

Operations Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Operations manager interviews test two things side by side: whether you can run people and rosters day to day, and whether you can hold a budget and a supplier relationship together under pressure. Expect a mix of behavioural questions about past decisions, scenario questions that test judgement in the moment, and some direct questions about how you use budgeting and reporting tools.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about specific past situations, usually around process improvement, staff conflict or supplier problems, looking for evidence of what you actually did.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical operational problems, such as a missed supplier deadline or a declining service level, testing how you'd diagnose and respond under time pressure.
- **Process walkthrough:** Direct questions about how you run a recurring operational task, such as budget tracking, expecting a step-by-step answer rather than a story.
- **Technical / tools:** Questions about ERP systems, Excel or Power BI, checking that your reporting and data skills match what the role actually needs day to day.

Most operations manager interviews start with a phone or video screen focused on your current scope, team size and budget responsibility. The main interview is usually a panel with the hiring manager and someone from finance or HR, moving from behavioural questions into scenario-based ones, sometimes with a short case or numbers exercise. Larger organisations often add a site visit or a second-round meeting with the team you'd be managing before reference checks.]

1. Walk me through how you manage an operational budget from month to month.

Why they ask

Budgeting and forecasting is a core part of the role, and interviewers want to know you have a repeatable method rather than a one-off story.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walkthrough: how you set the baseline, how often you review actuals against forecast, what triggers a variance conversation, and how you report up.

Example answer

"I set the budget at the start of the period against agreed volumes, then review actuals weekly rather than waiting for month-end so surprises show up early. If a line is tracking more than a small margin off forecast, I dig into whether it's a timing issue or a real cost problem before raising it. I keep the reporting in a format finance can pull straight into their own consolidation, usually Excel or an export from our ERP system, and I flag risks to my manager before they show up as a surprise in the monthly numbers."

2. Tell me about a time you improved a process that was costing the business time or money.

Why they ask

Process improvement is one of the role's core tasks, and this checks whether you can spot a problem and see a fix through rather than just identify it.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the specific process problem, the task you took on, the action you took to fix it, and the result.

Example answer

"One of our teams had a handover step between shifts that regularly caused delays, because the outgoing shift logged issues in one system and the incoming shift checked a different one. I mapped the handover, found the gap, and moved both teams onto a single shared log with a five-minute standup to walk through open items. It cut the number of jobs that slipped between shifts and meant the incoming team started their day with a clear picture instead of chasing information."

3. One of your key suppliers has just told you they can't meet a delivery deadline that affects a client commitment. What do you do?

Why they ask

Supplier and contract management is a named responsibility, and this tests judgement under time pressure rather than knowledge of a textbook process.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement-under-pressure response: what you'd check first, who you'd involve, how you'd manage the client side, and how you'd stop it happening again.

Example answer

"First I'd get the supplier on the phone to understand exactly what's slipping and by how much, rather than reacting to the headline. Then I'd look at what options exist internally, whether we can substitute stock, adjust the sequence of work, or absorb the delay without the client noticing. I'd flag it to whoever owns the client relationship early so there are no surprises on their end, and afterwards I'd review the contract terms with the supplier to see whether this is a one-off or a pattern worth renegotiating."

4. How do you use tools like Power BI or your ERP system to track operational performance?

Why they ask

The role list names ERP systems, Excel and Power BI specifically, so interviewers want to confirm your reporting skills match the tools they actually use.

How to structure your answer

Answer directly and practically: name the tools you use, what you track in them, and what decision each report actually feeds.

Example answer

"I pull most of my raw data out of the ERP system, whether that's staffing hours, order volumes or supplier lead times, and build dashboards in Power BI so the team can see service level and cost trends without waiting for a monthly report. Excel is still where I do the messier ad hoc analysis, like modelling a roster change before I commit to it. The point isn't the dashboard itself, it's that it lets me have the budget or performance conversation with actual numbers instead of a gut feel."

5. Tell me about a time you had to manage a rostering or staffing conflict between team members.

Why they ask

Managing teams, rosters and performance is a core task, and this checks how you handle the people side, not just the operational logistics.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: the specific conflict, your role in resolving it, the action you took, and how it settled.

Example answer

"Two senior staff both wanted the same block of leave over a period we knew would be short-staffed. Rather than just picking one, I looked at what each of them actually needed the time for and found a way to split the block so both got most of what they wanted, backed by a temporary shift swap with another team member. It meant neither of them felt overruled, and we still covered the roster gap"

without resorting to overtime.”

6. How would you approach a service level that's been declining for three months running?

Why they ask

This tests whether you diagnose a problem properly before acting, which matters given the role owns both delivery and cost outcomes.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a diagnose, plan, execute structure: how you'd investigate the cause, what you'd change, and how you'd confirm it worked.

Example answer

“I'd start by pulling the data apart rather than assuming a single cause, checking whether the drop is consistent across the team or concentrated in one shift, one supplier or one part of the process. Once I had a real cause, whether that's a staffing gap, a supplier issue or a process step that's slower than it used to be, I'd make one change at a time so I could actually tell what worked. Then I'd track the same metric weekly for the next month to confirm it's holding, not just a one-week bounce.”