



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 44: RANDAL PINKETT – DATA DRIVEN DEI (BUT FOR REAL)

Phil Wagner

Hello from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes to Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real human lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. We can't really have a conversation about DEI without acknowledging that so many DEI efforts, so many DEI programs, so many DEI initiatives they fail. But why do so many DEI programs fail despite our leaders' best intentions? Well, our guest today has some great insight. He says any effort to mitigate bias and grow inclusivity within an organization has to begin with its people. At the end of the day, organizations don't change. People change. Dr. Randal Pinkett is an entrepreneur, innovator, and DEI expert. He's the co-founder, chairman, and CEO of BCT Partners, a global research, training, and data analytics firm whose mission is to provide insights about diverse people that lead to equity. Dr. Pinkett has been a successful entrepreneur for over 20 years. He was the founder of four previously successful companies and is currently the co-founder, chairman, and CEO of his fifth venture, BCT Partners. Dr. Pinkett was also the first and only African American to win the top honor on the hit reality television show season four of The Apprentice, which, if you've watched that season, you know there's some DEI lessons baked into that season as well. I want to go ahead and note that if you're a William & Mary student, you can find all of Dr. Pinkett's work in Swem libraries and online, including an audiobook format. You've likely been recommended some blackfaces in high places. Black faces in white places are excellent resources. As is his newest work, Data Driven DEI. The tools and metrics you need to measure, analyze, and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Pinkett, thank you so much for joining us today. Truly an honor to welcome you on our podcast.

Randal Pinkett

Thank you for having me on the podcast, Phil. I'm excited to be here, and I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Phil Wagner

All right, so let's talk about Data Driven DEI. We've talked a lot about data-driven efforts on this podcast, but there's a lot of confusion. What does that even mean? What data? What do I measure? Talk to us a little bit about that work and the significance of data in DEI efforts.

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. There's the old adage: If it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed. And I say old adage, it's been floating around for quite some time now, but the reason why it's been floating around is because there's some truth to it. Interestingly, in my experience, and you mentioned I've been in business now for more than three decades, and I've been in DEI for more than two-three decades. When I'm talking with leaders, they say we have to measure and set a goal for marketing. We have to measure and set a goal for sales. We have to measure and set a goal for fundraising. We have to measure and set a goal for student enrollment. I mean, the list just goes on and on and on. And then we get to DEI. They say, what do you need? What do you mean you want to set a goal? Oh, it's a quota. It's not rigorous enough. Oh, it's too loosey-goosey. Oh, it's too soft. And I'm like, Why are we even having this conversation? Why is DEI any different? Why should it be any different? And I will argue it is not any different than any of the other disciplines that I mentioned a moment ago. And part of that could be the maturity of DEI coming into its own and being recognized. But part of it is, quite frankly, people making excuses. This is what it boils down to is an unwillingness or a lack of commitment and a lack of wanting to be held accountable. Let's keep it real to meeting diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. And I think it is arguably more the latter than it is the former. When we talk about data-driven DEI, what we're talking about is meeting essentially five criteria. Let me break those down for you. The first is making sure that you use data in order to set objectives with measurable goals. Second is making sure that you have data to perform an assessment that establishes a profile and a baseline. Third is leveraging promising and proven practices based on the experience of expert practitioners and those with lived experiences. Next is using data to gauge progress, evaluate results, demonstrate impact, and engender accountability. When you meet those criteria, you have a data-driven approach to DEI.

Phil Wagner

So you say in this work that any effort to mitigate bias and grow inclusivity has to begin with people. And I teach in the soft space, and I think the people part of the enterprise and then the technical data part of the enterprise those are often pitted against each other. What do you mean when you say this has to begin with people, and how does that relate to this data-driven approach?

Randal Pinkett

That was a great question, Phil, and you cited one of my favorite excerpts from the book, which is that organizations do not change. People change. Which means any effort for more diverse relationships, more inclusive behaviors, more equitable practices has to begin with people, which means it must begin within you, within me, within who's listening to us right

now. Which means there has to be some personal transformation. If there is no personal transformation, then there is no transformation, be it organizational or otherwise. So a data-driven approach, interestingly, begins with how do you use data to know where you are in your journey, to measure your preferences or your biases, your competencies, or what you do well. How do you set measurable goals? How do you gauge progress against your strategies, and how do you evaluate your results, your impact, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? If we're not data-driven, nothing is data-driven.

Phil Wagner

So when it comes to DEI, you present sort of the classic business case and also a personal case. And I think a lot of the conversation we've had thus far takes us to this place where we start to dismantle each of those a little bit more. Can you tell us a little bit more about some of the specific business benefits?

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. And there has been a ton of research on this topic and very convincing, dare I say, evidence of the business case. The value of diversity, equity, and inclusion for businesses, organizations, universities, nonprofits, et cetera. You win the competition for talent. That is, you out-recruit and out-retain the competition. You strengthen your customer orientation. Whoever your customer is, you better understand them, you better service them, you better support them. Studies have shown you increase employee trust, retention, engagement, satisfaction, and performance. You improve decision-making and foster innovation. Research shows that diverse teams take longer to make decisions, but they make better decisions. Some really great recent work on diverse juries, reaching better verdicts in the courtroom, enhancing your organization's image, brand, and reputation. Great work out of the UK that has shown that in the minds and the eyes of consumers, your social practices are very closely aligned with your brand and your image and your reputation. And then lastly, great work by McKinsey that's done several studies that has found that when you get this right, it goes directly to the bottom line, that there are financial returns that outperform the competition when you are more embracing of diversity, equity, and inclusion. So, the evidence, again, has been clear and compelling of the value of the business case for DEI.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, we often cite that in our curricular frameworks for this here as well. I'm wondering, as a DEI professional, how do you navigate the social tides of right here and right now? We know there is a business case for teams outcomes, for profit outcomes, for brand identity outcomes. There's also a lot of pushback in this space right now. Looking at recent case studies, you've got your Targets and your Bud Lights who took a stand on LGBTQ rights and kind of had a loud stakeholder group, though minority come in and rattle. I took my kids to see the new *The Little Mermaid*, which is fantastic, a wonderful retelling, but face backlash simply because Disney chose to cast a black actress. Do you see the business case changing as these loud, though minority stakeholder groups kind of rattle, or do you think this is just an outlier group and that there still will consistently be a business case for this? I asked that a little bit tongue in

cheek. Of course, we know that case will always be there, but how do we navigate this kind of rocky moment?

Randal Pinkett

Another great question, Phil, and I agree. I don't see the business case changing. So, I echo your closing comments. But we are in an era of what some describe, and I've grown fond of this word of reversion, which is organized resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion. And it is deeply troubling. I maintain faith, dare I say hope, that the underlying principles of DEI we all still share. Now, maybe I sound idealistic, but I hope I'm not. That is my talk about dignity and, respect, and fairness. I dare you to have resistance to that. I dare you. But somehow, the language of diversity, equity, and inclusion has been co-opted. It's been turned on its head, ironically, to mean divisiveness, that we're rewriting history, that we are closing off ideas that open us up to different ways of thinking. But that's exactly the opposite of what diversity, equity, and inclusion represents. So whether it means we have to change the language, not the business case, change the articulation of the principles, not the business case, I want to believe, I have to believe, I fundamentally believe there's something deeper that we all can rally around that is in the spirit of dignity, fairness, and respect. Because if not, Phil, we are really in trouble.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I'm with you, and I share your conviction, and I share your hope and optimism. And I think that's why building tools for our toolkits right here and right now, to do this work well, because, again, you look at the DEI industrial complex, we have dropped the ball along the way, we have been messy along the way. This is a reminder to get our act together. And that's what I love about your work: is very rigorous methodology to tell us exactly how to do that. And I think your work answers that question because you also break down the personal and professional benefits at an individual level for DEI. And I think that can carry and sustain this greater change-making we're talking about. Can you unpack that for us a little bit more some of the personal and professional benefits we get by engaging in this space?

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. And what's interesting is you could go to almost any organization's website, and you could likely, notwithstanding the polarization of DEI, but you could likely find a statement of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ask someone what is the case for why they should care about diversity, equity, and inclusion. And they would be less likely to have an immediate answer to that question. In fact, I asked a room full of DEI professionals at a Fortune 500 corporation, what do you see as the personal case? And the very first response I got was it helps my organization. That's not what I asked. I asked you to be selfish. What's in it for you? The most popular radio station on the planet is WIFM. What's in it for me? So I ask, what's in it for you? Well, here's what the research tells us. The research tells us that you can expect enhanced personal growth. You can expect this one blows me away. Improved health and wellness. That is, a study found that there is lower risk of mortality, less cognitive decline, and less physical decline when you have more diverse relationships, when you have more

inclusive behaviors, and when you embrace more equitable practices. It enhances your diversity of thought. It enhances your learning and performance at school and at work. It expands your network of relationships. It increases your range of opportunities. And last but not least, for those of you who are purely utilitarian, it leads to more positive evaluations on your job, earlier performances, higher compensation when you embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, this has worked for all of us, and there's benefits for all of us. I have reaped those benefits. I have seen students reap those benefits. I've then seen our corporate partners reap those benefits. So I'm very much picking up what you're putting down. So, let's talk a little bit about how to get there because you have to put in the work to actually achieve those benefits. You got to sow the seed to reap the results. In data-driven DEI, you outline a very detailed five-step approach to creating measurable and impactful DEI initiatives. That first step it involves an assessment. You got to step back and figure out what's really going on with my current reality. Talk to us about that assessment and why it's so critical in this process.

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. So, it is a five-step process. It actually has a step zero, which is a little off for those purists with numbers. But step zero is all off alliteration of the letter I. So, the first step is DEI incentives. Clarifying why this matters to you, which gets back to what we just discussed, the business case and the personal case. Step one is DEI inventory, conducting an assessment. And therein, for people, you want to assess your preferences and your competencies. Your preferences are the things you're naturally inclined to think or do. Your competencies are the things that you're naturally able to do. It's important to know your preferences because it also gives you insight to your blind spots. If I have a preference for being around men, I might have a blind spot for evaluating women. My competencies is a value judgment. What do you do well, and what do you not do well? Am I good at inclusive leadership? Am I good at navigating and bridging difference? If not, I need to know that. So, if I don't know where I am, I can never know where I'm going. So step one is DEI inventory, and for an organization, it's the four P's. You want to assess your people, your practices, your policies, and your performance. Benchmark your performance. If you can cover those four bases: people, policy, practices, and performance, then you've conducted a comprehensive DEI inventory. That's step one.

Phil Wagner

All right, so you got step one. I know where I'm at. I've got step zero locked in place. I know my why. I know my North Star. I know what's guiding me. The next step is programming that into my GPS. Right. I need to determine where it is that I want to go how I'll know if I've actually arrived. I don't know that we ever fully arrive there. It's always a journey. Can you give us some examples of those effective objectives and goals so we're not just shooting into the wind, but we're very strategic and pointed where we want to go?

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. And you mentioned earlier how sometimes, not in your words but mine kind of qualitative and quantitative can be at odds with each other. I guess they can bump heads. Well, the beauty of the framework I've offered in the book is it's based on an amalgam of quantitative and qualitative. It's the OGSM model, which stands for objectives, goals, strategies, and measures. I'll start with the OG. I know that sounds colloquial, starting with the OG. But the OG is objectives and goals. Objectives is a qualitative statement of what you want to accomplish, plain and simple language. I want to be a more inclusive leader. I want to strengthen my organization's culture and climate, to be more embracing of members of the LGBTQIA community. That's qualitative. Quantitative is the goal. How are you going to know you've accomplished the objective? Which means if it is more inclusive behaviors, I need an assessment that assesses my inclusive behaviors. It might produce an index on a scale of six. You're at a four. Okay, well, then, my goal is to go from a four to a five in twelve months. I'll readminister that assessment. If it's an organization and its culture and climate, I could produce an inclusive culture composite score out of 100. We score at an 82. So, over the next six months, I want to move that needle from an 82 to a 92. And there is my objective qualitative, and my goal quantitative.

Phil Wagner

I'm taking notes here because I'm like, I got to teach from this tonight. This is great. This is fantastic. And I'm reminded we've had another conversation recently on the podcast where we talk about the importance of measurement but also ensuring that measurement doesn't become a naive proxy for progress. And what I love about your framework is that you give us a great way to take what we measure, to take that data and actually do something with it. So once you've got your objectives and your goals locked in place, tell us the next step.

Randal Pinkett

So, the next step is one of my favorites. It's DEI insights. Again, alliteration on the letter I. DEI insights says before you decide what you're going to do, pause for the cause and ask the question, what worked for somebody else? Or what worked for another organization? And in fact, if you go to the data-driven DEI website at datadrivendei.com, I could not believe it was still available when I got it. But datadrivendei.com, you'll find best practices, proven practices, promising practices, and free tools and templates and, case studies, and other resources to scaffold your journey. But the point here is, do not reinvent the wheel. There's been lots of research about how employee resource groups work about how people are using virtual reality. There's a series called Through My Eyes, how people are using mobile apps like The Inclusion Habit, how people are using machine learning, like precision analytics that have been proven to make a difference for moving behavior, moving culture, moving climate, improving skills and abilities, et cetera. So DEI insight says, pause for the cause. Look to see what's worked for somebody else, some other organization, some other person that it might inform doesn't define what you do, but it informs what you do.

Phil Wagner

And going back to our earlier conversation here, do you have concerns that as we look to organizations who have been maybe front runners and upholding the banner of DEI inclusive policies, forward-facing public communication on their commitments, the Targets of the world that now maybe younger, less mature, less established companies look and say, ha. I can see now what doesn't work what didn't work. And I'm going to not be so intellectually brave. Do you have any concerns about, again, the loudness of the social moment?

Randal Pinkett

Well, you make a great point. Looking to what works also prompts you to look to what doesn't work. And it's a constantly evolving learning curve for all of us in this space, the DEI industrial complex. We are constantly evolving and strengthening our knowledge base around what does and doesn't work. And one size doesn't fit all. What may have worked or not worked for Target doesn't define what you do, but you can learn from their experience. Why, we'll get back to this when we get to step five. I'm such a big fan of storytelling, so when we tell stories, it gives us the ability to not just inspire but also to inform.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, that's good. So, do you want to talk about stories? I think my next question is how can people and organizations determine if their DEI initiatives have been effective. There's some storytelling baked in there, but I'll allow you to kind of lead. Sorry, I got us a little bit off track from our five-step model. Our nice, neat conversation here.

Randal Pinkett

No, it's cool. No, I have an entire section on DEI data storytelling. How do you tell an effective, inspiring, informative story that uses data? But when I say that to people, they're like, oh, you're talking about charts and tables. Well, maybe. But quite frankly, if I am to tell you my story of leaving America to go to England and experiencing culture clash, and my mom told me when I told her I don't like the food, she said, well, son, I could teach you how to cook soul food, but I got a better idea. What's that, mom? Ask someone to teach you a dish from their country when you go back. And I learned how to cook Chinese food from somebody from China and Caribbean food from somebody from Jamaica. And so now I have this eclectic culinary repertoire that not only allowed me to put weight back on I had lost but also gave me insight to different cultures that now, as an entrepreneur, when I do business globally, I have a little bit insight of who's sitting across the table from me. Now, guess what? There was a whole lot of data in there. No numbers, no charts, qualitative data. I engaged with people. I had a conversation with my mother. I explored. I gave you three different countries that I explored. So, all of that is a part of what is storytelling. And the beauty, again, is that it inspires, but it also informs. And when we tell our stories, two beautiful things happen. We're able to share our lived experience, but we also find our voice. And for those of us who may not be accustomed to this DEI journey, I'm an old-school executive. I can talk about manufacturing and, marketing and sales, but I don't talk about DEI. Well, guess what? Tell your story. You've just stepped into the DEI space.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. I love that. We talk a lot about storytelling on this podcast. There's a functional role of storytelling even in the broader theoretical constructs that ground DEI work. So, absolutely. Speaking to very important spaces and places in your work, you tell us, maybe I should say you warn us that there's no stopping point here, right? That this is a constantly evolving, never-ending, iterative, continuous cycle. Unpack that cycle for us and maybe help disarm that because that might seem like, okay, then I'm not even going to get into this work because I'm goal-oriented. I want to get somewhere, and you're telling me I can't get anywhere. We do get someplace, but there's a value to staying in that cycle, that process of continuous improvement. Can you unpack that a little bit more for us?

Randal Pinkett

Absolutely. So, I'll round out the five steps in answering the question. Step four, finally, is DEI initiatives. What are you going to do? But notice that that's step four. What are you going to do? And here we're talking about the S and the M of OG SM. Again, OG objectives and goals. SM strategies and measures. Strategies are what specific steps will you take? I'm going to read a book. I'll listen to a podcast. Maybe the Diversity Goes to Work podcast. I might take a course, maybe a course that's available in the campus catalog. I might go to the library. Oh, I'm just offering up some wonderful ideas here. Or I might read an article online or watch a movie or travel someplace, or have a courageous conversation over lunch, but that is a strategy. A measure is very simple and let me be distinctive between outputs and outcomes. An outcome is a final result. We mentioned earlier, I want to have more inclusive behaviors. I want to strengthen my culture and climate. That's an outcome. An output is a measure of activity. Well, how many classes did you take? How many books did you read? How many videos did you watch? How many times did you go to the library? Those are not final results, folks. Going to the library, reading the book, watching the video is not a final result. That's an output. It's a measure of activity. And the S and the M measure your activity, which means you're likely making progress toward the goal. Last thing I'll say to your question is, yeah, it's a cycle. Because step five is DEI impact, gauge progress, measure results, evaluate course correct, the cycle continues. But the good news is, once you've been through the cycle, you've learned, you've grown, you're a better person, you're more inclusive. But there's also still areas for improvement. Just like life is a journey, DEI is a data-driven journey, not a destination.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I love it. I love it. Again, big fan of your work, as are our students. I think Blackfaces in High Places is just an excellent read. I love data-driven DEI, and let's talk about supporting this work. So, if I'm a listener, I'm going to go out and grab a copy of this book. I already know it. I feel it. I can sense the energy in this conversation. I want to go read your work. What's it going to do for me? Does it help me enhance my own leadership? Is it personally directed? Does it help me figure out how to build a better organization? What's it going to help me do?

Randal Pinkett

The benefits are both personal and professional, and I'll start with the personal. It's going to make you a better friend, a better significant other, more empathic, better of understanding people, leading people, working alongside people, supporting others, civic engagement. It's going to bring all those personal benefits. But then, professionally, it's going to help you perform better in school, at work, on your job, to be able to navigate and lead people who are different than you. I argue that being an inclusive leader is the signature trait of leadership in the 21st century. In our global world, in our diverse world, in our polarized world. I would argue that it's not enough to get outside of your comfort zone to engage with people different than you. What we need today is people who can bridge across difference, who can bring Democrats and Republicans together, who can bring immigrants, the native-born, together, who can bring black and white and brown and yellow and the list goes on together, who can bring heterosexual LGBTQIA together. Like we need to be bridges for a society that right now is becoming frayed at the fabric that once constituted that society, so it'll bring all of those things to you, and more beautifully, it'll bring all of that to our society as well.

Phil Wagner

I love it. Final question for you is tell our listeners how they can support you. Of course, go grab copies of your work, but where can they follow you? How can they continue to support your thought leadership and the important work that you're doing in this space?

Randal Pinkett

Thank you, Phil. So I can be found on all social media platforms at Randal Pinkett, Randall with one L. That's Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. You can learn more about me at randalpinkett.com. Again, Randal, with one L and you can go to the Data-Driven DEI website, where, again, there's free tools, templates, resources, best practices, and case studies on data-driven approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion at datadrivendei.com.

Phil Wagner

There you have it. Data Driven DEI out now. Please go grab a copy. Support the wonderful work of Dr. Randal Pinkett. Thank you so much, Dr. Pinkett, for joining us today. Again, incredible conversation. Big fan of the work you do, and we look forward to continuing to share that work with our students, our listeners, and everyone we come into contact with.

Randal Pinkett

Thank you, Phil. Appreciate you, appreciate your voice.

Phil Wagner

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