



Reflecting on Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Systemic online and Face-to-Face Coaching Sessions: A Qualitative Study on Presence, Reflection, and Relational Processes in Coaching

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Abstract

Mindfulness-based interventions have gained increasing relevance in coaching, counselling, and organisational development. At the same time, digital coaching formats have become more widespread, raising questions about how relational presence, reflection, and mindful interaction can be facilitated across online and face-to-face settings. This study explores how mindfulness-based interventions are experienced and reflected upon within systemic coaching conversations conducted in both online and in-person formats. Using a qualitative research design grounded in systemic and constructivist perspectives, reflective diaries from both coach and coachee perspectives were analysed through qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that mindfulness-based interventions can support relational presence, emotional grounding, and reflective depth in both formats. The study highlights that mindfulness in systemic coaching is not merely a technique, but closely intertwined with the systemic attitude of openness, attentiveness, and non-judgement. The research further demonstrates the practical relevance of reflective processes for professional coaching practice and contributes to the growing discourse on digital coaching environments and mindful relational work.

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Keywords: systemich coaching, qualitative research, mindfulness, reflection, coaching processes

1. Introduction

Systemic coaching increasingly takes place within complex and rapidly changing social and organisational contexts (Hinkelmann & Enzweiler, 2018; Kutz, 2020; Lindemann, 2023) ^[19, 26, 27]. At the same time, digital communication technologies have transformed how interpersonal encounters are organised, including coaching and counselling conversations. Particularly since the expansion of digital work environments, online coaching formats have become an established component of professional coaching practice (Wegener *et al.*, 2016) ^[44]. Yet questions remain regarding how relational presence, attentiveness, and emotional connection can be fostered in digital settings (Bailenson, 2021; Meyer, 2023; Wegener *et al.*, 2020) ^[3, 30, 43].

Parallel to this development, mindfulness-based approaches have received growing attention within coaching and organisational contexts (González *et al.*, 2018; Greif *et al.*, 2018; Lützenkirchen, 2004) ^[15, 16, 28]. Mindfulness practices are frequently associated with enhanced self-awareness, emotional regulation, attentiveness, and relational presence (Amberg, 2016; Brazier, 2025; Chang-Gusko *et al.*, 2019; Greif *et al.*, 2018; Michalak *et al.*, 2022) ^[1, 7, 9, 16, 31]. In coaching contexts, mindfulness-based interventions may support both coaches and coachees in slowing down, becoming more present, and engaging more consciously in reflective processes (Brazier, 2025; González *et al.*, 2018; Greif *et al.*, 2018; Schmidt, 2016) ^[7, 15, 16, 36].

The present study emerged from practical experiences within systemic coaching education. Initial observations suggested that short mindfulness interventions, such as mindful check-ins or grounding exercises, appeared to influence the atmosphere and relational quality of coaching conversations in meaningful ways. These experiences raised the question of how mindfulness-based interventions are experienced within systemic coaching conversations in both online and face-to-face settings.

The study therefore investigates the following research question:

How are mindfulness-based interventions reflected upon within systemic online and face-to-face coaching conversations?

By focusing on reflective experiences rather than measurable outcomes, the study contributes to a qualitative understanding of mindfulness, relational presence, and systemic coaching processes.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Reflection as a professional process

Reflection plays a central role within professional learning, coaching, and systemic practice. Rather than being understood merely as retrospective thinking, reflection can be described as a structured and intentional process of critically engaging with experiences, assumptions, and actions in order to generate future-oriented learning (Arendt *et al.*, 2025; Dewey, 1991; Fraefel, 2017; Kösel *et al.*, 2022; Schön, 1984; Tan *et al.*, 2023) [2, 10, 13, 24, 37, 40].

Contemporary approaches emphasise that reflection is not only an individual cognitive process but also a relational and social phenomenon (Natsiou & Tsitouridou, 2025) [32]. Understanding often emerges through dialogue, shared meaning-making, and collaborative interpretation. In professional contexts such as supervision, coaching, or counselling, reflection therefore supports the development of professional awareness, ethical sensitivity, and adaptive action (Bengtsson, 1995; Gruber, 2021; Heringshausen, 2025) [5, 17, 18].

Within systemic perspectives, reflection further involves recognising that observations are always shaped by subjective perceptions and contextual conditions. Consequently, reflective practice requires openness towards multiple perspectives and ongoing awareness of one's own assumptions (Kösel *et al.*, 2022; Kutz, 2020; Lindemann, 2023; Watzlawick *et al.*, 2017; Willemse & Ameln, 2018) [24, 26, 27, 42, 45].

2.2. Systemic coaching

Systemic coaching is grounded in constructivist thinking. Rather than viewing problems as isolated individual phenomena, systemic coaching understands people as embedded within and individually observing relational and communicative systems (Hinkelman & Enzweiler, 2018; Kutz, 2020; Lindemann, 2023) [19, 26, 27].

From this perspective, meaning emerges through interaction, communication, and interpretation (Lindemann, 2023) [27]. Coaching therefore does not provide expert solutions but intends to facilitate processes of reflection, perspective-taking, and resource activation (König *et al.*, 2019; Lindemann, 2023; Patrzek, 2016; Radatz, 2010) [23, 27, 33, 34].

A key principle of systemic coaching is that coachees are regarded as experts in their own lives and contexts. Coaches could not and do not impose solutions but instead support

coachees in exploring their own meanings, resources, and possibilities for action (Kutz, 2020; Lindemann, 2023) [26, 27]. The coaching process becomes a collaborative space for reflection and relational learning.

2.3. The systemic stance

The systemic attitude requires coaches to remain aware that every observation is shaped by subjective perception. Coaches therefore avoid assuming objective knowledge about the coachee's reality and instead remain open to multiple possible interpretations (Erpenbeck, 2023; Kutz, 2020; Lindemann, 2023; Radatz, 2010; Watzlawick *et al.*, 2017; Willemse & Ameln, 2018) [12, 26, 27, 34, 42, 45].

Hence, within systemic coaching, methods or 'tools' are not considered sufficient. Greater emphasis is placed on the continuous reflection and of the coaches' systemic stance, which includes openness, curiosity, appreciation, and non-judgemental attentiveness (König *et al.*, 2019; Kutz, 2020; Patrzek, 2016) [23, 26, 33].

This stance aligns closely with mindfulness-based approaches. Both perspectives emphasise presence, acceptance, and awareness of the present moment rather than premature interpretation or evaluation (Amberg, 2016, S. 17; Kutz, 2020) [1, 26].

2.4. Mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions

Mindfulness can be broadly understood as intentional, present-moment awareness characterised by openness and non-judgement (Amberg, 2016, S. 17) [1]. In coaching contexts, mindfulness practices may support emotional grounding, attentiveness, and self-awareness (Brazier, 2025; González *et al.*, 2018; Greif *et al.*, 2018) [7, 15, 16].

Mindfulness-based interventions can take various forms, including breathing exercises, body awareness practices, reflective pauses, or mindful check-ins and check-outs (Chang-Gusko *et al.*, 2019; Malinowski, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2021) [9, 29, 46]. These interventions are often relatively simple but may significantly influence the atmosphere and relational quality of coaching conversations.

Research suggests that mindfulness practices can support emotional regulation, stress reduction, attentional focus, and relational presence (Amberg, 2016; Bauer, 2020; Brazier, 2025; Calderone *et al.*, 2024; Greif *et al.*, 2018; Siegel, 2011) [1, 4, 7, 8, 16, 38]. Within coaching settings, mindfulness may therefore contribute to a deeper reflective process and strengthen the quality of interpersonal connection (González *et al.*, 2018; Greif *et al.*, 2018) [15, 16].

2.5. Online and face-to-face coaching formats

Digital coaching formats offer increased accessibility, flexibility, and geographical reach. Online settings can reduce travel time and facilitate coaching across organisational and national boundaries (Jones *et al.*, 2016; Wegener *et al.*, 2020) [21, 43] and add, therefore, to a more sustainable approach in a global working environment.

However, online coaching may raise questions regarding relational depth, embodiment, and non-verbal communication. Face-to-face settings are often associated with stronger bodily resonance, spontaneous interaction, and richer sensory perception (Bailenson, 2021; Dohen *et al.*, 2010; Meyer, 2023; Stieger *et al.*, 2023; Wegener *et al.*, 2020) [3, 11, 30, 39, 43].

However, from a systemic perspective, both formats represent relational contexts rather than better or worse

alternatives. The relevant question is therefore not which format is superior, but how relational processes, presence, and reflection are experienced within each setting.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study adopts a qualitative and constructivist research design. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when investigating subjective experiences, relational processes, and contextual meaning-making (Hussy *et al.*, 2013; Kutz, 2020) ^[20, 26].

Rather than measuring mindfulness interventions quantitatively, the study explores how these interventions are experienced and reflected upon by participants within systemic coaching conversations.

The research further follows a systemic understanding that experiences and meanings are socially constructed and context-dependent. Consequently, the study does not aim to identify objective truths about coaching effectiveness but instead reconstructs the subjective reflections of participants (Hussy *et al.*, 2013) ^[20].

3.2. Data collection

The empirical material consisted of systemic coaching conversations conducted in both online and face-to-face formats. The coaching sessions included mindfulness-based interventions such as grounding exercises, mindful pauses, and reflective check-ins.

To capture reflective experiences, the study employed reflective diaries written by both coach and coachee after the sessions. Reflective diaries were chosen because they allow participants to describe experiences, perceptions, and emotional processes in their own words and close to the actual coaching situation (Bolger, 2003; Hussy *et al.*, 2013) ^[6, 20].

The coaching conversations were intentionally designed to create reflective and relational spaces characterised by attentiveness, openness, and slowed-down interaction.

3.3. Data analysis

The reflective diaries were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis combined inductive and deductive category development (Kuckartz, 2018) ^[25].

Initial categories were derived from the thematic areas of mindfulness, online settings, and face-to-face settings. Additional themes emerged inductively from the material itself.

The analysis focused particularly on experiences of mindfulness interventions, relational and emotional dynamics, experiences in online and face-to-face settings, and reflections regarding systemic presence and connection. This interpretive approach enabled a nuanced exploration of subjective experiences within the coaching process.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings reveal several important dimensions regarding mindfulness-based interventions within systemic coaching conversations.

4.1. Mindfulness as relational grounding

A central finding was that mindfulness interventions frequently contributed to emotional grounding and relational presence.

Participants described that short mindful pauses or breathing

exercises helped them arrive more consciously within the coaching conversation. These interventions appeared to slow down interaction and invite a calmer and more attentive atmosphere. At the end of the session, these interventions often were described as supporting emotional grounding, helping the coachee to leave the conversation in a more settled and internally organized state.

Rather than functioning as isolated techniques, mindfulness interventions seemed to shape the relational space itself. Participants often reported feeling more focused, emotionally present, and connected to both themselves and the coaching process.

4.2. Mindfulness and the systemic attitude

The findings further suggest that mindfulness-based interventions are closely connected to the systemic attitude of the coach. Mindfulness was not experienced merely as a method but as part of a broader relational orientation characterised by attentiveness, openness, and appreciation. Coaches who embodied calmness, presence, and non-judgement appeared to support deeper reflective processes within the sessions. This observation aligns with systemic perspectives emphasising that the quality of relational presence may shape coaching processes more strongly than individual techniques (König *et al.*, 2019; Kutz, 2020) ^[23, 26].

4.3. Online coaching and digital presence

In online coaching formats, participants appreciated the flexibility and accessibility of digital coaching. At the same time, several reflections highlighted that online interactions required more conscious efforts to establish relational presence and attentiveness.

Mindfulness interventions appeared particularly valuable within digital settings because they helped participants transition into the coaching conversation, reduce distractions from the surrounding environment, and supported the development of trust and relational presence in the online setting.

4.4. Face-to-face coaching and embodied interaction

In face-to-face coaching participants reported a strong awareness of bodily presence, atmosphere, and subtle relational cues within in-person interactions. Mindfulness interventions in these settings often intensified feelings of calmness, trust, and shared attentiveness.

The physical environment appeared to support spontaneous resonance and emotional connection. Nevertheless, the findings do not suggest that face-to-face coaching is inherently superior. Rather, the results indicate that each format shapes relational experiences.

4.5. Reflection as professional learning

Another important finding concerns the role of reflection itself.

The reflective diaries enabled both coaches and coachees to process their experiences more consciously and recognise subtle relational and emotional dynamics that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

Reflection therefore functioned not only as a research method but also as a professional learning process. Through reflective writing, participants became more aware of how mindfulness, relational presence, and systemic interaction influenced the coaching process.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored how mindfulness-based interventions are reflected upon within systemic online and face-to-face coaching conversations.

The findings suggest that mindfulness interventions can support emotional grounding, relational presence, and reflective depth in both coaching formats. Importantly, mindfulness was experienced not simply as a technique but as closely connected to the systemic attitude of openness, attentiveness, and appreciation.

The study further demonstrates that online and face-to-face coaching formats create relational conditions. Meaningful relational processes were possible in both contexts when mindfulness and systemic presence were intentionally cultivated.

From a practical perspective, the findings underline the importance of creating reflective and mindful spaces within coaching conversations. Even brief mindfulness interventions may contribute significantly to relational quality and emotional attentiveness.

The study also highlights the value of qualitative and reflective research approaches for investigating coaching processes. Reflective diaries enabled nuanced insights into experiences that would be difficult to capture through standardised measurement alone.

However, the study has limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the findings are context-specific. Future research could therefore explore mindfulness-based coaching interventions across broader organisational and cultural contexts or examine long-term reflections of mindful relational practices in coaching.

Further studies might also investigate how digital technologies influence embodiment, attentiveness, and relational resonance within professional coaching environments.

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