

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

butterfly effect: Edward Lorenz's theorem that small, seemingly insignificant, actions or changes can have widespread or long-term effects.

Discussion:

This observation came from meteorologist Lorenz's study of weather phenomena and his finding that very small disturbances in atmospheric conditions can lead to unexpected large changes in the weather. This concept contributed to Gestalt therapists' understanding of field theory and organismic self-regulation.

A simple example of this occurred when a bird sat on a wire near a major airport and was electrocuted. This created a short circuit in the wire, cutting off electricity to the airport and causing flight delays throughout the country. On the human level, a young man was going to call a woman he had recently met, but lost her phone number. He decided instead to take a walk in a park and by chance met another woman, whom he eventually married. They now have children and grandchildren, who might never have been born if he had not lost that phone number.

Illustrative Quotation:

- **Edward Lorenz**: "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?"

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