

**Assistant Professor Davor Filipović, Ph.D.**

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **FLASHES OF THOUGHT**

Author: **Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**

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I did know much about Dubai and UAE until I met two of my colleagues during an executive program at Harvard Kennedy School of Government. I was intrigued by their story about Dubai and UAE, and the way things function there as well as the way they represented their country. At first stories I heard about Dubai seemed to me like a fairy tale but very quickly I realized that was reality for which is most responsible their leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and people who accept his stances and the way of living. Therefore, I decided to read his book *Flashes of Thought*.

Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum is considered the founder of systematic strategic planning in the UAE Government, and he has pioneered many innovative ideas in the public and commercial spheres, both locally and nationally. In 1995 he became the Ruler of Dubai, and he was elected Vice-President and appointed Prime Minister of the UAE in 2006. The book *Flashes of Thought* was founded on a dialogue at the Government Summit that was held in UAE in February 2013. The book represents a collection of concise messages, ideas and thoughts presented in 36 chapters with the main aim of pointing out the role of government in working towards the well-being of people, and observing government as an authority at the service of the people and not the authority over the people. The foreword of the book was written by Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE.

In the first chapter author is explaining what really government's job is. In his opinion the government's job is to achieve happiness for its people, and they are government's first, second and third priority. He sees the government as an active part of society, never as something that is separated and isolated. The government works for the people, achieves its objectives through the people and measures its success through their satisfaction. The mission of the government is to please its people and to build the promising future for their children.

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\* Assistant Professor Davor Filipović, Ph.D., University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business, Trg J. F. Kennedyja 6, 10 000 Zagreb

Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum reflects on the government of the future in the next chapter. His first and foremost concern is to make government closer to people, faster, better and more responsive in providing its services. Therefore, he sees government of the future open for service 27/7, all year round because if the private sector remains open for business there is no reason that government does not do the same. Government of the future competes with and surpasses the private sector in service quality. He wants that government welcomes customers more professionally than hotels, and manages processes better than banks. Citizens should be able to complete any government transaction at any government center. Government of the future should be available everywhere though sifting government services onto smartphones so that customers can file and follow up on transactions using mobile devices at their convenience. The author states that they have already started to work on many of these ideas, and as soon as people start to feel benefits in everyday life, they will start to consider a new definition for success in providing government services.

Third and fourth chapter of the book offer author's insights about positive energy and positive thinking as well development priorities of UAE. He believes that positive energy and optimism help people to take up any challenge in life and succeed in even the most difficult tasks. He also believes that positive energy is contagious, and that people can transmit it to others. Since running water does not stop when it reaches a rock but it turns either right or left and continues its way, positive person is confident that no challenge will stand in the way of achieving his or her goal. People's mind and their way of thinking create their reality. Positive energy turns hard times into beautiful moments, hardships into manageable challenges, and impossible into nothing more than a word or point of view. According to Sheikh Mohammed's development priorities of the UAE are empowerment, education and Emiratisation. Empowerment is central to his vision and vision of President of UAE Sheikh Khalifa. Their focus is empowerment throughout their institutions and authorities. Education is top national priority and they have launched a number of initiatives and projects in that area. Emiratisation refers to activating and empowering Emirates in the workplace. In order to accomplish that the President has launched a set of major initiatives which aim at employing 25.000 Emiratis.

In the fifth chapter Sheik Mohammed writes that people should have their own distinct personality, and they should have pride in their language and their heritage. Creativity should be integral to everything they do as well as intrinsic to their personality, if excellence is what they seek. When building Palm Islands – the biggest man-made islands in the world - Sheik Mohammed insisted that they should not be built in the most appropriate and common way recommended by experts but in the form of palm tree. Today, Palm Islands are world-renowned landmarks of Dubai. Their huge scale, which makes them visible from the space, is symbol of ambition, positivity and capacity to deliver of Dubai's people. Islands unique shape signifies spirit of creativity, innovation and heritage of Dubai's people. Author concludes this chapter with the message to his colleagues that if you accustom yourselves to creativity in small things, creativity on larger scale will follow.

Sixth chapter of the book explains motives for building the tallest building man has ever seen – Burj Khalifa. The name of the building was chosen to honor President of UAE, Sheikh Kalifa, and Downtown Burj Khalifa has become key landmark for all visitors to Dubai and UAE. Foreign officials and media used to wonder about the motives for making

tallest building and about the feasibility of that project. Building the tallest tower on earth is a national accomplishment, a historic milestone and a key economic turning point. It is a symbol of pride, not only the Emirati people, but to all Arabs. Sheikh Mohammed hopes that today Burj Khalifa symbolizes the new global changes taking place; a new world where East meets West, where civilizations come together and where human creativity reigns with no heed to geographic, ethnic or religious boundaries. The future is for those who dare to dream and find courage to pursue their dreams. Therefore, thousands of engineers, workers, consultants and others from all over the world worked together to construct that impressive building, and new technologies were used to reach such heights making the United Arab Emirates a new global hub where the best minds come together to make greatest dreams come true. When building Burj Khalifa great economic benefit directly from that building was not expected. Instead, its returns will benefit the economy as a whole since Burj Khalifa has enhanced the image of Dubai in particular and UAE in general, saving millions of dollars in branding. Building Burj Khalifa also sends a message to all people in UAE and to the world. Message to UAE's people is that they can achieve so much and be number one in the world in various fields, and message to the world is that UAE is new presence in global economy.

In the next chapter author focuses on the "Spirit of the Union" which is official brand for UAE National Day celebrations. Its logo is a stylized silhouette based on iconic photograph of seven founding fathers at the birth of the UAE on 2 December 1971. The UAE is most successful union in contemporary Arab history. According to author the success of 41-year-old nation teaches important historical lessons to whoever wishes to draw upon them. The most important lesson is that union has a spirit, and no union can thrive if it is based solely on material interests. Sheikh Mohammed advice to any leader, weather of country, a company, a team or anything else is to unite hearts before uniting efforts, and to feel spirit before building the place.

Eight and ninth chapters of the book focus on one day in author's life, and on being number one. Since life was created simple it is important to live it as such is a mantra of Sheikh Mohammed. Simplicity starts in the heart, away from negativism and pessimism. His advice to all is to live a simple life. In Sheikh Mohammed's opinion UAE is no less than number one. Nobody remembers runners-up. Whoever convinces himself that he is not worthy of first position has doomed himself to failure from the very beginning. His people and he are fond of being number one. There is no alternative to first position, and the word impossible is nowhere to be found in the vocabulary of the UAE. The best is exactly what you will get if you accept no less.

Author refers to empowering women in tenth chapter, and horse riding, poetry and leadership in eleventh chapter of this book. Some people, usually from abroad, wonder about the empowerment of women in UAE society. UAE has already moved beyond the phase of empowering women. They are empowering society itself through its women as well as their economy by strengthening the role of women. They are also advancing government services when women occupy leadership positions, and they are improving infrastructure, health and education services, and even their military by relying heavily on women's roles in these fields. Horse riding has a special place in author's thinking. It is synonymous for pride, chivalry, dignity and nobility – all of which are indispensable characteristics for a leader. Horse riding comes from Arab roots, and horse races, particularly 160 kilometers

endurance races, require planning, patience and high control – all qualities that should be found in any leader. Poetry is another world. A poet's eye is bounded to his heart, and poet sees what others fail to see. Sheikh Mohammed points out that horse riding, poetry and leadership form triad, positively interacting with one another to make any person better horseman, better poet and a better leader. That does not mean that every leader has to be poet or a horseman but every leader should have passion in life that adds depth, uniqueness and style to his leadership.

Author discusses the Gulf Cup and endurance in twelfth and thirteenth chapter. Winning the Gulf Cup or any other championship is an occasion for his people to renew their joy and self-confidence, and to join together in shared passions. Winning makes people aware of importance of team spirit and reminds them that they can succeed if their efforts are united. Sheikh Mohammed won 2012 World Endurance Championship, a horse-riding event held that year in the UK. Drawing on that experience he provides advices for whoever aspires to attain the title of world champion in any sport. His first advice is to acquire knowledge, and surpass others in knowledge. Knowledge is shortest path to victory, even in sports. His second advice refers to training, training and more training. To become world champion he trained his body as well himself to setting different strategies to reach the finish line. He also trained his horse to increase his stamina. His final advice is to trust in God and in yourself, and to be optimistic. These psychological elements are most important of all because they distinguish you from your opponents.

Fourteenth chapter of the book refers to author's role models. His role model is Prophet Mohammed, and leaders who have taught him the most of what he knows are Sheikh Zayed, Founder of UAE, and his own father, Sheikh Rashid. Author accompanied his father on all his trips, and those trips were synonyms for learning, gaining experience and exploring life. Author also accompanied Sheikh Zayed on all his trips after the formation of the Union. Those journeys were like intensive courses in the art of life management. He taught him not through words but through questions, by involving him in discussions, and through examples. Perhaps the most important lesson he had learnt from Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid is that leader should be father to his people.

Sheikh Mohammed discusses time management in fifteenth chapter of the book. He raises a question not about managing our time but investing our time. What can be said in three-hour meeting can be summed in half an hour. According to author time is like a flowing river – you cannot step in the same water twice. Therefore, one of his principles in life is that every minute of our lives is worth filling with accomplishments, happiness and good deeds. It saddens him to young people today spending so much time in coffee shops, watching TV or playing video games because their time is a great asset for the development of their country, society, families and generations. Some say that year is equivalent to 365 days. Sheikh Mohammed points out that year is equal to the number of days invested in yourself, your family, your society or in your spiritual life! These are the only days that actually count when people write the story of their lives.

Author presented his thoughts on the Arab Spring and investments in sixteenth and seventeenth chapter. During 2004 Arab Strategy Forum he told to Arab leaders that if they do not carry out radical reforms with tangible benefits for citizens, their people will forsake them and history would judge them harshly. He was not foreseeing the unseen but simply drawing on lessons from their history. People want governments that provide ex-

cellent healthcare, education, housing, justice, and safety – a real economic development. The UAE has for many years been known as a pillar of stability in the Middle East. Sheikh Mohammed is bothered by some comments that UAE is “deriving benefit from unrest” in other countries. Those comments are backed with no evidence. Author states that UAE does not work that way. UAE is ranked among the top countries when it comes to helping other nations to achieve stability, prosperity, and development. The UAE economy is built on stable foundations and they are developing a model for achieving sustainable development, rather than temporary development that lives off regional tensions. UAE embraces people from 200 nations, all working, investing and giving the best they have to offer.

Sheikh Mohammed stated his view on ideas and creativity in eighteenth chapter of the book. He stresses that the fresh thinking that fuels constant progress in government does not come only from the center and the top, but also from all around and from the roots. Employees have to be empowered as a source of innovation. In order to generate genuine, meaningful, and beneficial change it is not enough to place suggestion boxes in institutions – creativity must become an established culture with integrated systems. According to author institutions have to begin rewarding employees according to their creative contributions.

In nineteenth chapter author explains UAE Vision 2021. Overarching goal of UAE is to become one of the top countries in the world by 2021. Sheikh Mohammed points out that the road to fulfill the vision will be built on first rate education, world-class healthcare system, human development, competitive knowledge economy, sustainable environment and integrated infrastructure as well as safe, just, and secure nation. One of the most important lessons from both ancient and contemporary history is that progress of countries, people and civilization starts with education. Therefore, the future of nations starts in their schools. The goal of UAE is for Emirati students to rank among top 20 countries in the world in science, mathematics and reading. Sheikh Mohammed states that he has great confidence in their children and children’s capabilities. Since UAE offers 100% coverage for public health services in all regions their challenge does not lie in providing medical services but rather in improving their quality. One of the UAE’s goals is to rank among the top ten countries on the global human development index. They have a vision for a society characterized by excellence in human development at all levels of education, health, social care and culture. Author also points out that it is imperative to look at the rest of the world with competitive spirit because if that spirit is lost that will mark the begging of country’s regression. In recent years UAE has been able to develop their infrastructure up to truly global standards. The most recent global competitiveness report ranked UAE sixth worldwide on the infrastructure quality index. Author also refers to justice. Justice is the foundation of their governance and they strive to maintain that legacy from their ancestors. Justice in the context of judicial systems does not come only from passing righteous verdicts, but also from ease and clarity of legislative processes, and speed of resolution of court cases.

Author’s thoughts on taking risks and challenges were presented in twentieth and twenty-first chapter of the book. Since UAE is well known worldwide for its remarkable pace of development many people wonder if big construction projects are risky. Sheikh Mohammed states that no project was ever achieved without risks, and that every kind of work entails certain degree of risk. Life is also full of risks but greatest of all is to take any risk. Projects are never lunched without thoroughly examination and research. Besides,

author points out that they refuse to instill fear into their minds and teams. Life is also full of challenges. Sheikh Mohammed's greatest challenge was to convince his teams to believe in his vision and to trust in the change he seeks. Words are not enough, and it is necessary to succeed a few times in order to reassure people that you are on the right track, and convince them to embrace your vision. Great people are defined by the challenges they take up. Author cannot judge an individual's strength and capability unless individual is confronted with the challenge because challenges bring out a person's best and worst sides. Sheikh Mohammed postulates that true experience is measured not by the number of years that we have worked, but by the number of challenges that we have taken up.

Sheikh Mohammed refers to the word impossible in twenty-second, and on gathering with business people in twenty-third chapter of the book. He states that impossible is word coined by those who do not want to work, or rather, those who do not want us to work; impossible is nowhere to be found in the dictionary of the UAE. According to author that word is used by people who fear to dream big; it is like chains that tie person down, hindering his every move. Some people said that developing tourism industry in hot desert was impossible as well as building towers in the sea. By receiving more than 10 million visitors yearly, and by building biggest man-made island in the world with hundreds of towers housing thousands of people clearly the word impossible lost its meaning. Impossible cannot be found where there is perseverance and faith. There is no impossible in life. During the meeting with a group of around 500 international executives Sheikh Mohammed shared a story about the success of airline company Emirates which started with renting two airplanes. Today, Emirates airlines is ranked third worldwide. He stresses that competition always makes you better and stronger. Based on the foundations of the success of Jabel Ali Port, a project many people did not understand at the beginning, Sheikh Mohammed points out that people should arm themselves with a long-term vision, high ambitions and far-sightedness. Without a vision to guide their path, and without ambition that knows no limits, people will never build a bright future for generations to come.

Twenty-fourth chapter of the book analyses monitoring of government performance since it is one of the most important pillars of successful government. The first level of monitoring consists of measuring performance according to strategic plan. Comprehensive electronic system that encompasses thousands of performance indicators for measuring the achievements of ministries against their plans is used. The second level consists of field follow-up which refers to monitoring the level of customer service usually through mystery shopping. Although Sheikh Mohammed receives monitoring reports he does not base his decisions solely on them, hence he moves to third level of monitoring which includes personal visits to government institutions. The fourth level of monitoring is financial, and carried out by State Audit Institution outside the government. The fifth level consists of process managed by Federal National Council which provides useful insights. Sheikh Mohammed also states his opinion on human mistakes in this chapter. He might go easy on people who make mistakes, but never on people who make no effort. He does not like that his officials have exaggerated fear of mistakes because that kind of fear stands in the way of creativity, innovation and change. A few mistakes made by person working productively cost far less than a person paralyzed by laziness or fear. It is by making mistakes that a person learns.

In the next chapters, twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth, Sheikh Mohammed shares his thoughts on Accession Day and the UAE's success. Since he came to power in Emirate of

Dubai on 4 January 2006 that day is commemorated each year as Accession Day. On that day Sheikh Mohammed honors sections of society that deserve special attention and appreciation so in 2011 Accession Day was dedicated to orphans, and he urged whoever wished to congratulate Accession Day through advertisements in the media to instead spend the same amount of money to orphans. In 2012 Accession Day was dedicated to mothers. Sheikh Mohammed personally lunched a series of initiatives and visited a few families with mothers who successfully balance their work with motherhood, setting an example for their society through strength and patience. In 2013 Accession Day was dedicated to general labor staff – domestic workers, street cleaners, construction workers, public transportation drivers and others who make people's lives easier and better every day, but who are sometimes completely unnoticed. Transforming that national occasion into interactive social experience has turned to be a great success. True happiness does not come from hanging a picture on a wall or publishing congratulations in newspapers, but from drawing a smile on a mother's face, or instilling a sense of security in an orphan, or by showing a worker that the whole society appreciates his or her services. Sheikh Mohammed referred to a question about the recipe of UAE's success raised by foreign participant during a dialogue session at the Government Summit. Since success is not destination, but a journey he pointed out that UAE is still on the road to success because they have by no means achieved all they want. Still he underlined that love for his country is the most important quality on the journey to success. Besides the love for the country team spirit is of utmost importance on the road to success, and that team spirit is inherited from their founding fathers and they uphold it still today.

Sheikh Mohammed presented his thoughts on the aid to the world and his expectations from employees in twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapter of the book. Since its inception 1971, the UAE has provided an estimated 43 billion USD in foreign aid. Annual foreign aid is equivalent to around one percent of UAE's gross national income. Sheikh Mohammed expects from government employees to be the main drivers of development. He counts on them to improve services government provides, to achieve his vision and deliver expectations of UAE's people. The development of government is possible only through the development of its workforce. Therefore, UAE has invested in 2012 more than 1.3 million hours in training more than 55,000 federal government employees. Leadership program for second-line and third-line leaders was launched, and excellence awards were given out employees, since competition among employees brings out the best of them. Criterion of seniority was replaced with the principle of competence in promotion and recruitment. Author offers three advices for public servants. First, in his opinion, they should act like leaders because true leadership is not in one's position, but in one's way of thinking and acting: it is in the nobility of one's objectives and goals. Second, if someone looks at civil service as a mere job that person will be mere employee. Therefore, government employees should see their jobs as an opportunity to show their talents and capabilities as well as opportunity to add new value to the society, and influence and inspire all people around them. Third, government employees should develop their capabilities continuously, expand their knowledge and broaden their horizons, and never give up on their work.

In twenty-ninth and thirtieth chapter of the book author discusses motivating teams and one nation. The first key to motivating a person toward better performance is to empower him or her to achieve. Nothing motivates an employee more than seeing the results of his own achievements. The second key to motivation, according to Sheikh Mohammed,

is the need to reward distinguished and creative employees. They should be held up as examples for the whole institution. Since human competition is central to every aspect of our life competitive environment cannot be created unless creativity is rewarded and praised. Third idea of motivation is related to the idea with which this book began: that the job of government is to ensure the happiness of society. Employees are part of the society, and it is necessary to ensure their happiness in order that they in turn can bring happiness to others. Some people, both inside and outside UAE, have misconceptions about the nature of relationship between the UAE federal government and the local governments in each emirate, as well as the nature of relationships among emirates. Some imagine conflict of interest or unhealthy competition, and few foreign newspapers have gone so far as to liken situation in UAE to a cold war. People under such illusion are obviously unaware of the nature of the relationship between ruling families in the emirates. Therefore, Sheikh Mohammed bespeaks that “we are not just emirates; we are United Arab Emirates.” This book was inspired by Government Summit which brought together officials from federal government and every local government under one roof to exchange information, expertise and successful experiences. To work with one spirit, according to one vision is what they seek. The goal of UAE is to be among best nations worldwide, because Emirati people will settle for nothing less than the very best.

Author refers to time management and family tourism in thirty-first and thirty-second chapter of the book. When people remark on Sheikh Mohammed’s constant rush to execute projects, he responds that future starts today, not tomorrow. The UAE has transformed itself from an arid desert into a well-developed nation on the global stage in just four short decades. They have never had the luxury of time. Their objective is to make their people happy and hence there is no delaying happiness. Multiply the days of delay by number of people to calculate the years wasted in procrastination. A successful nation forgoes its own path to success without relying in the situation around it. A successful nation does not wait for the future, but rolls up its sleeves and makes the future. Every year the UAE welcomes more than 10 million tourists from all around the world. Tourism has grown into key pillar of UAE’s national economy. Many years ago they focused on a new kind of tourism – family tourism. In 1996 Dubai Shopping Festival was launched in order to offer a unique tourist experience to all family members. That annual festival has proved to be a huge success since its direct economic returns are estimated at 4 billion USD per year. The past few years have also seen the construction of many significant attractions in UAE as well as expansion of Emirates Airlines. Hence, the UAE has become a major international destination for family tourism all year around.

Thirty-third and thirty-fourth chapters of the book are dedicated to redefining leadership and cabinet reshuffle. Sheikh Mohammed states that leadership is neither conferred by chance at birth, nor guaranteed by study even at the finest academies. He personally knows many graduates from such academies who have worked on themselves and expanded their knowledge to reach high leadership positions, while others stopped at some point because their qualities and skills did not help them progress any further. It can be seen that enquiring nature places some people ahead of others on the path of leadership. In UAE they want to change the concept of leadership so that includes anyone who has the ambition and the will to change himself, and also benefit his society. Anyone who can improve the life of those around him is a leader. All people are born with seeds of such qualities which they

can nurture or grow, so that bit by bit, they advance on the path of leadership and ultimately evolve into great leaders. Every single achievement you make, every single life you change and every single skill you acquire brings you one step closer to becoming a better leader. When asked whether he plans to reshuffle his government in near future Sheikh Mohammed pointed out that only achievers who are able to keep up with the change, take on challenges and bring out the best in their teams will stay. Only innovative and creative officials with wide horizons, great determination, positive energy and optimism will stay. Sheikh Mohammed also stressed that every time when the interests of his country dictate change he will not hesitate to take such a decision. His objective is not change per se, but changing for better. If that change can be achieved with the same team, so much the better but if it cannot be achieved change of the team will be considered.

Last two chapters of the book are dedicated to the importance of horses for Emirati people, and to sound leader in sound body. The relationship of Emirati people to horses comes from their Arab roots and that perpetuates the sport of their ancestors. Nowadays, horse raiding represents their identity, their pride in their heritage and their high morals, which they are instilling in their younger generations. When commenting on question regarding the link between leadership and taking part in sports Sheikh Mohammed stated that leader should be fit, healthy and athletic. He should be both mentally and physically active with strong build and sharp mind. Therefore, he says “a sound leader in sound body.” His advice to all is to practice sports on regular basis, for the quality of your life is related to quality of your health, and your level of achievement in life depends on how energetic and active you feel. Those who have control over themselves can control the world around them. Author finishes the book with the simple advice of great importance: make time in your life for exercise, for this soundest investment that can be made in health, future and happiness.

Other than Flashes of Thought Sheikh Mohammed wrote a book My Vision: Challenges in the Race for Excellence in which he examines in more detail aspects of UAE’s unique development experience. Ideas presented in both books encompass the idea that public sector should be better than private sector; the role of positive energy, optimism and creativity in country’s development; excellence as a way of living; removing word impossible from people’s dictionary; the confidence in its own people; replacing criterion of seniority with the principle of competence etc. Those ideas are not heard of in many countries in the world, and even if these ideas are heard of they are not real unlike in Dubai and UAE. Transformation of Dubai and UAE into one of the world centers should be an example for development to all countries in the world. According to a saying the day a person starts thinking that he succeeded that is the day of his downfall. Thereby, Sheikh Mohammed’s recipe for success is to continually raise the bar whenever people reach their goals. In the world full of “leaders” with empty words and suits this book is must read for anyone who wants to succeed in political, public and private arena since Sheikh Mohammed does not talk the talks – instead he walks the walk!