In the Making

Adaptive Humanism:

Moving From Limiting to Quantum Narratives to Connect with the Emerging Future

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Abstract

We believe that while humanity is experiencing a time of transition and transformation, it is "stuck" within limiting narratives. Those narratives prevent individuals and societies from exploring new options and from acting upon those alternatives; that is, from co-creating a future. We propose the concept of Adaptive Humanism, a process of moving from limiting to quantum narratives through conscious (that is, self-aware) and continuous adaptation to a new situation, as well as critical examination of both challenges and opportunities offered by that new environment. We briefly explore limiting narratives from the perspectives of psychology, philosophy, and sociology and present real-life examples, compiled during interviews conducted by the authors. Further, we propose that the theoretical framework and practices of Theory U create a non-judgmental open space to get "unstuck" and to move from limiting to quantum narratives, meaning self-correcting narratives oriented to and emerging from the future.

Keywords
adaptive humanism, Theory U, limiting narratives, quantum narratives, transformation

Origins and Context of This Research

After three decades of interacting with local communities in Colorado—Francisco in Metro Denver and Herlinda in the Western Slope of Colorado—we met in 2022 through online meetings focused on the needs and challenges of the Hispanic population in those two geographic areas after the COVID-19 pandemic.

We communicated frequently to talk about the reasons why, despite the resources and help available, many Latinos were not accessing those resources. Among other reasons (language barriers, cultural differences, limited formal education, fear of deportation), we found that the pandemic's negative impact caused many Hispanics (and many non-Hispanics too) to firmly adhere to "old" stories and narratives that prevented them from changing and improving their lives. Perhaps this was a mental and emotional defense mechanism. More generically, we wondered what internal stories we are telling ourselves that keep us "stuck" in the past? We soon discovered that those "old" stories, which we call "limiting narratives," deserved proper and deeper research to understand their origins and impacts, as did finding a way of transforming them from maladaptive beliefs to narratives connected with the emerging future.

In parallel, we both took part in u-lab,[1] an online-to-offline program based on a framework and process for transformational change called Theory U (Scharmer, 2016), offered by the Presencing Institute[2] in partnership with MIT. Francisco attended u-lab for the first time in 2015, as part of a small group at a coffee shop in Denver. Then, starting in 2016 and every year thereafter, he organized a hub (Emerging Future Denver Group), initially in person and then moving online in 2020. In the second half of 2022, Herlinda attended u-lab 1x as well, giving us a common framework of reference for understanding change and transformation as well as a lived experience of seeing narratives shift from limiting to quantum.

This paper emerges from our investigation into restrictive (limiting) narratives together with our firsthand observations of the transformation of such narratives into quantum narratives.

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[1] u-lab is a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) offered by MITx Online that provides an introduction to the framework Theory U (Scharmer 2016) and how it can be applied for leading change in business, government, and civil society contexts worldwide. https://www.u-school.org/

[2] See https://presencinginstitute.org/

Initial Thoughts

We are experiencing a moment of disruption and a time of transition on a global scale. In fact, Tillich (1963) already expressed this decades ago when he stated, "we are living in a historical period characterized by profound and revolutionary transformations as we pass from one historical era to another. No one can seriously doubt it" (p. 65). From a different, contemporary perspective, Spanish philosopher José Martínez Hernández (2023) states that we are living at a time of "crisis, fate, and catastrophe," understanding "crisis" not only as "deep changes in everyday beliefs," but also as a "historical moment" when "the path does not appear open because the horizon has been clouded" (p. 47).

At times of disruption, individuals, societies, and civilizations must decide if they will adhere to the same ideas and paradigms they followed up to that point, or if they will connect with what is emerging in the context of the disruption. In the authors' perspective, the first option confines individuals, collectives, and societies to an immutable world, promoting restrictive narratives. If we accept that the future emerges primarily in the context of a conscious and continuous adaptation alongside critical examination of challenges and opportunities, then any narrative that keeps us locked out of the field of possibilities—be it by repeating the past or by perpetuating the present—should be deemed a limiting narrative.

Conversely, the second option signifies a transition whereby individuals and groups move their cognitive and decision-making frameworks, as well as their self-perception, beyond the pre-existing world's boundaries to an emerging and not yet fully comprehensible reality.

Quantum narratives, reflecting a shift in consciousness, enable individual and group connection to a field of potentiality. These narratives, evolving in diverse existential contexts, are incompatible with limiting narratives, particularly during disruptive periods where transitioning to quantum narratives is essential to avoid stagnation. Because the ongoing transformation renders certain long-standing Western narratives related to Modernity (prevalence of individualism, rationality as calculation and control, progress and linear time, and even the role of grand narratives) are becoming obsolete, thus paving the way for emerging ones. Historically, such narrative shifts have occurred during disruptions, as exemplified by the post-Bronze Age transition, a period that eventually led to the "Axial Age" (Jaspers, 1968). However, this historical parallel is only partially applicable to contemporary changes, considering modern factors like global techno-science, population growth, and unsustainable living practices.

A new framework, tailored to contemporary times, is necessary to comprehend and transition from traditional to quantum narratives, requiring appropriate methodologies to facilitate this shift. Emerging narratives in transhumanism, artificial intelligence, and techno-science prompt the abandonment of outdated narratives, such as those depicted in techno-spiritual science fiction or the portrayal of artificial intelligence as either a panacea or a

threat to humanity. However, despite their apparent obsolescence, discarding these entrenched narratives remains challenging, especially due to their perpetuation and amplification through social media, which continues to influence individual and societal thoughts and actions.

Adaptive Humanism

In that context, we explored the need for a practical and theoretical framework to better understand the limiting narratives and the transition to new (not-limiting, self-correcting) narratives, as well as finding a practice to prompt and facilitate that transition. We also wanted a framework where the caring of humans as humans and the adaptability of humans to a new future could be both maintained at this kairotic time. We called this framework "Adaptive Humanism." We define Adaptive Humanism as a model for thought and action gestated by those on the margins of society, that is, those frequently excluded from the new future, that promotes critical analysis of the current reality with the intention of transforming limiting narratives into quantum narratives through a process of conscious change and dialogical cocreation.

At an initial level, "Humanism" could be defined as "meditating and caring that man be human and not inhumane" (Heidegger, 1993, p. 224), and, following Sartre (1946/2007), a sense of being responsible for all as he states, "I am responsible for myself and for everyone else" (pp. 24–25).

From a different perspective, "Humanism" has been understood by Riemen (in Myers, 2018) as an "inclusive worldview" based on accepting as a fact, "the dignity of every human being," as well as the dignity of the planet and of all living beings on the planet (p. 10). However, we do not accept Reimen's Eurocentric approach to humanism which views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective. Instead, we follow Martínez Hernández (2023), who proposes to move beyond Modernity, which is understood as a "unified and Eurocentric understanding of the history of humanity towards a humanism" (p. 57) that "puts humans and their creative capacity in the center of reality" where "ethics and humanism are twinned" (pp. 321–322).

Meanwhile, we understand "Adaptive" as the wisdom to know when and how to implement personal, social, or business changes to function better in a constantly changing environment. In a stricter sense, "Adaptive," in this context, means the capacity to adjust, learn, and innovate in response to changing factors, conditions, or environments, with a focus on anticipating and preparing for future challenges and opportunities. We understand adaptation as being expressed as a novel reconfiguration of elements already present in the current environment to create a coherent space, where, through a shift in perspective, the connection with the source of wisdom is revealed.

Key to Adaptive Humanism is its emphasis on adaptability, that is, "the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances so as to survive with valued norms

and behaviors" (Bendell, 2020, p. 22). It recognizes that the world is in a constant state of change and, thus, solutions and ethical frameworks must evolve accordingly. This adaptability redresses rigid or dogmatic approaches to critical examination that may adhere to fixed ideologies (limiting narratives). In other words, Adaptive Humanism acknowledges the need for principles and actions to be applied differently in various cultural, environmental, and technological contexts, as opposed to "one-size-fits-all" approaches. This adaptable, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary approach also differentiates itself from other forms of critical examination that may be more rigid or fixed in their outlook. From that perspective, "adaptive" can be defined as the evolving ability of being attuned to the creative nature of nature.

To further express key elements of Adaptive Humanism, we draw on two additional sources. First, Heraclitus in his Fragment B119: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων (*Ethos anthropoi daimon*) which Heidegger (1993) translates as "The familiar abode for man is the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)" (p. 258). The second is Jung's famous expression: "the most important problems of life . . . can never be solved, but only outgrown" (Jung, 1967, p. 10). In the first case, openness to the unfamiliar has a transformative effect in the perception of self and world, thus allowing a person to connect with their deepest source of creativity. In the second case, there is a shift in consciousness from solving a problem to connect with a better version of oneself. Thus, two key elements of Adaptive Humanism are expressed: having an inclusive worldview and being attuned with the source of creativity.

The Existential Ground Where Narratives Emerge

To understand the shift and change in narratives—to see which narratives are becoming obsolete and, therefore, turning into limiting narratives—and to detect which new narratives are being told and who is telling them, requires analyzing all those elements in the existential context where those narratives take place.

Drawing on Heidegger's conceptualization of being (Heidegger, 1993), the authors suggest that the existential milieu from which narratives arise is characterized by three distinct modalities of existence within the "world" (in its existential connotation): (1) the condition of simply inhabiting the given ("always-already-there") world, (2) the process of altering this pre-established world to fit individual necessities, and (3) the act of conceptualizing a divergent world and actualizing that potentiality in the current milieu. Each of these ways of being in the world provides the ground for different narratives: limiting narratives, antenarrative (Boje, 2018, pp. 1–6), and quantum narrative (Boje & Sanchez, 2019, pp. 65–66).

For the first two decades or so of our lives, we all live in a world that is (has been) always already there. Then, we begin to modify that world to "dwell" there, meaning the transformed world becomes our "home" (oikos, in Greek), a "domicile," from "domus," a place to live. According to Heidegger, there is a third mode of living in the world: "Thinking," which, for the limited purposes of this

paper, we understand as "cognitive meditation" in the sense of openness and receptivity to new possibilities.

Becoming acritically attached to any narrative creates a limiting narrative, keeping that person "stuck" inside the (often) self-imposed limits of that narrative. From a psychological point of view, narratives that appear early in life (Piaget, 2000, pp. 84–91) and remain unchallenged later in life become limiting narratives. From this perspective, a limiting narrative is a pattern of thinking and acting that was downloaded, but not created, by the storyteller. "Limiting" can be connected with Fromm's (1976) analysis of a "nonproductive life" because in both cases there is a lack of agency to transform the world. "I do not experience myself as the acting subject of my activity," wrote Fromm (1976, p. 41), which thus limits the ability "to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego" (Fromm, 1976, p. 40). Marita Svane (in Boje, 2018, pp. 153–182) explains that the limiting narrative is so because it lacks a proper "narrative," that is, there is no "beginning-middle-end" (as Aristotle in his *Poetics* required for all narratives), but just a "lived experience" with no plot.

Moving to "dwelling" (adapting the received world to our needs), this is the "world" built when people achieve a new level of cognition and awareness, of time, space, others, and themselves. It is here that people develop a non-limiting narrative. Boje (2018) describes it as an antenarrative or fore-caring, that is, a story that, while still connected to the past, is also simultaneously oriented towards the future, but lacks coherence and the "observer" remains unaware of the impact of their consciousness on the narrative. The antenarrative about the future, includes four steps: fore-having (preparations before the narrative fully develops), fore-structuring (preparations between prototypes and their iterations), fore-concepts (communications about advanced preparations), and fore-sight (connection with the possible future arriving) (Boje, 2018). The antenarrative, the narrative proper of "dwelling," reflects an "accommodation between people and their surroundings," including "cultivating and naturing," as noted by Valente and Silva (2019, p. 609).

While no longer being guided by a limiting narrative, the antenarrative can only take us to the threshold of the future, but not to the future itself. The reason is that the antenarrative still operates in the dimension of chronological time (past, present, future), but not in the dimension of *kairos*, that is, possibilities, appropriate moments, and opportunities. As Boje (2018) explains, "the quantum collapse is outside ordinary spacetime and is therefore transcendent" (p. 6). In other words, the antenarrative remains inside ordinary spacetime, while the quantum narrative is no longer restricted to ordinary spacetime. The future can be understood as an expansion of consciousness to become aware of opportunities and alternatives not yet explored, and of the multidimensionality of the futures (*kairos*). To quote Egan (2001), the future is an "unused option" (p. 306).

We propose that the quantum narrative is not chronological, but *kairological*. Being kairological, this narrative could allow us to overcome the

separation from ourselves, others, and nature and become aware of our oneness with ourselves, others, and nature. It could be said that there is a quantum leap from the present into the future, as if we "borrow" energy from the future to connect with the future, "tunneling" the "barriers" that otherwise would prevent such a "leap" (Hey & Walters, 2003, p. 73). When that happens, as Henderson suggests, a quantum narrative (perpetually self-correcting) is "assembled" (Boje, 2018, p. 66). But, once again, the results are not seen at the level of *chronos* (linear, mechanical time), but *kairos* (see Boje 2018, pp. 51–89, for full discussion). From this perspective, it could be said that in the same way that the limiting narrative is always enclosed inside the always-already-there world, the quantum narrative is always connected with the always-emerging-here future. The process of jumping from one narrative to the other is what we have previously presented as Adaptive Humanism.

Limiting Narratives

Narrative and Limiting Narrative in the Literature

In seeking a definition of "narrative" and then reviewing the literature about the "limiting" elements of the limiting narrative, two points surfaced that we will explore below. The first point is that all narratives in the context of Western Civilization can be considered limiting narratives, but not at the same level of limitation. The second is that limiting narratives can be detected by their results and consequences, and that such narratives remain mostly unseen and unrecognized by the tellers of those narratives.

Lowe (2000) points out that it is difficult to distinguish between "story," "text," and "narrative" (p. 17), and that "narrative" is "used in a number of competing senses" (p. 18). Having said that, Lowes (2000) defines "narrative" as a "voice outside and beyond" the characters of the story (p. 18). In other words, as we will see below, from a psychological point of view, the "voice" of the limiting narrative is "outside and beyond" the reach of the storyteller. Lowe (2000) continues, describing narrative as including four key elements: a reorganization of time (for example, the past is relived again and again), a "restricted point of view" (a key element in any limiting narrative), a series of "mental events" (rather than actual ones), and a sequential or linear understanding of the story told in the narrative, that is, the narrative offers a "definitive sequence" for the story (pp. 19–20). Lowe summarizes all those elements presenting the narrative as an "artificial universe inside our heads" (p. 29). That "artificial universe" (with the four elements mentioned above) provides the foundation for every Western narrative, beginning with the time of Homer and ending in the present day. What is more, Western narratives, Lowe proposes, impose "restrictions" or "game patterns," thus defining what should be accepted as possible or real (p. 55). From that point of view, it can be argued that all Western narratives are, therefore, limiting narratives.

But, in practical terms, what is a limiting narrative? For the purposes of this research, it is useful to understand that, according to Piaget (1977), when children in their "tenderest years" are exposed by their parents to an "atmosphere of laws" and, by the environment, to "external regularities," the children develop an awareness of "individual schemas" that they should follow and remember (p. 47). Eventually, children "begin to imitate the rules of others" and "refuse to alter those rules" (p. 47). Piaget asserts that by the age of ten, usually, but not always, children begin to explore their own schemas. In this context, a limiting narrative is a story (or schema) internalized at a certain age and still being followed by the individual at an age where that story is already obsolete (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000).

Erich Fromm provides another perspective about limiting narratives in his analysis of "nonproductive orientations" or negative character types such as exploitative, hoarding, and marketing types. They all share common elements: dependency on external factors and on others, deception and manipulation, and lack of authenticity. In contrast, the productive orientation is the "healthy, life-loving character orientation representing the ideal way of relating to the world and oneself" (Fromm, 1990, p. 59).

In this context, a limiting narrative is one, "in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization to less healthy ways of coping with conflicts" (Fromm, 1990, p. 10). From another perspective, while limiting narratives and irrational beliefs are not the same, irrational beliefs, as defined by Ellis (2001), illuminate some key elements of limiting narratives. Ellis defines irrational beliefs as "illogical, overgeneralizing, and awfulizing ideas" (p. 21). Those ideas create "illogical demands for certainty" (p. 373) in a "dogmatic and rigid" context (p. 101). Replacing "ideas" with "narratives" in the sentence above provides a solid definition of limiting narratives. Both irrational beliefs and limiting narratives can be described as pessimistic generalizations and as maladaptive reactions to obstacles or challenges. They are both incongruent with reality.

In the context of education, Freire (2000) describes "banking" education, where the "receptors" of information are passive participants in the process. In this case, the limits created by the limiting narrative are twofold: first, learning happens from a single perspective or interpretation, and second, the ability to think critically is not supported. In other words, "receptors" (students) are trapped inside one narrative without the opportunity or the ability to explore alternative viewpoints. In fact, as Freire writes, the banking model of education is "fundamentally narrative in character," (p. 71) which means that the student acquires the information "without perceiving ... or realizing the true significance" of that information (p. 71). Because of that, the oppressor dominates the narrative and the oppressed develops a distorted idea of their own humanity. Freire continues to state that the limiting narrative associated with the banking model of education "leads men and women to adjust to the world and inhibits their creative power" (p. 77).

Narratives, which control time (see Lowe, 2000), may lead to a reduced time horizon, influencing the breadth of future-oriented vision in decision-making or storytelling (Ebert & Piehl, 1973). Limiting narratives constrict event perception and causal comprehension. Lowe (2000) also recognizes narratives as innate cognitive frameworks established from infancy, suggesting a propensity for early-acquired narratives to impede the adoption of new ones.

We find there is confusion between "letting go," basically a journey of self-discovery leading to a higher level of consciousness, and "giving up" or "losing." From that perspective, a limiting narrative is any narrative that prevents a journey of self-discovery and, consequently, access to the full dimension of human life. We will revisit this topic later, from a different perspective.

Puig (2011) introduces another element: we can define a limiting narrative as a narrative which reduces (or nullifies) the ability to hold our attention on what is relevant, thus preventing a person from reinventing (adapting) themselves because that person becomes "blind to life opportunities" (Puig, 2011, p. 17).

In summary, limiting narratives, acquired at home or at school, in our infancy or as adults, are "artificial universes" inside our minds keeping us blind to our own potential. Those narratives present themselves in a wide variety of ways.

Examples from Interviews

Limiting narratives may or may not be based on actual, factual events, but on the interpretation given to an event at that time when it happened. Often this is during the early stages of the cognitive development of a child. However, in a real sense, it is irrelevant if the starting point of a limiting narrative was a real event or not. As Plato suggested in his famous Allegory of the Cave (*Republic*, 514a–520a), if the only thing we ever know is an illusion, then that illusion will be, for us, our whole reality.

To illustrate limiting narratives, we draw on our experience interviewing a total of 145 interviews from 2019–2023 in two different regions of Colorado, Metro Denver and the Western Slope, as consultants for two different organizations, Aurora Community Connection and AmeriCorps (see Appendix for additional information). We have selected examples from the interviews that illustrate limiting narratives.

One of the people we interviewed, a woman in her forties, expressed that when she was a teenager, she worked babysitting the children of a woman who had cancer. Seeing the suffering of those children, the interviewee decided to never marry or have children. She recalled the decision she made all those years ago, expressing that "the fears of repeating the past prevented me from having a future."

During another interview, a man in his fifties, shared that because he was "rejected by Harvard," he had to work in construction jobs. He later clarified that

he thought Harvard was a high school (not a university), and that he did not know where Harvard was located. He then said that, when he was a child, somebody in his family dissuaded him from going to school using the expression, "you will never go to Harvard, therefore, don't go to school." Four decades later, his life is still guided by the idea that he should not participate in any kind of formal education.

Another interviewee, a young woman, said she bought her first car rather "later in life," even when she had the means to buy a car many years earlier, because when she was a child, her father told her and her younger sister that women should not own cars. As an adult, she faced problems, such as being on time for work and missing social events, for not having a car. Yet, the "voice" of her father prevented her from buying one for many years.

One man shared that after attending a short presentation about personal development, he reacted by saying to the presenter: "I like everything you just said, but this is not what my grandmother taught me." It should be noted that the education he received from his grandmother happened decades ago when the interviewee was a child in Mexico. Now an adult living in the United States, this man was unable to adapt those old (and certainly good) teachings to his new cultural environment.

There are many other examples of limiting narratives we heard during our interviews, including a man in his fifties who said, "I am too old to change" or a woman in her thirties who told us, "I have to be always on good terms with everybody I know." These examples help to illustrate how limiting narratives restrict our idea of what is possible and prevent us from fully expressing ourselves or achieving our goals. The question then becomes: how do we move beyond limiting narratives? What is the alternative? Short answer: quantum narratives. Therefore, we turn to the radical existential reorientation from living "inside" a limiting narrative to existing in a quantum narrative oriented towards the future.

Quantum Narratives

Quantum Narratives in the Literature

While limiting narratives keep us "stuck" (frozen, trapped) in the always-already-there world, quantum narratives, described by Boje and Sanchez (2019) as quantum narratives, allow us to explore new alternatives and possibilities and, more importantly, to transform those possibilities into actions and realities. Quantum narratives, as their name indicates, are based on understanding reality as a quantum reality that is constantly changing, without a fixed outcome, as opposed to the classical physics and its mechanical understanding of reality. Boje (2018) points out that a quantum narrative is properly called so because it is a narrative where, "the observer has an effect on the experiment," that of "collapsing waves of possibilities," adding that "we also collapse different

ways of possibility" either by our actions or by our inactions, be it about personal, regional, and global issues (p. 1).

Ross (2018) explains that there are three key components in quantum physics: superposition, entanglement, and uncertainty. We can recontextualize those elements for quantum narratives.

Superposition: In quantum mechanics there is a "superposition of waves," which is "the wave formed by adding the disturbances of many (possibly infinite number of) waves with different wavelengths (frequencies)" (Ross, 2018, p. 94). Similarly, a quantum narrative could feature characters or events that exist in multiple states simultaneously, leading to complex and ambiguous storylines with no need to choose any single storyline or discard others. Contrary to what happens with limiting narratives, with superposition no prevalent narrative exists.

Entanglement: Quantum entanglement is "a state of two or more particles whose wavefunction cannot be expressed as the product of wavefunctions for the individual particles" (Ross. 2018, p. 90). Similarly, a quantum narrative incorporates the idea of "conscious entanglement," where the actions or decisions of one person or event affect others, even if they are physically separated. This is the opposite of the isolation or separation created by limiting narratives. A quantum narrative requires storytellers to transgress the separation between themselves, others, nature/the Universe and move toward a sense of meaningful connection with the dimensions of life mentioned above.

As Boje (2018) states, "Our destinies are intertwined and entangled," adding that "the alternative is for all of us to collapse fore-caring waves, rather than waves of ignorance, selfishness, and greed" (p. 2). Boje transfers to storytelling one of the key elements of quantum physics: the interconnection between all things. Given that the actualization of such connection depends on the consciousness of the observer, Boje invites us to focus our attention on "collapsing" the "fore-caring waves" (our connection with a future self or potential self), rather than remaining "stuck" inside a limiting narrative.

Uncertainty: The uncertainty principle states that "it is impossible to measure, simultaneously, the position and momentum of a particle to better than a certain accuracy" (Ross, 2018, p. 27). Similarly, a quantum narrative could explore themes of uncertainty and unpredictability, where the outcome of events or decisions cannot be determined with certainty, leading to unexpected plot twists or outcomes. This is contrary to the predetermined outcome proper of a limiting narrative.

It should be noted that Modernity (the last 500 years of Western and now global civilization) rejects ambiguity. *Denn was it elender als die Ungewissheit?* (What is more miserable than uncertainty?) asked Martin Luther in 1525 in his *De Servo Arbitrio / Vom unfreien Willen* (*On the Bondage of the Will*). Tillich (1955) discusses the negative impact of this statement by Luther in the modern world, indicating that "the power of certainty [is] never secure and never without

temptation" (1955, p. 78), and life is an "oscillation between ecstatic confidence and despairing doubt" (1955, p. 77).

Therefore, it can be said that, on a global scale, overcoming global limiting narratives (born out of classical, Newtonian physics) and enacting quantum narratives means to move beyond Modernity. That movement is needed because the element of uncertainty in quantum mechanics is directly connected with the future. While the future behavior of particles cannot be predicted with certainty, it can be thought.

This question has been researched by some theoretical physicists (for example, Hameroff & Penrose, 2014) who posit that consciousness might be intimately linked to the quantum world, even suggesting that the brain operates on quantum mechanical principles, potentially explaining the coherence of thought and the richness of conscious experience. At this moment, the Penrose-Hameroff model remains speculative and without definitive empirical support. Yet, its potential ramifications are tantalizing. Should consciousness be proven to have a quantum mechanical underpinning, it would revolutionize artificial intelligence, medicine, and even our understanding of time, potentially opening new ways of connection with the future.

If we accept that limiting narratives remain unknown to the storyteller of those narratives, thus "trapping" the storyteller inside that narrative, and if, at the same time, we accept that in quantum narratives the storyteller's consciousness plays a fundamental role in establishing the nature of reality, then consciousness is the key element to "jump" from a limiting narrative to a quantum narrative.

Boje (2018) has argued that human beings are not simply passive observers of the world but are actively engaged in projecting themselves towards future possibilities. "Quantum narratives" mean "preparing in advance to collapse waves of potential good into good events. By good, we mean the most positive ecosystem consequences" (Boje, 2018, p. 4). This projection is guided by our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world, as well as by our anticipations and expectations. Boje has argued that storytelling can be a powerful tool for projecting ourselves towards future possibilities and for shaping the course of human history (2018 pp. 5–8). By activating quantum narratives, we can cocreate new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. As he described, quantum narratives allow the emergence of "intra-weaving modes of being-in-the-world toward future" (2018 p. 153). In other words, quantum narratives only emerge when we are open to the emergence of those narratives.

Storytelling is an anticipatory act. It projects a narrative into the future, and in so doing, opens new possibilities for action and understanding. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In this way, storytelling is intimately connected to

our anticipatory mode of being, and to our capacity to imagine and bring about a different future (Boje, 2018, p. 356).

Examples of Quantum Narratives in Real Life

While not as numerous as examples of limiting narratives, we would like to share two examples of shifting from limiting narratives to quantum narratives. These examples are taken from participants in a u-lab hub. As these two examples happened in the context of u-lab 1x 2022, they anticipate the topic of how Theory U could initiate the transformation of limiting narratives into quantum narratives.

To contextualize the examples, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the Theory U process (Scharmer 2016; 2018). The "U" represents a process and pathway that leaders and teams can move through to bring about profound systemic shifts. The journey includes several stages, including becoming aware of acting according to "downloaded" patterns, sensing (seeing the world with fresh eyes, gathering data, and empathizing with others), presencing (a pivotal point in the process: connecting with one's deepest sources of intuition and inspiration, to one's authentic self, and to a higher, future potential), crystallizing (clarifying the vision and intention for the future to be co-created), prototyping (small-scale experiments or prototypes developed to explore and test new ideas and initiatives), and performing (the new ideas become part of the regular operations). (For details, see Scharmer, 2009, pp. 119–229.) By moving through the U-shaped journey, participants in the process become equipped to see and act from a deeper level of awareness, enabling more holistic, creative, and sustainable solutions to emerge. In short, Theory U is a versatile framework that can be adapted to various contexts and challenges, offering a cohesive methodology for profound personal and systemic change.

Both examples of quantum narratives are from participants in the Denver u-lab hub. Each completed all activities and were present in all sessions of the three-month u-lab transformational learning journey.

Example 1: Drawing upon the principles of quantum narrative as proposed by Boje, the transformative journey of the Latino business owner can be recast to illustrate the interconnected nature of his personal and professional evolution.

A Latino entrepreneur in his forties tapped into a u-lab1x hub in Denver, motivated to reshape his path after facing a difficult situation at home. He quickly put into practice the Theory U methods learned during the workshop, engaging in activities like coaching circles, shadowing, and stakeholder interviews. This initiative brought significant improvements to his and his family's lives, as he shared with Francisco. Despite these strides, as an immigrant and someone for whom English was a second language, he doubted his chances of climbing the management ladder in the commercial painting company where he worked.

Then, an opportunity arose when the owner of the company required him to manage a team of newly hired former inmates and parolees as a condition of employment. He agreed, with the understanding that he would teach them the techniques he had learned, aiming to guide them in transforming their lives. This strategy was effective and the former inmates and parolees, while becoming part of the painting crew, also learned the basics of Theory U and how to apply it to their own situation. In essence, the man managed to reshape his own life story and connect with a deep-seated desire to co-create a new future for himself and his team. This experience acted as a prototype of future endeavors, because this man went on to run his own small painting company, predominantly employing former inmates. He continued his relationship with his former employer, now as a subcontractor, exemplifying the quantum narrative principle of intertwined paths and mutual growth. This is also an example of Adaptive Humanism: this man accepted his responsibility for his own life and the present and future lives of those under his supervision, and, far from rejecting a new challenge, he adapted to his new situation by elevating himself to the level of the challenge.

Example 2: A young Latina immigrant engaged with an online u-lab 1x hub in 2021, reaching out to Herlinda with a determined goal to "change her life" and to secure a job that would offer financial stability and personal satisfaction. In the process of exploring Theory U within the u-lab 1x, she was introduced to the transformative concepts of "letting go" and "letting come."

Through this transformative learning, she realized that to create a new trajectory for her life, she needed to release limiting beliefs that had held her back. This included the fallacy of being too old to learn, the resignation to never seeking an office job, and overcoming the skepticism from peers who couldn't envision her stepping outside the service and hospitality industries that were familiar to her community. She decided to "let go" of these narratives, allowing her to enter a state of "becoming," where she actively pursued a position as an outreach program coordinator. She recalled that during the interview for the position she was raw and authentic, highlighting her lack of experience but underscoring her willingness to learn and grow—key components of quantum narratives where potentiality takes precedence over actuality. Her initiative and capacity to embrace new narratives paid off when she was hired and, within five months, had not only acquired the necessary computer skills but had also ascended to a leadership position as a team supervisor for 18 people. Her preexisting ambition to improve her life was certainly amplified by the principles of Theory U experienced in the u-lab 1x hub, which Boje's quantum narrative framework might suggest provided her with the storytelling tools to envision and enact a "positive story" for her future. This story was not a fixed narrative but an evolving journey toward broader ambitions like becoming a community leader— embodying the quantum narrative principle that our stories are dynamic, unfolding across both time and space, influenced by our interactions and entangled in the narratives of others. From the perspective of Adaptive Humanism, by being open to the unfamiliar, her awareness shifted and her perception and understanding of self and world was transformed.

Theory U and Quantum Storytelling

Both Theory U and quantum storytelling delve into understanding change, leadership, and organizational development, albeit from different angles, different academic traditions, and distinct areas of focus. Despite that, similarities and parallels emerge. For example, both approaches challenge linear, deterministic narratives. Theory U emphasizes the need to tap into emerging future possibilities, while quantum narratives underscores the unpredictable, emergent nature of stories that evolve in a nonlinear fashion (Boje & Henderson, 2014, pp. 2–3). Moreover, from another perspective, the presencing moment of the "U" in the graphic representation is represented as a gap. We view that "gap" as requiring a quantum leap. Thus, we see a new connection between Theory U and quantum narratives. We propose that finding the deeper story in conversation is a key element in the journey of personal and societal transformation, and perhaps provides the energy needed to "jump" into the future.

Moreover, Theory U underscores the importance of deep listening—to oneself, to others, and to what emerges from collective attention. Similarly, quantum narrative emphasizes being present and attentive to stories as they unfold, without clinging to pre-established narratives. In short, quantum narratives and Theory U challenge established ways of understanding and narrating organizational realities. The former pushes back against oversimplified, linear corporate narratives, while the latter encourages leaders to let go of old paradigms and operate from a deeper source of knowing. Time (both chronological and kairological) is a crucial element in both frameworks. Quantum storytelling, drawing from quantum physics, plays with the idea of entanglement and the non-linear nature of time. Theory U also works with time in a unique way, particularly in the journey from downloading past patterns to presencing, which Scharmer (2009) describes as "connecting with the Source of the highest future possibility to bring it to the now," (p. 163) and crystalizing, "clarifying vision an intention from our highest future possibility" (p. 192). Both theories are fundamentally about transformation—whether transforming narratives in organizations (quantum narratives) or transforming leadership consciousness and systemic structures (Theory U).

The interplay highlighted above demonstrates that an integrative approach between Theory U and quantum narratives could help people and organizations create open spaces for quantum narratives to emerge implementing the ideas and the methodologies of Theory U. In other words, integrating the principles and practices of Theory U with the field of quantum narratives can lead to innovative and transformative approaches to organizational change and leadership, facilitating the "letting go" of limiting narratives and the "letting come" of quantum narratives.

We believe the integration and interplay between Theory U and quantum narratives presented in this paper align with both Scharmer's and Boje's approaches. Consider the following, drawn from each author. Scharmer writes:

> The social field is not a thing, it's a social reality that emerges through the quality of our relationships, conversations, and actions. The social field of positivity is a space of possibility that emerges when we let go of our habitual ways of operating and open ourselves up to new perspectives and possibilities. It's a space of co-creation, innovation, and collective action, where we can work together to create a more just, sustainable, and equitable world. (2009, p. 233)

We are struck by the similarity to Boje's declaration:

> Storytelling is an anticipatory act. It projects a narrative into the future, and in so doing, opens new possibilities for action and understanding. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In this way, storytelling is intimately connected to our anticipatory mode of being, and to our capacity to imagine and bring about a different future. (2021, p. 6)

The interplay between these two quotes indicates that quantum narratives is the creative expression of meaning of the space of possibilities opened by the social field of positivity.

In addition, Boje's emphasis on storytelling (quantum narrative) as a tool for leadership could be connected to Scharmer's idea of leading from the future. Storytelling is a powerful means of creating a shared vision of the future, and of inspiring individuals and organizations to align and act in pursuit of that vision. By telling stories that reflect our deepest values and aspirations, we can create new horizons of meaning and possibility that can guide our actions and shape our understanding of the world. In fact, Scharmer said that "to create a future that is different from the past, we need to be able to tell a story that helps us move from one place to another. We need a narrative that inspires us, that gives us direction, and that brings us together in a shared journey of discovery and transformation" (2009, p. 172).

Finally, because Adaptive Humanism, quantum narratives, and Theory U share common themes related to adaptive capacity, change management, narrative, meaning making, and the spiritual and psychological aspects of human adaptation, Adaptive Humanism provides a framework for developing opportunities for integrating these concepts to support individuals and organizations in navigating change and uncertainty. In other words, Adaptive Humanism serves as a dynamic framework between limiting narratives, quantum narratives, and Theory U, providing a philosophical and practical framework that emphasizes adaptability, integration of multiple narratives, deep listening, and an ethical, human-centric approach to change and development.

Closing Reflections

The interaction of Adaptive Humanism, Theory U, and quantum narratives opens a vast field for academic exploration, presenting a complex interaction that demands thorough investigation. This exploration, integrating Theory U with quantum narrative principles, points towards a transformative path for collective development. While initial findings support this proposition, it calls for more rigorous research to confirm and practically apply this integration. Current efforts focus on developing methods to counter limiting narratives in individuals and organizations, encouraging the adoption of quantum narrative dynamics. However, this task extends beyond our current scope, leaving several critical questions open. These include the effectiveness of engaging individuals disconnected from their potential futures, strategies for national-level narrative change (Zunzunegui, 2023, in Mexico; and Liotti, 2023, in Argentina), and recognizing alternatives to dominant techno-deterministic narratives.

Further, the academic world must evaluate whether religious and scientific perspectives are constraining narratives that we need to transcend. Debates about moving beyond Modernity's narratives or even those of Western Civilization, and the emergence of unique digital narratives, remain underexplored. Addressing these issues requires more precise questioning and a commitment to Adaptive Humanism, which entails consciously shaping emerging futures into reality, aiming to co-create a quantum future free from the constraints of past narratives. Adaptive Humanism calls for a continuous, aware adaptation to an ever-changing future, while preserving a unified human identity, free from fragmentation or self-deception.

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Appendix

Interviews by Francisco Miraval

From June 24, 2019, to April 7, 2021, Francisco Miraval, serving as a consultant for Aurora Community Connection (ACC) in Aurora, Colorado, and under the supervision of Dr. Robin Waterman, conducted 85 interviews with a diverse group of ACC's program participants, parents, staff, board members, and community stakeholders. These interviews were aimed at fulfilling grant requirements and conducting community research on poverty and post-pandemic recovery. Utilizing the conversational interviewing technique developed by Dr. Waterman, based on Dr. Susan Silbey's anthropological methodologies at MIT, this approach allowed for indirect discussions on relevant topics, ensuring authenticity and adherence to principles of dialogical and dialectical exchanges. The interviews, conducted in-person and via Zoom due to the pandemic, prioritized privacy and were carried out in English or Spanish, depending on the interviewee's preference, with a clear explanation of the voluntary nature of participation and data privacy.

The demographic breakdown of the interviewees from the 80010 Zip Code of Aurora, Colorado, included 50 women, 11 men, and 24 teenagers, predominantly Hispanic/Latino (77 individuals), with smaller numbers of White (5) and African American (3) participants. The interviews varied in duration based on the demographic group and were conducted in languages preferred by the participants, mainly Spanish and bilingual (Spanish and English), with fewer English-only speakers. Detailed notes were taken during these interviews instead of recordings, and summaries were provided to Dr. Waterman for analysis. Francisco Miraval also performed pattern analysis on the aggregated data to identify instances of limiting narratives.

The 80010 Zip Code in Aurora, Colorado, home to approximately 45,000 residents, presents a unique demographic profile. The median age of 32 is younger than the Colorado average, with a higher percentage of male and single individuals. Hispanics constitute the largest racial/ethnic group, followed by Whites and African Americans. The area is characterized by lower median household income and higher poverty rates compared to Aurora and Colorado overall. Educational attainment is below state levels, with a significant portion of

the population having completed high school but a smaller percentage attending and completing college. Notably, this area is predominantly Spanish speaking, a unique characteristic among Colorado's large cities.

Herlinda Quintana

From September 2019 to August 2023, Herlinda Quintana, working as a consultant for AmeriCorps in Rifle, Colorado, conducted 60 interviews with Latina women involved in community programs. The initial goal was to understand the educational needs of Latinas in the Western Slope region, which, during the pandemic, shifted to focus on their health needs. These interviews, aimed at identifying and addressing limiting narratives, employed a semi-structured approach, starting with a form to gather personal information and needs assessment. The interviews, held at local non-profits, participants' homes, and via Zoom during the pandemic, lasted 30-60 minutes each, adapting to individual circumstances and needs. Participants were selected by AmeriCorps or partner non-profit staff, and the interviews were conducted in Spanish with a clear explanation of the voluntary nature of participation and data privacy.

The interviews, which were not recorded but detailed through extensive notes, delved into various topics including education, healthcare needs, barriers to resource access, and personal stories like childhood and immigration experiences. Herlinda Quintana provided summaries of each interview to a designated AmeriCorps representative, and the data was carefully validated by AmeriCorps staff. In the analysis, Quintana identified patterns of negative storytelling, termed as limiting narratives in this study, which were then re-examined for further insights.

The demographic profile of the interviewees in these sessions was consistent: all were Latina women, predominantly foreign-born, and Spanish-speaking. The 81650 ZIP code in Rifle, Colorado, where the interviews were conducted, has a median age of 32 and is characterized by economic challenges for the Hispanic community, including lower median household income and higher rates of housing instability compared to regional averages. The study's methodology ensured rigorous data protection, with physical notes securely stored and digital versions tightly controlled, to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the Latina community's educational and health needs while ensuring ethical research practices.