

10 Questions to Olaf von Maydell

1. Why have you decided to join the Jacobs Foundation Board?

It was an exciting idea for me to work together with worldwide experts to improve learning conditions for the youth.

2. How would you describe your work as a Jacobs Foundation Board Member to a schoolchild?

The Jacobs Foundation has a house in Zurich where qualified people work together. These people try to support schools so that the children in these schools have more fun and learn more.

3. Which combination of skills, competencies, and experience do you bring to the Jacobs Foundation Board?

I first studied international agricultural development, did my PhD in environmental economics, and worked in international development projects. I then became a certified tax consultant and worked for ten years in an international NGO's management as well as the Max Planck Institute for Human Development. I am now an expert in non-profit law and partner in a specialized and fast-growing consulting company of lawyers, auditors, and tax consultants. I am co-author of a standard commentary of non-profit law, and lecturer at the Humboldt University and other academies for non-profit law and accounting for NGOs. My core competency is compliance.

4. Why is variability in learning- the Jacobs Foundation's theme of the Strategy2030 - relevant today?

From my own school experience, as a father of three children and lecturer I know students are unique. Despite this uniqueness, a one-fits-all strategy is probably the most common way of teaching throughout the world. Addressing individual differences is a big challenge which needs to be explored to raise the potential of all children.

5. What are the biggest challenges and opportunities in the Jacobs Foundation's direction of travel?

I see two main challenges ahead of us. First we need to measure the success of rather abstract objectives, and second we need to remain critical about our own work. To tackle these challenges we have several resources and opportunities we can employ including highly motivated staff, sufficient funds, experience and a worldwide network. Finally we are working in a post-epidemic environment which is open for new ideas.

6. What are your key priorities as a Board Member and as part of a Board Working Group?

To ensure the security of the Jacobs Foundation by having an adequate level of checks and balances.

7. Please complete the sentence: Learning is....

... expanding your own limits.

8. What does learning mean to you personally?

Expanding my limits and questioning my beliefs.

9. Who has inspired you throughout your career?

My father.

10. Which book/s have you read you could recommend and for what reason?

As you are probably not interested in the best books about non-profit law...

Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson.

The authors stress the issue that any development (project) will fail if a sufficient institutional framework is lacking. This explains for example why there is no positive correlation between the amount of development aid funds and actual development in countries with poor governance.