



xista Event

xista Talk | Journey from Cell to Cellestia

Raj Lehal

Host: Sophia Hannes

Journey from Cell to Cellestia In my talk, I will share how a research project, originally designed to answer a fundamental scientific question, ultimately gave rise to Cellestia. Beyond delving into the science, I will discuss the challenges commonly encountered by academic founders—particularly young PhDs and postdocs—and practical strategies for overcoming them. Drawing from my journey as both a scientist and entrepreneur, I will reflect on the lessons learned and the importance of pursuing research with a clear purpose, especially within a start-up context. Finally, I will highlight the entrepreneurial mindset: the perseverance, resilience, and self-belief required to keep going—even when no one else shares your vision. Raj Lehal is an accomplished biotech entrepreneur and executive based in Zurich, Switzerland. He holds a PhD from EPFL, where his research led to the founding of Cellestia Biotech AG. As co-founder and CEO/CSO of Cellestia, he transformed the company from a single-asset, research-stage startup into a clinical-stage enterprise, raising over USD 75 million in venture capital and securing partnerships with leading international investors. Most recently, he spun out Anciata Therapeutics, securing USD 34.5 million in financing and establishing a collaboration with Eli Lilly. Dr. Lehal also co-founded Viventis Microscopy, which was acquired in a multimillion-dollar deal by Leica Microsystems in 2024. With over a decade of experience in the life sciences, Dr. Lehal has led scientific, clinical, and business development efforts across oncology and autoimmune indications and is listed as an inventor on more than ten patents. In addition to his executive roles, he serves as a strategic advisor to multiple biotech startups and is actively engaged in mentoring young entrepreneurs in Europe and Canada. He also serves as a selection committee member at the University of Toronto for the Lifetime Achievement Award, Impact Award, and Emerging Leader Award.

Wednesday, October 8, 2025 12:00pm - 03:00pm

Sunstone Building



This invitation is valid as a ticket for the ISTA Shuttle from and to Heiligenstadt Station. Please find a schedule of the ISTA Shuttle on our webpage:

<https://ista.ac.at/en/campus/how-to-get-here/> The ISTA Shuttle bus is marked ISTA Shuttle (#142) and has the Institute Logo printed on the side.

