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Code review is a process through which a source code is systematically assessed to verify its compliance with specific standards. Such compliance allows the software product to remain with a reduced amount of bugs or flaws (it'll be free of them once in a blue moon) that are many times the result of a slapdash approach by developers. Code review can focus on the software's architecture, functionality and style, but it can also deal with its security. Hence the term secure code review. (Take as implicit the fact that, when here we talk merely about "code review," we refer to the analysis that involves security because a review without considering it ends up being insufficient).Code review is based on coding standards and requirements that, in fact, are what developers should bear in mind from the outset. Errors arising from non-compliance, no matter how small, can take a heavy toll on the organization owning the code and related individuals and entities, especially when criminals exploit them. Today, mainly within the DevSecOps approach, it's recommended that code review be carried out early in the software development cycle (SDLC) before deploying the software into production. The idea is to make this a constant operation so that issues are reported to developers asap and to avoid high costs in the future.Manual code review vs. automatedBoth savvy humans and automated tools can perform code reviews. Currently, there's a whole raft of tools for code review. And although these may vary in their features, such as ease of use, appearance and capabilities, here we make a comparison in general terms. Automated code review is less expensive and can cover much more code in less time than manual review. Indeed, when a reviewer is tasked with reading and reviewing code line by line, they are usually assigned only a particular piece or segment of code. In the case of large products, it would take a lot of time and effort to review all code manually. So, this form of review generally has less scope than that performed by intelligent machines, but, as we'll see, it's an indispensable procedure given the limitations of the tools. Automated tools have a database of predefined standards and requirements for compliance review and error detection. Organizations that purchase the tools can configure them to follow specific rules and ignore others and to work according to one or more specific programming languages. The point is that whatever is outside the predefined capabilities of the tool escapes its detection radar. Additionally, not everything a tool reports truly represents an issue or flaw in the code. We refer to these last two hurdles as false negatives (omissions) and false positives (lies), respectively. Preventing these from being present when making code review reports is then in the hands of the experts and their manual work.One of the biggest shortcomings of code review tools is their inability to detect so-called business logic flaws. Automated tools do not understand the human intentions and business logic behind a particular system. Business logic refers to the part of the software that codifies business rules that determine processes such as data creation, modification and storage. Business logic describes multiple series of activities or steps in which relationships are established between the end user interface and the database. More often than not, business logic flaws are peculiar to the application in question and its functionality. They are miscellaneous and do not follow defined or similar risk patterns for all cases. Moreover, they are not located in a specific line of code but involve several areas of the overall architecture.The business rules dictate the software's responses or reactions (e.g., prevention actions) to the different possible scenarios. Vulnerabilities in business logic often mean the inability of the software to detect and correctly handle some scenarios, certain strange or unexpected user behaviors that the developers didn't take into account or anticipate. That's where attackers capitalize on their cunning. For example, let's say the logic in a money transfer application is not restricting user input according to what might have been determined in the business rules. Instead, it treats the entire set of negative values, which may lead to an unforeseen procedure such as, let's imagine, something, extracting money, rather than depositing it to the supposed recipient of the transfer. These types of vulnerabilities are often rated with very high severity because of the potential impacts of their exploitation. It is a task of the manual code review to detect and report these enormously dangerous security issues.Nevertheless, on balance, rather than considering substituting or replacing one method with the other, we should speak of complementation. Ideally, we should use both methods, not just one. The automated code review, with its scope and speed, allows the time and effort invested in manual code review to be reduced. It enables the expert to concentrate on pieces of code that may have more complex and severe vulnerabilities than those the machine can identify. Unfortunately, there are many who, in their ignorance, continue to believe that one or more automated tools running in their organizations is good enough. They have not heeded comments like those made in communities such as OWASP: "manual code review should be a component of a company's secure lifecycle, as in many cases it is as good, or better, than other methods of detecting security issues."Zeroed in on manual code reviewWho can perform manual code review?The manual code review can be carried out by colleagues of the developers, senior engineers or other professionals, including external providers such as Fluid Attacks with its Secure Code Review. The people in charge of a thorough code review should have extensive knowledge of software development, programming languages, secure coding practices, security standards, requirements and vulnerabilities, among other things. They should be able to think and act like threat actors and have the virtue of patience and vast review experience. However, some reviewers may be just beginning to gain experience and should not be excluded but may simply be assisted by other, more seasoned individuals. This decision, in any case, may vary according to the needs and characteristics of the code of the organization requesting the service. Keep in mind, as it's commented in the OWASP Code Review Guide, for instance, that "a new single sign-on authentication module in a multi-billion dollar company will not be secure code reviewed by a person once read an article on secure coding."How to do manual code review?It's always recommended that a single person doesn't do a manual code review. What initially escaped the developer's eyes, in some cases, may also escape the reviewer's eyes. Although with the inclusion of a second individual, the same thing can also happen, the probabilities would certainly be reduced. Additionally, work performed by several individuals promotes the creation of a collaborative environment between the members of the development and review teams. Cooperation can occur when the reviewer is not seen as a patrolman but as an advisor that positively affects the efficiency of the developers with relevant feedback. Reviewers should ask developers to send small code changes to them for a better workflow. And they can do reviews in environments isolated from those in which the developers may be working so they don't act as obstacles.To conduct comprehensive and effective reviews, experts must be in context, knowing what they are assessing. They must learn about and broadly understand the software's functions, purposes and features to be evaluated, including the programming languages and libraries and other components used and their interactions. From there, reviewers should ask questions such as what might happen if some operation of the code fails. They must know what types of users are allowed and which are their privileges. They must understand what kinds of data are being processed and in what way and ask what would happen if they were compromised. In addition, they must model potential threats, in part recognizing threat agents and their possible purposes, and, depending on the type of software, anticipate what security vulnerabilities they may find.The amount of information to be gathered in a code review will depend on the organization's size, the reviewers' skills and the potential risks of the code. A good way to start this collection may be to establish contact and conversation with the application developers to receive at least some basic information. Automated tools also come into play to provide general data before the manual review is implemented on specific areas of the code (prioritized, for example, by risk) to assess style, interpretation and security. Tools such as linters can even be used in advance by developers to get cyberattacks to not hesitate to contact us. In a Manual Code Review (MCR), the source code is read line by line to check for possible vulnerabilities. This involves a lot of skills, experience, and patience. The issues or errors discovered in this review will greatly help to increase the efficiency of the firm. With an Automated Code Review (ACR), there is a set of predefined rules that are determined for the code to comply with. Software tools provide assistance in ACR that displays a list of warnings that are in violation of programming standards.So how to decide which works best for you? Here's a comparison that we thought would help you make this decision.Differences Between Manual & Automated Code Review1) Time:MCR Because the user reads every single line of the code, it is easy to gather the intentions of the developer. But even if that is the strength, it takes a lot of time to look and read these codes line by line.ACR No wonders it's
fast! Automation software can read thousands of lines of code very swiftly. But these lack the skills of identifying the business logic and the intentions of the developer.2) Examination:MCR This method is very useful in crossing the rarely visited code paths. Few techniques such as penetration testing examine paths that have inputs fed, but lesser-traveled paths or hidden paths can be missed. But a rigorous manual code review is better in identifying these paths that are misunderstood by automated tools.ACR These intentionally hidden paths can also be easily explored by automation tools that are much more sophisticated but the automated code review can miss the intentions behind these.3) Subtle Mistakes:MCR Because the reviews are done by reviewers on an individual basis, it is very possible that the human eye can miss a few vulnerabilities that are related to integration or other isolated problem.ACR These mistakes and small errors that are missed in manual reviewing are easily caught by automated systems. However, this automation cannot go beyond a particular limit of reviewing which can be done by manual code review.4) Costs:MCR Having trained skilled engineers to handle an entire manual code review comes attached to its obvious cons. It takes years of experience before a reviewer is able to adequately take up to manage reviews.ACR It isn't necessary for reviewers to have the entire knowledge and skills of reviewing. The automation software is programmed to issue warnings of potential errors.Conclusion:Both these methods of review have their own pros and cons. Thus we understand the difficulty in choosing which one to go ahead with. Generally, the trend is now shifting towards automated code review because of time, cost and effort but still, many companies prefer to have a human touch to it. Ensuring our code is secure is a critical part of protecting our applications and we should strive to build applications that are both secure by design and in practice. Many organizations use different approaches to achieve this. Today were going to take a look at the differences between SAST and manual code review and some of the pros and cons surrounding both approaches. Manual Code ReviewManual code review is the process of inspecting source code line by line to identify potential security vulnerabilities, coding errors, and other issues. It sounds like a lot of effort but in reality, many agile development teams carry out code review on commit, and therefore were not evaluating large code-bases at any one time. Pros of Manual Code ReviewIn-Depth Understanding: Manual code review allows the reviewer to gain a deep understanding of the code and its inner workings. This is particularly useful in identifying complex vulnerabilities that automated tools may not detect. Reviewers are also able to analyze the context and logic behind the code, which can lead to more accurate assessments of potential security risks.Customized Solutions: When a vulnerability is identified during a manual code review, developers can work together to create tailored solutions that fit the specific needs of the application. This collaborative approach can result in more robust and effective fixes compared to those offered by automated tools.Identification of Weaknesses: We don't always find critical vulnerabilities when reading code, but there may be particular practices or coding patterns that could lead to a vulnerability in the future.Training: Manual code review provides an excellent opportunity for developers to learn from one another, share knowledge about secure coding practices, and improve their skills. This ongoing education can lead to a better overall code security and a stronger development team.Cons of Manual Code ReviewTime-Consuming: One of the biggest drawbacks of manual code review is the time it takes to complete the code. Subjectivity: Manual code review can be subjective, as it relies on the expertise and experience of the reviewer. This can lead to inconsistencies. Scalability: Manual code review is not easily scalable, as it requires a significant amount of human resources. This can be a challenge for organizations with limited resources or rapidly growing codebases. Static Application Security Testing (SAST) scanners are automated tools that analyze source code to identify potential security vulnerabilities. These tools use predefined rules and heuristics to scan for common security issues. Pros of Automated ScanningSpeed and Efficiency: SAST scanners can quickly scan large volumes of code, making them much faster and more efficient than manual code reviews. For organizations with large codebases or tight deadlines this could be a deciding factor.Consistency: Automated tools like SAST scanners are designed to be consistent in their results. This means that, unlike manual code reviews, they do not suffer from subjectivity or inconsistencies based on the reviewers knowledge or experience.Coverage: SAST scanners can analyze every line of code in an application, this can also extend to third party libraries and dependencies that would usually be out of scope for manual code review. Cons of Automated ScanningFalse Positives: Automated tools like SAST scanners are prone to producing false positives, which can lead to wasted time and effort in fixing non-existent vulnerabilities.Lack of Context: SAST scanners are only able to analyze the code itself and cannot take into account the context or logic behind it. This means that they may miss complex vulnerabilities that require an understanding of the applications inner workings.Limited Scope: SAST scanners can only detect vulnerabilities that are already known to the tool. This means that they may miss new or unknown vulnerabilities that have not been added to the tools database. ConclusionWhile manual code review allows for a deep understanding of the code and the ability to create tailored solutions, it can be time-consuming, subjective, and not easily scaled. SAST scanners, on the other hand, offer a more efficient and consistent way to identify potential security risks, but they may miss vulnerabilities that require a deep understanding of the code and the ability to create tailored solutions, it can be time-consuming, subjective, and not easily scaled. Both approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses, and the best approach to code security is a combination of both manual and automated tools, leveraging the strengths of each to create a more robust and secure application. If this is impossible for your organization due to budget, time, other constraints then consider which approach would yield the highest return on investment. Alex is a Web Application Security specialist with experience working across multiple sectors, from single-developer applications all the way up to enterprise web apps with tens of millions of users. He enjoys building applications almost as much as breaking them and has spent many years supporting the shift-left movement by teaching developers, infrastructure engineers, architects, and anyone who would listen about cybersecurity. He created many of the web hacking courses in TCM Security Academy, as well as the PWPA and PWPF certifications.Alex holds a Masters Degree in Computing, as well as the NPMT, CEH, and OSCP certifications. TCM Security is a veteran-owned, cybersecurity services and education company founded inCharlotte, NC. Our services division has the mission of protecting people, sensitive data, and systems. With decades of combined experience, thousands of hours of practice, and core values from our time in service, we use our skill set to secure your environment. The TCM Security Academy is an educational platform dedicated to providing affordable, top-notch cybersecurity training to our individual students and corporate clients including both self-paced and instructor-led online courses as well as custom training solutions. We also provide several vendor-agnostic, practical hands-on certification exams to ensure proven job-ready skills to prospective employers.Pentest Services: Us:Blog|LinkedIn|YouTube|Twitter|Facebook|InstagramContact Us: Lets talk about how TCM Security can solve your cybersecurity needs. Give us a call, send us an e-mail, or fill out the contact form below to get started. Tel: (877) 771-8911 | email: Try GraphiteCode reviews are a critical component of modern software development, serving as a quality gate and a collaborative learning opportunity. With the advent of AI-driven tools, teams now have a choice between two main approaches: manual review and automated review. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the best approach often depends on the project's specific needs and constraints. Manual Review: The Human TouchManual review involves a developer or a dedicated reviewer manually inspecting the code for errors, vulnerabilities, and style inconsistencies. This approach has several advantages: Deep Understanding: Manual reviewers can gain a deep understanding of the code's logic and intent, which is crucial for identifying complex vulnerabilities that automated tools might miss. Contextual Awareness: Reviewers can take into account the broader context of the code, including its purpose and the requirements it needs to fulfill. Immediate Feedback: Manual review allows for immediate feedback and discussion, which can help developers learn from their mistakes and improve their code quality. Flexibility: Manual review is highly flexible and can be tailored to the specific needs of the project. However, manual review also has some drawbacks: Time-Consuming: Manual review is often a slow process, especially for large codebases. Inconsistent: Different reviewers may have different standards and approaches, leading to inconsistent results. Limited Scalability: Manual review is not easily scalable, making it difficult to maintain as the project grows. Automated Review: The
Machine's EyeAutomated review uses tools like Static Application Security Testing (SAST) to automatically analyze the code for vulnerabilities and errors. This approach has several advantages: Speed: Automated review is much faster than manual review, allowing for more frequent checks. Consistency: Automated tools apply the same rules and standards consistently across the entire codebase. Scalability: Automated review can easily scale to handle large codebases and complex projects. Comprehensive Coverage: Automated tools can analyze every line of code, ensuring that no potential vulnerabilities are missed. However, automated review also has some limitations: False Positives: Automated tools can sometimes flag code as vulnerable when it is not, leading to unnecessary investigations. Limited Context: Automated tools lack the contextual awareness of manual reviewers, which can result in missed vulnerabilities. Lack of Nuance: Automated tools may not be able to identify subtle issues or vulnerabilities that require a deep understanding of the code's logic and intent. Finding the Right BalanceThe key to a successful code review process is finding the right balance between manual and automated review. Here are some strategies to consider: Use Automated Review for Initial Checks: Automated tools can quickly identify obvious issues and provide a baseline level of security. Use Manual Review for Deep Analysis: Manual reviewers can focus on the more complex and nuanced aspects of the code, such as logic errors and contextual vulnerabilities. Combine the Two: Use automated review to identify potential issues and then use manual review to investigate and verify them. Tailor the Process to Your Project: Different projects may require different review approaches. For example, a small project with a tight deadline might benefit more from automated review, while a large, complex project might benefit more from manual review. Continuous Learning: Both manual and automated review can be improved over time. Manual reviewers can learn from automated tools, and automated tools can be updated to reflect the latest security best practices. ConclusionCode reviews are a critical part of software development, and finding the right balance between manual and automated review is key to ensuring the quality and security of your code. By combining the strengths of both approaches, teams can create a more robust and secure application while also improving their code quality and learning from their mistakes. Remember, the goal of code review is not just to find errors but to create a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration. Tools like Diamond or Graphite can automatically identify syntax errors, style violations, and potential bugs, allowing human reviewers to focus on higher-level concerns.2. Define clear roles for each layerAutomated review: Style consistency, basic error detection, security scanning, performance metricsManual review: Architecture assessment, business logic validation, readability, maintainability3. Use automation to guide manual reviewsTools like Diamond can highlight potential issues for human reviewers to investigate further, making manual reviews more efficient and focused. This collaboration between automated tools and human judgment creates a more thorough review process. For more on this, see our guide on integrating AI into your code review workflow.4. Choose the right toolsSelect automated code review tools that integrate seamlessly with your workflow. Consider factors like ease of use, integration with your development environment, and the ability to provide actionable feedback.5. Establish a review processDefine a clear process for how reviews will be conducted, including roles, responsibilities, and communication channels.6. Foster a culture of collaborationEncourage open communication and collaboration between developers and reviewers. This helps in identifying and resolving issues more effectively.7. Regular updates and improvementsKeep the review process up-to-date with the latest security best practices and tool updates.8. Monitor and measure the effectiveness of the review processTrack metrics like the number of issues found, the time taken to resolve issues, and the overall quality of the code after review.9. Provide training and supportOffer training and support to developers and reviewers to ensure they are familiar with the tools and the review process.10. Automate repetitive tasksUse automation to handle repetitive tasks like syntax checking, style enforcement, and basic error detection, freeing up reviewers to focus on more complex issues.11. Encourage feedbackEncourage reviewers to provide feedback on the review process itself, helping to refine and improve it over time.12. Celebrate successesAcknowledge and celebrate the successes of the review process, such as the identification and resolution of critical vulnerabilities.13. Stay informedKeep up-to-date with the latest security vulnerabilities, coding best practices, and tool updates.14. Collaborate with the communityEngage with the security and development communities to share knowledge and learn from others.15. Iterate and improveThe review process is not static; it should evolve over time as the project and the team's needs change. Regularly reassess and improve the process to ensure it remains effective and efficient.16. Document the processCreate a document that outlines the review process, roles, and responsibilities, making it easy for new team members to get up to speed.17. Use a review toolConsider using a dedicated code review tool that integrates with your development workflow, providing a centralized place for reviews and feedback.18. Set clear expectationsEstablish clear expectations for the review process, including the time and effort required, and the importance of thorough reviews.19. Encourage peer reviewsEncourage developers to review each other's code, fostering a culture of peer support and learning.20. Regular communicationMaintain regular communication between developers and reviewers to ensure everyone is on the same page and to address any issues that arise promptly.21. Use a shared workspaceUse a shared workspace or repository for code reviews, making it easy for everyone to access and collaborate.22. 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vulnerabilities, performance bottlenecks, or violations of coding standards. It is important to provide detailed explanations and suggestions for improvement alongside each identified issue. 5. Discussion and Collaboration: After completing their individual examination, reviewers should come together to discuss their findings. This collaborative session allows for knowledge sharing and ensures a comprehensive review. During these discussions, reviewers can provide feedback, ask questions, and propose alternative solutions. 6. Resolution: Once all issues have been identified and discussed, its time to address them. The development team should prioritize and resolve the identified issues. It is important to track the progress of issue resolution to ensure that all problems are adequately addressed. 7. Follow-up: After the code review process is complete, it is essential to follow up to gauge its effectiveness. This may involve tracking metrics such as the number of issues identified, the time taken for issue resolution, and any improvements in code quality. This feedback will help refine future code review processes and improve overall development practices. By following these seven steps to manual code review, you can significantly enhance the quality of your code and reduce the risk of bugs or vulnerabilities in your software. An effective code review process promotes collaboration among team members and ensures that the final product meets the required standards. Remember, a thorough and well-executed manual code review process is an essential component of software development, contributing to the overall success and reliability of your project. Understanding the Manual Code Review Process: A Comprehensive Overview Understanding the Manual Code Review Process: A Comprehensive Overview In todays technology-driven world, software development is an integral part of many businesses. As software becomes more complex, it is crucial to ensure that it is secure, reliable, and efficient. One way to achieve this is through a manual code review process. What is a manual code review? A manual code review is a systematic examination of software source code by a human reviewer. It involves analyzing the code line by line to identify any vulnerabilities, bugs, or performance issues. This process aims to improve the quality and reliability of the software. Why is manual code review important? Manual code review plays a vital role in ensuring the overall quality and security of software. It helps identify potential vulnerabilities, such as injection attacks or insecure data handling, which may not be easily detected through automated testing tools. Additionally, manual code review allows for a deeper understanding of the codebase, leading to improved maintainability and readability. The steps involved in a manual code review process: 1. Planning: The first step in the manual code review process is to plan the review. This includes defining the scope of the review, setting objectives, and allocating resources. It is essential to determine the specific goals and areas of focus for the review. 2. Preparation: Before diving into the actual review, thorough preparation is necessary. This involves gathering necessary documentation, such as design specifications or requirements, and becoming familiar with the projects context and purpose. 3. Review: The core of the manual code review process is the actual examination of the source code. The reviewer carefully inspects each line of code, looking for potential issues like logical errors, security vulnerabilities, or scalability problems. This step may involve using specialized tools or manual techniques to aid in identifying issues. 4. Communication: Effective communication is crucial throughout the manual code review process. The reviewer needs to provide clear and concise feedback to the development team. This feedback should highlight identified issues, suggest improvements, and provide explanations where necessary. 5. Resolution: Once the review is complete, the development team addresses the identified issues. This may involve making necessary code changes, fixing bugs, or implementing security measures. The resolution phase ensures that the software is improved based on the reviewers feedback. 6. Verification: After the issues have been addressed, it is essential to verify that the necessary changes were implemented correctly. The reviewer should re-evaluate the code to ensure that the identified issues have been resolved and that new problems have not been introduced in the process. 7. Documentation: Finally, documenting the manual code review process and its outcomes is vital. This documentation serves as a reference for future reviews and helps maintain consistency and accountability within the development team. Benefits of a manual code review: Performing a manual code review offers several benefits. It helps identify and fix potential security vulnerabilities, reducing the risk of data breaches or unauthorized access. It improves software quality by identifying bugs, logic errors, or performance issues that may impact user experience. It enhances maintainability and readability of the codebase, making it easier for developers to understand and update the software in the future. It promotes knowledge sharing among team members, as reviewers gain insights into different parts of the codebase.

Manual code review. Manual source code review. Compared to automated code analysis manual code review generally produce.