Keep it simple stupid

C. A. R. Hoare (a boffin) said, "There are two ways of constructing a software design; one way is to make it so simple that there are obviously no deficiencies, and the other way is to make it so complicated that there are no obvious deficiencies. The first method is far more difficult." This can be applied to lots of things, including football.

It has been interesting hearing again about Brian Clough’s management style following the tenth anniversary of his death. Apparently he kept it very simple – everyone knew their job and heaven help anyone who didn’t do it. It resonated with in interview I once heard when Ian Rush described Bob Paisley’s management style. It was an FA Cup game and his team talk was basically ‘Right lads this lot are rubbish. Get out there and stuff ‘em!’ Obviously Cloughie was a bit more specific than this, but in football as in church leadership (and education too for that matter – my other area of interest) if the goals are clearly set, clearly communicated and have a measurable outcome, then people know what they’re supposed to do and they know if they have failed to achieve it. Especially if Cloughie was your manager.

It’s not rocket science. Or maybe it is. I’ve never worked for NASA but I suspect similar principles apply, and with them the cost of failure is a bit more serious than an early cup exit.

Both the medical side and the tactical side of football have become very complicated nowadays, with technology giving stats about just about everything, and so the temptation must be to overcomplicate everything in an effort to get a competitive edge.

And yet maintaining the competitive edge continues to revolve around very basic elements – the spirit of the team, self-belief and inner confidence. At the risk of sounding like John Harbin (who actually knows about this sort of thing), keeping things simple, being clear on your role and having someone there to drill it into you and encourage you, remains more powerful than all the video analysis there is.

The temptation to over complicate things has spread (rather unsurprisingly) into interpreting the Bible. There are some out there that have spent their lives researching the numbers of verses and key facts in scripture with mind-boggling detail and thoroughness. I quote, ‘Research has uncovered patterns in certain original language words and phrases that reveal a hidden meaning behind the Biblical text.’

Whilst not wanting to spend precious time checking out their findings to either affirm or disprove them (life is too short and I really think there are better things to be doing with our time and energy), it’s not something that lights my candle. And on top of that, as a follower of Jesus, trying to imitate him with my thoughts and actions – OK I still have some way to go but I’m trying – I honestly think that Jesus himself would have glazed over if confronted with these theories. In the nicest possible way I’m sure.

In fact I imagine he was more like Brian Clough in this respect. Hear me out – not that Cloughie was the messiah, despite what some thought at the time – but that he kept things fairly simple. He broke things down into clear and specific things that both numpties and intellectuals alike could cotton onto, and broke the mystique surrounding faith that the religious types had created in order to be superior to the common person like you and me. I think they got a bit upset when he didn’t admire their religious rules, regulations and ceremonies, and boiled it down to the simplicity of this - love God and love one another.

Simples. Like they say on the Othello gamebox – a minute to learn and a lifetime to master.