Imagine a team of actors trying to make a movie without a director, cinematographers, editors, makeup artists, stunt people, caterers, cleaners. A variety of skills and talents is needed for an effective team to produce a creative result. The best teams are not those in which everyone thinks the same way, works in the same way. In fact the most effective teams combine a variety of skills, attitudes and personal behaviours.

BUT - in group work this variety has the potential to drive you crazy. What about:

- people who want to get bogged down in detail when we want to get the task done?
- people who want to find out what you had for breakfast when you want to focus on the task?
- people who are totally blunt and don’t seem to care about your feelings?
- people who can only see the end point when there are a million possibilities?

"Right, let's get this done"
"No way – let's make sure everyone has had their say before we move on"

One way to look at the advantages of variety is to talk about people’s behavioural styles. For example a person in your group may always be focusing on the task (“right, let’s get this done”) while another might appear to be focussing on the people in the group (“let’s make sure everyone has had their say before we move on”).

Both have a key role to play in making sure the group works well and gets the job done. These are not people types – these people might act quite differently in a different situation. The important thing is to recognise the variety of the people in your group and make sure everyone has their say.

Another way to look at the advantages of variety is by considering two types of creative thinking:

- convergent thinking (e.g. brainstorm all the applications you can think of for this principle) and
- divergent thinking (e.g., choose the most effective application and explain the theory behind it).

Both kinds of thinking are needed in creative problem solving groups. Divergent thinking is a great asset when you are starting out - trying to work out what the possibilities are. Convergent thinking is great when you are trying to focus and come to a conclusion. Most people can do both, however, some people are stronger in one style. People who are good at divergent thinking are a great strength early on, and those who are good at convergent thinking are a great asset towards the end.

So have a chat with your group members about what kinds of skills, talents, personal approaches they bring to the group and consider the ways you will value them and deal with things that annoy you. Perhaps people can choose to take on group roles that they might enjoy. Try out a few useful phrases:

"Is this the right time for a brainstorm?"
"Let's try to focus on the issue now."
"How about we try to get as many ideas up as possible first?"
"It would be good to make sure everyone has had a chance to say something."