

The Evolution of my Career: A 35-Year Perspective



Mitch Layng
*Carbon and Utilities
Manager
London Fire Brigade*

An interview with Mitch Layng, the recipient of the 2016 Energy Manager of the Year award in the Energy Management Awards.

Can you share the story of how your career path in energy management began?

I didn't initially choose a career in building services, I wanted to do something art related such as graphic design when I left school. However, an opportunity arose through the school careers process that led me to a position as a trainee building services engineer with a government organisation. This provided me with an excellent grounding in this sector, along with day release and evening school to study for my engineering qualifications.

Roles in both the public and private sectors as a design engineer led to a client-side position in a large insurance company, managing both design and operational aspects for all their UK buildings. The operational aspect interested me for several reasons, not least because there was an opportunity to see more of the life cycle of the process following the design and construction, and the impact that design has on the operation, including energy consumption and the wellbeing of the occupants.

Energy management in the early days was not driven by climate change. When I started my career there was a global oil crisis and this led to organisations being more pro-active in reducing energy due to the high cost of oil at the time. Being involved with a government organisation, we were leading the construction industry in terms of energy management, and the production of standards and guidance. Energy management at that time was different, mainly due to technology not being as advanced as it is today. It involved behavioural change, which involved campaigns highlighting the need to switch off – such as the "Save It!" campaign, along with basic control optimisation ensuring time clocks were set correctly, and heating set points were accurate. The use of management systems utilising algorithms and AI did not exist, and much of the data crunching to monitor consumption was a manual process.

You remained with M&G Real Estate for more than 17 years. In what ways have your responsibilities evolved throughout the years?

My initial position at M&G Real Estate (it was called Prudential Property Investment Managers at the time) involved managing the engineering aspects of the facilities management team, and providing advice to property and asset managers. Energy management at that time was only a small part of the role, although there was a dedicated energy manager in place dealing mainly with utilities supply contracts.

My role changed when the property managers' roles were outsourced, and I put together a business case (which was accepted) to keep an in-house energy management position. Regulations around energy management and carbon emissions were developing at speed around this time, and I could see the importance of having someone to advise on the reporting and operational requirements of these regulations. The introduction of The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) Regulations 2015 brought into force the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (known as MEES), which had a big impact on the property energy performance requirements.

These regulations focused the attention on energy performance certificates (EPCs) and a whole industry grew up to offer the provision of these services. It was important to ensure the correct type of service was provided, not only to obtain accurate EPCs, but to extend these to provide reports on what could be done to improve the ratings in anticipation of the regulations being tightened in the future.

You won the EMA's Energy Manager award in 2016. What did it mean for you and how was it received by the organisation?

From a personal perspective it was recognition of what I had achieved in a complex and evolving industry. Previous awards I have been involved with, both as a winner and as a judge, in particular the CIBSE Building Performance Awards are won as part of a team, whereas the Energy Manager Award highlighted my personal achievements. I would add that I could not have achieved this without the support of the organisation and colleagues.

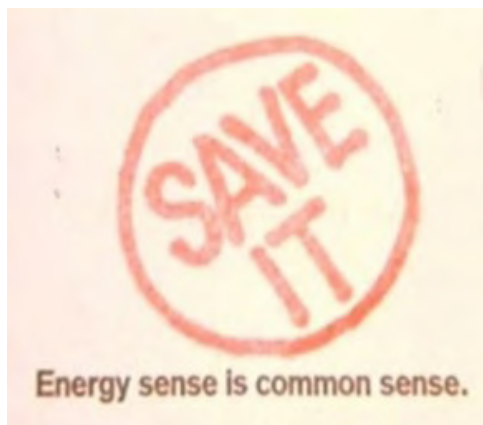
From an organisational perspective, the award was well received in my immediate team, and was appreciated within M&G Real Estate. In my view, the importance of energy management has increased significantly since 2016 due to climate change and world events becoming more prominent, and awards like this are a lot higher profile today.

Following your departure from M&G, you delved into the realm of energy management consultancy. In what ways did you have to adjust to the new position?

I had always considered that at

some stage in my career I would work for myself, and when the opportunity arose, I took the chance and Layng Energy Solutions was born. The venture started well with several commissions which included working with BSRIA (Building Services Research and Information Association) on a number of publications. One of these, Building Services Analytics, was of interest as it dealt with energy management and the use of technology, and the impact this was having on energy and wellbeing.

I ended up with a contract working in the facilities management department at London Fire Brigade



(LFB), although not entirely energy related, it drew on my experience in the FM world, and it did help to focus the FM contract on energy related issues.

I did find the transition from working within a large organisation to working as a consultant quite a difficult one, for two main reasons. I missed the camaraderie and support of colleagues, and it was challenging for me to go out and sell myself to obtain work. This was one skill that I was missing, and the main reason I have ended up in-house working for London Fire Brigade.

What does your role at London

Fire Brigade entail and how does it compare to your earlier roles?

My responsibilities at London Fire Brigade can be divided into two main areas – procurement and management of utility contracts, and energy management.

The procurement was not something I had previously been involved with to any great degree and is quite a complex arena. This has been both challenging and rewarding, particularly with the recent volatility of energy prices. Also, being involved with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and its pathway to net zero carbon by 2030 has been interesting and has really highlighted the challenges involved, particularly within the public sector. I am working closely with a number of colleagues within London Fire Brigade, in particular the Technical Assurance Team and Carbon Reduction Team, to achieve LFB's aim of being carbon net zero by 2030.

In terms of energy management, I was really pleased that LFB were awarded the Low Carbon Initiative – Building Management in the national Energy Awards 2024. This was in recognition of introducing and developing The Energy Portal. It has transformed our Building Energy Management System (BEMS) into an easy-to-understand dashboard to demonstrate and share how we maintain, control and monitor the performance of our fire stations and other buildings. The Energy Portal can be accessed by everybody and is being used to help reduce our energy consumption and costs.

The energy management role in LFB is similar to previous roles, but the challenges are different. With 103 fire stations and 4 support

buildings all operating 24/7, finding ways of saving energy is not easy. Compared to office buildings or shopping centres for instance, where savings can be found out of operational hours, this is not possible with buildings that operate 24/7/365. This makes winning the energy award more pleasing. New technology will assist in going forward, as this becomes more affordable and available.

Can you identify a particular influence that shaped your career in the industry?

I would say there were probably four occasions/events that most shaped my career:

1. Excellent training with the government organisation I first started with. This included 6 months in the "Drawing Office Training Centre", where I learned purely design and drawing, and then 6 months on site seeing how designs were turned into the finished product, and the challenges faced on site.
2. Moving from design into an operational role with the insurance company – I was mentored by a very experienced engineer who took me under his wing and set me off into the world of FM.
3. Starting with M&G Real Estate and the experience gained with managing a variety of buildings, such as shopping centres, office buildings, retail parks and warehouses.
4. Becoming a non-executive board member of the Building Services Information and Research Association (BSRIA). This gave me more awareness of the governance process behind large organisations,

and the impact that decisions can have on all stakeholders.

If you could go back in time, what guidance would you offer your younger self?

TAKE RISKS. I tended to play safe and stay in my comfort zone, but later realised that I may have missed out on opportunities. Early on in my career there was a shortage of engineers in Europe and America, which would have given me broader experience. Not that I regret anything now.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. I didn't really plan my career path, things just happened that seemed the correct thing to do at the time. Try



and see what areas are predicted to grow and become more important in the future, and work out what is important to you.

If you wrote a book about your career, what would you title it and why?

"Re-imagining the life cycle of buildings – an engineer's view".

My career has seen many changes in how engineers design, operate, refurbish, reconstruct and demolish buildings. In the early days, climate change and occupant wellbeing were not at the forefront of the life cycle as it is today. Technology, including renewable generation equipment, has progressed so much

it's unrecognisable from 20 or 30 years ago, and its use now is key to managing energy consumption. Artificial intelligence will impact this area even more in the coming years and will require continual re-imagining as this technology progresses. In addition, other factors will become increasingly important and engineers will not only be focused on cutting carbon emissions, but will take more of a holistic view of building services design that will consider the wider impacts on society and the environment. The way people work has changed dramatically over the past few years, and this is likely to continue, meaning people have

more of a choice in where they can work. If employers want to attract staff, the quality of the workplace will have to be at the correct level to ensure occupant comfort and wellbeing. I believe these issues will help drive forward the changes required.

What are your aspirations for the future?

To give something back to the industry and to encourage young people thinking of becoming involved with the building services sector. It is also important to encourage diversity within the industry, and this can be achieved through education and awareness. I have been involved through the Chartered Institution of Building Services (CIBSE) and others in talking at career events in schools, to highlight the opportunities. It is important to try and make a career in building services and energy management sound interesting, and highlight the importance of tackling climate change.