



# DECRYPTING THE HRM ASPECTS OF THE WAGNER GROUP: AN EARLY BIRD REVIEW

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**Abstract:** The name of the Wagner Private Military Company has been flashing all over the media and news channels for the past year because of their discreet way of holding operations. The mere existence of the company came to light during the Donbas War in Ukraine which took place over a brief period from 2014-2015. The Wagner group played a prominent role in The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. The reasons why the Wagner Private Military Company has grown to fame have been elaborated in the current paper, including its uncommon ways of recruiting and training its personnel. The functioning of the company is one of its kind and the paper highlights the Human Resource Management practices applied by the Wagner group which makes it different from other companies.

**Purpose of study:** The paper aims to analyze the uses of various aspects of HRM and its integration by a PMC in The Russian Federation. Our purpose is to configure all the elements of the Wagner Group that pertain to policies and principles followed under the practice of human resource management and at the same time emphasize its actions that were opposed to the subject of HRM.

**Findings:** The backlash of the Wagner PMC after the Russia-Ukraine war led to some changes in its policies, which included an increment in the recruitment, training, and compensation policies.

**Keywords:** PMC (Private Military Company), Human Resource Planning, Workforce, Workload, Recruitment, Training.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which has been going on for more than a year, and shows no signs of stopping, apart from the Russian military, the role of PMCs (private military companies) has been significant, with the most prominent and effective one being the Wagner group which had deployed its forces in the Crimea region of Ukraine.

Apart from the Russia-Ukraine war, the Wagner Group has its troops deployed in many other countries, participating in various activities. Their forces have been hired to guard mines in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan. The government of Mali uses the support of the group to combat Islamic militant groups. Wagner's mercenaries have also been in Syria since 2015, fighting alongside pro-government forces and guarding oilfields. The current paper focuses on scrutinizing the effectiveness of Human Resource Management in helping the Wagner Group achieve its objectives.

## II. OBJECTIVES

For several years now, the Wagner group has acted as a hidden ace for the Russian government. They have been responsible for selecting the most competent soldiers and maintaining the company's global reputation, all to ensure its continued success. This study aims to shed light on the staffing process employed by the Wagner PMC, highlighting the various uses and misuses of HRM. The paper focuses on the problematic application of these practices by the Wagner group and their unsuccessful attempts to find solutions.

## III. KEY CHALLENGES

The Wagner Group has faced numerous problems in executing its plans and achieving its objectives. Some of the issues include the involvement of the group in various military operations in other countries. The ordinary citizens of Russia have been uninterested in the employment opportunities offered by the group, despite the various incentives offered by them. As a result, the group had to turn to other countries and expand their recruitment operations, including prisoners from Russia.

Since the group has been involved in various conflicts in Ukraine and in other countries like Syria, Sudan, Mali and many more, it has a negative image, which has hampered the recruitment process due to which it had to resort to means of recruitment other than the traditional methods which had now become outdated. After the failed mutiny in Russia in June 2023, the group had to move out of the country, their leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin had to move to Belarus and the group had to shift their training camps there.

#### IV. DISCUSSION: PLANNING AND ANALYSIS

##### 4.1 HR Planning

Human resource planning is said to be a technique that is used by organisations to make sure that it recruits the required number and correct type of personnel, at the correct place, at the correct time, with the ability to achieve the goals by effectively using minimum resources.

In important flashpoints around the world, such as Ukraine, Syria, and Libya, the Wagner Group contributed targeting intelligence, training, logistical support, infrastructure security, and backstop for proxy militias and paramilitary groups.

Keeping in mind these requirements of the job and the shortage of employees, the age limit was reduced from 25 (in 2018) to 22 (in 2023) and recruitment and training were planned accordingly.

##### 4.2 Job description

The contract that prospective members of the organisation are required to sign before joining lists the obligations that employees are expected to fulfill and the duties that they are expected to take on. A rigorous secrecy policy is among the terms and conditions that are mentioned in this document.

In the year 2014, when the Wagner Group was reportedly created, it had a workforce of 250 employees. By the end of 2022, it had a strength of 50,000.

Since traditional recruitment methods through dedicated recruitment centers no longer work, and recruitment through prisons is not effective, the Wagner group has now turned to digital modes viz., online advertisements through Twitter (Now X) and Facebook (which is owned by Meta).

These ads have been released in foreign languages like English and French which signifies the disinterest of Russians in joining the group and the motive of expansion from the group's perspective.

#### V. DISCUSSION: RECRUITMENT TECHNIQUES

The Wagner group had a unique way of selecting their desired bunch of personnel and this was all because of their desire to expand and grow. They have evolved into a network of businesses and mercenaries over the years. If looked upon the distinctive recruitment techniques used by the Wagner group officials, the interrelatedness can be highlighted between these techniques and the talent hiring processes mentioned in human resource management. Some of their techniques are mentioned in Figure 1.

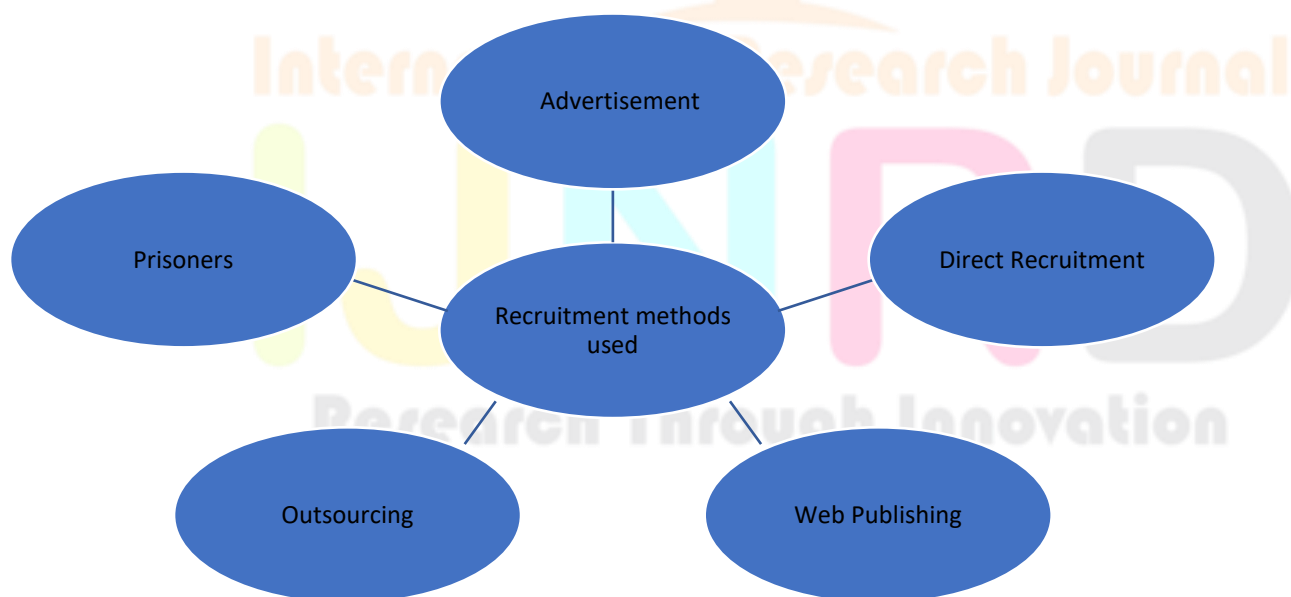


Figure 1: Recruitment techniques

##### 5.1 Advertisement

Advertisement is one of the most popular ways of luring applicants spread across a large area in a short span of time. The most common way of advertising is through the use of print media. Instead of using television and newspapers, the Wagner group decided to hang large billboards in areas such as Moscow. One such billboard in Yekaterinburg depicts the picture of three heavily armed men inviting the general public to join the Kremlin-linked military force.

## 5.2 Direct recruitment

Direct recruitment is an external source of recruitment where a representative from the organization is appointed to go on-site and recruit potential candidates directly. The benefit of such recruitment is that the role of middleman is eliminated which makes the process uncomplicated. Also, this reduced the organization's expenses as the cost of hiring fresh troops was no longer needed. In the freezing town of Murmansk, there was said to be a recruitment center that had been operative for a long time. A representative of the Wagner Center in the Komi Republic has confirmed this and says that the center opens daily until 6 in the evening. This way Wagner Group is successful in combining two of the most famous recruitment methods which are direct recruitment as well as the utilization of recruitment agency. The highlight of this particular decision of the group is that to maintain the limits of their expense they have combined both these methods and have created a separate department which acts as an agency that recruits people.

## 5.3 Web publishing

After the immense spread of the internet these days, the job hunt has taken a totally different direction. Employers and employees tend to find each other on employment-focused websites and apps. Direct recruitment and recruiting through word of mouth have been considered as some ancient methods these days. According to sources the Wagner group had been involved in fighting throughout Central America and recently faced a lot of backlash for losing more than 20,000 fighters in the drawn-out battle for the eastern Ukrainian city in Bakhmut. Consequently, they started using Facebook and Twitter to fill the positions of medics, psychologists and even drone operators to aid fighting operations in Ukraine. These ads have almost crossed 120,000 plus views on both of these social media platforms.

## 5.4 Outsourcing

Outsourcing is the process of reducing the workload and transferring the accountability to accomplish tasks and services to a third party. The Wagner group itself is a result of war outsourcing to private militants. Along with this the Nepali Gurkhas who are considered to be one of the most powerful warriors had also decided to join the Wagner group. Previously they had tried to pursue the Indian army as well to which they refused, so the Wagner group ended up dragging the Nepali Gurkhas onto their side. The Wagner group was so hellbent on expanding their workforce and maintaining their pace that they had posted employment ads in various languages such as Vietnamese, French and Spanish.

## 5.5 Prisoners

This has been one of the most unique and petrifying ways of recruiting a workforce in a very long time. Out of the many bizarre ideologies of the Wagner group, hiring prisoners has been one of the most famous ones. The United Nations stated that they were utterly shocked upon learning about the hiring of Russian prisoners serving sentences in Russian correctional facilities. They stated that the Wagner group had allegedly also recruited foreign nationals serving in the prison to expand their workforce. Some of the reports received by the UN stated that the Wagner group was keen on using scare tactics and pressurizing the prisoners to serve as fighters for them. Prigozhin, who is infamously known as "Putin's chef" and also as the controller of the Wagner private military personally flew down on a chopper to visit the inmates of the penal colony number 8, in the Tambov region. According to one inmate, Prigozhin urged fellow inmates to enroll in the military and fight in Ukraine in exchange for a reduced sentence of up to 6 months.

## VI. DISCUSSION: SELECTION AND TRAINING

### 6.1 Selection

Selection is a negative process involving choosing the most fitting candidates from the existing pool of candidates and rejecting the inept ones.

The Wagner Group has a more complex way of working which overlaps not only the steps of selection but also of recruitment. Even after adopting various methods of recruitment, the Wagner group has been dealing with the issue of shortage of employees. Advertisements state that volunteers aged 22-50 who pass a preliminary test will be selected for preparations and training.

In the year 2018, for the selection of employees to be posted in Syria, the Wagner group selected almost everyone who was 25 years old. The candidates had to pass a polygraph test. The purpose of the test was to check if the candidate worked for any special services or was cooperating with competing organizations.

After this, a consultation with a psychologist is done, who questions the candidate on his perception of the time that might be taken by him to kill an opponent and the possibility of him not killing the opponent. This is done to check the warrior skills of the candidate.

### 6.2 Training

Training is a methodical way of transmitting specialised or procedural knowledge to workers so they can improve their knowledge and abilities for carrying out a particular task. A newly appointed mercenary usually has to go through a month of training, during which they would be required to work on developing the abilities needed to carry out combat operations.

Strategic thinking, performance, teamwork and coordination are some of the areas in which recruits are trained as the group is generally assigned tasks such as sneak attacks, reconnaissance, intelligence-gathering, and targeted attacks on hostile leadership.

As in the case of any other organization, even in the Wagner Group, training is a continuous learning process wherein attributes such as commitment, result orientation, honesty and integrity are focused upon in day-to-day working.

In Mol'kino, Krasnodar region, Russia, the Wagner group managed two camps in close proximity of the 10th Special Mission Brigade of GRU Spetsnaz, where training for particular operations was rigorously carried out with the assistance of Russian military and intelligence services.

The typical training term for the Wagner group is assumed to be for a month, within which the employee receives instructions with the goal of enhancing the competencies required to carry out combat operations.

Wagner Group training camps are now located in Belarus following their revolt in June 2023.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Wagner Group has been the most effective PMC amongst all the Russian PMCs. This has been possible due to the proper utilization of the human resources available to them, which depicts the importance of human resource management for any organization.

From the point the employees are hired to the point when they leave the organization, all the stages comprise various aspects of HRM. Since the policies of the organization are made clear to the employees from the very beginning, the employees are well aware of what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it.

It has been made very clear that the employees were and will always be the essence of the Wagner group. Their actions have always led them to victory if the outcome dealt with improving their employee's welfare. Wagner PMC is in a class by itself because of its determination to shape out the best in every employee, from establishing training camps to providing compensation benefits. Their downfall was the result of them neglecting their human resources and focusing on profit maximization and control over territories.

Even though the topic of the Wagner group has been controversial due to its vicious ways of luring people to work under them, their impact will always last forever.

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