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What constitutes a successful life? How do middle-aged men and women who are at the pinnacle of their profession conceptualise success? Do such men and women differ markedly in their conceptions of what constitutes success? Sheelagh O'Donovan-Polten provides an unprecedented window into the most private thinking about success of four male and four female middle-aged lawyers, each of whom is widely recognised to be at the apex of the legal profession in Canada. Using a phenomenological mode of inquiry, she compiles a comprehensive profile of each lawyer's unique construction of success and, through inductive analysis, arrives at a composite rendition of life-career success during middle adulthood. Extending the lines of inquiry of Robert Kegan and Carol Gilligan and incorporating insights of several other adult development and career development theorists, she arrays fourteen core attributes of life-career success within the framework of a metaphorical scales. This sophisticated model of life-career success enables O'Donovan-Polten to explore the relationship between the evolution of the self during middle adulthood and middle-aged persons' conceptualisations of what constitutes success. Having developed a detailed context within which the gender factor is isolated for close scrutiny, she provides evidence of continued institutionalised discrimination inherent in the very language and processes of law. Rather than ending up with attributes identified predominantly with one gender or the other, she manages to illustrate the complexities of gender identity in relation to significant values and constructions of the self and of success. Ultimately, success is shown to be a context-dependent, multifaceted, paradoxical and ever-evolving concept. The Scales of Success will have a great deal of appeal to professionals working in the areas of developmental psychology, vocational psychology, career development, human resource development, adult education, and related areas.
