

## **When Life Itself Is the Threshold: Rethinking Coaching Through Chronic Liminality**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reconceptualizes coaching practice through the lens of chronic liminality, understood not as a temporary transitional phase but as an enduring condition shaped by structural, social, and economic realities. Drawing on sustained engagement with marginalized women and worker communities, it challenges the primacy of reflection-centric assumptions embedded in mainstream coaching discourse and advances an action-led understanding of meaning-making and agency. Two interrelated frameworks are introduced. The Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM) explains how meaning emerges through continuity of action in survival-oriented contexts, while the Liminal Becoming Model describes how identity and agency evolve over time without requiring resolution or stability. Together, these models position growth as enacted rather than articulated, and becoming as unfolding within continuity rather than closure. The paper argues that, in conditions of ongoing uncertainty, coaching shifts from facilitating linear transition to scaffolding sustained engagement, enabling individuals and communities to act, recalibrate, and build awareness in context-sensitive and culturally grounded ways. Implications are outlined for coaching practice, coach education, and supervision, advancing a reorientation of coaching that recognizes dignity in endurance, intelligence in responsiveness, and becoming within continuity.

*Keywords: chronic liminality, action-led meaning, becoming, coaching practice, marginalized contexts, agency, presence*

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### **Introduction**

Coaching, as it is widely practiced, rests on a set of largely implicit developmental assumptions about how individuals navigate uncertainty. Central among these is the belief that periods of disruption are transitional, temporary phases through which individuals move before arriving at renewed clarity, stability or direction. Within this framework, reflection is positioned as the primary mechanism through which experience is processed, awareness is generated, and action becomes possible.

This orientation has been shaped by a range of philosophical and developmental traditions that privilege introspection, insight, and resolution as markers of growth. Whether through reflective practice, experiential learning cycles or humanistic models of self-actualisation, coaching has come to rely on a sequence in which reflection precedes action and liminality is assumed to be a phase that can be exited.

Within coaching discourse, this assumption often remains implicit. Clients enter periods of uncertainty, reflect upon them, and move toward renewed clarity or stability. Disruption is treated as bounded; liminality is something one passes through. Liminality has traditionally been understood as a transitional phase, a temporary state between one stable condition and another.

This paper challenges this assumption.

It argues that liminality is no longer confined to episodic transition. Instead, it has become an enduring and increasingly characteristic condition of contemporary life. Economic precarity, shifting labour structures, caregiving burdens, social fragmentation, and rapid global change have normalized sustained uncertainty. Stability is not always the default state to which individuals return; for many, uncertainty is ongoing rather than exceptional.

While this condition is most visibly pronounced in marginalized contexts, it is not limited to them. Engagement with women navigating structural disadvantage makes chronic liminality unmistakable in a way that responsibility emerges early, options are constrained, and life unfolds without reliable stability. Yet these contexts illuminate a broader social reality rather than representing an isolated case. Across social strata, individuals increasingly operate within shifting, unpredictable environments where clarity is provisional and adaptation continuous.

If liminality is enduring rather than temporary, then prevailing coaching assumptions require reconsideration. Much of mainstream coaching implicitly treats reflection and insight as precursors to effective action, presuming that individuals have sufficient psychological space and stability to pause, articulate meaning, and then move forward. But what if action does not follow reflection? What if meaning is sustained through continuous engagement rather than discovered through contemplative distance?

The central claim of this paper is that chronic liminality understood as sustained and structurally embedded uncertainty, demands a rethinking of coaching philosophy. Rather than assuming eventual resolution, coaching must recognise that agency, transformation, and becoming often unfold within ongoing constraint. In such conditions, meaning may emerge through action before it is articulated, and development may occur without the promise of stability. The contribution of this paper is not to argue against reflective coaching, but to contextualise it. It invites coaching philosophy to broaden its assumptions so that it can hold both worlds, the reflective world of self-exploration and the action-led world of survival, continuity, and ongoing becoming. Here, reflection refers to introspective processes through which experience is examined and rendered meaningful, and is distinguished from reflexivity, which engages a broader critical awareness of self, context, and relational positioning within systems (Fatien Diochon & Nizet, 2019).

To advance this argument, the paper first examines how temporary liminality is assumed within dominant coaching frameworks. It then presents a vignette drawn from lived coaching encounters to illustrate chronic liminality in practice. Building on this, two conceptual models are proposed: the Action-Led Meaning Model, which explains how meaning is sustained through continuity of action, and the Liminal Becoming Model, which articulates how identity and agency evolve over time without requiring resolution. The paper concludes by exploring implications for coaching practice, education, and supervision.

If coaching is to respond meaningfully to conditions of chronic liminality, it becomes necessary to examine the philosophical assumptions that have shaped how change, agency, and development are understood within coaching practice. Many contemporary coaching approaches are implicitly grounded in traditions of thought that privilege reflection, insight, and narrative

coherence as the primary pathways to transformation. These traditions have been deeply influential in shaping the way coaching conceptualises growth. While these traditions have contributed significantly to the evolution of coaching, they also embed a particular understanding of liminality – one that is bounded, transitional and ultimately resolvable. This raises an important question for contemporary coaching practice: What happens when liminality is no longer temporary, but enduring? When individuals are not moving through uncertainty, but living within it?

### **Chronic Liminality and the Limits of Reflection-First Coaching**

Liminality is commonly understood as a threshold state, an in-between phase in which prior identities dissolve while new ones have not yet taken form. Within coaching discourse, it is often positioned as temporary, a zone of discomfort entered during transition and exited once clarity or resolution is achieved. Building on van Genneep's work, Victor Turner conceptualised liminality as a bounded phase characterised by ambiguity and *communitas*.

The concept of chronic liminality offers a way of understanding conditions in which uncertainty is not episodic but sustained. Unlike transitional liminality, which assumes movement from one state to another, chronic liminality refers to ongoing states of instability shaped by structural, social and economic realities. In such contexts, individuals do not necessarily move toward resolution: instead they continue to act, decide, and respond within conditions that remain fundamentally uncertain. Both van Genneep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) conceptualize liminality as a bounded, in-between phase within a broader sequence of social transition, rather than as a continuous condition within which life unfolds. Here, liminality is not a bridge between states, but a space that is lived. Within this framing, uncertainty is temporary, and development is oriented toward eventual stability, a logic that continues to shape many contemporary coaching models.

Western psychological and developmental traditions have reinforced this orientation, and their influence is clearly visible in contemporary coaching practice. Many coaching models implicitly follow a sequence in which reflection generates awareness, which then informs action, assuming that individuals have the space to pause, process, and articulate their experience before responding to it. Developmental frameworks, such as Maslow's (1970) and Carl Rogers' (1961), assume that once basic physiological and psychological needs are sufficiently met, individuals move toward higher-order processes such as self-reflection, coherence, and self-actualisation. Coaching models influenced by these traditions often follow a similar sequence; reflection generates awareness, which then informs action.

In many lived contexts, particularly those shaped by sustained responsibility and constraint, such space is limited or absent. Reflection is not necessarily rejected; rather, it is deprioritised in the presence of more urgent demands. Lived realities in structurally constrained contexts suggest a different ontology. For many individuals, liminality does not resolve because the forces that generate it are not transitional but structural. While this condition is most visible in marginalised contexts, it is not confined to them. Contemporary global realities increasingly mirror similar patterns of sustained uncertainty. The disruptions of COVID-19, ongoing geopolitical conflicts, and rapid technological shifts such as artificial intelligence have destabilised previously assumed trajectories of work, identity, and security. For many, stability

itself has become provisional rather than guaranteed. Poverty, gendered divisions of labour, restricted mobility, caregiving responsibilities, precarious employment, and entrenched social hierarchies are not phases to be moved through. They are conditions within which individuals continuously operate. Under such conditions, uncertainty is not episodic; it is ambient.

Several philosophical traditions offer an alternative developmental perspective in which meaning is not necessarily discovered through prior reflection but enacted through engagement. Frankl (1946/2006), for instance, positions meaning as something sustained through engagement with life, even in conditions of constraint. Similarly, Eastern traditions such as the Bhagavad Gita emphasise disciplined action undertaken without attachment to outcomes as a path to growth. Ubuntu philosophy further highlights that becoming unfolds relationally, within communities rather than through isolated self-reflection.

These perspectives point to a different developmental sequence:

- Meaning may be lived before it is articulated.
- Agency may be enacted before it is explained.
- Becoming may unfold without the resolution of uncertainty.

This distinction is significant because many lives do not permit extended pause or reflective distance. Following Sen (1999), agency cannot be reduced to an abstract ideal, but must be situated within the real freedoms and enabling conditions that shape what individuals are actually able to be and do.

An additional observation emerges here. Even in relatively stable contexts, choices are often shaped by external structures such as education systems, family expectations, or socio-economic conditions. Individuals may initially live out externally defined pathways, only later encountering dissonance that prompts reflection. In such cases, reflection follows lived experience rather than preceding it.

This does not render reflection irrelevant; rather it repositions it within a different sequence, one in which action, experience and adaptation generate the conditions for meaning making. To understand how this reordering unfolds in coaching practice, it is necessary to turn to lived encounters where these dynamics are enacted in real time.

This paper therefore reframes liminality as chronic, an enduring condition in which individuals continually negotiate the tension between what is and what could be, without the assurance of stable resolution. Adaptation, in such contexts, is not formally learned; it is normalised through necessity. Individuals continuously recalibrate, responding to shifting constraints with practical intelligence. Yet this reveals a structural tension. Despite sustained effort, life does not consistently move toward what dominant narratives define as progress or upward mobility. The issue is not a lack of resilience, but the structuring of effort itself. When available resources are directed toward sustaining existence, long-term orientation often remains constrained or inaccessible.

At the same time, this pattern reveals a less recognised form of capacity. Action is continuous and non-negotiable. Survival depends on it. However, as individuals move toward

relative stability, a different imbalance often emerges: reflection increases while action diminishes. Momentum slows, and deliberation takes precedence.

This points to a central insight. Action and reflection cannot be treated as sequential stages; they must be understood as interdependent. When one dominates at the expense of the other, development stalls. In such instances, individuals do not remain in liminality but slip into limbo, a condition of stagnation rather than movement. Liminality, by contrast, signifies ongoing engagement, even in the absence of certainty.

Liminality, therefore, is not an episode to be resolved. It is the terrain upon which life unfolds.

This reconceptualization carries direct implications for coaching. Coaching can no longer be positioned solely as a process that helps clients move through liminality toward stable ground. Instead, it must be understood as a practice that supports navigation within ongoing uncertainty, where movement is continuous and resolution is not guaranteed.

### **Practice- Informed Inquiry and Vignette**

This paper adopts a practice-informed, conceptually driven approach grounded in sustained field engagement with marginalized women and worker communities. Rather than presenting formal empirical findings, the analysis draws on longitudinal observation, dialogic interaction, and reflective synthesis across contexts. The intention is not to generalise universally, but to articulate patterns of experience that challenge dominant assumptions within coaching theory. The conceptual models proposed are therefore interpretive and generative, offering a framework for understanding contexts in which conventional developmental and reflective assumptions may not fully apply.

The vignette that follows<sup>1</sup> is not presented as a standalone narrative, but as an analytical lens into how action, agency and meaning -making unfold within conditions of chronic liminality. It is structured around three interrelated dimensions:

1. The nature of action under constraint.
2. The sequencing of reflection in relation to lived experience; and finally
3. The expression of agency within limited but active choice environments.

Entering a coaching session with a group of marginalized women, my own awareness surfaced immediately. The room was filled with attentive eyes, some curious, some cautious,

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<sup>1</sup> The vignette is drawn from coaching engagements conducted as part of field-based work with an NGO supporting women in community settings. All identifying details have been anonymised, and the account is presented as a composite narrative to protect participant confidentiality. Participation in these sessions was voluntary, and conversations were situated within a coaching, not therapeutic, context.

The author remains aware of her positionality as an external facilitator working across social and experiential differences. The observations presented are therefore situated interpretations rather than claims of representation, offered with sensitivity to context and respect for participants' lived realities.

some quietly assessing. My clothing, accent, and presence felt visible in ways that made me aware of the distance between our lived realities. An internal urge arose to get it right, to speak carefully, to remain accessible, and to avoid imposing unfamiliar language.

I began with a simple question, “How was your day?”

“The way it is,” one woman replied, smiling shyly.

As the conversation unfolded, a pattern emerged. Their narratives rarely began with “I.” They began with “we.” We did this. We went there. We handled that.

Their eyes met each other as they spoke, confirming a shared reality. What surfaced was not individual grievance, but collective knowing, an exhausted yet cohesive understanding of everyday life. Very quickly, a central theme took shape, the desire to work, earn, and improve life. Alongside this, an equally strong constraint; restrictions on women leaving the home. Domestic responsibilities, childcare, family expectations, and implicit social boundaries shaped what was possible.

When asked about challenges, the conversation returned repeatedly to money and rising expenses like school fees, household needs, and the constant effort required to keep families functioning. There was little language of identity or introspection. Their concerns were expressed in practical terms.

Small moments of relief existed. Some women spoke of occasionally sharing food ordered by their children. Even this was described briefly, without lingering. The present demanded attention elsewhere.

A discussion on government rations revealed a similar pattern. A family entitled to 30 kilograms of rice might receive less. The shortfall was accepted with matter-of-fact clarity. The available responses were already understood; accept, resist, or find alternatives. Resistance was often weighed against risk. Decisions were immediate, situational, and practical.

Across conversations, a long-haul orientation became visible. Progress was not expected quickly. Struggle was repetitive and daily, yet hope persisted quietly. A phrase surfaced repeatedly in different forms: *We have to make life better for our children*. Among younger women, another shift appeared: *Our lives should be better than our parents' lives*.

One encounter stood out. A woman sat quietly with a child who had a severe physical disability and limited movement below the neck. As a mother, this evoked an immediate sense of connection, along with the awareness that relatability can easily become projection.

She spoke calmly about wanting work she could do from home while caring for her child. When asked how she managed daily routines, she replied, “I leave him in one place,” and described how she had taught him to signal when he needed assistance.

In that moment, my initial assumptions felt challenged. I had presumed limitation where life had already adapted. The disability had not defined the boundary of her thinking. Her question remained simple: “What more can I do?” This encounter reflects a form of chronic

liminality. Life here is not situated between stable phases, but lived within ongoing constraint, responsibility, and adaptive action. Action is already in motion; reflection follows lived experience.

The vignette reveals a consistent pattern. Action is continuous and non-negotiable, not preceded by reflection but embedded within lived responsibility. Meaning is not articulated in advance but emerges through engagement. Agency is exercised within constraint, not outside it. Reflection, when it appears, follows action rather than initiating it. These observations challenge reflection-first assumptions in coaching and point toward a different developmental logic.

This raises a set of questions for coaching:

- Action: Is action itself a mode of presence?
- Awareness: Does survival-oriented living cultivate a form of awareness grounded in immediacy?
- Reflection: Can reflection, when overemphasised, disrupt fluidity of action?
- Sequencing: Might reflection be contextually sequenced rather than universally foundational?

These questions emerge not from abstraction, but from lived encounters in which action is not the outcome of insight; it is the ground of existence.

Such contexts reveal a gap in prevailing coaching assumptions. If action precedes reflection, and presence is enacted through responsibility rather than cultivated through introspection, then reflection-first models are insufficient to explain how meaning and agency are sustained.

The following section introduces the Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM), a framework that articulates how meaning, agency, and presence emerge through continuity of action rather than prior introspection.

### **Reframing Coaching Under Chronic Liminality: An integrated Action- Becoming Framework**

The analysis developed thus far points toward a fundamental shift in how coaching must understand meaning, agency and development under conditions of chronic liminality. To articulate this shift, the paper proposes an integrated conceptual framework of two interrelated components, the Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM) and the Liminal Becoming Model. While they are analytically distinct, these models operate together. ALMM explains how meaning, agency and presence are enacted through continuity of action in the immediate environment. The Liminal Becoming Model extends this logic across time, explaining how repeated engagement gradually reshapes identity, aspiration and agency without requiring resolution. Together, they offer a unified account of development under chronic liminality, where action sustains the present and becoming unfolds through continuity rather than closure.

Much of coaching theory draws from adult development and reflective learning traditions, which tend to assume that clients have the psychological space and readiness required for

introspection (Bachkirova et al., 2017). Within reflective practice, reflection is often seen as the means through which individuals interpret experience and adjust their actions (Schön, 1983). Similarly, experiential learning frameworks describe development as an iterative process, where experience is worked through reflection before informing future behaviour (Kolb, 1984). In coaching, this places reflective dialogue at the centre of the process, positioning it as a key route to awareness and meaning-making (Stelter, 2014). Consequently, reflection is frequently treated as a precursor to change, where examining beliefs, clarifying values, and reinterpreting narratives are expected to shape subsequent action (Cavanagh & Grant, 2006). This orientation, however, rests on an implicit assumption that individuals are able to access the cognitive and emotional space required for reflection, an assumption that may not hold in conditions of sustained liminality.

This sequence, however, presumes a context in which sufficient stability exists for reflection to occur. Under many conditions, this assumption holds. In survival-oriented or structurally uncertain environments, it frequently does not.

Within the encounters described earlier, reflective prompts consistently returned to action. This was not avoidance, but necessity. When invited to reflect on past losses or constraints, responses remained anchored in the present: “That is done now. We need work to survive.”

To conceptualise this pattern, the paper proposes the Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM), which explains how meaning, agency, and presence emerge through sustained action before reflective articulation becomes possible. The model draws on Frankl’s insight that meaning is not merely constructed cognitively, but enacted through responsibility and engagement with life (Frankl, 1946/2006).

### ***Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM): Action as the Site of Meaning***

The Action-Led Meaning Model proposes that under conditions of uncertainty or survival-oriented realities:

- Meaning emerges through continuity of action rather than prior reflection
- Agency is enacted through doing rather than narrating
- Presence is embodied through responsibility rather than cultivated techniques
- Reflection follows action.

The reflective questions that arise in such contexts therefore differ from those assumed in reflective coaching traditions. Rather than asking *What brings joy?* or *What expresses my authentic self?* individuals often ask: *What sustains life? What creates income? What enables the next step?*

Meaning, in these contexts, is not constructed primarily through narrative interpretation but through sustained engagement with responsibility. What sustains meaning is not resolution but continuity. The long haul is lived rather than questioned. Action, in this sense, becomes existential oxygen. Stagnation has little room, not because life is easy, but because stopping would threaten meaning itself.

Reflection, when it occurs, is often oriented toward past loss or imagined futures beyond current reach. It rarely centres on engagement with the present moment. Even experiences of being stuck are short-lived, as necessity compels continued movement.

A further implication emerges in how presence is experienced. In many reflective traditions, presence is associated with stillness, silence, and inward awareness; however, presence-based approaches also recognise it as an embodied and attentive state (Silsbee, 2008). In survival-oriented contexts, presence is enacted differently. Caregiving demands attention. Work demands alertness. Scarcity demands continuous monitoring of resources. Presence is not cultivated as a technique; it is lived as responsibility.

ALMM therefore reframes presence as:

- Embodied attentiveness
- Sustained responsibility
- Engagement without collapse

Daily action within constrained roles cannot be postponed or abandoned. Presence becomes inseparable from survival. ALMM thus reframes action not as a consequence of awareness, but as a primary condition through which awareness emerges.

### **ALMM: Conceptual Dimensions**

The Action-Led Meaning Model can be understood through four interacting dimensions:

#### **A. Responsibility-Driven Action**

Action occurs because life demands it; opting out is rarely possible.

#### **B. Continuity Over Closure**

Meaning is sustained through ongoing effort rather than final resolution.

#### **C. Adaptive Agency**

Individuals navigate constraints through situational responses; acting, waiting, conforming, or resisting.

#### **D. Emergent Reflection**

Reflection arises through accumulated experience and is typically brief, practical, and oriented toward improving future action.

ALMM does not argue that reflection is unnecessary. Rather, it suggests that reflection is contextually sequenced, often following action rather than preceding it. While ALMM clarifies how meaning, agency, and presence are enacted through continuity of action in the present, it also points toward a broader developmental trajectory that unfolds over time. Action sustains

engagement moment to moment, but repeated engagement gradually reshapes identity, aspiration, and agency across longer temporal horizons.

The next section therefore extends this logic into the **Liminal Becoming Model**, which explores how repeated action, delayed reflection, and chronic liminality gradually shape identity, agency, and transformation across time. Repeated engagement does not merely sustain life; it gradually reshapes identity, aspiration, and orientation toward the future. ALMM operates at the level of lived engagement; the Liminal Becoming Model articulates how such engagement accumulates into transformation.

### *The Liminal Becoming Model: Development Through Continuity*

At the outset, it is important to clarify the relationship between the Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM) and the Liminal Becoming Model. Liminal Becoming represents the broader developmental condition within which individuals live and evolve under circumstances of chronic liminality. ALMM explains how individuals navigate this condition in everyday life. Through cycles of responsibility-driven action, experience, and adaptive response, individuals sustain meaning while simultaneously participating in a longer arc of becoming.

Unlike stage-based developmental models, such as Kegan's (1994), which orient development toward increasingly stable structures of self and meaning, this framework does not assume that liminality culminates in resolution. Instead, becoming unfolds within uncertainty, not beyond it. Development, therefore, does not emerge through arrival at fixed states, but through sustained engagement with life as it is.

Becoming, in this sense, is made possible precisely because liminality persists. Skill, orientation, and competence are shaped through repeated engagement with lived circumstances rather than through final resolution. This view resonates with process-oriented philosophies, particularly Whitehead (1929), which understand reality as ongoing becoming rather than a movement toward fixed states.

Eastern philosophical traditions further centre action as transformative. The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises disciplined action undertaken without attachment to outcomes as a path to growth and discernment (Sharma, 2015). In this view, learning unfolds through continuity of action rather than escape from experience. The Liminal Becoming Model resonates with this perspective; becoming does not emerge through the removal of liminality, but through a deepening capacity to live and act within it. Within this condition, becoming does not follow fixed stages but unfolds through recurring orientations that individuals move through fluidly, depending on life conditions.

Becoming, however, is not arrival. It is a shift in orientation, from reactive survival toward more intentional engagement. Liminality remains present, but agency expands. Action continues, not because struggle ends, but because disengagement would threaten meaning itself. What sustains becoming is not resolution, but responsiveness; the capacity to act, wait, adapt, or resist in relation to changing conditions. While transformative learning theory emphasises the role of critical reflection in reshaping meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000), development may also be

understood as emerging through ongoing engagement with lived experience rather than as a linear progression.

### ***Integrating ALMM and Liminal Becoming***

Together, ALMM and the Liminal Becoming Model form an integrated framework for understanding development under chronic liminality. ALMM describes the micro-process through which meaning, agency, and presence emerge through sustained action in present. The Liminal Becoming Model describes the macro-trajectory through which identity and aspiration, evolve over time through continued engagement.

Development, in this framework, is not contingent on stability. It is cultivated through sustained engagement with life as it is. This reframing shifts coaching away from facilitating transition toward stable endpoints, toward supporting sustained engagement, where action, reflection and becoming are dynamically interrelated rather than sequential. The following section explores these implications for coaching practice, education, and supervision.

### **Implications for Coaching Practice, Education, and Supervision**

Reframing liminality as an enduring condition rather than a transitional phase fundamentally alters the assumptions underpinning coaching practice. If uncertainty is ongoing and action precedes reflection, then coaching cannot be oriented primarily towards insight generation or resolution. Instead, it must engage with how individuals sustain action, meaning, and agency within lived conditions. First, the emphasis shifts from facilitating insight through reflection to supporting continuity of action, where engagement itself becomes a site of meaning-making. Second, the coach's role extends from questioning and interpretation to scaffolding responsiveness helping individuals navigate constraints, sustain effort, and recalibrate in real time. Third, coaching presence is reconfigured from reflective stillness to attentive engagement within activity, where awareness emerges through participation rather than withdrawal. Finally, success is not defined by resolution or closure, but by the individual's evolving capacity to act, adapt, and sustain dignity within ongoing conditions.

The Action-Led Meaning Model (ALMM) and the Liminal Becoming Model together suggest that development often unfolds through sustained engagement rather than resolution.

### ***Coaching Practice: Joining Life Mid-Stream***

In conditions of chronic liminality, life is already in motion. Responsibilities are active, decisions are ongoing, and action is underway. Coaching does not initiate action; it joins it mid-stream.

The role of the coach is less about driving clarity and more about supporting adaptive engagement helping clients recognise what is already working, stabilise attention, and refine action within their realities.

A key implication is that reflection cannot be assumed as the starting point. It becomes contextually sequenced. In many situations, reflection emerges only after continuity of action or when pressure eases. Premature reflection may feel irrelevant or intrusive. Coaching practice

therefore requires discernment: knowing when to invite reflection, when to remain with action, and when to simply witness effort.

A further implication emerges at the level of questioning. When action unfolds under conditions of uncertainty, it is often accompanied by fear of loss, error, judgement, or consequence. In such contexts, coaching questions may need to shift away from analysing the situation toward engaging with what enables continued action. Rather than asking *What is the dilemma?* or *What makes this difficult?*, the focus may move toward *What is getting in the way of the next step?* and *What allows you to proceed despite uncertainty?* This orientation brings attention to resistance and allowance as lived dynamics within action, supporting movement without requiring premature resolution of underlying conditions.

This orientation also expands coaching beyond individual optimisation. When situated within lived realities, coaching engages with collective patterns, how responsibility is carried, how meaning is sustained, and how future possibilities are imagined.

### ***Coach Education: Developing Contextual Literacy***

Coach education must prepare practitioners to work with uneven readiness rather than idealised clients. Many programs assume psychological space and readiness for introspection; these conditions are not universal. What becomes critical is contextual literacy, the ability to read the social, economic, and cultural conditions shaping a client's agency. This includes recognizing when action itself is meaningful, when reflection may impose unnecessary cognitive load, and when restraint is the most ethical response. The emphasis shifts from technique to discernment. Coaches must learn not only how to ask questions, but when questioning may disrupt rather than support engagement. Expanding coaching pedagogy to include action-oriented, relational, and contextually grounded perspectives further enables recognition of often overlooked forms of intelligence, endurance, adaptability, and relational navigation. This marks a shift away from training coaches to facilitate insight, towards preparing them to recognise and work within conditions where insight may not be the primary driver of development.

### ***Coaching Supervision: Sustaining Ethical Presence***

Working within chronic liminality places distinct demands on coaches. Progress may be slow, outcomes uncertain, and change difficult to measure using conventional markers. Supervision becomes essential in supporting ethical practice within this ambiguity. It provides space to examine impatience, projection, and subtle saviour impulses that may arise when working across contexts.

The discipline required is one of restraint, avoiding premature intervention, respecting pace, and trusting continuity of action even when change appears minimal. In this sense, supervision mirrors the stance advanced in this paper: remaining with liminality rather than attempting to resolve it.

Together, these implications reposition coaching as a practice grounded in continuity rather than resolution. Development is supported not by moving individuals out of uncertainty, but by enabling meaningful engagement within it. This reframing calls for a more context-sensitive,

ethically attuned and responsive to the realities within which people live and act form of coaching.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored what coaching becomes when it engages with lives shaped not by temporary transition but by conditions of chronic liminality. In such contexts, uncertainty is not a phase to be navigated and exited, but an enduring condition within which individuals act, decide, and construct meaning. This challenges a foundational assumption within much of contemporary coaching that reflection precedes action and that development culminates in clarity or resolution.

In response the paper has proposed an integrated framework comprising the Action-Led Meaning Making (ALMM) and the Liminal Becoming Model. Together these models offer a reorientation of coaching under conditions of sustained uncertainty. They reposition growth as something enacted rather than merely articulated, sustained through engagement rather than achieved through closure. They suggest that action can function as a primary mode of presence, that reflection may be contextually sequenced rather than foundational, and that becoming unfolds within uncertainty rather than after its resolution. In doing so, the paper offers an alternative to linear and stage-based narratives that continue to shape coaching theory.

The implications extend beyond theory. They invite coaches, educators, and supervisors to reconsider assumptions about readiness, pace, and intervention when working with lives shaped by uneven conditions of stability and constraint. More fundamentally, this work contributes to an ongoing philosophical question within coaching: whose experiences our frameworks centre, and whose forms of agency, endurance, and practical intelligence remain under-recognised.

Rather than proposing a universal model, this paper calls for greater conceptual humility and contextual responsiveness. Coaching's relevance in an increasingly uncertain world may depend less on expanding technique and more on its capacity to remain with lives as they are, supporting dignity, agency, and becoming without requiring resolution as a precondition for growth.

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