

Ridhwan Succession Planning

November 14, 2021

Introduction

An orderly plan for leadership succession is important for securing the ongoing stability of the school and the future continuity of the Diamond Approach as a teaching and path. Ensuring the long-term health and viability of the school will particularly be important as we move past the era of Hameed and Karen's leadership roles. During the past few years various elements of this process have been unfolding within the Synod, Ridhwan Board, Academy, Teacher Body, and other areas of the school. This document represents the planning and vision that has emerged to date regarding the future of the school. It will be updated as needed as we go forward in this process.

Hameed began thinking of the question of succession planning for the Diamond Approach teaching when it became clear that the teaching and the school are developing in such a manner that they will survive for some future generations. He wanted to make sure this development happens in a healthy way that safeguards the unique character and contributions of this path. Succession planning is a continuing process that will involve various bodies within the school. Generally, we plan on maintaining an organizational structure that is functional and effective in the world, but has the openness and responsiveness to support the aliveness of the teaching. Ultimately, we trust that the teaching itself will guide the unfoldment of the school and determine the structures and ways of operating in response and according to the particular needs of the situation. We will need to continue developing our capacity, our culture, and our working relationships as a foundation for navigating the inevitable changes that happen over time. In transition, we will need to balance steadiness in uncertainty, with flexibility and openness to fresh opportunities. What follows describes certain parts of the process where some of the pieces are beginning to fall into place.

Leadership Structure and Succession

There are three main leadership structures in the school: The Obsidian Synod, the Ridhwan Foundation Board of Directors, and the Ridhwan Academy. The Executive Committee, currently a subcommittee of the Ridhwan Board, will play a key role in connecting and coordinating decision-making between these bodies. The continuation of these organizational structures, as well as numerous other functioning committees, are key parts of the overall succession planning for the school, including an Executive

Director, a central office, and accompanying administrative staff. Hameed and Karen, the founders of the Ridhwan School, have been gradually removing themselves from formal leadership positions. Their aim is that other qualified teacher-ministers and school bodies take up some of the responsibilities they have held and the school community learns that the teaching and the organization still operate optimally. This began by Karen stepping down from the position of Director of Training in California, then Hameed from the position of President of the Ridhwan Foundation. Then Hameed and Karen stepped down from membership in the Synod, and Hameed from being the chair of the Ridhwan Board. Their intention is to continue this trend over time and to focus more exclusively on the teaching.

Hameed and Karen continue to exercise a degree of formal and informal leadership in the school. They exercise formal leadership through leading the Ridhwan Academy and through their being on the Ridhwan Board and its Executive Committee. They are concentrating their work within the Academy, for it is the primary locus of the direct dissemination of the teaching itself. They provide informal leadership through consultations with the President, Vice-president and Executive Director, with synod members, and with other teachers and program directors. In the future, the difference between organizational leadership and leadership with regard to the teaching may become more distinct. For example, there may emerge certain persons who are recognized as lineage holders of the teaching, and these individuals will be important for the overall cohesiveness of the school and integrity of the teaching, even if they are not specifically serving within one of the formal leadership structures of the organization. Our organizational structures will need to remain flexible enough to accommodate various possibilities that will best support the teaching itself.

The Obsidian Synod

The Obsidian Synod provides the spiritual leadership of the school as a whole and oversees the high level running of the school. The Synod was established in 1998 by Hameed to be the interface between the organizational structures and the teaching and teachers of the Diamond Approach. Its goal is to ensure that the school's structures, decisions, and activities serve, support, and harmoniously express the Diamond Approach. Since its inception, the Synod has gradually been assuming the role formerly held by Hameed and Karen. The Synod will continue to lead the Teacher Body as the nucleus of the school.

At this time, the Synod is partly chosen by the Teacher Body and partly appointed by Hameed. After Hameed no longer makes appointments to the Synod, appointed members will be chosen by the Synod itself, in conjunction with Karen, while she is still active in

the school. The Teacher Body will continue to select the other members. The size of the Synod may vary from seven to eleven members, with an equal number appointed by Hameed and/or the Synod and an equal number selected by the Teacher Body. However, the President of the Ridhwan Foundation will always be selected by the Synod. Selected members may serve for one or more terms (which are currently six years). Qualified ordained teachers may be selected or appointed to serve on the Synod. In addition, mature, qualified students who are not ordained teachers may be appointed to serve on the Synod if deemed appropriate by Hameed and/or the Synod. The Synod shall determine the qualifications for membership to this body. Ridhwan Foundation By-laws state that the Vice-President is considered to be an appointed member of the Synod for the duration of their (renewable) 6-year term. The Vice-President position is not filled at the present time, while more thought is being put into the nature of this role.

Ridhwan Foundation Board of Directors

The Ridhwan Board deals with policy decisions regarding finances, legalities, property, fundraising, administrative staff and other such areas. It performs these responsibilities in consultation with the Synod and will continue to serve in this way in the future. The Synod chooses the Ridhwan Foundation President and Vice-President, who also serve on the Board, along with at least one other synod member. In the future it will be important for at least one of the Academy leaders to also have a seat on the board. The Ridhwan President and Board hire and oversee the Executive Director, who in turn is responsible for hiring and overseeing the various staff positions that will continue to be important supports for the functioning of the organization and operation of the school.

The Academy

The Academy is the central teaching structure within the Foundation and serves as the core of the school. It includes all Diamond Heart and Diamond Heart Retreat programs, seminary programs for training teacher-ministers, and Diamond Approach Online (DAO) and what is developing into the Diamond Net. Hameed and Karen are presently the leaders of the Academy, where Hameed is Chancellor and Karen is Vice-Chancellor. Should one of them decide to no longer lead the Academy or become unable to do so, the other will continue to lead the Academy and may choose others to help them in that capacity. When neither Hameed nor Karen is leading the Academy, the Synod together with the directors of Academy programs will choose the next leader(s) of the Academy. Specifically, five members from the synod and five directors of the Academy plus the Ridhwan president will make this joint decision. The exact structure of Academy leadership may vary depending on the need. It could be one person, or there could be two or even three Chancellors.

Continuation of the Teaching

Looking to the time when Hameed is no longer actively teaching, we can anticipate some future shifts in the school. Teachings currently offered by Lightly Held will be taught by the Academy. All-school retreats, training retreats, and teacher retreats should continue, in part because such retreats provide a centralizing and optimizing focus for students and teachers. In addition, there is more of the Diamond Approach to be taught, including new teachings, new ways to approach the teachings from different angles, and further unpacking and expansion of teachings that have already been given. There will also be new generations of students and teachers who will not have received certain teachings. Many of these retreats can be taught again, with appropriate modifications, for new generations of students in the school.

The Academy Chancellor(s), in consultation with the Synod and Academy directors, will determine the content of the teaching for all-school retreats, teacher training retreats, teacher retreats, and continuing education classes for teachers, as well as selecting the teachers for these events.

The Diamond Approach will remain a living teaching that is inherently open-ended. Hameed and Karen are beginning the process of preparing teachers to carry on the teaching in their absence. Depending on the emergence of members of the school who prove themselves to be vehicles of the teaching, new segments of the teaching can be developed by them. They are also considering the best ways to safeguard and pass on to particular individuals their various journals, notebooks, and electronic files regarding the teaching so that these materials benefit the school and are made available appropriately to the Ridhwan Foundation. These materials will be owned by the Ridhwan Foundation but only accessed by a limited number of individuals who would function as holders of these materials. These individuals will be appointed first by Hameed and Karen, and then by the Synod together with the Academy directors, in a similar manner as the selection of the Academy Chancellor(s).

Teacher Body and Succession Planning

An essential element of succession planning is that the Teacher Body, from which most of the leadership comes, is intended to be the heart of the school. Students are connected to their teachers, so teachers remaining well-connected to the Teacher Body will serve an overall cohesive function for the school community. In addition to ongoing teacher trainings, for some years the Teacher Body Organizing Committee (TBOC) and currently

the Regional Stewards have been supporting the development and maturation of the whole Teacher Body, as well as regional teacher groups, teaching teams, and individual teachers. This is a multidimensional process that is expected to continue in an ongoing, open-ended way.

Input from the Teacher Body about succession planning will be important for its continuing development and refinement, and part of the living evolution of the school.

While decisions for Diamond Heart programs and seminary trainings will be made within the Academy, succession planning for other Diamond Approach groups, small groups, and private session teachers will be the responsibility of those individual teachers and teaching teams. Each teacher should consider what will happen to their large groups, small groups, and/or private session students when they are no longer actively teaching. Plans should be discussed openly and explicitly with colleagues and even within regional groups, keeping in mind that periodic reviews and updates may be needed from time to time. Sometimes students will need to be informed about such plans for clarity and for holding of their process and engagement with the path.

Student Body

The world-wide student body is a living expression of the teaching and the school itself. Our international community has recently been coming together as a more unified field of individuals and groups that are connected by the love of truth and engagement in the Diamond Path. This connectivity and communion have been supported by the Student Body Committee and community conversations, in addition all-school retreats, offerings of the Diamond Net, and various kinds of student-organized initiatives. As time goes on we expect there to be further initiatives that both support and express this development. As the Student Body as a whole develops and matures, it can become an all-inclusive field that reflects the view and values of the teaching, so the fabric of the school can become more and more saturated with this perspective and its implications, making it the ground from which our community relates and our organization functions, both now and for future generations.

Other Resources

More information about both the present and future school can be found on the school portal in the Ridhwan School Visioning Document: <https://www.diamondapproach.org/public-page/ridhwan-school-visioning-document>, and in the Description of the Ridhwan School: <https://www.diamondapproach.org/public-page/description-ridhwan-school>