

# American Republic Insurance Company



Insurance; Des Moines, Iowa

## Workplace Issues:

- Cultural Change
- Efficiency/Productivity
- Space Utilization
- Technology/Infrastructure

## Applications:

- Call Center
- Collaboration/Team
- Executive Office
- Open Office

**Project Scope:** 601 employees; 658 workstations; 120,000 square feet

## Herman Miller Products:

- Ethospace System
- Aeron Chairs
- Caper Chairs
- Eames Tables
- Meridian Pedestals
- Meridian Stackable Lateral Files
- Meridian Storage Cases, Bookcases, and Flex Storage Cabinets

## Programs/Services:

- Asset Inventory Management (AIM)
- Easy Options Capability
- Ergonomics

**Year Completed:** 2003



Watson Powell founded American Republic Insurance Company in 1929 with 200 charter policies. Today, the Iowa-based business is licensed in 49 states and manages more than 300,000 active policies with the support of 15,000 agents nationwide.

As American Republic approached its 75th anniversary in 2004, CEO Mike Abbott prepared to lead the company into its next phase of growth. Specific goals were set for improving American Republic's overall efficiency. One was the introduction of a culture change supporting a more team-centered work style. This required some technology updates, but making better use of space was an important component of the plan to meet the goal. It entailed tearing out a lot of drywall and introducing systems furniture.

"We were highly structured, which stifled communication for a number of reasons," recalls Ernie Moore, the corporate facilities manager who supervised the project before retiring from American Republic early in 2005. "The company needed to change."

Moore and a committee of American Republic employees conducted an extensive—and competitive—search for the right furniture line and dealership to work with before choosing Herman Miller and Iowa dealer Pigott, Inc.

American Republic selected the Ethospace system and standardized on four workstation footprints set at 54-inch heights. Flexibility was built in to permit users to arrange and customize each workstation's display and storage elements. Stack-ons were allowed to raise workstation heights in areas where more visual and/or acoustical privacy was needed. Aeron became the chair of choice following a trip to NeoCon in Chicago.

The project began when American Republic opened a branch office in another location—also standardized on Herman Miller—and transferred several headquarters staff to the new office. This freed up half a floor at HQ for the new installation. Once complete, a group of employees moved into the new space as their previous location was converted to Ethospace. This process continued until the entire seven-floor installation was finished.

The new office configuration effectively addressed a number of workplace issues. Placing private offices throughout each floor rather than at windows provided more opportunities for natural light to penetrate the building, aided in some cases by glass tiles on higher





workstation frames. The previous layout's lack of wire management and technology—some desks did not have telephone access—were now capably handled by Ethospace.

These modifications have helped drive the desired change in American Republic's corporate culture. The more open Ethospace environments enable employee work teams to meet informally and spontaneously. Day-to-day communication between supervisors and staff is enhanced, allowing the easier transfer of information. And workstation configurations are customized for different groups to support team identities.

Yet from a design perspective, it is perhaps American Republic's highly valued art collection that reaps the greatest visual benefits from the company's new look. "The leadership feels that art is essential to its corporate culture, and the facility had to reflect that," explains Emily Spradling, commercial interiors consultant with Pigott, Inc. "We needed to maintain a neutral palette in furniture, fabrics, and finishes, and work with the art collection rather than detract from it."



Moore, Spradling, and their design team achieved the neutral palette objective, but kicked things up a notch by creating something they call the "wave." Aisles are laid out in non-standard patterns that lead to different displays of art, giving the viewers "a sense of discovery" of the work, Moore says, from a variety of perspectives.

And how did American Republic employees respond to their new work environment? "It was a tremendous success," Moore says.

