

Stewardship of the Mindfulness Ecosystem

*Taking a wider perspective on the challenges facing
contemporary mindfulness based approaches*



My meditation journey and mindfulness experience

- Started a regular meditation practice with Transcendental Meditation in 1995
- Explored mantra-based practices over 10 years
- Engaged with a Buddhist Centre from 2010 and Buddhist meditation practices
- Started training to teach MBSR in 2013, and teaching from 2014
- Joined the Mindfulness Network in 2016 after completing an MA in Mindfulness Based Approaches at Bangor University
- Joined the Mindfulness in Schools Project as a trustee in 2025

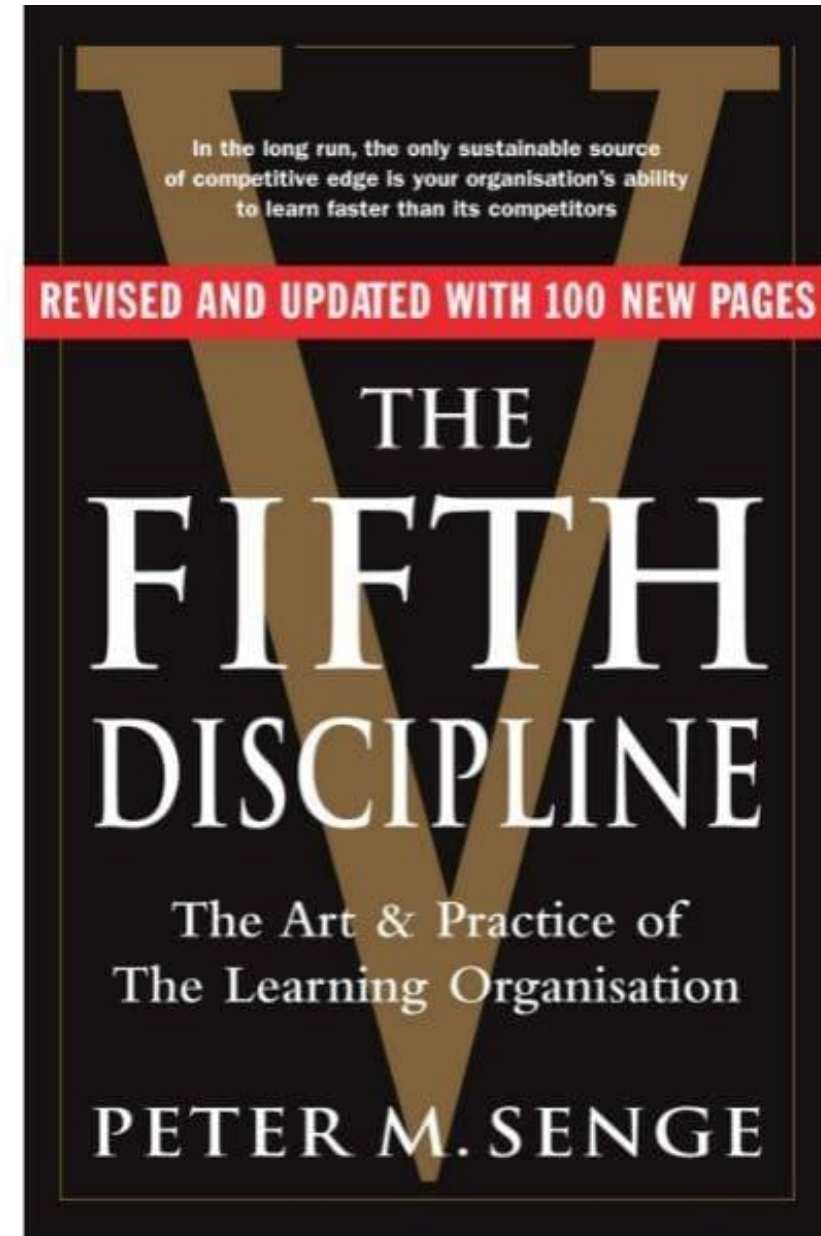
Caveat

This is a personal perspective based on personal practice, teaching, supervision, and leadership roles in a number of contexts, not just in the Mindfulness Ecosystem.

It is not representative of any particular organisation that I am affiliated with.

Ecosystems and Systems Theory

- Business and human endeavors are systems...we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system. And wonder why our deepest problems never get solved.
- The world is made of Circles
And we think in straight Lines
- Examples
 - Ecological systems, climate change
 - Open source software, where what you offer is free to use and adapt
 - The Internet
 - Contemplative traditions, including mainstream mindfulness





The Mindfulness Ecosystem

“mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) was developed as one of a possibly infinite number of skilful means for bringing the dharma into mainstream settings. It has never been about MBSR for its own sake. It has always been about the M. And the M is a very big M”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

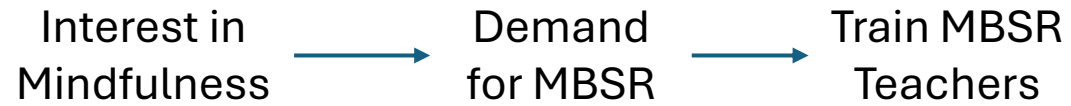
Some reflections on the origins of MBSR, skilful means, and the trouble with maps

May 2011

Stewardship and Ecosystems

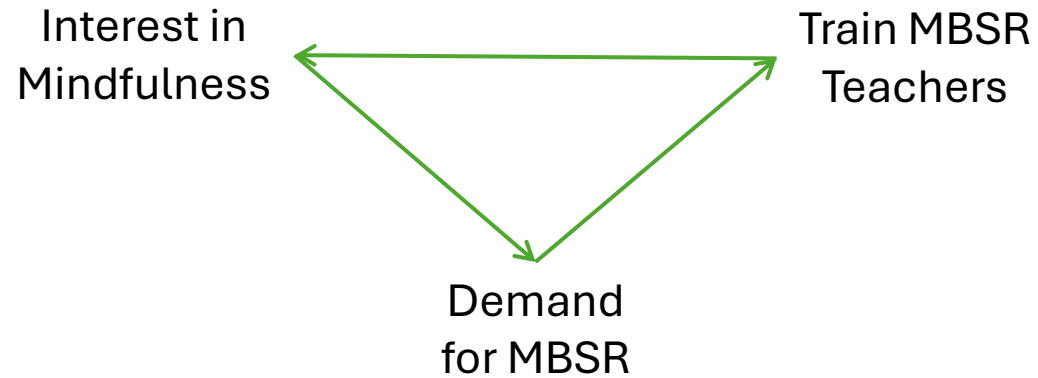
- Stewardship means taking care that the ecosystem flourishes
- It expressly does not involve control of the ecosystem
- A healthy ecosystem has all parts of the system in balance and supporting the flourishing of the system
- New components can introduce imbalances that can radically change the ecosystem, positively or negatively

Quick intro to systems thinking - 1



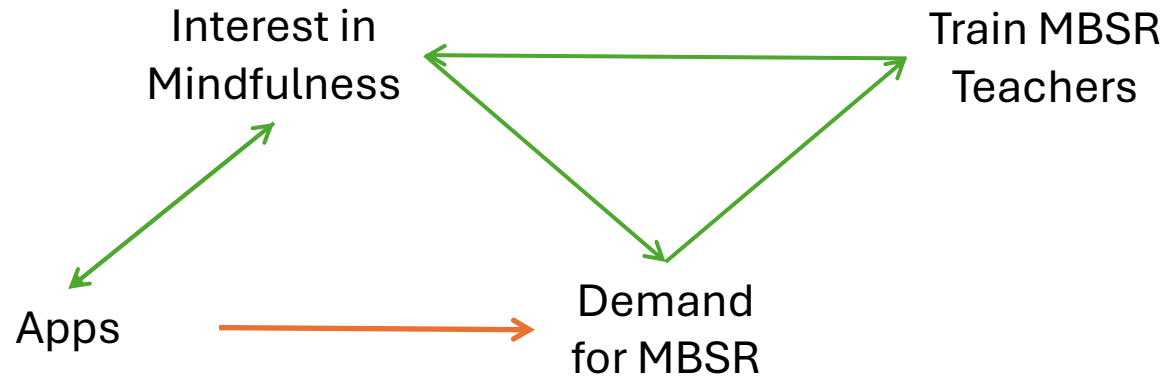
Including all MBSR derivatives such as MBCT

Quick intro to systems thinking - 2



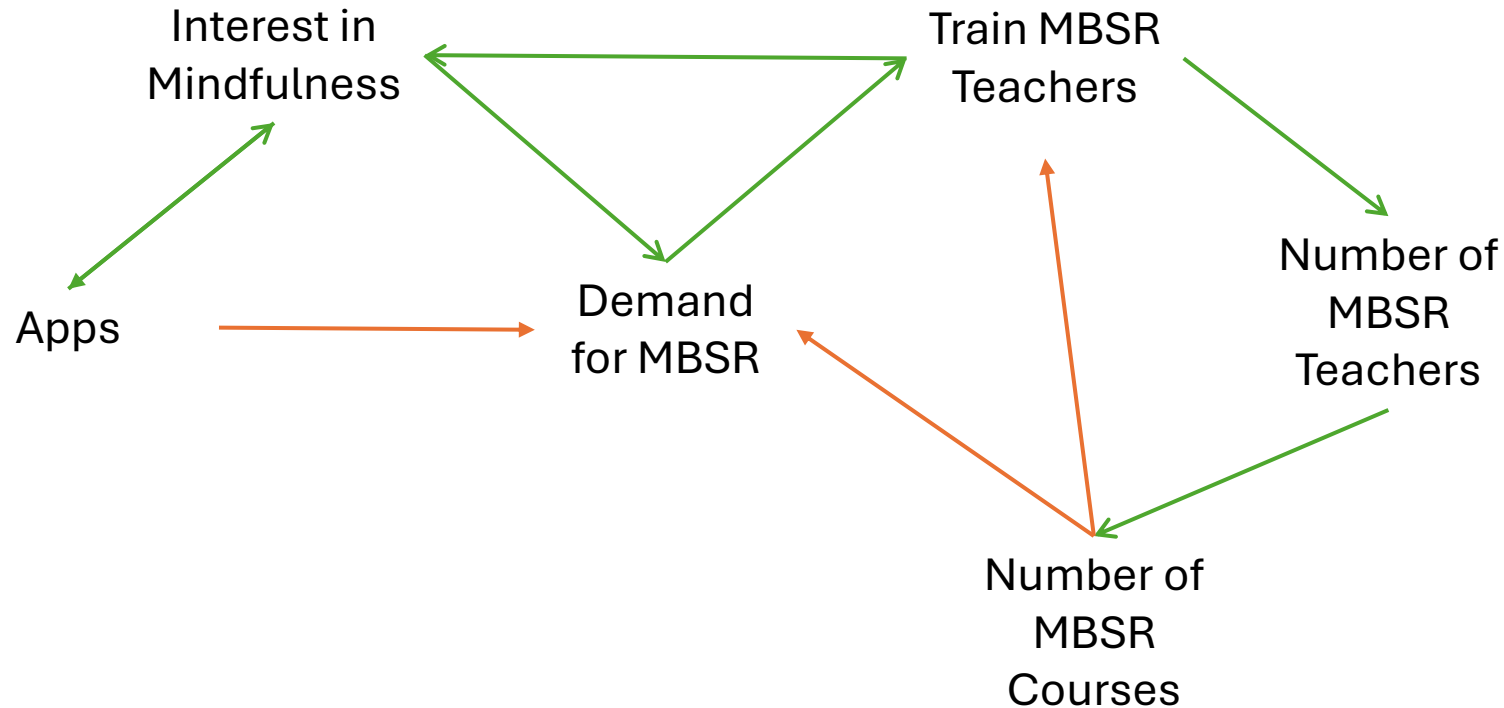
This is a reinforcing loop as more teachers promote more interest

Quick intro to systems thinking – 3



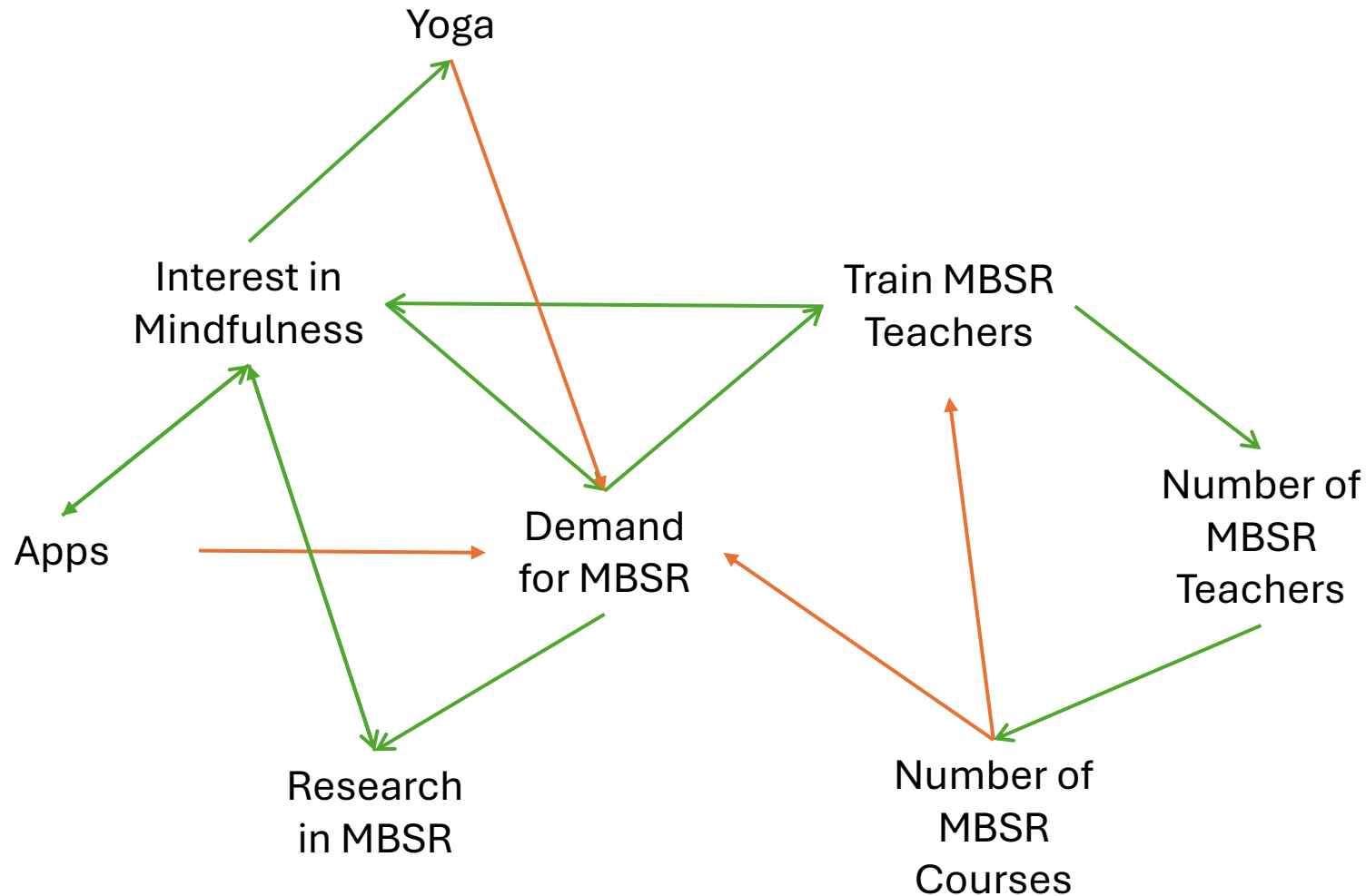
Apps are an alternative to MBSR courses, are cheap and easily available. They increase interest in Mindfulness but compete with MBSR and reduce demand for MBSR.

Quick intro to systems thinking - 4



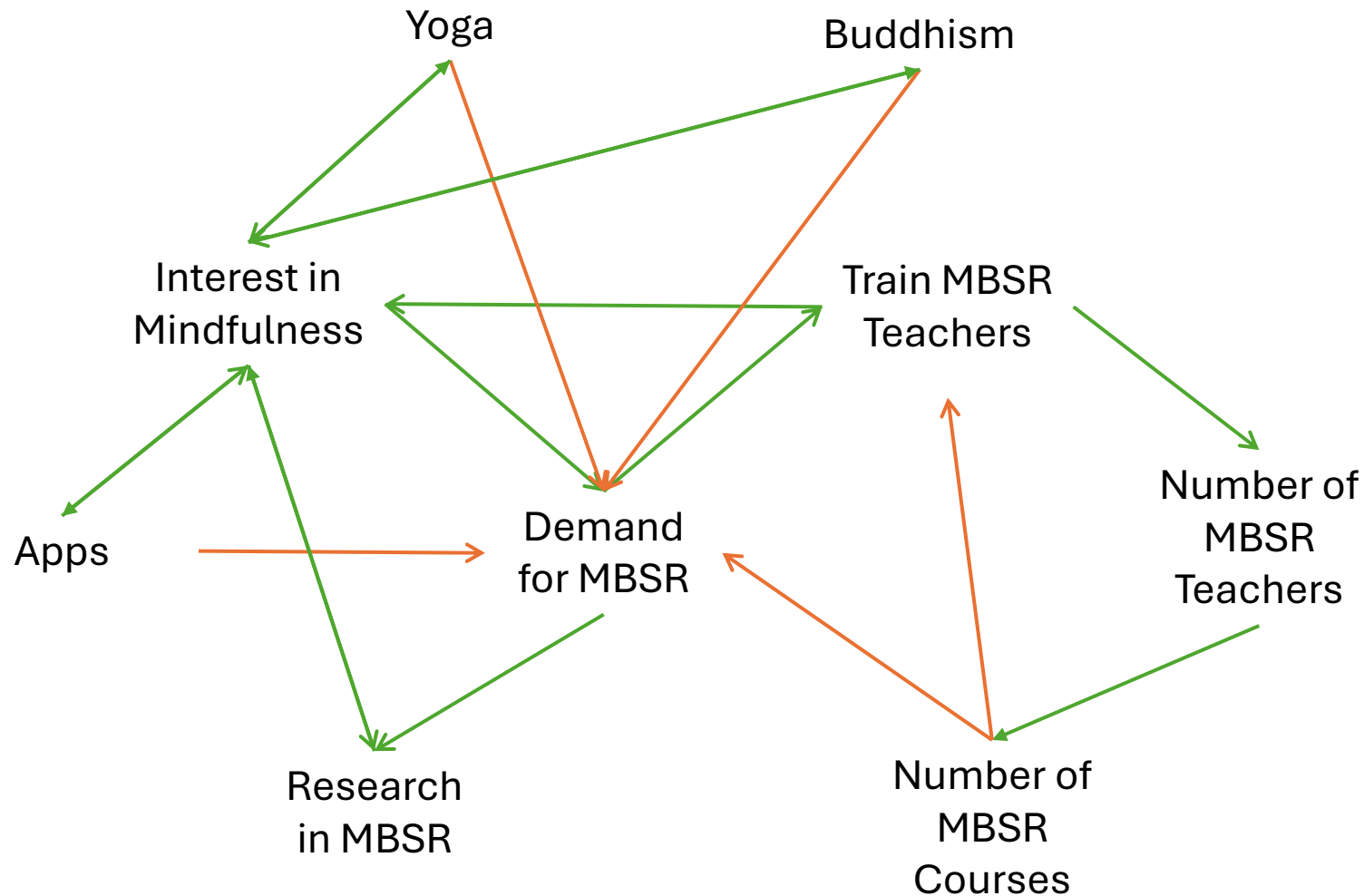
With more teachers creating more courses, demand for MBSR falls, disillusion sets in among teachers and demand for teacher training falls.

Quick intro to systems thinking - 5



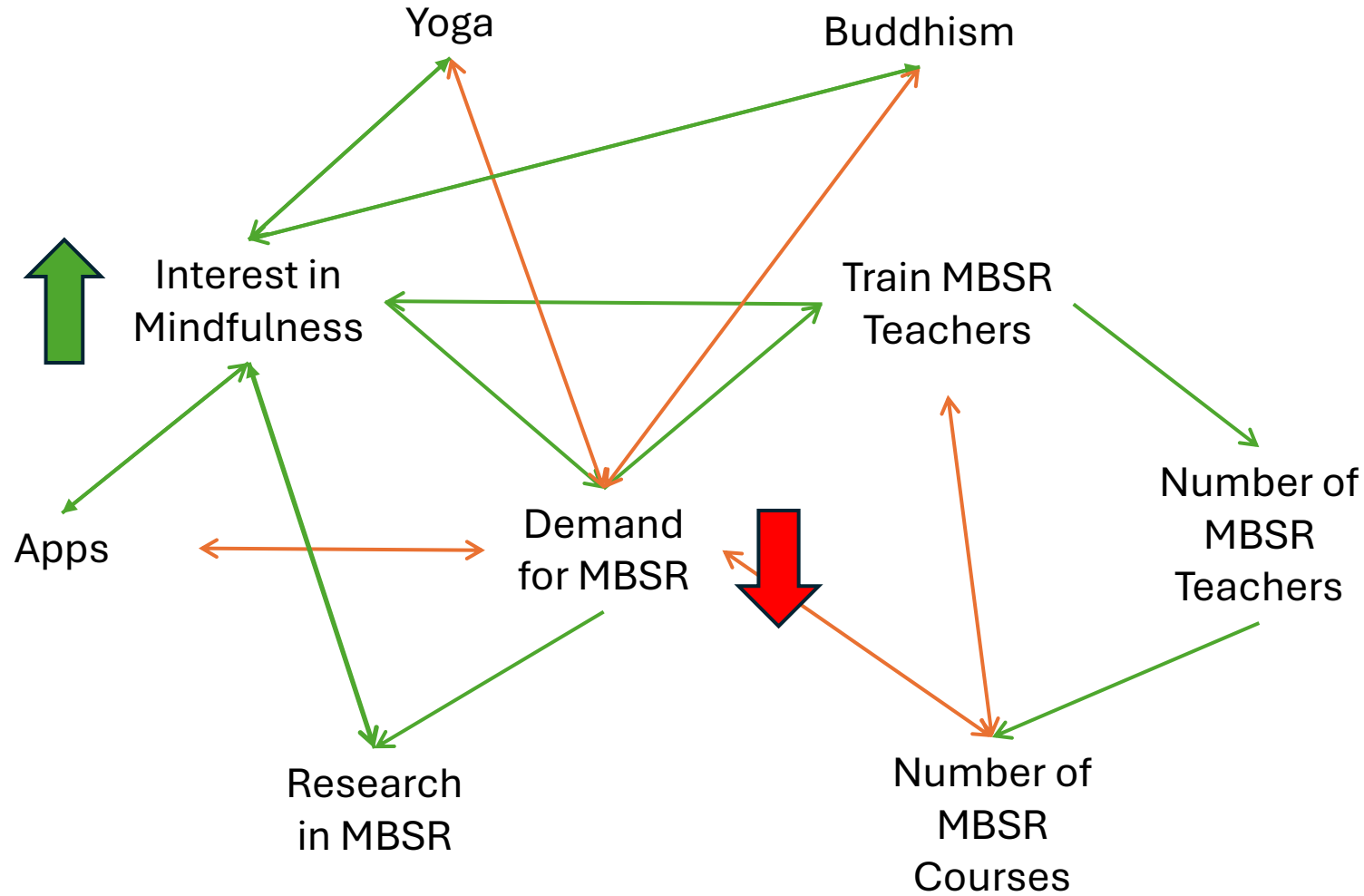
Yoga teachers offer meditation, brand it mindfulness, and it is more easily available and offers other benefits.

Quick intro to systems thinking - 6



The Buddhist roots of MBSR, coupled with the broader acceptance of meditation, attract more into Buddhist teaching rather than MBSR

Quick intro to systems thinking - 7



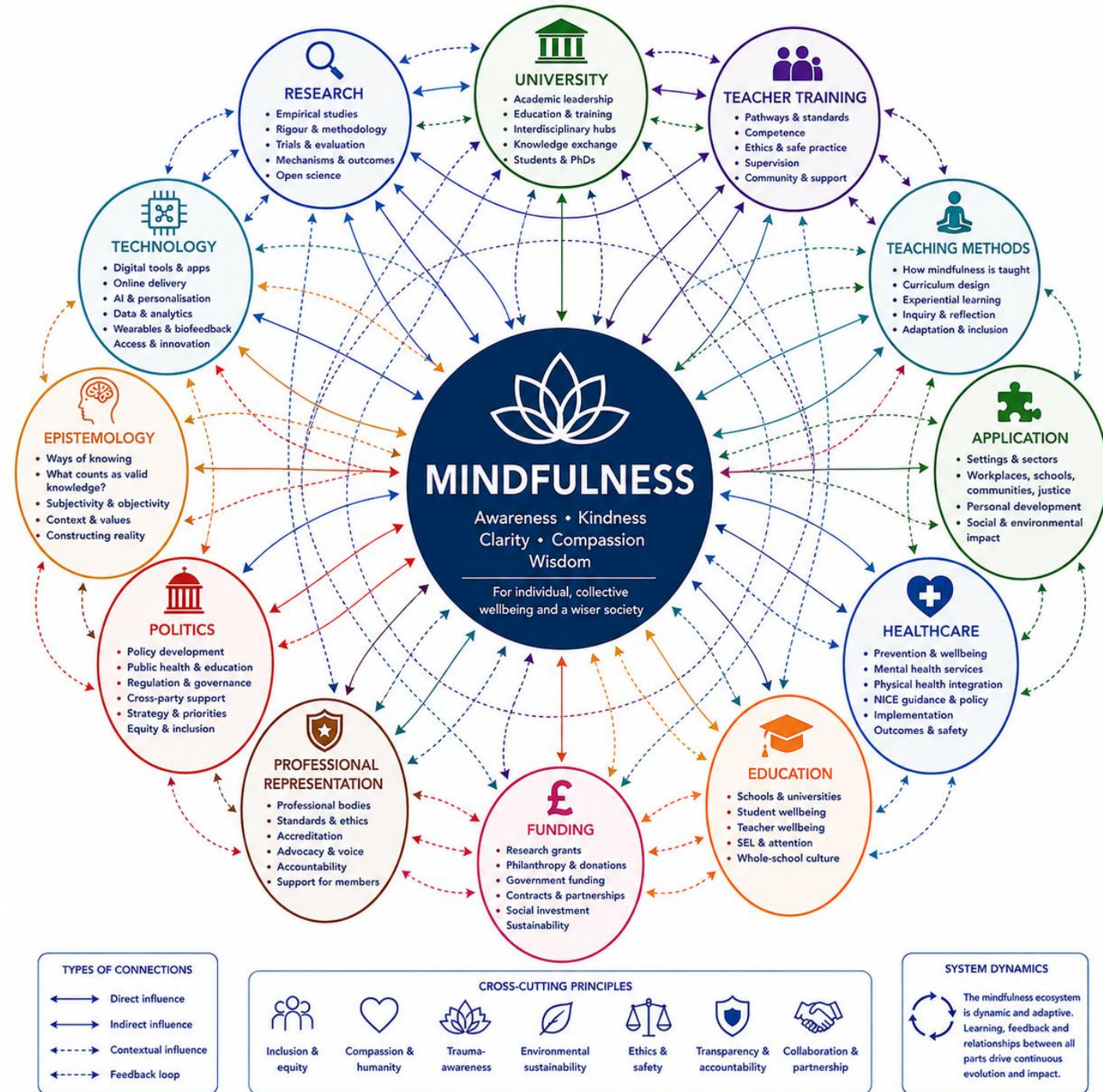
So, in the system as a whole, interest in mindfulness can grow while demand for MBSR drops

The Mindfulness Ecosystem

- Much bigger than MBIs
- Highly Interconnected
- Small change in one area can have a radical effect
- A healthy ecosystem is self-regulating

So what might we add in to the current ecosystem to strengthen it?

Graphic generated by ChatGPT



What does the Mindfulness
Ecosystem today look like from
the outside?



← Colouring Books & Apps

Mindfulness Courses

Buddhism & Yoga →

Transcendental Meditation →

Which one is right for me?



What's on the mindfulness menu?

Which course shall I serve?

Mindfulness Teacher

MBSR

MBCT

MBCL

MSC

.b

Frantic World

Deeper Mindfulness

Vipassana

SWOT Analysis of the Mindfulness Ecosystem



STRENGTHS

- Solid research foundation
- Proven programmes
- Increasing understanding of psychological processes
- Large, well-trained pool of teachers and supervisors
- Public acceptability and engagement



WEAKNESSES

- Complexity of offerings
- Programme-centric training limits adaptability
- Teachers find it hard to reach clients
- Governance not responsive to grassroots needs
- Professional standards onerous and inappropriate in some contexts
- Training centred on programmes, not principles



OPPORTUNITIES

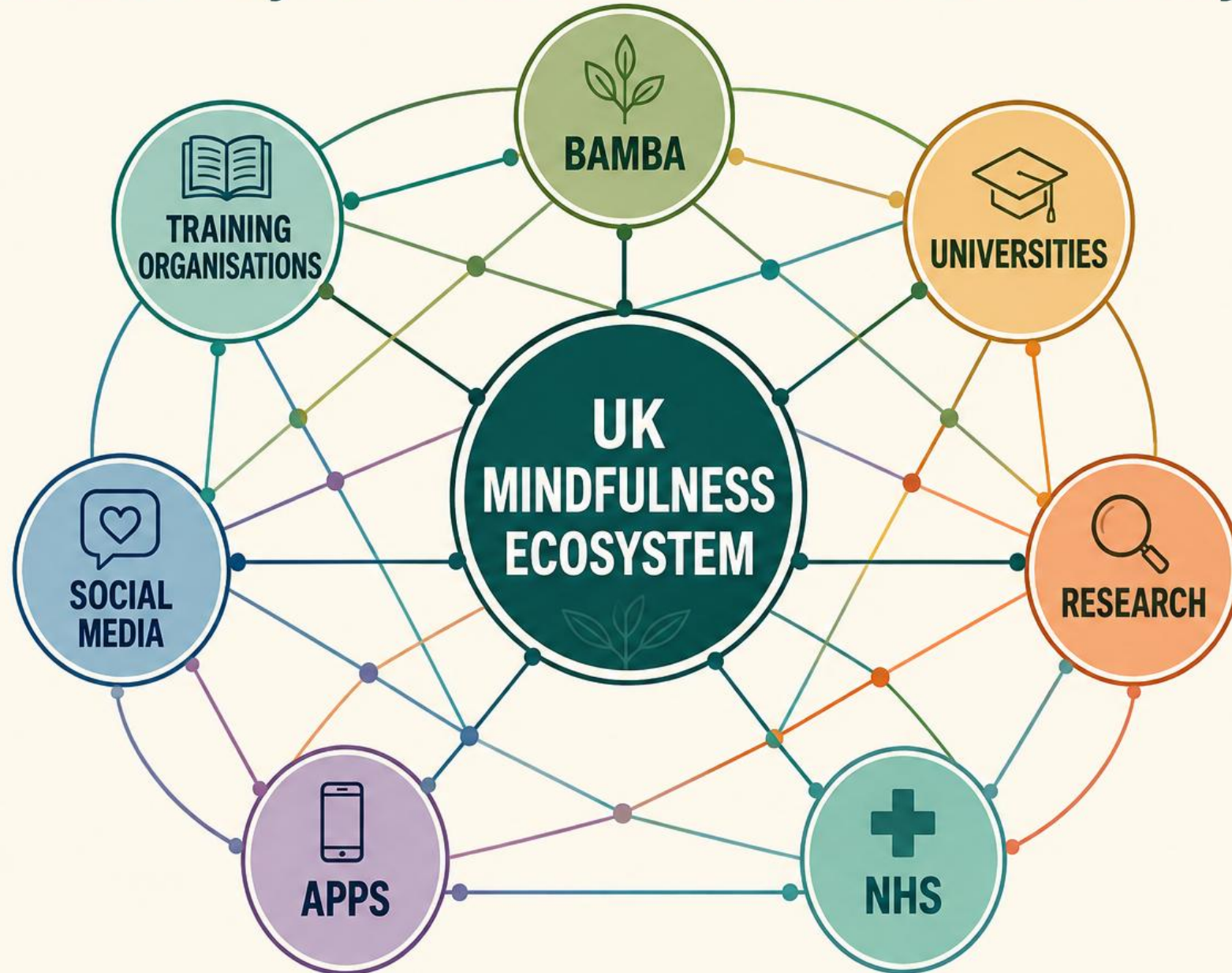
- Create a democratic organisation representing professionals
- Create an agency linking teachers to the public
- Make teacher training science- and principles-led
- Foster adaptation to context
- Shift the emphasis from research to application



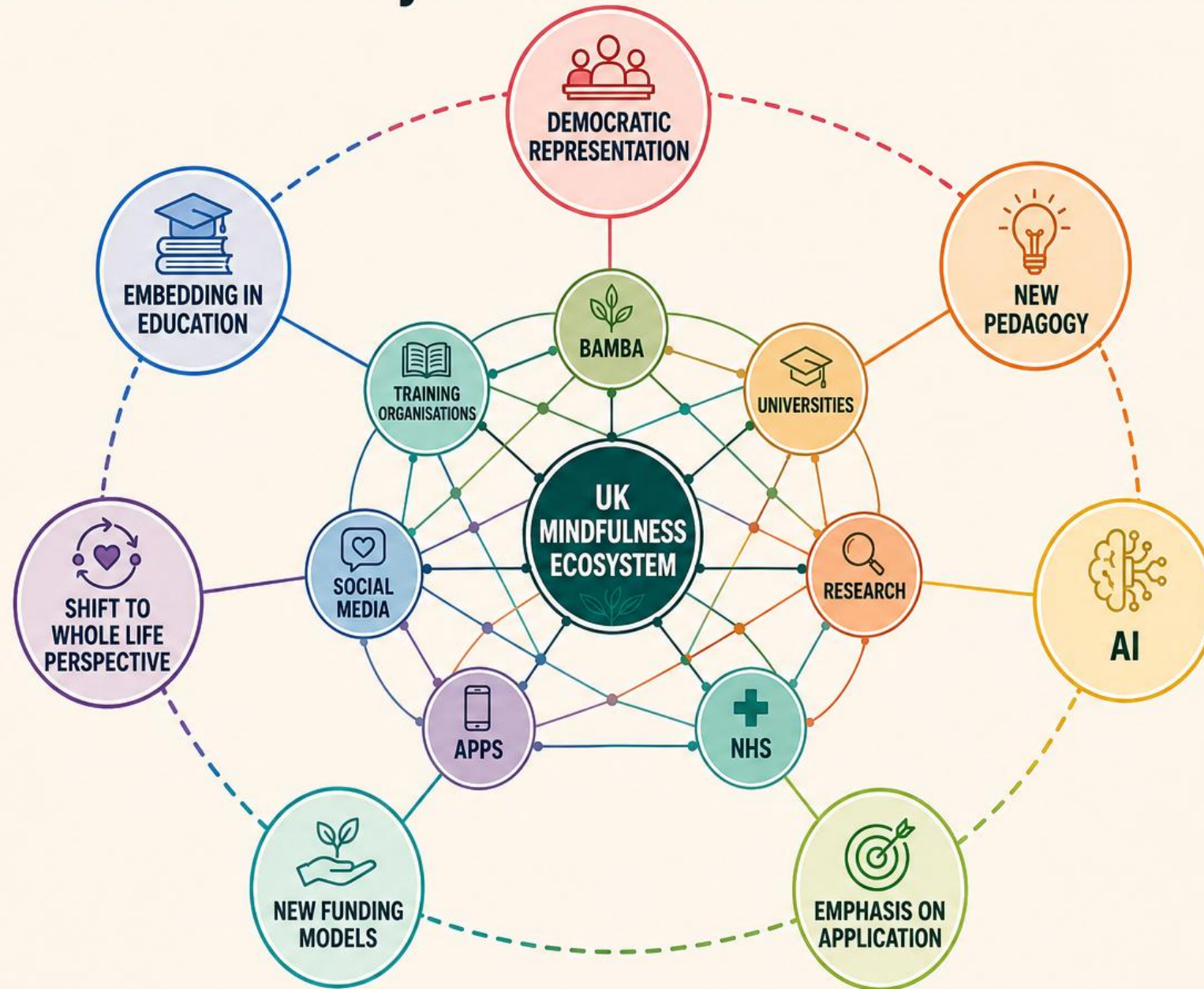
THREATS

- Lack of funding
- Disillusion among teachers

Dominant Players in the UK Mindfulness Ecosystem



Possible New Players in the UK Mindfulness EcoSystem





Some changes that would change the ecosystem:

- Widen our perspective on mindfulness and understand more broadly the interacting influences
- Move to a more principles-based mode of training teachers, and empower them to adapt to contexts
- More funding directed at application rather than research
- A whole life perspective on mindfulness, with support for continuing practice, and embedding in education / lifelong learning
- A democratic representation of teachers and practitioners
- A unified presentation to the public (Expedia for Mindfulness?) that facilitates informed choice and eases access

Small changes can have huge impacts, and movement on any one of these can cause changes to ripple through the ecosystem.

What might be a better way of presenting mindfulness to the public?

The Mindfulness Restaurant

What are you looking for?

- Mindfulness Menu
- Calm
 - Clarity
 - Self-compassion
 - Connection
 - Everyday awareness

The Mindful Chef



It's big and
complicated!

What do you think?