

Liminal Muse goes digital

A year on from the last article on their Liminal Muse Conversation cards, **Charlotte Housden** and **Michelle Lucas** share how they've evolved the tool to fit the times

A year ago (*Coaching at Work, May/June 2020*), we shared how we developed, tested and launched our Liminal Muse Conversation cards.

These are decks of 19 double-sided cards with 38 photographic images (all taken by Charlotte) that help clients quickly shift from more logical thinking towards surfacing their feelings and engaging with their emotions.

We had consistent feedback about how useful coaches (and other helping practitioners) found the cards. There was a common thread around facilitating open and divergent conversations, and clients heard themselves saying things they had not said before.

We wrote the article in February 2020, shortly before the pandemic when countries went into lockdown and we all started working from home. It's been a challenging year for many, both personally and professionally. We've had to pivot towards remote working and video platforms are now the default. Inevitably Liminal Muse customers asked us for a digital version of the cards, and while we had the images, the tricky part was how to share them online in an interactive way.

We tried a couple of platforms and noticed that the images were much smaller on the screen than the physical cards. Additionally, while many participants intuitively navigated the whiteboards and quickly built confidence, some felt the software was complicated. Rather than a lovely, engaging and somatic session, their anxiety pushed them into a thinking space. This was the opposite

Deckhive – an example

How to use Deckhive for an arrivals exercise

- Start a session in your web browser and share the link with your client(s). Continue your conversation through Zoom, Teams or Skype.
- Once in the session, invite your client(s) to scroll through the pack, exploring both sides of the cards and selecting a card that answers a question such as, 'How are you arriving today?'
- The client(s) drags their selected card from the left-hand side into the centre. Once selected, the card can be moved around the space. It can be enlarged, deleted or duplicated. Sticky notes can be added for structure or note-taking.
- When working in a group, clients can use the same space at the same time and see each other's selections. Unlike a physical pack of cards, Deckhive offers an unlimited number of images, so multiple participants can select the same card.

Example feedback from a team coach

- *"I used the digital images with an executive team who were all very high on the rational, serious academic side, scientists and things like that. I was agonising over how this would work, but it took them to a different space. It was fantastic opener. As a tool it quickly built psychological safety and openness"*

of how the cards usually worked.

An additional issue was the double-sided nature of the cards. A key feature of Liminal Muse is that the images and colours are different on each side of the cards. The process of turning and selecting slows down the client's thinking, enabling them to stop, reflect and access their emotions and feelings. Interactivity and playfulness are intrinsic to the use of the cards, yet digital whiteboards didn't offer this functionality.

Then a number of our clients mentioned a platform called Deckhive. Launched at the end of December 2020, Deckhive has been specifically developed for coaches to work interactively with digital cards. Martin Galpin, a business psychologist

and co-creator of the At My Best® cards, is one of the team behind Deckhive. Martin was clear about what they wanted to build: "We set out to develop something that was very simple for the user but flexible enough to work for a really broad range of card-based content."

This is what coaches and facilitators have been saying about Deckhive:

"So good for virtual coaching; helped me beyond words."

"I find Deckhive can make remote coaching even better than being in the room. Across a series of sessions, my clients are easily able to pick up on recurring themes and connections because we return to and build on the same tables each time."

"In my view this tool is a real game changer for coaches and consultants."



Figure 1: Liminal Muse Cards on Deckhive

Working with Liminal Muse cards

The essence of working with the cards is that the coach or facilitator poses a question, and the client selects one or more images in response. For example, the coach might ask a client to choose images that reflect a situation that they want to unpick. The interactive nature of Deckhive closely replicates how people work with the physical version – they can turn the image to check the other side and easily make a different choice.

This process can be helpful when the client needs catharsis – they can select multiple images and the coach can facilitate the gradual refinement of their choices. Conversely, it enables a client to start in a focused way, with the coach facilitating a broadening out of their thinking. The editable post-it is a useful feature as well. A client can choose a number of images that represent the resources they need and the coach, or client, can label this cluster of images (see Figure 1).

An essential feature of Deckhive is that it facilitates individual and group work. The facilitator can easily create additional tables, making more space for break-out activities. Coaches can also create their own decks, using words or images that they use regularly with clients.

At the end of the session clients can take screenshots of the images they have selected, which serve as an aide-mémoire – Deckhive is working on creating a pdf version of this. Sessions are also saved on the facilitator's account, so clients can revisit their work in the next session.

One user concern is whether it's easy to introduce the Liminal Muse cards during a session. Many of us work emergently and we don't always know what tools we'll use until we're in conversation. The way to invite a client(s) to Deckhive is through a unique session link, which can easily be pasted into a chat function. No sign-up is required. This process simply creates a unique identifier so the session is private to specific clients.

- "I love the versatility of Liminal Muse (a very welcome addition to my toolkit) and the depth of conversation the images elicited in our group sessions"
- "This was a truly enriching experience and a safe space to let everything hang out! Amazing how evocative an image can be. Much needed at the moment"

We trialled Deckhive over a number of weeks and found it intuitive and easy to use. It solved the 'card flipping' challenge, the image size was much bigger, and it addressed technology challenges some coaches had experienced. We're delighted to find a platform that works so seamlessly with Liminal Muse Conversation cards – so much so that we've now become a Deckhive Creative Partner and our cards are hosted on the site.

"Working with digital images, on seemingly unrelated topics, was a very different approach for me. I was completely surprised at how they brought out some very deep inner thoughts and emotions. I found it extremely impactful."

"This was my first experience of engaging with Liminal Muse images and I found it a wonderfully rich and stimulating experience. For me it evoked some new and very powerful connections."

As lockdowns start to lift, some client work may revert back to being in person, although the digital way of working will definitely remain in some form. We've had so much positive feedback on both Liminal Muse Conversation cards and Deckhive, we anticipate it being a sustainable way of working with clients. It'll be interesting to see how quickly users take up edition one of the cards on Deckhive as we have two more editions of the physical cards which could be added if there's sufficient demand. 📍

- To buy a pack of digital Liminal Muse Conversation cards visit: <https://bit.ly/3n3CXo6>
 - For a physical pack, go to: www.liminalmuse.co.uk
- User guides and example exercises included

About the authors

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