Case description

You are John Taylor, head of a cross-functional team at NextGen Tech, a mid-sized technology startup focused on developing AI-powered industrial solutions. The company is launching several new product initiatives, and you need to hire a Program Manager to coordinate multiple strategic projects across engineering, product, and operations teams, ensuring successful delivery of key milestones.

The Program Manager will:

- Oversee and coordinate multi-team projects
- Track and manage project timelines, budgets, and technical deliverables
- Engage and manage external vendors, cloud providers, and development partners
- Ensure adherence to quality, security, and compliance standards
- Regularly report progress to the executive team and investors

Decision Task

You will review three shortlisted candidates for the Program Manager role. Based on their profiles, select the candidate you believe is the best fit. Provide a brief (1–3 sentence) justification for your choice.

The challenge is that the hiring budget is limited, and each candidate brings different strengths, areas for development, and compensation expectations. The decision must consider:

- Stakeholder goals (engineering, product, operations, executives)
- Gains each candidate can contribute
- Pains (potential challenges or limitations)
- Resources required (salary, training, internal support)

Candidates

Background: 12 years leading technology programs and operational processes in mid-sized tech firms; managed complex software deployments and vendor contracts.
Education: B.Eng. in Computer Engineering; Lean Six Sigma Black Belt.
Strengths: Deep technical knowledge in software project delivery, infrastructure management, and vendor negotiation; strong track record reducing operational risks.
Development Areas: Primarily focused on operations; less experience driving cross-functional product innovation; prefers established processes over experimental approaches.
Salary Expectation: €3,000/month (negotiable with performance-based bonus)

Maria Costa

Background: 7 years coordinating software development, product operations, and supply chain integration for tech hardware and software projects.
Education: B.A. in Business Administration; PMP certification.
Strengths: Strong stakeholder management, excellent communication, experienced at bridging engineering, product, and operations teams; adaptable to changing priorities.
Development Areas: Moderate depth in technical engineering and cloud infrastructure; will require targeted onboarding in company-specific systems and processes.
Salary Expectation: €2,400/month + modest bonus tied to project milestones.

Daniel Kurt

Background: 4 years as a project coordinator in a robotics startup and AI lab; led automation, data tracking, and proof-of-concept pilot projects.
Education: M.Sc. in Project Management; strong data analysis skills (Python, R).
Strengths: Highly adaptable, skilled at using data to optimize workflows, creative problem solver; comfortable introducing new technology and automation solutions.
Development Areas: Limited experience managing large teams or high-stakes vendor contracts; will require mentoring initially.
Salary Expectation: €1,750/month , with growth linked to performance reviews

Aisha Khan