on the Stoic principles they had adopted in the workplace, the challenges they had faced, any benefits that had accrued and on anything they could do differently to improve the impact of their Stoic practices on their workplace situations. Interview participants worked in a variety of workplace settings and geographic locations and varied in age and gender, as summarised in Appendix A. Approximately 4 in 5 of respondents were male with some two-thirds of participants aged between 30 and 49.

The majority of participants in both survey and interviews were novices of Stoic practices, with three-quarters practicing Stoicism for up to 5 years and 4 in 5 self-reporting their understanding as average (49%) or in its early stages (31%)[2]. As this study focused on exploring the experiences of professionals self-reportedly practicing Stoic philosophy in their workplaces and acknowledging that Stoicism is a reflective and transformational practice based on experiences, there was no expectation that participants would be 'experts' in Stoic philosophy; the inductive and deductive analyses of the data collected allowed for themes aligned with ancient Stoic principles to be identified and inform our understanding of contemporary Neo-Stoic practice in workplace contexts (Holloway 1997; Jebb, Parrigon and Woo 2017).

Inductive and Deductive Data Analyses

The emic expressions of participant experiences afforded opportunity for inductive analysis of emergent themes (Jebb, Parrigon and Woo 2017), which are presented in this paper in terms of an etic interpretation deductively conducted using the understanding of Stoic practice outlined above (Holloway 1997). An iterative interpretation of the data allowed for themes to be identified through the inductive analysis which were subsequently compared with the key elements of Stoic practice recorded, translated and interpreted in line with the available scholarly literature (LeCompte and Schensul 2010).

Whilst the survey was what Terry and Braun (2017) describe as 'fully mixed', it was the open-ended, qualitative questions that illuminated the ethical dimensions of participants' Stoic practice and were therefore included in the thematic analysis and presentation of the findings for the purposes of this paper. The ethical dimensions of Stoic practice were thus derived from thematic analysis of participant responses to open-ended survey questions and transcripts of the experiences participants shared through the interviews. Saturation of thematic insights was reached through 19 individual interviews, consistent with expectations for narrowly defined qualitative empirical studies (Hennink and Kaiser 2022). To support

[2] Findings derived from responses to Q1 and Q2 of the survey.

the analysis of prevalent key themes, responses to the open-ended qualitative survey questions were uploaded to NVIVO® along with the interview transcripts.

Of the themes identified through the inductive analysis, the data strongly supported an etic interpretation designated as 'common good'. This theme was most prevalent and closely aligned with the Stoic principle of ethics. The 'common good' theme emerged from explicit interviewee statements and implicit acknowledgements of their role in a broader social context. For example, a geologist working in the UK described his experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns as, "like a sort of humanity, we are going through a very weird exercise of […] being in a room by yourself, and with other people as a family". A pastor in the US, on the other hand, referred directly to "one of the things that [she] used very consistently is the common good".

The following sections present an interpretive analysis of the collected data (Freeman and Greenwood 2020), revealing patterns that contribute to a novel understanding of professional ethics. The understandings, insights, and possible wider contributions of Neo-Stoicism, practiced within the context of contemporary workplace SES, become particularly evident through the interpretive analysis stage of this study, outlined in the following section.

Findings of Interpretive Analyses

Through the inductive analysis, key themes were identified from the qualitative data and iteratively consolidated into broader main themes. Subsequent deductive analysis of these themes was guided by the Stoic reason that the universe has an 'overall good order' which is maintained through universal equanimity and can be rationalized through the three main principles of logic, ethics, and physics (Seneca 2015). The focus of the interpretive analysis was predominantly on what participants described as key aspects of their intention to 'be Stoic', deductively considered and interpreted from the Stoic perspective that all rational beings contribute to the universal order based, in part, on their moral capacities (ethics) (Seneca 2015). Noted within the findings of the study was an awareness by participants of being Stoic within the context of a broader common good and their desire to provide guidance to others as a contribution to this commoning (*parrhesia*), interpreted as evidence of Neo-Stoic ethics in practical terms (Fig. 2) and through an SES lens.

Through participants' experiences, an empirical glimpse into the expression and manifestation of Neo-Stoic ethics within the workplace emerges. At the time the interviews were conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic had begun to have significant implications around the world, exemplifying the interconnectedness of our global SES. Recent studies indicate the considerable changes to workplace dynamics, caused by the pandemic, presenting emotional and cognitive challenges impacting sensemaking capabilities (Kundra and Dwivedi 2023). The study findings suggest Stoicism helped practitioners navigate pandemic-related and other workplace changes while maintaining ethical conduct and promoting the common good.

Analyses of what it meant for participants to 'be Stoic' were important for assessing the potential of this ancient philosophy as a practice in contemporary professional ethics contexts. For example, the Stoic process of intentional assent—reflecting on beliefs and actions in response to external events—helped individuals understand their contribution to the common good and broader SES. Participants' experiences suggest the Stoic process of

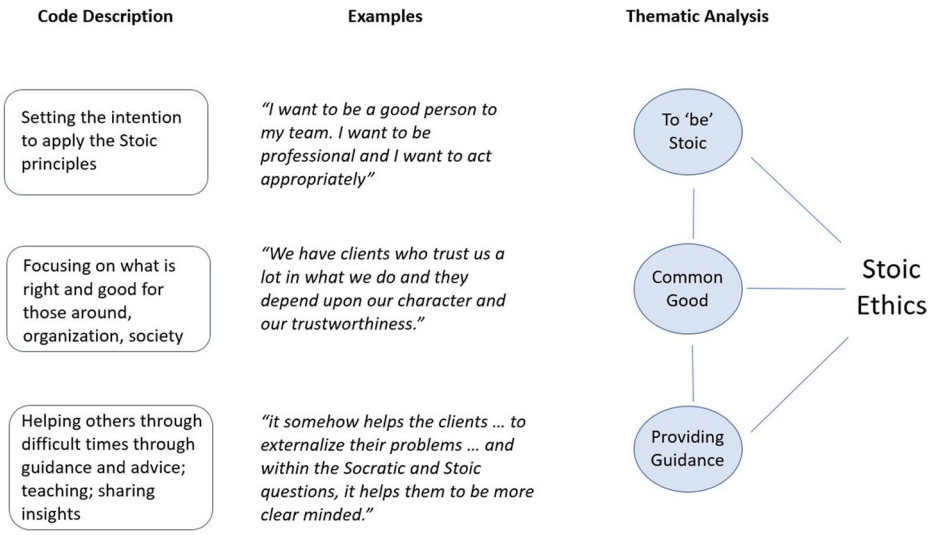

Fig. 2 Summary of thematic interpretative analysis. Includes code description, examples representing these code descriptions and the results of the thematic analysis depicting the main themes of 'to be Stoic', the 'Common Good', and 'Providing Guidance' as representative of Stoic ethics practice

assent can offer an alternative or complementary perspective to institutionalized ethics in professional settings.

The findings of this study present Neo-Stoic practitioners as exhibiting a sense of ethicality from within their own faculties which extends beyond the cultural norms or expectations of their workplaces. This process of Stoic assent is contextualized through themes like emotional regulation, stress management, decision-making, and the dichotomy of control. These themes formed key elements contributing to participants' understanding of how to be Stoic in practical contemporary terms.

In the following, narratives of participant experiences that relate to their developing understanding of how to be Stoic within challenging workplace settings are presented. These take the form of short vignettes (displayed in text boxes) summarizing experiences shared and direct quotations from participants. Supplementary details of each of the auxiliary themes contributing to the main focus of 'being Stoic' are provided in Appendix B.

To 'be' Stoic in Contemporary Professional Ethics Contexts

Participants described (practicing) Stoicism as a way to anchor character and cultivate equanimity during challenges; a view shared by McPherson (2013) regarding virtue ethics in changing workplaces. Interviewees applied Stoicism to cope with workplace challenges while maintaining a broader perspective on the common good. This was articulated by a geologist, for example, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as he suggested people generally "will [need to] be anchored very likely into some kind of Stoicism practice" as a "common language" for dealing with the challenges of change.

Study participants shared that by practicing Stoicism they were better able to maintain a sense of equanimity amid workplace challenges by developing a capacity to regulate emotions better:

> "with Stoicism, I can control my own emotions and my own way of thinking, and then I can apply the principles better because of that" (military environmental projects manager).

> "that ability to come back to a simple, easy to remember logical framework that I can use in pretty much every situation" (corporate buying manager).

> "the environment's not getting better but my handling of the environment is getting better" (software Engineer & Analyst).

Participants felt more responsible and mature (Ogunfowora et al. 2021) managing emotions to better respond to situations and understanding their wider contributions. For example, a UK mental health nurse used Stoicism to navigate fears of deployment to "scary" COVID-19 situations while guiding others. The ability to process his responses to these challenging circumstances allowed him, from his own perspective, to reason that his skills were an important contribution to the wellbeing of others while maintaining the necessary awareness to his own mental health. He shared how he used his Stoic practice to be "a calm, dependable person for the family members […] at this time […] as well as colleagues and patients".

Similarly, a US high school music teacher interviewed used Stoic practice to prepare himself mentally to be better able to deal with scenarios, should they arise, acknowledging that 'something' will inevitably change. This allowed him to process his feelings of panic, as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic eventuated, and he was faced with both personal and workplace disruptions provoking ethical considerations. He pointedly remarked that the economic impacts of government responses to the COVID-19 outbreak on schools in the form of funding reductions had a potentially significant effect on his field of education, as the Arts were often seen as an area where funding cuts could be easily made. Practicing Stoicism to consider scenarios and solutions, he explained, allowed him to adapt quickly to any situation. The high school music teacher's reflection—"what is best for the students and not what do I wish was happening for me right now"—allowed him to focus on his contribution to the common good.

The demeanour of interviewees as they expressed their desire to be Stoic was that of humility in their expression of how they chose to embody Stoic philosophy for the purpose of contributing to a common good by taking responsibility for their own actions. Despite this agency, there was a distinct lack of self-importance present in the stories shared by those practicing the Stoic principles, notwithstanding a level of self-rationalised egoism in terms of taking actions based on their own long-term best interests (Woiceshyn 2011).

The notion of evaluating individual good in this way as a part of a wider contribution to a common good (McPherson 2013) is a central tenet explored here in relation to the viability of the practice of Neo-Stoic ethics within the context of and beyond compliance-oriented professional ethics. Interviewees interpreted professional ethics as resulting from self-determined reflective practice and alignment with being Stoic. The following three examples exemplify this point:

1. a pastor reflected upon the practice of Stoic philosophy specifically as a way of being, rather than merely an application of techniques or following of rules deemed to be ethical;
2. a US Navy officer referred to Stoicism as a "very good practice for life", suggesting the need for consideration of Stoic practice within one's life generally, in the first instance, and then in the workplace as a part of the contextualisation of one's life; and.
3. a counsellor for refugee children and former refugee himself, stated, "it's about being a good person and having the qualities of a good person".

These participants' insights begin to depict an orientation and perspective practiced through Stoicism as a valuable contribution to professional ethics discourse and broader SES thinking. Specifically, intentional contemplation, reason, and reflection guided by Stoic practice appeared to allow study participants to regulate their emotions and gain a more intimate understanding of their intrinsic contribution to the common good of a broader SES. How this sentiment then translated to actualised intentional contributions to a common good more broadly is detailed in the following section.

Contributions to a Common Good

The relationality of a common order explicit within Stoic universality (Seneca 2015) and contemporary SES thinking uniquely positions this philosophy within professional ethics discourse; within the context of the universality of a common good, the particularities of intentional contributions by individuals are of paramount importance. Hence, the validity of the practice of being Stoic becomes evident only through decisions made and actions taken. As suggested by Carden et al. (2022), individual intentions directed explicitly toward a common good may be of lesser, or at least of equal import to, the contribution itself.

In this section, examples of Stoicism being practiced by participants in extreme and challenging workplace conditions and changing circumstances, exemplify their understandings of and contributions to commonality beyond self-interest, norms, or expectations. We begin with a vignette of the reflections shared by a study participant who was working as a geologist for a large international oil and gas firm operating in Algeria to temporarily having to change jobs to a preschool French teacher in Canada.

Through Stoic contemplation, he described allowing himself to digress from a change in circumstances and perceived social status (which might have resulted in an ego-driven response), to instead focusing on his duty to a common good, regardless of circumstances. He explained how focusing on the importance of his responsibilities to the care of the young children gave him purpose beyond the ego-based importance he attributed to his role as a high-level geologist. When he subsequently returned to the oil and gas company, he was faced with dealing with a boss who was much younger and less qualified than he saw himself to be. He explained how he was again able to practice Stoic assent to recognise the contributions to a common good each member of the team made, himself included, and expressed how he was then better able to temper his responses.

Fostering an awareness of, and responsibility for, one's own actions within a broader SES context was also something an IT consultant applied through Stoic practice across different workplace scenarios.

Having worked in large corporations and then in a smaller private consultancy he shared how he viewed the multi-level structures of large organisations as creating cultures that lacked personal responsibility or a sense of community (polis). He stated, "the flatter [hierarchical structure] is better […] trusting people to be accountable and responsible for their role and work together as teams". He went on to state how he believed "there were better ways to run a corporation or to run a small business with these [Stoic] principles" through more intentional communication aimed at better understanding alternative perspectives, approaches, and intentions. Moving from a large organisation to working in a smaller firm allowed him to reflect on the different dynamics he was experiencing, where he felt personal responsibility, fostering greater flexibility to respond to client needs alongside a sense of being able to contribute through improved openness and sharing of insights.

This insight plays an instrumental role in conceptualising beyond compliance perspectives (Norman 2011) as contributions to a common good are considered and enacted within different social structures. Creating a culture where there was an awareness and acceptance of how different people approached their work made a profound impact on a US Navy senior official's experience of his workplace.

He expressed how, through his Stoic practice, he was no longer trying to control everyone and becoming frustrated with the outcomes; instead, he shared that he was focused on how to get the jobs and projects done through working with how others approached their work. He reflected upon how the command-and-control defence training he was accustomed to in the navy had created an ego-driven work environment which caused stress for those he supervised and eventually, he realised, for himself. Through greater awareness, invoked through Stoic practice, he was able to assent to a mindset of, in his words, "living in accordance with nature and accepting the natures of other people instead of trying to drag people along"; thus, understanding the dichotomy of control within complex SES structures and interactions.

The reflective practice integral to the Stoic approach shared by participants is an important consideration when exploring professional ethics; the practice is integrated into and forms a "central place" (McPherson 2013, p. 286) within which individuals choose to conduct themselves and contribute to a workplace. The high school music teacher interviewed, for example, explained how, through his reflective Stoic practice, he better understood how to contribute his knowledge and musical skills in a variety of ways, whether that be within the school system or in a different context. As he navigated the challenging circumstances in his workplace, arising from the COVID pandemic, he shared how he came to the realisation and acceptance that there existed opportunities to contribute to society more broadly, beyond his position and title at a particular school. In workplaces, this can be a very powerful concept as there is a tendency to form attachment to a position within the organisation, attaching an individual to a position rather than considering one's societal duty in a dynamic, holistic, and evolving way (Mejia 2020). This brings forth professional ethics as existing beyond expectations that might rest within the constructs of a position, policy, or regulation, allowing for a much broader conceptualisation from the perspective of contributions to a common good and equally, to a SES.

Mejia's (2020) argument that, "Socratic ignorance wakes up members in a business firm from a certain moral lethargy and complacency that the organizational setting typically induces" (para 54) is resonate with the experiences shared by a global security and intelligence analyst.

This participant had a Pakistani upbringing and expressed a natural tendency toward community mindedness and family values and responsibilities. Living in the United States at the time of the interview, the individualist culture he experienced as prevalent there was at odds with the culture he had grown up with; proving a challenge as he navigated his feelings and desires between the two cultures. He shared that, ultimately, he chose the path of "doing what is right" for the common good in line with his own values regardless of what might have been deemed ethical within his workplace and situational societal context.

His discernment of what was 'right' is reminiscent of Letter 120 written by Seneca to Lucilius, where Seneca states, "Nothing is good unless it is honorable, and what is honorable is necessarily good" (2015, p. 479[2]). Seneca further stresses in the letter that the integrity of 'honourable' actions needs to be consistently displayed across varying circumstances.

This study found that professionals, informed by Stoicism, reflected on their actions within a broader context of responsibility (Macklin & Mathison, 2018), intentionally acting to promote the common good. This is well summarised by a government consultant stating "I spend a lot of time trying to help various, shall we say good causes. Trying to look at that point of view to try to make the world better for a few people. I can't do it for everyone but a few people I can." The next section highlights what emerged as a progression by practitioners toward an intention to apply their understandings and interpretations of Stoic philosophy through guidance to others, further broadening the social-ecological context of their Neo-Stoic practice.

Providing Guidance for the Benefit of the Common Good

> "[I]t is a virtue to give benefits that are not guaranteed to be repaid in the future, benefits whose returns are felt immediately by a donor of real excellence […] the benefit is the intention of the giver." (Seneca 2011, pp. 19 and 23).

The quote here by Seneca highlights the natural inclination within the practice of Stoicism to be of assistance to others through exemplifying virtuous character and, directly or indirectly through actions, offering guidance to others (Morris 2004). The Stoics, particularly Seneca, cautioned however that "most advice depends on the situation […and is] geared to events, and events are always moving – no, hurtling – along" (2015, p. 214[1]); wise-reasoning is thus required to maintain equanimity of thought (Epictetus 1995).

The contemporary Neo-Stoic practitioners interviewed shared their experiences of providing guidance to others, informed by their understandings of Stoic practice as they navigated the Stoic reasoning of 'preferred' (Pigliucci 2017) or 'promoted' (Brennan, 2006) 'indifferents' within their contemporary workplace contexts. Participants' reflections showed they were not solely focused on how they were performing within their roles but were also concerned with ensuring they were helping others through their actions. This was expressed by a veterinarian and practice owner through "Providing guidance to staff through situations where emotions are heightened; particularly challenging in health care/veterinary practice as customers face challenging decisions with regard to their pets …Trying to distil the emotions down to better provide the support needed to the client." These tendencies represented intentional contributions to a common good and broader societal context, a choice practitioners engaged with willingly to offer guidance to others and to contribute to the overall improvement of workplace dynamics.

Participants' reflections suggested they applied Stoic philosophy in their workplaces in numerous ways: through discussions regarding the mental wellbeing of refugee children; to friends

going through divorce; colleagues struggling to find the confidence to present their knowledge to their superiors; recovering drug and alcohol addicts; and homicide witnesses, among other examples. Professionals practicing Stoic philosophy sought to help colleagues and staff to solve problems by offering a broader social-ecological context for their contributions and circumstances.

To assist refugee children through his work with the Red Cross, one interview participant stated that he "began to look back to [his Stoic] studies […] to find a way or a method to get into these young people's mind [sic.] and see if [he] could help motivate and inspire them". He went on to say,

> "[If] I meet someone with anxiety, I would […] somehow use Epictetus and talking about the dichotomy of control and to make them realise, what is reality and what is self-conception."

The high school music teacher interviewed drew on Stoic philosophy to manage conflicting demands on his students' and colleagues' attention, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic created disruption. The teacher found Stoicism useful in interactions with colleagues by reflecting upon his own experiences with getting "caught in that downward spiral" of feeling out of control and using the Stoic principles to refocus on what he could control (physics) and contribute to the collective (ethics). He shared that teaching "tends to crush spirits easily," but Stoicism helped him develop a more useful perspective and a sense of holistic contribution beneficial to himself and others.

Similar attention to the wellbeing of others emerged through the perspectives shared by a participant employed in the US military with extensive experience in active duty as well as corporate military workplace environments.

Having applied Stoic philosophy within his own experiences in combat training and active military duty, this participant was not only able to practicemaintaining his own equanimity in stressful situations, as advised by Epictetus, but also took great pride in providing guidance to others based on his experiences with the practice of Stoicism. He shared how his own experiences and reflections gained through Stoic practice allowed him to offer insights and suggestions for how colleagues, family, and friends might approach their own challenges.

Similarly, a manager of large Canadian military environmental construction projects articulated his practice of Stoic wise-reasoning to determine the right actions for the scenarios his team faced; "I'm grabbing onto these principles as a means to […] help me dissect […] whatever issues or items my staff have", to provide guidance on how to best approach their own work and contribute to the projects as a whole. This sentiment was further expressed and illustrated by a corporate do-it-yourself (DIY) retail buying manager working in New Zealand in a manner that displayed a keen sense of wanting to further people's understanding of the practical applications of Stoicism toward greater social-ecological imperatives in the workplace, beyond self-interest. He said,

> "[It's] trying to get people to actually spend the time to really find out about themselves […]. The value of this and to pitch [it] in the right way […] so it opens people's minds […] and in a time when we're just being fed the next dopamine hit, […] that would be powerful."

Where for many the decision to offer guidance to others was a choice on their part, for others, such as the UK mental health nurse, their professions entailed the provision of guidance which, as he stated through the following quote, he chose to do from his understanding of Stoic practice.

> "The people I work with [are] on the more mild to moderate mental health problems, so they're not […] serious mental health problems and they're generally kind of working and getting on with their lives. It's just [that] they're struggling maybe with anxiety or depression, emotional kind of deregulation as well, and helping people manage that […] it's always useful, I think, to give people advice for things that have worked in my own life […] it's always better to say […] 'this has worked for me, why don't you try it yourself?'."

These intentional contributions to a broader common good through the provision of guidance to others, applying Stoic reasoning for the regulation of emotion, were also evident through the experiences and perspectives shared by a private investigator.

He explained how when conducting investigation interviews, including with people who may have committed or witnessed heinous crimes, he used the Stoic understanding of natural and societal systems that everything is transient and perpetually in a process of changing (physics) to help the suspects and witnesses he interviewed reason that the interaction and discomfort they were having in that moment would pass. During his interview, he conveyed a sense of his ability to create a calm environment, as depicted by the Stoics through their philosophical discourses and teachings, where people felt comfortable sharing what they knew or had seen as a proclamation of their duty, and of his duty, to unearth information that would serve a common good.

Epictetus (2008, p. 8[5–6]) observed that the "standards of reasonableness and unreasonableness vary from one person to the next" and that "education has no goal more important than bringing our preconception of what is reasonable and unreasonable in alignment with nature". The examples introduced and discussed in this findings section indicate that Stoicism, interpreted and practiced by individuals across a range of contemporary workplace circumstances, has the potential to authenticate intentions to contribute meaningfully to the broader SES context of a common good, beyond ethical compliance determined by regulations, norms, or expectations. The depth of consideration and reflection shared by study participants showed an important understanding of universality and of each individual's contribution to a common order within the whole SES. These considerations and potential implications of Neo-Stoic practice in the context of professional ethics in the workplace are expanded upon in the following section.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Neo-Stoicism offers a pathway for professional ethics that moves beyond prescriptive codes and compliance frameworks (Crane & Matten, 2010), situating ethical practice within the dynamics of complex SES. This perspective aligns with Harper's (2021) interpretation of Plato, which emphasizes that a balanced character and philosophical principles underpin social justice. Hence, a philosophical approach "maximizes the overall wellbeing of society" (Harper 2021, p. 13). Given the integral role of business in society, reliance on authoritarian, compliance-driven measures is insufficient for ensuring ethical professional conduct (De George 1990). This study suggests that Neo-Stoic principles can enhance

professional ethics in practice by connecting business ethics with societal ethics (Islam & Greenwood, 2021; Norman 2011) enacted through interdependent agents within the SES.

Küpers argues that, "proper understanding requires an ethic that is grounded in everyday performative interactions between individuals and social groups", emphasizing ethics as lived practice rather than the mere "appearance of moral legitimacy" within policy or regulatory frameworks (Küpers 2015, p. 30; Küpers and Minsri 2024). Such grounding of ethical conduct through a philosophy of ethics-as-practice may prove highly efficacious in workplace contexts (Macklin and Mathison 2018, p. 134). Theoretically, ethics-as-practice allows for uncertainty, ambiguity, and subjectivity to be accounted for within professional ethics and assoicated decision-making (Clegg et al. 2006). The findings of this study show potential for Neo-Stoic practice to guide active engagement with, and empirical application of, ethics-as-practice theory aligned with SES thinking.

Participants demonstrated awareness of their place in the SES by applying Stoic principles and reflecting on workplace challenges. This approach may serve to address critics of ethics measures that rely on subjective interpretations of ethical conduct (Flanigan 2018; Price 2018). The primary argument against such methods is that a perception of what is ethical does not necessarily denote what is ethical, even when guided by the content of policies or regulatory frameworks. Thus, it is important to highlight here the distinction between this empirical research using a social science approach into what *is* versus normative research on what *should* or *ought to be* from a philosophical perspective (Flanigan 2018; Price 2018). The study offers empirical indications, from a modest sample size, that Neo-Stoics appear inherently aligned with SES sustainability when navigating ethical dilemmas.

Determining the 'right' action is contentious due to the subjectivity of whose ethical grounds are privileged. Machan (2017) offers a way forward by interpreting what is "right" as "what one takes as something one knows to be correct beyond any *reasonable* doubt" (Machan 2017, p. 104, original emphasis). However, as "relational processes are fundamental to understanding the ethics of business" (Islam 2020, p. 5) the determination of what is 'right' may well vary depending on specific circumstances or workplace cultures (Steyl 2020). This highlights the need for intentional contributions to the common good, grounded in an understanding of SES sustainability.

Achieving this may require a Socratic method (Hadot 1995; Mejia 2020) to expose hidden truths and 'destabilize' normative concepts (Mejia 2020) to move toward a common good, or 'communal based rationality' (Queiroz 2012). This thinking is relevant to SES sustainability because, as De George (1990) observes:

> "[None] of us can be sure we know, in all situations, what is right. We are all fallible. Hence, we can only try to determine, as carefully as possible, what is right, and so act" (p. 29).

and that,

> "[I]n a pluralistic society, the norms of conventional morality are sometimes not clear" (p. 30).

These observations support a Neo-Stoic approach to professional ethics, opening up space for "more human models in economics and business" (Giovanola 2009, p. 440) that recog-

nize the economy's effect on values and relationships. Giovanola (2009) goes on to argue that it then becomes "possible to overcome the emphasis on self-interest and personal well-being as utility maximization, and to promote the shift from the notion of the egoistic (economic) *individual*, to the concept of *personhood*" (p. 441, original emphases) and a social-ecological orientation, thus contextualizing the contributions to a common good as practiced through Neo-Stoicism and the interconnectedness of SES sustainability.

Integration of Neo-Stoic Ethics in Professional Settings

Training in Neo-Stoic practices, such as reflective self-examination, emotional regulation, and focusing on what is within one's control, may help leaders to navigate complex ethical conflicts and dilemmas, such as balancing short-term gains with long-term sustainability and welfare while maintaining composure under pressure. Furthermore, corporate codes of conduct and mission statements may benefit from explicitly incorporating Neo-Stoic principles, emphasizing the pursuit of the common good, personal integrity, and self-control. This alignment sets a tone of virtue and ethical reflection throughout an organization.

However, for enacting these principles practically, Neo-Stoic ethics orientation would need to encourage open dialogue, self-scrutiny, and honest reporting, aligning with the Stoic commitment to truth and integrity. By promoting trustworthiness, self-discipline, and ethical consistency, Neo-Stoic values may serve to strengthen the culture of trust within organizations and stakeholder relationships. The emphasis of Neo-Stoic ethics on the individual responses and detachment from external happenings presented in this study presents a challenge in terms of potential broader integration within complex professional scenarios that require clear, actionable rules. Indeed, the vignettes and quotes from experiences shared by participants working within organizational contexts exemplify this dilemma.

In professional contexts, accountability and responsibility for the broader impacts of decision-making requires clear organizational policy frameworks or guidelines which support consistent and coherent ethical behaviour across individuals, teams, and departments or subsidiaries. Integration of Neo-Stoic principles into corporate governance structures would, therefore, need to support ethical decision-making throughout the organization while anticipating the Stoic individualisation of such decision-making. This might be achieved by: (a) embedding Stoic ethical principles as interpretive anchors within codes of conduct to complement prescriptive rules; (b) adopting context-sensitive decision protocols, incorporating reflective questions, such as, 'What is within my control?' and 'How does this serve the common good?' alongside ethics compliance guidelines; (c) instituting ethics-as-practice training and dialogue platforms. Organizational Neo-Stoicism may be initially appraised as providing practical guidance and encouragement for leaders to consider not only legal compliance but also the moral dimensions of their decisions, aligning with Stoic values such as virtue, wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance. Similarly, Stoic principles may be useful in providing guidance for ethical decision-making from broader SES perspectives.

Conclusion

The aims of this study were: (1) to narrow the divide between normative and empirical research in relation to contemporary workplace ethics practiced through Neo-Stoicism, and (2) to explore Neo-Stoic alignments with SES perspectives which foster ethical practices

within contemporary workplaces, using a philosophical approach to examine workplace experiences. The findings elucidate an acknowledgement of, and contribution to, the common good through intentional actions within the SES, resulting from Neo-Stoic ethics.

Using a reflective and interpretive/methodological approach, this study contextualizes '*being Stoic*' in contemporary workplaces to advance professional ethics, guided by philosophical inquiry. The study proposes that professionals' understanding and practice of Neo-Stoic ethics can lead to SES sustainability through awareness of, and contributions to, the common good. The perspectives and experiences shared by Neo-Stoic practitioners depict practices which contribute beyond the compliance of policies or regulatory boundaries and are cognisant of social-ecological sustainability contexts.

Participants described how their intention to be Stoic affected a greater awareness of their own contributions to the wider whole of society within the context of their variable and changing personal and professional circumstances. Subsequently, intentions and awareness translated into an appreciation of, and contribution to, a common good; whilst the provision of guidance to others represented an opportunity to serve a purpose beyond self-interest, contributing to a broader overall perspective of their place in fostering SES sustainability.

This study of self-reported practices of Stoic philosophy in the workplace builds upon previous research which has explored the growing "heightened state of ethical awareness" and scrutiny of management ethics (Premeaux 2004, p. 278) through ancient philosophical relevance to contemporary business practices (Small 1993, 2013; Case et al. 2011; Watson et al. 2024). The shared experiences contribute to a better understanding of this (once influential) ancient philosophy's relevance to modern professional ethics and contemporary imperatives such as SES sustainability.

This study presents empirical evidence of the way in which the Stoic tenet of 'the common good' has been taken up by professionals in a contemporary workplace context, indicating a practical, heuristic approach to ethical conduct, interpreted through an SES lens. The findings of this study indicate that Neo-Stoic practitioners seek to develop as moral agents through their *praxis*. This agency was shown through participants' reflection and emotional regulation, indicating benevolent workplace responses (Lurie 2004; Melé 2009; Steyl 2020), contributing novel perspectives on professional ethics and providing groundings for future studies (especially related to its efficacy).

Future studies may seek to explore the notion of intentional contributions to a common good and moral efficacy (Ogunfowora, Maerz and Varty 2021), across a broader range of workplace contexts. This will help form multiple perspectives (organizational, team, individual) on sustainability and resilience, capturing interrelatedness within a community (Koehn 2013). Future studies should also consider additional theoretical and practical implications and perspectives of Stoic philosophy within the workplace beyond individual practitioners' experiences, including in the context of contemporary performance and productivity paradigms. Exploring these interactions would contextualize Neo-Stoicism integration into, or enhancement of, established professional ethics practices within the SES.

Understanding the practicalities of ethics-in-practice is a further crucial component to transforming professional conduct and workplace behaviour (Jones 2010; Small 2013) toward social sustainability constructs within the context of complex nonhomogeneous cultures (Koehn 2013). As stated by Bragues (2006),

> "Business, then, can only be at its most ethical when it gives individuals opportunities to thoughtfully participate in the management of their company's affairs and contemplate the ultimate meaning of things". (p. 343)

Importantly, any ethics, from the Stoics' perspective are not static. On the contrary, ethical development is viewed as dynamic and ever evolving (Bowden 2012) and therefore, rather than simply imposing perspectives, compliance, or fixed interpretations, a Neo-Stoic perspective promotes much needed *collective learning* (Macklin and Mathison 2018) or *wisdom learning* (Küpers and Gunnlaugson 2017) within the complex interactions of SES. Further research could fruitfully explore how Neo-Stoic ethics-as-practice can move professional conduct decisively beyond compliance, offering a robust alternative to utilitarian and prescriptive approaches, and actively supporting social-ecological sustainability.

Appendix A

Participant Professions
Global Security & Intelligence Analyst (Plastics Manufacturing Industry)
IT Project Manager
Military
Military Defense Construction – Environmental Projects
High School Band Director – Music Teacher
Philosophical Therapist & Red Cross Worker
Veterinarian and Practice Owner
Mental Health Nurse
Pastor
Software Engineer and Analyst
Private Investigator
Novelist and Writing Teacher
Retail Management Buyer
Navy – Commander Master Chief; Special Advisor to Commanding Officer
Commercial Electrical Sales
Geologist in Oil & Gas
Consultant – Government Work
IT Consultant
Artist and AA Sponsor
Countries Represented
United States x 9 participants (Michigan, Arizona, Colorado, California, Iowa, West Virginia x 2, Chicago)
United Kingdom x 3 participants (Oxford, Wales x 2)
Canada x 2 participants (Ontario, Saskatchewan)
Denmark (Copenhagen)
Sweden
New Zealand (Auckland)
Caribbean (Dominican Republic)
Germany (Berlin)
Gender of Participants
Male x 15
Female x 4
Participant Age Profile
20–29 × 2
30–39 × 6
40–49 × 7
50–59 × 3
60–69 × 1

Appendix B

Theme	Description	Examples
Emotional Regulation	Includes worry, anxiety, fear mitigation, depression, calm, focused, detached and any other form of emotional response that is regulated using Stoic philosophy	*"…with Stoicism, I can control my own emotions and my own way of thinking, and then I can apply the principles better because of that." (manager of military environmental construction projects)* *"that ability to come back to a simple, easy to remember logical framework that I can use in pretty much every situation. If I'm getting an anxiety, which I do still have, not anywhere near the level I used to, that I can go, 'OK. Is this actually greater in my imagination than in reality?'" (corporate buying manager)* *"… you have to … be able to work with your emotions, to express yourself in writing. but you, at the same time you shouldn't become hysterical…"; "…it's like [with Stoicism] you have a de-escalation technique…"; "if you don't write with emotion it's it's boring. So you have to work with [your emotions] and you have to, at the same time, you have to keep your distance to analyse them or to use them in a way … when emotions come up I try to look at them first like a gift basically like how can I use them, are they useful to me* *(writer and writing teacher)*
Practice	Understanding and recognition of, desire to undertake or techniques for undertaking Stoicism as an ongoing practice	*"I come to work and I have ADD, so I have a problem with focus … So, I do struggle on a daily basis. … So, I'll use Stoicism, which is the chief philosophy of life that I use. It has [helped] tremendously, you know, in spite of all my struggles right now, … it has increased the level of thought of operating on a daily basis. So, I apply that daily." (manufacturing security & intelligence analyst)* *"sometimes it's just staying … with the challenge. … [Stoicism] provided me I think more patience just … staying with it, being a little bit indifferent and staying with [it]." (commercial lighting sales)* *"Well the environment's not getting better but my handling of the environment is getting better." (software Engineer & Analyst)*
Stress Management	Regulating stress responses; taking charge of 'stressful' situations	*"In military training, you know, when you're out in the field and you can't eat and you can't sleep and you have people yelling at you or you're getting blown out of fire bases or whatever. Or even during deployments. I've been to Afghanistan five times. So, there's a lot of things that happen that you just can't control. And it really helps to stay in the mind state that, hey, I can't, I didn't have any way to control the fact that we're in this situation but now I can judge how I'm going to perceive this and how I want to act according to my judgment." (active military duty)* *"I think the Stoic principle is the only way I could really survive the work I am [doing] right now. … I worked in a confined area for 28 days, it's not a big deal now actually, but at that time it was, where we will be in the same place for 28 days, working in the middle of the desert in Algeria, North Africa, and then for 28 days we'll be off and you were basically with the same people for 28 days. You were working seven [days a week], twelve hours a day." (geologist in oil & gas)* *"I had this panic came over me and I talked myself down recognizing that I wasn't really there to make money. It was about virtue. And what I was there for was to promote beauty in the world and and to let people know about my enthusiasm, about making my art. And when I realized that was my purpose, instead of making the money, I was at peace." (artist)*

Theme	Description	Examples
Decision Making & Problem Solving	Using Stoic philosophy to gain clarity to make decisions; taking decisive action; calmly solving problems	*"… it somehow helps the clients … to externalize their problems. And within this Socratic and Stoic questions, it helps them to be more clear minded." (therapist and red cross volunteer working with refugee children)* *"I think [Stoic philosophy] made me better able to problem solve because if you're focusing on what's not in your control, well, you can't solve that problem." (IT project manager)* *"I think I make calmer, clearer decisions and that I think that instead of … being in an emergency type state and reactive, the benefit for me is, 'oh, well, know we can deal with this, … this isn't the end of the world'. And keeping kind of an even keel on things that that could be upsetting, that don't have to be." (pastor)* *"that's the main principle that I use, … take charge of the situation to resolve it one way or the other" …" things still get stressful, but it helps you initiate the process to solve the issues in a logical, more calm way" (commercial lighting salesperson)*
The Dichotomy of Control	Understanding and acceptance of that which is within one's control and that which is outside of one's control	*"I think one of the first things is to remember what I controlled and what I didn't. Things like the resources I was allocated I have no control over, the lack of authority over the technical team. I had no control over the structure of the organization as such that the project manager wasn't even in the line management chain. You know how rational either the technical team, or the stakeholders were behaving was completely outside my control. Their opinions of me [were] outside my control. The number of hours in a day and the number of e-mails in my inbox was totally outside my control. But what I could control was how I communicated with both parties and how I responded to, … the ever-increasing number of emails in my inbox." (SHUK1542020 - IT project manager)* *"A lot of journaling of going well 'Do I agree with what's being more the direction that music education with the focus on the activity side is going?' And it kind of led me to 'Well, no, I don't. And in stepping back and going, well, what can I control? Well, I can control whether we go to this festival or not. And I can't control people's perceptions of that." (high-school music band director and teacher)* "*I think one of the first things is to remember what I controlled and what I didn't. Things like the resources I was allocated I have no control over, the lack of authority over the technical team. I had no control over the structure of the organization as such that the project manager wasn't even in the line management chain. You know how rational either the technical team, or the stakeholders were behaving was completely outside my control. Their opinions of me was outside my control. The number of hours in a day and the number of e-mails in my inbox was totally outside my control. But what I could control was how I communicated with both parties and how I responded to, you know, the ever increasing number of emails in my inbox." (IT project manager)*

Theme	Description	Examples
Universality - Broader Context	Recognition and acceptance of broader universal context of one's place and that of others as well as circumstances	*"One of the things that is important and I think it comes with a corporate setting is the fact that … every individual on my team is part of a larger corporation. … when I think about it that way and then when I deal with … my staff, I look at it from a situation of, much like Stoicism, we're all connected. … there's a universal cause and effect …" (manager of military environmental construction projects)* *"For example, you work with somebody who's accused of murder. You have to engage with that person just as if they're anybody else and treat them with the same dignity and respect that you treat anybody else. And I think that is kind of a Stoic principle, in my opinion, that you tried to, in interacting with anybody, try to extend that kind of courtesy and just basic humanity to." (private investigator)* *"I'm just remembering to do what's right for people. … Sometimes there's a lot of having to stand up for people's rights in my job, directly or indirectly in kind of recognizing that sometimes people can be … stuck in a system and I'm doing … what's easy for the system rather than what's better for the individual." (mental health nurse)*
Providing Guidance to Others	Helping others through difficult times through guidance and advice; teaching; sharing insights or perspectives with others	*"…if I meet someone with anxiety, I would somehow use Epictetus and talking about the dichotomy of control and to make them realize, what is reality and what is self-conception?" (therapist and red cross volunteer working with refugee children)* *"I use [Stoic philosophy] regularly with my teams. I often have to help them solve problems. So, it's important for them to understand. And I usually ask questions that determine, you know, what we can influence and what we can't influence in a problem that we have to solve. So as a leader, I try to get them to understand what's within their influence or within their control, what's not within their control and in so doing, then we can decide what pieces of the problem or we can actually address in what sequence." (manager of military environmental construction projects)* *"I've been studying stoicism for 20 years. I've been studying philosophy for over 50 years, almost 60 years, shall we say. I started out, I suppose, at university, thinking I could change the world like everyone does. And it took me, I don't know, 40 years to realize I couldn't. But what I can do is for my company, for my consultants and my family and myself, I can make things better. I spend a lot of time trying to help various, shall we say good causes. Trying to look at that point of view to try to make the world better for a few people. I can't do it for everyone but a few people I can. … and then spread that as far as I can throughout the rest of the world." (consultant – government)* *"Providing guidance to staff through situations where emotions are heightened; particularly challenging in health care/veterinary practice as customers face challenging decisions with regard to their pets …* *Trying to distil the emotions down to better provide the support needed to the client" (veterinarian and practice owner)*

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Chrystie Watson is a Lecturer in Sustainability Leadership and Management at Charles Darwin University, Australia. Her research interests include the application of ancient philosophies within contemporary contexts, organisational and workplace dynamics, and sustainability business, leadership and management practices.

Peter Case is Professor of Organization Studies, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, and professor emeritus at James Cook University, Australia. His research interests include organization theory and philosophy, global health, and international development.

Josephine Pryce is an Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Associate Dean Research Education in the College of Business, Law and Governance at James Cook University, Australia. Her research interests include the nature of work, volunteering, occupational culture, and sustainable working lives. Josephine is also interested in research methodologies and the scholarship of teaching.

Carol Jarvis is Professor of Knowledge Exchange and Innovation, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England. Working from a complexity perspective and focusing on lived experience, her current research explores new ways of thinking about leadership and followership and the potential for innovating working practices flowing from this.

Wendelin Küpers is Professor at the Institute of Strategy and Management of Corvinus University of Budapest in the Department of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Development. Combining a phenomenological and cross-disciplinary orientation, his research focuses on embodied, emplaced, emotional, creative, and aesthetic dimensions of organizing and managing. In his current research and teaching, he is focusing on more responsive, responsible, and wiser forms of organizations and management/leadership that are contributing towards more integral and sustainable practices.