# **The Action-Centric Model & Graphic Design**

## **The Action-Centric Model**

Generally, there are two accepted models to describe the overall process by which designers create products.

The **rational model** is all about planning. You think through the entire process and follow concrete, sequential steps.

The **action-centric model**, which defines design in terms of personal creativity and fluidity, not objectives and parameters. It's a model favored by those who like to get straight to the action.

## **The Design Process in the Action-Centric Model**

The action-centric model sees design as beginning with emotion, creativity, and personal aesthetic judgments made by the designer. Basically, you can't plan out the entire process, but have to make the evaluations as new objectives and restrictions become apparent during the design process. The key to the action-centric model, therefore, is improvisation.

This means that the action-centric model is not one of a strict, sequential series of stages or steps. You don't follow a formulaic pattern in the way you create a design. Instead, the stages of design, analysis/testing, and implementation occur simultaneously and recursively. Instead of one always coming before the other, you bounce between all three.

We can think of this in the metaphor of juggling. In the rational model, you handle one ball at a time, and toss it repeatedly until it's perfected. In the action-centric model, you're juggling all three balls together, dealing with each one as it comes up, but being free to switch between them freely. You can drop one ball for a minute, and pick it up again later, or start juggling in the reverse direction. The design process is fluid and dynamic because you deal with challenges as they emerge. This is generally a circular, rather than sequential, process, where design, analysis, and implementation build upon each other.

So, do the rational and action-centric models have anything in common? Well, both do agree that the designer has to make decisions based on research, as well as their own knowledge. Of course, in the rational model this knowledge comes from working within a controlled, sequential process. In the action-centric model, knowledge and research come from the designer's intuition, minute-by-minute decisions, and experience.

## **Pros and Cons**

The action-centric model is much younger than the rational model, but is already very popular with many designers and theorists. Many people complain that the rational model simply fails to accurately describe what the design process is like in practice.

* It's seen as a more accurate depiction of what the design process is like in practice, not just in theory. This is because it's very rare that a designer actually knows all the objectives, restrictions, goals, and parameters of their project from the very beginning. The action-centric model depicts process.
* The action-centric model is too poorly defined, too open, and does not present an easy-to-understand formula for the design process.

## **Lesson Summary**

The **rational model** requires a formulaic approach based on known objectives and parameters, while the **action-centric model** is a more improvised approach. In the action-centric model, it's the designer's creative intuition, judgments, and experience that drive the design, not pre-set goals or restrictions. The stages of the design process are circular, not sequential, building on each other simultaneously.