

Spotlight on



Triona Zelesnik,
Principal Consultant, PhD

In this Q&A, Triona shares her insights and perspectives on the strategy consulting projects she is typically involved in, what attributes make for a great client collaboration, how industry needs are rapidly evolving, and what this means for the future partnerships.

Triona is a principal consultant in the European Strategy & Insight team. She has a wealth of experience in global life science and pharmaceutical brand strategy consulting. Triona has broad cross-indications experience with specialist expertise in immunology, solid tumor oncology, and endocrinology.

Recently, Triona specialized in integrated evidence planning as part of asset and portfolio strategy along with evidence-led patient care pathway development to support commercial success.



Q&A

→ What does your role in Lumanity involve?

I'm a principal with the strategy consulting team and I'm based in Berlin, Germany. Here at Lumanity, we operate a 'sell-deliver-lead' model. Account management is part of my role, but as with all our senior roles, I am hands-on throughout our projects, and take an active role with client engagement, project ideation, and concept development. I also manage a team and spend time developing our talent – I really enjoy that I get to balance these different roles.

→ What are the types of client challenges that you particularly enjoy tackling?

I consider myself a generalist in my field. I've worked right across the product development life cycle – helping teams with everything from developing basket trial design right the way through market access, launch strategy, portfolio acquisition strategy, competitive defense, market shaping, and post-launch projects. Across this I've also worked on a range of indications, all with their unique pressures and challenges.

This said, I think the projects I enjoy the most center around commercial strategy – particularly the interplay between clinical and patient needs – the potential benefit over competitors, the scientific validation for those assumptions, and how the medical system is positioned to facilitate access to new therapies. That's the space I enjoy. Where is this product going to fit? How do we best communicate that to the various stakeholders that are going to be responsible for making sure that product reaches the physicians and the patients who need it?

That focus on early consideration of the patient is something that stands out to me. How are new treatments going to be made available to the patient? How is the patient going to navigate their way to this treatment? How will a physician determine that their patient is eligible? How will the benefit be communicated to them?

Another type of project I really enjoy starts with figuring out 'what is the challenge, really?' It was very early on in my career that I was taught there is always three aspects to understanding the challenges associated with a given project. The first is what is stated in the request for proposal (RFP). The second is, what's the motivation behind what's being asked for... why this project at this time? What is the client going to do after the project to make a difference?



And the third aspect is understanding what the people behind the project need. Our clients are people – they have personal and professional motivations. Maybe this project is mission critical for them personally and they need a partner who will roll up their sleeves and wade into the murky depths with them. Maybe it's not and they need us to be operationally lean and get the job done, allowing them to focus their attention in other areas. I find it rewarding when I understand what the person that I'm collaborating with truly needs and try to deliver on all three levels.

→ How much importance do you place on including the patient voice early in the life cycle?

When we think about the patient voice, the meaning of that has evolved throughout my career. We've seen a discernible shift towards not just 'including' the patient voice, but also in the depth of understanding more broadly who these patients are... what their individual journey is, and what their real challenges are. This enriches everything, from clinical trial design to endpoint selection, and commercial awareness of what an actual unmet need might be... where there's space for you to potentially launch this product. If you don't understand your patient and you have a poor perception of the patient journey, you're going to get things wrong – including potentially choosing the wrong clinical endpoints.

We still need to challenge ourselves on when and how we bring in the patient perspective, but it's also about making sure that we fully understand the patient journey and experience in the right depth.

→ What made you pursue a career in this industry and also decide to join Lumanity?

At its most basic, I'm a scientist who likes to talk to people, solve problems, and help others achieve things. I'm curious by nature, I'm good at breaking down problems into component parts, and I've had a 20-year education in the scientific method that lends itself well to this industry. I can also see value in what I do and with the people I collaborate with.

I've found that I thrive in teams and companies that have the agility and flexibility of a boutique, with the bandwidth, coverage, and the depth that you get in large organizations. There's a feel to that mix and Lumanity has a real combination of experts across all disciplines, with established industry expertise, scientists, and really smart consultants.

There's also something very attractive about a purpose-built, cross-functional, expert organization, which Lumanity is. I love the pick-and-mix, cross-functional projects.

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Those are the sweet spot for me – they allow you to work seamlessly with expertise across our business and assess the different perspectives before determining the best way forward. It's not something that every company can truly deliver, but I think Lumanity is particularly well-positioned to do that.

→ What are the important characteristics you believe are key to being a great consultant and client collaborator?

You have to like being busy, curious, a problem solver, and be very much a self-starter. You juggle a lot of things, you mentally change gears several times a day, and you need to wear a lot of hats, which I enjoy.

In addition to those aspects of being curious and self-motivated, you also have to want to know the answer and I think this is something important for me that I look for when I'm recruiting or helping to onboard new people into the business. I know that this is a characteristic that our clients also look for – somebody who's going to keep probing to understand why something is the way it is and whether it can be challenged. And we see that in our client feedback. They absolutely value the fact that we sometimes need to delve further, and we're going to tell them if we disagree with a position and make sure we push to achieve the best decision or way forward.

→ What do you personally bring to the role of a consultant?

From a personal perspective, I've had a relatively complex medical journey. Despite being very well informed, I've struggled at times to find my way to the right treatment at the right time. And I find myself thinking about how the work that I do adds to or mitigates barriers to patient access. I also bring this focus through reduction of unnecessary complexity in projects where it's not necessarily articulated as the key challenge. I enjoy when I can see that element in the projects we work on, and I find that it's an angle that often resonates well with our client partners.

One relatively unique challenge for me is that I work remotely which is not typical in this industry, so what I'm doing day-to-day is out of immediate sight from the wider organization. I don't have many opportunities to have those office corridor conversations. But this works for me – especially when I returned from maternity leave, having had triplets. I'm also involved in many of our internal projects and team mentoring – I think that's been great for maintaining visibility within the organization. And despite not seeing most of my colleagues in almost two years, I haven't felt disconnected from Lumanity. I continue to make myself sort of an integral part of the team and the business.

→ How do you see the future with respect to client needs and the projects you work on?

One of the big impactful changes that I see is the change in product approvals. We're seeing efforts to reduce some of the bureaucratic approval burden particularly when we think about rare diseases for example. This should enable novel, personalized medicine to reach patients in need in a much more efficient manner which is great, but I can really see the pressure this

is going to put on launch teams. More than ever, launch teams and commercial teams need to coalesce earlier around their assets to be fully prepared, and ready to launch into what is for sure increasingly complex markets.

Linked in some ways to that complexity, there's also this significant shift in the in the financial pressure that we see. There's been a shift after the COVID-19 pandemic, but also generally in where budgets are being prioritized by healthcare systems. There's very little truly open, empty white space for most treatments that are about to be launched.

This is part of the general trend of vastly increasing complexity on one hand, and on the other, the need to do more with less.

→ We sometimes see criticism in the financial news as to why pharma frequently partners with consultancies – what evolution do you see here?

I see the need for consultancy rising as teams need agility 'in the moment' when it comes to deep expertise, timely fresh thinking, and resource support.

Client intimacy in these scenarios is going to be paramount to provide the high value our clients' need to succeed. That closeness and intimacy ensures that we are delivering tailor-made solutions, and an ability to work in the weeds with pharma teams, enabling teams to feel understood, and to work with them, not just on the problem in hand, but with a perspective on what's coming next for them.

So, in summary, I can see two streams of responsiveness to that complexity and financial pressure I mentioned. One is going to be how we offer something that is rapid and repeatable, but the other part is leaning into those elements I outlined. What's driving that challenge? And what does this individual or team in front of me needs? That intimacy and human-centric partnership is a critical path to success for consulting now and going forward.

→ Why choose us?

Lumanity can be counted on for service and quality. We utilize proven processes supported by technologically advanced resources to produce high-quality services, with guaranteed satisfaction.

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