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What Is Normal Today?

And, Perhaps More Importantly, What Will It Be Tomorrow?

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This white paper is intended for informational purposes and to encourage strategic reflection and dialogue.

Executive Summary

In 2020, a few months after the COVID-19 pandemic began, CE3 Solutions published a white paper titled “I cannot wait to get back to Normal. Wait... what will Normal be?”

Fast forward six years—and WOW, how things have changed. This paper revisits that question in our current state: What is normal today? And perhaps more importantly, what will it be tomorrow?

Key Premise: *“Normal” is no longer a fixed destination. It’s a moving target—shaped by global events, geopolitical and domestic viewpoints, technological progress, and how we choose to respond.*

The Evolving Definition of Normal

Over the past several years—from the global disruption of COVID-19 to ongoing geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, rapid advances in artificial intelligence, and increasing climate events—our definition of “normal” hasn’t just changed; it’s continuously evolving.

What once felt temporary has, in many ways, become permanent. Hybrid work, digital transformation, supply chain volatility, domestic and geopolitical challenges, and shifting workforce expectations are no longer exceptions—they are embedded realities.

Rather than searching for a return to “normal,” it may be more useful to ask: what are we building next?

Eight Areas Shaping the Conversation

The following areas continue to define how organizations, governments, and individuals navigate an uncertain landscape. These are not meant to provide answers, but to encourage reflection and dialogue.

1. Governance and Responsibility

Debates around federal versus state authority continue to surface—not only in public health, but in areas like voting rights, immigration, technology regulation, education, and economic policy. In a world shaped by rapid change, who is responsible for guiding day-to-day life—and how flexible should those structures be?

Who is responsible for guiding the frameworks that shape our organizations and communities—and how flexible should those structures be in the face of rapid change?

2. Regulatory Oversight

Following crises—whether financial, public health, or technological—oversight tends to increase. Is that still the case? Are we looking at areas to potentially decrease oversight, and if so, why? Today, that conversation extends beyond healthcare to include data privacy, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity.

How much regulation is necessary to ensure safety without stifling innovation and growth?

3. Health, Safety, and Workforce Well-Being

Our appreciation for essential workers has broadened—and so has awareness of mental health, burnout, and workplace expectations and safety. Flexibility, benefits, and physical and psychological safety are no longer secondary considerations.

How do organizations sustainably support their people in a high-pressure, always-connected world—and what is the impact to people, reputation, brand, and business if these issues go unaddressed?

4. Climate and Sustainability

From extreme weather events to global climate agreements, sustainability is no longer a distant concern—it's immediate. The temporary environmental improvements seen during early pandemic shutdowns raised an important question: what long-term changes are we willing to make to preserve those gains?

Do we believe these changes need to happen—and if not, why? What are the long-term business and societal consequences of inaction?

5. Remote Work, AI, and Digital Transformation

What began as a necessity has become a strategic advantage. Remote and hybrid work models are now standard, while tools powered by artificial intelligence are rapidly reshaping productivity and decision-making across every industry.

How do we balance efficiency with human connection, and innovation with security?

6. Education and Continuous Learning

Virtual learning opened new possibilities but also revealed gaps. Today, education is increasingly flexible, digital, and lifelong. As industries evolve faster than ever, how do we prepare individuals not just for their first career—but for constant reinvention?

How do we prepare individuals—and organizations—not just for today’s roles, but for continuous reinvention in a rapidly changing landscape?

7. Business Continuity and Resilience

If the past few years have taught us anything, it’s that disruption is not a matter of “if,” but “when.” Organizations are rethinking supply chains, digital capabilities, and crisis preparedness. Resilience is no longer a backup plan—it’s a core strategy.

How much should organizations proactively invest in business continuity—and how do they balance risk with cost?

8. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The conversation around diversity, equity, and inclusion has experienced both acceleration and scrutiny in recent years. What was once a growing priority for many organizations is now, in some cases, being re-evaluated, reframed, or even scaled back.

Was DEI a moment, or is it a movement? And what role should it play in defining the future of work and business?

Strategic Implications for Your Organization

The Core Question: *How does all of the above impact your business? Do you understand what the major risks and opportunities are—and how you should best prioritize and approach them?*

Every organization faces a unique combination of these pressures. The leaders who will thrive are those who move beyond reactive responses and build the capacity for structured, proactive decision-making.

Consider where your organization stands today:

- Have you formally assessed how evolving governance and regulatory trends affect your operating model?
- Is workforce well-being embedded in your talent strategy—or treated as a secondary benefit?
- Does your business continuity plan account for AI disruption, climate risk, and geopolitical volatility?
- Are your outsourcing and partnership strategies aligned to current market realities?
- How are you preparing your workforce for continuous reinvention?

Conclusion

The question isn't whether we'll return to normal.

It's whether we're ready to define what comes next—and how we define it.

Organizations that approach this moment with strategic intentionality—grounding decisions in structured frameworks rather than instinct alone—will be better positioned to navigate whatever comes next.

If you are struggling to answer these questions or need a formalized process and approach to understand how to address these and other business challenges, CE3 Solutions would be happy to help.

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About the Author

Mike DeCandido is Chief Operations Officer and Partner with CE3 Solutions, LLC. He brings decades of executive leadership experience to help organizations navigate complex strategic and operational challenges.

About CE3 Solutions

CE3 Solutions, LLC is a boutique management consulting firm specializing in the creation and implementation of strategic and tactical roadmaps that simultaneously improve customer experience, shareholder and business value, employee engagement, and risk management. CE3 Solutions partners have collectively over 100 years of experience managing these areas with numerous Fortune 500 organizations, while also providing solutions to businesses of all sizes.

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