

Complete Night-Before Prep Guide — Razorpay COO Interview

Rahul Kothari | March 11, 2026 | 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Face-to-Face

PART 1: OPENING PITCH (90 seconds — practice 5–6 times out loud)

When Rahul says: “Tell me about yourself / what drew you to Razorpay?”

“Thank you, Rahul. I have 25 years of experience in operational leadership across technology and fintech — Dell, Datacom in New Zealand managing Microsoft support teams, and most recently 10+ years at PayPal across Malaysia and India.

At PayPal Malaysia, I was brought in for my strategic and operational expertise to complement a technical lead. We elevated the support function and developed strong talent — several team members moved on to PayPal Singapore and Australia.

When I moved to PayPal India, I built the global technical support operation for SMB merchants from absolute zero — no team, no process, no vendor infrastructure. Today, it's a 23-person team across Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai, operating 24/7. I also set up our vendor support structure — 18 vendors — first of its kind for our technical support org. And I've championed 8 AI initiatives to drive deflection and efficiency.

What drew me to Razorpay is the timing. You're approaching an IPO, serving 12 million merchants with 94% retention, and the product portfolio has expanded into banking, lending, and commerce. Support needs to evolve from operational to strategic — investor-grade operations, measurable merchant outcomes, tight integration with product and engineering. That transformation is exactly what I've built my career around.”

PART 2: THREE STORY BLOCKS (Know these cold)

STORY 1: "Built from Zero"

Rahul might ask: "Walk me through building the PayPal India operation."

"When I arrived at PayPal India, the technical support function for SMB merchants didn't exist locally. There was no team, no playbooks, no vendor relationships, no local escalation framework. Support was managed remotely, creating gaps in response time and merchant experience.

I approached it in three deliberate phases.

Phase 1 — Design the operating model first. Before hiring a single person, I mapped the support taxonomy — what issue types we'd handle, what complexity tiers existed, what SLAs were needed for each tier. I designed the org structure: a senior manager leading the function, two people managers creating a leadership layer, and senior engineers and engineers mapped to product areas. I also defined the escalation protocols — who owns what, at what point does something escalate, and what's the communication cadence upward. The principle was: build the rails before adding speed.

Phase 2 — Staff strategically. I hired across three cities — Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai — intentionally. This gave us geographic resilience, access to different talent pools, and timezone coverage for our 24/7 operation. I didn't just hire for technical skill — I hired for fintech awareness and merchant empathy. In a payments environment, the agent needs to understand that a stuck settlement isn't just a ticket — it's a merchant who can't pay their suppliers.

Phase 3 — Build the vendor ecosystem. This was the boldest move. Our org had never used vendors for technical support. I proposed it, built the business case, designed the governance model, and ran a pilot. Today we have 18 vendors operating within a structured framework — performance scorecards, quarterly reviews, SLA-aligned contracts, and volume allocation tied to performance.

The outcome: a fully operational 24/7, multi-geo, multi-tier support function with 41 people across internal and vendor teams, supporting SMB merchants globally with structured SLAs and audit-ready processes. And critically, the model scales — we can add merchant volume without linear cost increases because the vendor layer provides elasticity."

STORY 2: "Vendor Setup — First of Its Kind"

Rahul might ask: "Tell me more about the vendor model. How did you get buy-in and how do you govern it?"

“The vendor support setup was genuinely a first-of-its-kind for our technical support org at PayPal. The resistance was significant — leaders worried about quality dilution, compliance risk with vendors handling sensitive merchant data, and loss of control.

How I got buy-in:

I didn't start with a proposal — I started with data. I mapped our entire support volume by issue type, complexity, and resolution path. This analysis showed that roughly 40–45% of our volume fell into well-defined, repeatable categories — settlement status queries, basic integration troubleshooting, documentation requests. These didn't require deep institutional knowledge — they required good training and clear runbooks.

I then built a financial model showing the cost-per-ticket for internal vs. vendor resolution, projecting how a blended model would reduce our cost-to-serve while maintaining quality benchmarks. I presented this to leadership not as 'let's outsource' but as 'let's create a scalable capacity layer that frees our internal experts for complex, high-value work.'

The final piece was a risk mitigation plan — how we'd handle compliance (data access controls, PCI-DSS protocols for vendors), quality (certification requirements before go-live, ongoing QA sampling), and performance accountability (contractual SLAs with consequence clauses).

How I govern it:

The governance framework has four pillars:

Pillar 1 — Structured onboarding. No vendor agent goes live without completing a certification program covering our products, compliance requirements, and communication standards. This takes 2–3 weeks depending on the complexity tier they'll support.

Pillar 2 — Performance scorecards. Every vendor is measured on a balanced scorecard: quality metrics (CSAT, resolution accuracy, compliance adherence), efficiency metrics (AHT, first-contact resolution), and reliability metrics (attendance, schedule adherence). These aren't just tracked — they're reviewed in monthly operational reviews and formal quarterly business reviews.

Pillar 3 — Volume allocation as leverage. This is the key incentive mechanism. Top-performing vendors earn higher volume allocation, which directly impacts their revenue. Underperformers get structured improvement plans with 30/60/90-day milestones. If they don't improve, volume gets reallocated. This creates natural competition and self-correction.

Pillar 4 — Escalation integration. Vendor agents don't operate in a silo. They're integrated into our escalation framework — they can escalate to internal senior engineers through defined protocols, and those escalations are tracked for patterns. If a vendor is escalating

too frequently on a specific issue type, that's a training signal, not just a volume problem.

The result is a model that's been running successfully with 18 vendors, has been recognized internally as a template, and has never had a compliance incident. More importantly, it gave us the capacity elasticity to handle volume spikes — seasonal peaks, product launches, incident surges — without emergency hiring."

STORY 3: "AI Initiatives"

Rahul might ask: "You mentioned 8 AI initiatives. Tell me about the most impactful ones."

! Madhi — I need you to fill in the specific initiative names and outcomes from your actual work. Use this framework for your top 2:

AI Initiative A: [Name of initiative]

"The problem we were solving was [specific pain point — e.g., agents spending 30% of their time on ticket classification and routing, high misrouting rate causing delayed resolutions].

What we built was [description — e.g., an AI-powered auto-classification engine that analyzed incoming tickets for product area, issue type, complexity, and urgency, then routed to the optimal queue automatically].

The impact was [metrics — e.g., X% reduction in misrouting, Y minutes saved per ticket in classification time, Z% improvement in first-contact resolution because tickets were reaching the right agent the first time].

The broader lesson was [insight — e.g., AI in support isn't about replacing agents — it's about removing the low-value work so they can focus on what requires human judgment]."

AI Initiative B: [Name of initiative]

"The second initiative I'm most proud of is [description — e.g., a predictive merchant health model / a self-service automation / an AI-assisted resolution tool].

The problem was [pain point — e.g., we were reactive on escalations — by the time a merchant escalated, the damage to the relationship was already done].

We built [solution — e.g., a model that flagged merchants showing early warning signals based on transaction pattern anomalies, repeated contacts, or unresolved issue accumulation].

The result was [outcome — e.g., X% reduction in formal escalations, Y% improvement in at-risk merchant retention, proactive outreach to Z merchants per month before they reached a crisis point].

Why this matters for Razorpay: with 12 million merchants and an IPO approaching, you can't afford reactive support. Predictive, AI-driven merchant health monitoring is what separates an IPO-grade support operation from a traditional one. I've built this capability and understand both the technology and the operational change management required to make it work."

PART 3: ANSWERS TO RAHUL'S LIKELY PROBING QUESTIONS

"Why are you leaving PayPal?"

"PayPal has been an incredible platform for me — I've built a function from zero, set up vendor operations, and driven AI adoption. I'm grateful for that foundation.

But I'm at a point in my career where I want to apply these capabilities at a higher scale and at a more pivotal moment. Razorpay's pre-IPO stage is exactly that moment — the support function needs to be elevated from operational to strategic, and the next 12–18 months will define what that looks like for the public company. That transformation challenge is what energizes me.

I also see a strong alignment with Razorpay's India-first, global ambition — having worked across Malaysia, New Zealand, and India, I understand what it takes to build operations that work across markets."

Key rule: Never say anything negative about PayPal. Always frame as "moving toward" Razorpay, not "away from" PayPal.

"What would you do in the first 90 days?"

"I'd structure it as Listen, Diagnose, Act.

Days 1–14: Listen. I'd immerse myself in the operation — shadow support agents, sit in on escalation calls, review the current SLA framework, understand the tech stack. I'd also meet every key stakeholder: team leads within support, counterparts in Product, Engineering, Sales, and Compliance. The goal is to understand how things actually work, not just how they're supposed to work.

Days 15–30: Diagnose. Based on what I've learned, I'd map the gaps against what an IPO-

grade support operation needs. I'd categorize issues into three buckets: quick wins that can be fixed immediately, structural improvements that need 3–6 months, and strategic bets that are 6–12 month investments. I'd also analyze the data — support volume by product, resolution times by tier, escalation patterns, merchant satisfaction trends.

Days 31–60: Act on quick wins, plan the rest. I'd present a clear improvement roadmap to you and the leadership team, anchored to IPO readiness milestones. I'd execute the quick wins to build credibility and momentum — these might be things like fixing a broken escalation handoff, improving a specific SLA that's consistently breaching, or launching a self-service capability for a high-volume issue type. Simultaneously, I'd start laying the groundwork for the structural improvements.

Days 61–90: First visible win. By the end of 90 days, I'd want to deliver at least one measurable improvement that the organization can see — a specific metric that's moved in the right direction. This builds confidence that the function is on the right trajectory."

"How do you handle a situation where Product ships something that breaks the merchant experience?"

"This has happened multiple times at PayPal. My approach is: contain first, communicate second, fix third, prevent fourth.

Contain: Immediately assess the blast radius — how many merchants are affected, what's the revenue impact, is there a workaround? Deploy the workaround through support channels while Engineering works on the root fix.

Communicate: Proactive communication to affected merchants — don't wait for them to call. Internally, escalate through the incident management framework with clear severity classification and stakeholder notification.

Fix: Work with Engineering to prioritize the fix, keeping support in the loop on timelines so we can set accurate merchant expectations. Nothing erodes trust faster than giving a merchant a timeline that slips.

Prevent: This is the most important step. After resolution, I'd run a post-incident review — not to blame, but to identify the process gap. Was support included in the release readiness review? Did we have runbooks prepared for known risk scenarios? Was the monitoring in place to detect the issue before merchants did? These learnings feed back into the release process so it doesn't repeat.

The key mindset: support and product aren't adversaries in these moments. We're on the same team with the same goal — merchant trust. I'd position support as the team that helps

Product launch confidently, not the team that catches their mistakes."

"Our support needs to work across India and Malaysia. How would you approach that?"

"This is deeply familiar territory for me — I've operated across both markets.

The multi-market challenge has three dimensions: operational, cultural, and regulatory.

Operationally, you need a unified framework with local flexibility. Core processes — escalation protocols, SLA definitions, quality standards — should be consistent across markets. But the execution layer needs local adaptation: language support, local payment method expertise (UPI in India, local rails in Malaysia), and timezone-appropriate staffing.

Culturally, merchant expectations differ. Indian SMB merchants may have different communication preferences and urgency thresholds than Malaysian merchants. The support experience needs to feel local even if the backbone is global. This means hiring locally, training for cultural context, and giving local team leads autonomy within the global framework.

Regulatory, India and Malaysia have different data handling requirements, different financial regulations, and different compliance expectations. Support agents in each market need to be trained on their local regulatory context — what they can and cannot share, how data must be handled, what escalation paths exist for compliance-sensitive issues.

Having a Malaysian background myself, I understand the Malaysian market intuitively — the business culture, the regulatory environment, and the merchant mindset. Combined with my India experience, I can bridge both markets effectively."

"What's the biggest challenge you've faced as a leader?"

"Building the vendor support model at PayPal was the biggest leadership challenge — not because of the operational complexity, but because of the organizational change management required.

I was proposing something that had never been done in our technical support org. There was skepticism from peers who saw it as a quality risk, from compliance teams who worried about data handling, and from team members who saw it as a threat to their roles.

I learned that the leadership challenge wasn't building the model — it was bringing people along. I spent significant time in one-on-one conversations, understanding each

stakeholder's concerns, addressing them with data and risk mitigation plans, and framing the vendor model not as a replacement but as a complement.

For the internal team specifically, I was transparent: this isn't about replacing you — it's about freeing you to do higher-value work. And I followed through on that — as the vendor team absorbed routine volume, internal team members moved into more complex, specialized roles. Some of them saw it as the best career development they'd had.

The lesson: building something new is 30% strategy and 70% people. You can have the perfect operating model, but if the people don't believe in it, it won't work."

"How do you measure the success of a support organization?"

"I think about metrics in three layers:

Layer 1 — Operational health (the basics that must be solid): First Contact Resolution rate, Average Handle Time, SLA adherence by severity tier, ticket backlog trends, agent utilization. These are the foundation — if these are broken, nothing else matters.

Layer 2 — Merchant experience (the voice of the customer): CSAT by interaction, NPS by merchant segment, escalation rate and escalation resolution time, repeat contact rate (are merchants calling back for the same issue?). These tell you whether your operations are actually translating into a good experience.

Layer 3 — Business impact (what the C-suite and investors care about): Merchant retention correlation with support experience, cost-to-serve by merchant segment, support-driven product insights (how many product improvements originated from support data), and deflection rate (what percentage of issues are resolved through automation/self-service). This layer connects support to revenue and efficiency.

For Razorpay pre-IPO, I'd add a fourth layer: **IPO readiness indicators** — audit trail completeness, compliance incident rate, process documentation coverage, and capacity model accuracy (can we predict and meet support demand as merchant base grows).

The key is not measuring everything at once. I'd start by identifying the 5–6 metrics that matter most for Razorpay right now, build reliable measurement for those, and expand over time."

"Where do you see AI transforming support in the next 2–3 years?"

"I see three waves.

Wave 1 (now – 12 months): Deflection and efficiency. This is where most organizations are — chatbots handling FAQs, auto-classification of tickets, self-service portals. Razorpay's RAY Concierge for onboarding is a great example. The goal here is reducing the volume of simple issues that reach human agents.

Wave 2 (12–24 months): Agent augmentation. This is where the real ROI sits. AI that gives agents real-time resolution suggestions, auto-populates merchant context, predicts the likely issue before the agent reads the full ticket, and recommends the optimal resolution path based on similar historical cases. The agent is still in control, but they're dramatically faster and more accurate.

Wave 3 (24–36 months): Predictive and proactive support. This is where support becomes truly strategic. AI that monitors merchant transaction patterns and flags anomalies before they become issues. AI that predicts which merchants are at risk of churn based on support interaction patterns. AI that identifies systemic product issues from support data before they hit dashboards.

Razorpay is well-positioned for all three waves given the RAY ecosystem. The challenge isn't the technology — it's the change management, the data quality, and the governance. AI in fintech support needs guardrails because a wrong AI response about a settlement or a compliance matter is worse than no response. I've navigated this balance with the 8 initiatives I've led at PayPal — I know where to push and where to be cautious."

"Salary expectations?"

Strategy: Defer gracefully. Do NOT anchor a number with the COO.

"I appreciate you raising this. I'm confident that if we align on the role, scope, and impact expectations, we'll find a compensation structure that works for both sides. I'd prefer to have that detailed conversation with the talent acquisition team once we're both confident about the fit.

What I can say is that I'm approaching this thoughtfully — I understand Razorpay's stage, the ESOP component, and the value of being part of a pre-IPO journey. I'm not looking for a lateral move — I'm looking for something that reflects the step-up in scope and responsibility."

If he pushes: "My current total compensation is in the range of [your CTC]. Given the Director-level scope and the IPO-stage opportunity, I'd expect a meaningful step-up. But I'd really like to align on the role first."

Hard rule: Do NOT mention your 40-50% anchor or the make-whole RSU strategy to the COO. Save that for the compensation negotiation track with HR/talent acquisition.

PART 4: YOUR QUESTIONS FOR RAHUL (Pick 2, have 4 ready)

Question 1 (Strategic — RECOMMENDED): "As Razorpay approaches the IPO, what's the biggest operational gap you see in the merchant support experience today?"

Why this works: It shows strategic awareness, positions you as someone thinking about solutions, and gives you invaluable intel about what he wants fixed.

Question 2 (Role clarity — RECOMMENDED): "What does success look like for this role in the first 90 days, given the IPO timeline?"

Why this works: Shows you're already thinking about execution. His answer will tell you exactly what he's measuring you against.

Question 3 (Cross-functional — BACKUP): "How does the support function currently interact with Product and Engineering? Is there a structured feedback loop, or is that something you'd want this role to build?"

Why this works: Signals that you think beyond support silos.

Question 4 (Rapport — BACKUP, use if conversation flows naturally): "You led Razorpay's expansion into Malaysia through Curlec. What was the most counterintuitive lesson from building operations across India and Malaysia?"

Why this works: Shows you've researched his background. Creates a personal connection. Your Malaysian background makes this a natural conversation.

PART 5: LOGISTICS & FINAL CHECKLIST

Tonight:

- Practice opening pitch 5–6 times out loud (time yourself — 90 seconds max)

- Read through Story Blocks 1, 2, 3 once each
- Read through the Q&A section once (don't memorize — internalize the framing)
- Fill in your AI initiative specifics in Story Block 3
- Confirm office address and plan route (arrive 15–20 minutes early)
- Iron clothes, charge phone, get a good night's sleep

Bring tomorrow:

- Printed copy of your case study presentation (just in case)
- A notebook and pen (shows professionalism, lets you jot his responses to your questions)
- Phone on silent before entering

Mindset reminders:

- **Lead with business impact, not operational detail.** Rahul is BCG-trained — he thinks in revenue, segments, and unit economics.
- **Speak with conviction, not desperation.** You're evaluating them too. You bring 25 years of relevant experience — this is a mutual fit conversation.
- **Use your Malaysian background naturally.** Don't force it, but if Malaysia comes up (it likely will), it's a genuine connection point with Rahul.
- **Connect everything to the IPO.** It's the "why now" for everything — why support needs to be strategic, why processes need to be audit-grade, why this hire matters.
- **Be concise.** COO conversations move fast. If you see Rahul nodding and ready to move on, land your point and stop. Don't over-explain.
- **Show energy.** This is likely a culture-fit + strategic alignment round. Competence is established — now show you're genuinely excited about the mission.

The One Sentence to Remember If You Get Nervous:

"I built exactly what Razorpay needs — from zero, in a regulated fintech environment, at scale — and I'm ready to do it again at a pivotal moment in this company's journey."

This is your anchor. Everything else flows from this truth.